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STOIC AUTONOMY

By JOHN M. COOPER

I. INTRODUCTION

As it is currently understood, the notion of autonomy, both as something that belongs to human beings and human nature, as such, and also as the source or basis of morality (that is, duty), is bound up inextricably with the philosophy of Kant. The term "autonomy" itself derives from classical Greek, where (at least in surviving texts) it was applied primarily or even exclusively in a political context, to civic communities possessing independent legislative and self-governing authority.¹ The term was taken up again in Renaissance and early modern times with similar political applications, but was applied also in ecclesiastical disputes about the independence of reformed churches from the former authority in religious matters of the church of the Roman popes.² Kant's innovation consisted in conceiving of (finite) individual rational persons, as such, as lawgivers or legislators to themselves, and to all rational beings (or rather to all that are not perfect and holy wills), for their individual modes of behavior. For Kant, rational beings possess a power of legislating for themselves individually, according to which they each set their own personal ends and subject that selection, and their pursuit of the ends in question, to a universal principle, which is expressed in Kant's *categorical imperative*. The categorical imperative requires that one set one's own ends only within a framework that would warrant acceptance by all other such beings. For Kant, autonomy accompanies individual (finite) rationality, and has nothing to do with the political (or other organizational) circumstances of any specific community of agents, even though it un-

¹ See H. G. Liddell, Robert Scott, and H. S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), s.vv. αὐτονομία, αὐτόνομος. See also Martin Ostwald, *Autonomia: Its Genesis and Early History*, American Philological Association *American Classical Studies* 11 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982). Ostwald, building upon E. J. Bickerman's demonstration ("Autonomia: Sur un passage de Thucydide [1,144,2]," *Revue Internationale des Droits de l'Antiquité* 5 [1958]: 313-44) that the term belongs to the vocabulary of interstate relations, argues persuasively that it was coined in order to help weaker states drawn into an orbit of dependence on a stronger one to assert and preserve their limited independence. (Such states included especially Athens' allies in the Delian League, which was initially established to combat the Persians, in 478-77 B.C.E.) The term was not applied in classical times to the stronger states themselves.

² Here I follow the summary provided in J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3 n. 2, and the full account in R. Pohlmann, "Autonomie," in J. Ritter, ed., *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Basel: Schwabe, 1971), 1:701-19, to which Schneewind refers.

derstandably gave rise to the conception of a “kingdom” or “realm” of ends in which each (fully) rational end-setter would cooperate with, and support, all other end-setters in a harmonious pursuit by all of their individual self-set ends, under the umbrella of the commonly legislated categorical imperative.

Without making any reference to possible influences of Stoic ideas upon Kant—that would be beyond my competence, and anyhow would be work for a subsequent study—I shall explore here what I think are related ideas in ancient Stoicism. Before doing so, however, it might be both interesting and helpful to review the early history of the term “autonomy,” particularly as it was applied to individuals.

So far as I have been able to determine, there are just three places in surviving classical Greek literature (i.e., down to Roman imperial times) where the term is applied to individuals, as such, and without immediate reference to political autonomy, so understood. In one passage of Sophocles’ *Antigone* (821, referred to in Liddell-Scott-Jones) the chorus, in a lyric exchange with Antigone about her already decreed punishment, by being deposited alive in a blocked-off cavern to make her own way to Hades, speaks of her as the only mortal to descend to Hades alive and “of her own law” (αὐτόνομος). The unusual choice of word here (where the basic meaning intended seems to be “of her own free will”—ἐκῶν—and the word is applied not in virtue of any political autonomy) must, however, have something to do with Antigone’s own tragic insistence, which has led to her predicament, on following the higher religious law that requires burial for her traitorous brother in the face of directives of King Cleon forbidding it. If she does go down to Hades while still alive, and by her own act of defiance, that, too, will be a case of her following her own ideas of what law itself—religious and civic—requires in a case of such conflict with civic authority. In going down to Hades “of her own law,” she is deciding for herself which law (or directive) to follow—with this consequence. So, even here the context of political independence for the use of this term is not lacking, although it is a highly unusual case of it; there is no hint here of Kantian self-legislation of ends or of principles of self-criticism.

Somewhat similar is a passage of Xenophon’s *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* (3.1), where he praises Lycurgus’s Spartan arrangements for teenage boys, contrasting them with customs in other cities, where boys upon reaching that age are freed from daily oversight by tutors (παιδαγωγοί) and left “to be their own law” (αὐτονόμους): the implied contrast here is with the laws (νόμοι) of Lycurgus (see the reference to those in 1.2, 8). Teenagers in other cities are not under special laws of good and modest behavior at all, of the sort that Xenophon goes on to detail that were in force in Sparta (3.2–4); hence, they can be described as being “their own law”—they are allowed to do what they please (this is the meaning), since they are *not* subject to “youth laws” at all. In the “epilogue” of the *Panathenaic Oration* (215), Isocrates turns the tables on Xenophon (whether the

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correction is intended or not) in seeking to draw favorable attention to his own allegedly balanced account, earlier in the speech, of Sparta's contributions to the values of Hellenism, alongside those of Athens. He puts into the mouth of an unnamed former pupil, described as well known for his praise of Spartan practices, the word *αὐτονομία*, with strongly negative connotation, to describe one of the practices that Xenophon had praised so highly himself (2.6–9): that of encouraging young Spartans to steal food and other supplies from the non-Spartan country dwellers, provided that they could do so undetected. Thus, Isocrates seems to be saying, Xenophon was not right to count other Greeks' failure to have "youth laws" as granting the youths reckless "autonomy"; on the contrary, the Spartans are the ones who are guilty in this instance of making the boys and youths behave in recklessly "autonomous" ways that everyone else knows are disgraceful, despite their being demanded by Lycurgan laws.

Thus, even in these three apparently anomalous passages, personal "autonomy" carries with it a clear contrast to some existing legal provision with which it conflicts. As we shall see in the next section, it is only with Dio Chrysostom's *80th Discourse* (end of the first century C.E.), that we first find the terms *αὐτόνομος* and *αὐτονομία* used for personal autonomy understood in approximately Kant's way.

II. DIO CHRYSOSTOM ON THE "AUTONOMOUS" LIVES OF PHILOSOPHERS

In speaking of ideas related to Kant's in ancient Stoicism, I have primarily in mind the work of the original Stoics of the third century B.C.E. and especially that of the great philosopher Chrysippus. However, in order to introduce the themes I want to discuss in this essay, I begin by citing a fascinating and, in this context, apparently overlooked oration of the late first century C.E. popular philosopher, Dio of Prusa (who is also called Dio Chrysostom, "of the golden mouth," in recognition of his powerfully inspiring speechifying). Dio was not strictly a Stoic philosopher—he apparently did not teach or hold forth in any "school"—but he did study at Rome with the important Roman Stoic, Musonius Rufus (who taught in Greek, and who had among his other pupils Epictetus). During the middle decades of his life, Dio was a wandering orator, in forced exile from both Rome and his home in Bithynia, in northwest Asia Minor. He was a popular proponent of salvation through "the philosophical life." His conception of what that life is like and the source of its value owes a very great deal to Stoic theory and example. The discourse that I have in mind is the eightieth and last in the standard order, and bears the title *On Freedom* (Περὶ ἐλευθερίας).³

³ *Dio Chrysostom*, V, trans. H. Lamar Crosby, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951).

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Dio opens the discourse with a conceit. He attributes to his audience bafflement at, and dismissal of, the odd behavior of self-professed philosophers, who wander around the town, sporting beards, wearing torn cloaks reminiscent of Socrates, preferably walking barefoot, with no remunerative occupation or ordinary social connections, and paying no attention to the theatrical or other spectacles of Greek city-life. Rather, they attend individually to passersby on the street and engage them in conversation, or else just stand there in the middle of things, thinking (80.2). Dio then turns the tables, by declaring that only such philosophers are, in fact, in the condition, which was highly prized by all ordinary Greeks, of freedom (ἐλευθερία). Ordinary people, these critics of philosophers, are definitely not free; they are actually slaves. Indeed, Dio insists, only the philosopher is αὐτόνομος, living under his own law (another, related, condition that was highly prized in the Greek cities). In contrast, all ordinary people are subject to direction by outside forces (80.3); they are not under their own law. Money, fame, or pleasures with their alluring appeal are their self-imposed mistresses; they are in fact, Dio says, their self-imposed fetters and enslavement (80.7–14).

Dio goes on to explain (80.3–6) that the *political* autonomy that the cities and tribes have constantly fought for, from time immemorial, is worthless if (as, in fact, is the case) the people possessing it are themselves, individually, merely slaves. Indeed, even the great lawgivers of the politically autonomous cities, for example, Solon in Athens, were not personally autonomous themselves (τούτων οὐδενὶ μετῆν αὐτονομίας), since the laws that they gave were not actually the laws that would have satisfied themselves, but rather, only less satisfactory (indeed, bad) laws that were the best that their fellow citizens could be persuaded to accept (80.4). Thus the lawgivers lacked autonomy, because the laws that they were famous for establishing were not ones that, if the lawgivers were left to themselves, they would have laid down for everyone, including themselves, to obey. The actual laws were not really *their* laws at all. In fact, autonomy—self-rule, living under one's own laws—only comes when one obeys the law of nature (ὁ τῆς φύσεως νόμος), that is to say, the ordinance of Zeus (τὸν τοῦ Διὸς θεσμόν). This is the only law that is true, and that has any valid authority. Although it is open to view, people do not see it, and do not make *it* the leader of their lives.⁴ This, however, is precisely what the philosopher does see, and what he does do. In living by the law of nature, the law of Zeus, he also lives by his *own* law—and so obtains true autonomy, the only autonomy worth having.

In this short discourse, Dio uses the Greek words for “autonomous” or “autonomy” repeatedly (four times in all),⁵ always in a usage that he

⁴ νόμον δὲ τὸν ἀληθῆ καὶ κύριον καὶ φανερόν οὔτε ὀρθῶσιν οὔτε ἡγεμόνα ποιοῦνται τοῦ βίου (80.5).

⁵ Five, if one counts, as well, the very striking phrase that he substitutes once in explanation or variation: τοῖς αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ χρῆσθαι νόμοις (80.3), “to use oneself one's own laws.”

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himself clearly grasps and, indeed, clearly explains, but in which the terms do not appear, except, at best, in very undeveloped form (see n. 1), in Greek of the classical period. Classical Greek refers only glancingly to persons governing themselves individually on the basis of their own “laws” (i.e., laws that are, if not necessarily self-imposed, then at least self-chosen or self-recognized). One striking feature of the text is that Dio first uses this terminology (80.3) before he introduces (in 80.5) any reference to laws of nature or of Zeus, which, as I mentioned, he eventually equates with the “laws” that a philosopher, in living according to his own laws, will obey. The idea of autonomy, as Dio uses the term from the outset, is simply that of living according to one’s own “laws” of personal behavior. But what laws could these be? What justifies any claim, of the sort that Dio makes from the very beginning, and before making any reference to nature’s law, that what the philosophers live according to are entitled to the name of *laws*? How is this to be understood?

It helps that Dio couples the term autonomy with freedom (ἐλευθερία) at its first occurrence, and slavery (ἐν οἰκέταις 80.3; cf. δουλεία 80.4) with the lack of autonomy, both in the personal and in the political spheres. It was a commonplace of Stoic theory, which Dio could confidently expect his readers to recall immediately upon hearing philosophers described as the only free persons, that only perfected human beings, or “wise” people in Stoic terminology,⁶ are free, while everyone else is both a fool and (therefore) a slave.⁷ As Cicero explains the Stoic view (*Stoic Paradoxes* 5, sec. 34), if freedom is the power to live as you will (*potestas vivendi ut velis*), then, in fact, only the wise are free.⁸ Only the wise have a clearly conceived plan of life which they unwaveringly also follow; only they never do anything from fear, or through any threat or coercion; only they never regret anything that they have to do, or anything that they have done. Everyone else acts in obedience to circumstances, acting as *circumstances* direct, so as to avoid pain, or monetary loss, or the like, and following opportunities for pleasure or gain as circumstances dictate. Such a person acts in the abject and broken spirit of a slave, as Cicero puts it, ordered about willy-nilly—as a person that has no will of its own (*arbitrio carentis suo*) (sec. 35). Only wise people live as they themselves will. Even if they, too, vary their behavior to suit their circumstances, as everyone must, they do this not in pursuance of any fundamental attachment to anything that circumstances can control—that is, any external

⁶ Σοφοί, traditionally rendered in English by “sages”—but it is better to avoid that term nowadays, since it smacks of pretentiousness and obscurantism, and it was no part of Stoic theory that a wise person would have either of those qualities.

⁷ See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks, Loeb Classical Library, two volumes (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), 7.121. For evidence that these claims were already, and offensively, made by Zeno, the Stoic founder, in his *Republic*, see 7.32–33.

⁸ In H. Rackham, ed. and trans., *Cicero IV*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942).

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object or condition, whether pleasant, or painful, or possessed of any other concrete characteristics. They act only out of a single, consistent desire, in every circumstance, simply to “follow nature.” (And, of course, their wisdom consists centrally in knowing what following nature means, in each circumstance that may arise.) Thus the wise, and only the wise, are free, according to well-known Stoic principles, because only they, in consistently “following nature” in all their actions, are acting on their *own* will—their will to follow nature. They are never led by the nose by particular, concretely characterized events that occur or that are in prospect. Diogenes Laertius, in setting out the Stoic view, speaks of this freedom as the “power of ‘self-action,’” the power to do one’s own actions (ἐξουσίαν αὐτοπραγίας, 7.121).⁹

Still, it is quite a step from freedom as self-action and acting according to one’s own will (αὐτοπραγία), to autonomy or living according to one’s own laws (αὐτονομία). As if to distract the listener from recoiling at his novel conception of autonomy as something that belongs to individuals as such (without reference to their political circumstances), Dio immediately follows up by leaving aside freedom understood in Cicero’s way, as an individual’s “self-action,” and pursues, instead, the implications of *political* freedom, and the autonomy that goes with that. It was for that sort of autonomy, he says, instead of this philosophical independence, that tribes and cities have always fought¹⁰—fruitlessly, he says, as the history of Solon’s legislation shows. The laws of Athens that we know as Solon’s were not “his own” laws: as Solon himself confessed in a famous poem, he was not (as Dio puts it) “autonomous” in laying down the political laws and social practices that he devised and imposed on everyone, himself included (once he returned from a voluntary, ten-year-long exile). He imposed not the laws that he would have preferred, but the ones that he thought the citizens would accept. Under those laws, the Athenians continued to be slaves in their dependence on external circumstances, even after achieving political self-rule under Solon’s laws. Political autonomy was therefore useless to them, and so it is to all of us, as well. By contrast, Dio suggests, philosophers, however bizarre they might appear in the eyes of ordinary people and however unconventional their way of life may be, have not only freedom but *true autonomy*—a life truly under their own rule, under their own laws.

⁹ Plutarch quotes a passage of Chrysippus’s lost work *On Lives*, where Chrysippus equated the Platonic phrase, familiar from the *Republic* (and the *Charmides*), “to do one’s own” (τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν, which is characteristic of virtuous people, for example, just or temperate ones), with αὐτοπραγία or “self-action”: *Plutarch: Moralia*, XIII, ed. and trans. H. C. Cherniss, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), pt. 2, *Stoic Self-Contradictions* 1043b.

¹⁰ There is a problem with the text at this point; the MSS read in 80.3 something ungrammatical and unintelligible, ἀνόητοι εἶδους αὐτονομίας ἔρωτι ἐρώτες. I am not satisfied with the emendations that have been proposed by Post (printed, e.g., in the Loeb text and translated there) and others, but I believe that this issue does not affect what I say in my text.

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It is only at this point (80.5–6), when he goes on to speak of the laws of nature and the laws of Zeus, that we hear from Dio any reason at all for thinking of the philosopher's or the wise person's life in that way, as one under "his own laws." Now we can see, but not before, that for the philosopher, living by his own will (freedom) is living by his own laws (autonomy), because his consistent will is not only to follow nature, or Zeus, but also in doing so, to obey nature's and Zeus's law. As Dio, and his audience, too, knew very well, it was a central tenet of Stoicism that this is what following nature means. As we hear from Diogenes Laertius (7.88), the Stoic "end," which is understood as living following nature (τὸ ἀκολουθῶς τῇ φύσει ζῆν), involves not doing anything that "the law common to all things" (ὁ νόμος ὁ κοινός) normally forbids; and, as Diogenes tells us, this law is equated with the correct reason (λόγος) that runs through everything and is the same as Zeus. So, in living following nature—that is, as we have seen from Cicero's explication, in living freely and by his own will—the Stoic philosopher also lives by Zeus's or nature's law, which thereby becomes his own law for himself.

It seems, then, that Dio felt the need to draw upon both the Greeks' overriding goal of political autonomy and his claim that it fails to make people truly free (by the stringent, but well and forcefully articulated, standards of Stoic philosophy), in order to prepare the way for, and to validate retrospectively, this conception of philosophical freedom as a more important, indeed, the only true kind of, "autonomy." This seems to me to be some indication that the idea of personal, as against political, autonomy, which he introduces in this roundabout way, may have been Dio's invention. At the least, it does not seem that such use of the term was common coin by his time. (As I mentioned above, no earlier ancient author whose works have come down to us presents any such idea.) Thus, it seems that Dio juxtaposed, for the first time, the standard Stoic idea of the philosopher's (or, rather, the wise person's) freedom with another standard Stoic idea, that the philosopher (or the wise person) always obeys nature's and Zeus's law. The result is a conception of the philosopher or the wise person as the only one who truly lives autonomously, that is, by his own law.

III. RATIONALITY AS THE GROUND OF AUTONOMY

Although they seem never to have used the term autonomy in this connection, I suggest that the classical Stoics did, in fact, conceive the lives of wise people in just this way—as lives lived autonomously, under each individual's own law, where that law is also, and indeed by its origin, Zeus's or nature's law. The implication here—since the wise person is simply the perfected human being—is that Zeus's or nature's law is our law too, the law of human beings as such. So, it is only through

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accepting and implementing in one's life Zeus's law, that is, Stoic morality, that any human being achieves autonomy and lives autonomously. What in Stoic theory grounds this idea? This question is the focus of my discussion in the following sections of this essay.

The key point here is that, for the Stoics, human beings, and, out of all of nature's creations,¹¹ only human beings, are rational—only they possess the power of reasoning. It is important, though, to attend closely to what this power consists in, for the Stoics. We, with modern understandings of reason, might be inclined to think that it is simply the ability to tell what follows from what, or, in general, to deal with given data so as to form some reasoned opinion about what to think on the basis of them about some question that might be asked. But that is not how the Stoics, or indeed ancient philosophers, in general, think about rationality.¹² Rather, for them, reason is constituted, in the first instance (subject to further developments and perfections), by (the possession of) a somewhat open-ended set of particular *concepts*, which are themselves regarded as a body of basic knowledge, rationally articulated. Human beings are not born rational, and no child before "the age of reason" has any effective rational capacities at all.¹³ As children we follow natural instincts, aided, of course, by parental guidance, in seeking our growth and survival in our environments. In doing so, we come, through naturally imbued procedures, to form original, "natural" concepts of all sorts of objects, and their properties, that we confront in our experience. We only become rational, or possessed of reason, when, after a long period of such exposure to the world around us, we have accumulated this basic set of concepts. Thus, as we develop, we get an idea, or a concept, of human beings themselves (what it is to be a human being), of males and females, of mothers and fathers, of trees and plants that are of interest to us, of animals, such as dogs, or cats, or cows, or mice, that are found in our environments and that make a difference to us. As we seek to grow and survive, we also form concepts of various foods, of utensils, and, of course, of all the colors and tastes, and sounds and textures, that matter to us in our daily lives. In addition to accumulating such basic knowledge as children, as we develop we also get the concepts of good and bad, and certain other evaluative notions.

To say that we get these concepts "naturally" is to say that (still on the Stoic theory) we do not reach them by calculating or inferring anything in any way, for example from our experiences; we just naturally, given our experiences of, and with, the world around us, form the relevant con-

¹¹ That is, its creations on or in the vicinity of the earth. The exception implied here is meant to cover the sun and moon and stars, which, according to the Stoics, were rational beings, too—I do not mean to suggest that the Stoics envisaged or accepted any such nonhuman rational beings as, e.g., creatures on alien planets, or creatures flying through the air as angels.

¹² On what follows see M. Frede, "The Stoic Conception of Reason," in K. J. Boudouris, ed., *Hellenistic Philosophy*, vol. 2 (Athens: International Association for Greek Philosophy, 1994), 50–61.

¹³ What I mean here by "effective" will become clear below.

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cepts. You could say that this is how we are made, how we are constituted by nature when we are born into the world. We are born so as to develop in this way, and we do so develop unless some untoward circumstance prevents it. In fact, because we do not reach our first and basic concepts by any sort of reasoning, but simply by a natural process of development, the Stoics think that these are guaranteed to be correct concepts: concepts such that their content is guaranteed to apply to, to be true of, some of what the world itself contains. The world contains things of which our basic, natural concepts are true, just because those concepts have been reached in our development by these natural, noninferential, and on our part, totally nonvoluntary routes. We (our minds) have contributed nothing to the concepts' formation, so there is no possibility of distortion or mistake in them from our own minds. And what other source of mistake should anyone imagine there might be?

For a human to be a rational being, then, is, in the first instance, to possess this basic stock of totally natural, well-grounded and correct, concepts. These are concepts that all human beings, as such, will have, wherever and whenever they live, if they have not been specially prevented or deprived.¹⁴ Thus, to be rational, for the Stoics, is first of all to possess a certain stock of basic knowledge: knowledge about the objects that a human being deals with in the ordinary course of living, and of the properties of those objects on the basis of which this ordinary interaction takes place. These objects and properties really are such as we conceive them, through our "natural" concepts. (Below, I will consider some of the implications of this.) So far, I have said nothing about reasoning itself, that is, the power to draw inferences, to recognize logical consequence and incompatibility. These powers, it appears, are thought by the Stoics to be implicated in the possession of all concepts, including, of course, the concepts that constitute this basic stock.¹⁵ To have the concept of a dog, for example, is (in part) to know that anything that *is* a dog has four legs (unless one has been removed, or the animal has suffered some horrendous birth defect), and that if a thing is not alive at all, or not made of flesh and hair (but rather, say, of metal) it is not a dog. Thus, the Stoic conception of reason does include the capacity to think logically (using, e.g., as in these illustrations, *modus ponens* and *modus tollens*), but in their view, that capacity is conceived as a component of "natural" conceptual knowledge, in the possession of which rationality basically consists. This is not some further capacity on its own, and, of course, it is not, by itself, the whole of rationality or even rationality's basic element.

Being rational does not, however, mean simply that one possesses basic knowledge and basic thinking capacities. When we reach "the age of

¹⁴ So the Stoics seem to have thought. But maybe this was intended to be subject to a certain amount of local or even temporal variation—the "natural" concepts for one group of humans living in one environment might differ in some particulars from the "natural" ones for another group.

¹⁵ See the discussion by Frede, "The Stoic Conception of Reason," 54–55.

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reason" and become rational beings, instead of the nonrational, brute animal-like beings that children are, even while undergoing the experiences from which they are arriving at the basic concepts, our nature now becomes such that we *use* our rationality in all of our perceptual experiences, in everything we think, and in everything we do. Plutarch, in his essay *On Moral Virtue* (450d), quotes Chrysippus clearly to this effect: "[T]he rational animal is disposed naturally to use reason in all things and to be governed by it."¹⁶ Before achieving the "age of reason," we may, and will as we progress, have a limited ability to use such concepts as we have begun to acquire, and so to reason in ways that belong to them, but that is an on-and-off affair. Its results do not determine what we think or what we do; natural instincts and inclinations continue to prevail with us, regardless. However, after we reach the "age of reason," we use reason in all of our perceptions, all of our thoughts, and all of our actions, by a necessity of our nature. This means that when we see, say, a dog, and it looks to us like a dog, we are using our relevant concepts—thinking that, according to what we know a dog to be, this thing that we see *looks like that*, that is, it looks like it has the properties that are contained in our dog-concept. And we must either accept this impression, and judge that it *is* a dog (i.e., that it actually instantiates the characteristics contained in the concept); or we must reject this impression (holding that, despite appearances, the thing that is seen does not instantiate those characteristics); or else we must suspend judgment either way, withholding any claim that it does, or that it does not, have the included properties. (I do not mean to say that any discursive process to such conclusions necessarily takes place, only that such is the content of the thought that one thinks.) Being rational means operating in this way, by a necessity of one's nature.

Now, in these acceptances and rejections truth and falsehood play a directive role, again by virtue of what a rational nature itself includes. What one holds to be true is what one accepts (and to accept something is to accept that it is true), and what one holds to be false is what one rejects (and to reject it is to declare that it is false). Thus, Epictetus says (*Discourses* 3.3.2), "It is the nature of every soul [he means, every rational one] to nod yes to the true [i.e., what one takes to be true], to nod no to the false, and to suspend on the unclear."¹⁷ Rational nature, simply being what it is, pursues the true and flees from the false. But equally, as Epictetus in this passage goes on to say, it also pursues the good (i.e., what it takes to be good) and avoids the bad. The rational soul's nature

¹⁶ Plutarch: *Moralia*, VI, ed. and trans. W. C. Helmbold, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939). The Greek text of the passage here translated is: τοῦ λογικοῦ ζῴου φύσιν ἔχοντος προσχρησθαι εἰς ἕκαστα τῷ λόγῳ καὶ ὑπὸ τούτου κυβερνασθαι.

¹⁷ Epictetus, *The Discourses, as Reported by Arrian, the Manual and Fragments*, bks. 3–4, ed. and trans. W. A. Oldfather, Vol. 2, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928). The Greek text of the passage here translated is: πέφυκεν δὲ πᾶσα ψυχὴ ὡσπερ τῷ ἀληθεῖ ἐπινεύειν, πρὸς τὸ ψεῦδος ἀνανεύειν, πρὸς τὸ ἀδηλον ἐπέχειν.