

[1949. In Collier's Encyclopedia. New York: P.F. Collier and Son.]

STOICISM. Founded by Zeno of Citium a little before 300 B.C. in Athens, Stoicism, along with Epicureanism, ushered in the new Hellenistic age in philosophy, and it was destined to become the most influential school until supplanted by Neo-Platonism, the final formation of Greek philosophy in the third century of the Christian Era.

After Zeno's suicide (c. 260 B.C.) Cleanthes, the poet, presided over the school from 264 to 232 but he was not able to answer the opponents of Stoicism and to advance his cause. Chrysippus, succeeding him from 232 to 206, reorganized and reinvigorated the movement.

Our information concerning the next two centuries is far from complete. Panaetius of Rhodes (c. 180-110 B.C.) organized Stoicism in Rome, and Posidonius (c. 130-c. 50 B.C.), emphasizing religious speculation, seems to have influenced Philo of Alexandria. The works of Cicero (106-43 B.C.), who was not a Stoic, today furnish a most important source of information on the Stoic theories; and still extant are the works of the great Stoics, Epictetus (A.D. 50-130) and Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 121-180).

The Stoics divided philosophy into three areas: logic, physics, and ethics. Under the heading of logic they made a minute investigation of grammar, but their more fundamental concern was to defend the possibility of truth. Rejecting the sophistical conclusions of pre-Socratic philosophy, and yet not admitting the supersensuous realities of Plato, they thought that another attempt should be made to base truth on sense experience. This attempt requires the existence in the mind of an impression infallible distinguishable from every false impression, a mental image that attests its own accuracy—an assumption constantly attacked by the Academicians and Skeptics.

The Stoic epistemology was dictated by the Stoic materialistic physics, which held that everything real is a body occupying space, and that, since qualities are real, they, too, are bodies. From this it follows that two bodies can occupy the same space. Obviously, then, bodies are not aggregates of impenetrable atoms moved by impact; rather, as Heraclitus suggested, the world is a dynamic continuum. According to a biological analogy, which was proposed, the particular things of the world are governed

in their emergence and development by the inherent power of seeds- sparks, as it were- of the divine reason.

The underlying substance of the world, this divine reason, is an intelligent fire that directs all events. Nothing occurs by chance; everything is governed by Fate. Accordingly, in the religious practice of divination, while the entrails of the victim are not the cause of tomorrow's victory, their condition is consonant only with a world in which this army will be victorious tomorrow. By Fate, universal history goes its determined way: a gradual increase of fire will entirely consume the present order, and a new world will be born to run its course as an exact duplicate of all previous worlds.

Fatalism, however, is not destructive of morality, either theoretically or practically. Theoretically, morality is based not on an uncaused free will, but on voluntary action. A man is responsible for the act he wills. Whether or not he could have willed differently is an idle question. The Stoics exemplified morality in their conduct, and, as time went on, they emphasized it more and more in their writings. The *summum bonum*, according to the Stoics, is rational action, a life according to nature, not bestial nature as in Cynicism, but a life of virtue; to desire the impossible is irrational; and, therefore, we should concern ourselves only with what is in our power- not wealth, pleasure, or reputation, but our inward reaction to the circumstances of life.

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