REASON AS A GUIDE TO CONDUCT IN GREEK THOUGHT¹

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The first edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, edited by a ‘Society of Gentlemen in Scotland’ was published in 1771. In it, under the heading ‘Reason’, we read that Reason is ‘a faculty or power of the mind, whereby it distinguishes good from evil, truth from falsehood, etc., see under LOGIC and METAPHYSICS’. The belief that Reason can in some sense enable us to discover what is right and what is wrong, and so can function as a guide to conduct, provided an appeal of such power that in retrospect it has become a commonplace to say that it very largely dominated human thinking in western Europe for something like 250 years, from about the middle of the seventeenth century down to the end of the twenties of this present century. Then, quite suddenly it would now seem, this period came to an end, and the Age of Reason was followed by what Karl Popper called the Revolt against Reason.² While initially it was hoped, at least by many of us, that this change was merely temporary, it is now beginning to seem otherwise—the Revolt against Reason seems likely to continue, at least until some time still to come in the future.

Why this Revolt should have taken place is, of course, a very large question. During the Age of Reason it was often thought that human freedom and happiness could best be promoted if Reason could replace Authority. For Authority was in many cases, perhaps all cases, inherently unreasonable, resting as it did on entrenched political power, on class institutions and ecclesiastical organisation, and on occasion on nothing more than naked, arbitrary aggression. In the struggle for reform Reason seemed to constitute a potential ally of great power and persuasion. What is now, however, coming to be felt by many people is that reason is

¹The substance of this article was given as a lecture in the John Rylands University Library on Wednesday, 6 May 1981.
a very ineffective instrument in their struggle to secure what they want. Reason, it is said, gets you nowhere. This is obvious if the forces with which you are contending are impervious to reason. But this was always the case and was well understood in the Age of Reason. More serious is the situation where the objects that are willed and wanted are themselves unreasonable or can be plausibly so represented by others. In such cases the appeal to reason, so far from helping the cause, is a positive hindrance.

Such situations, however, may seem to provide grounds which are no more than disreputable for the Revolt against Reason. Unfortunately there are also deeper considerations. These amount to something like a Failure of Reason itself. In the case of an argument or a disagreement about mathematics or about the physical world it is, at least in principle, possible to convince and convert an opponent to one's own view by appealing to rational arguments based on facts. It is much more difficult—some would say entirely impossible—to do the same when the argument is about Right and Wrong. Yet if one cannot appeal to Reason to give us answers in this sphere how can we claim that Reason can function as a guide to conduct? It can hardly be doubted that this is a further consideration, and in itself an entirely reputable one, leading to a Revolt against Reason. It has always been recognized that one major source of inspiration for the Age of Reason lay in Greek philosophic speculation, and, despite all that has been written and said, I believe it may still be of interest to look once again at the strengths, weaknesses and failures of certain Greek attempts to use reason as a guide to conduct. I propose to say something in turn about Plato, about Aristotle, and about the Stoics. But before turning directly to Plato it may be helpful first to mention some fairly general considerations.

The two centuries before Plato was born in 428 BC saw the achievement of the Presocratic physicists, rightly acclaimed as constituting the beginnings of the European tradition of the rational investigation of the physical world around us, in other words of the physical sciences. Their achievement consisted in the discovery and description of such a degree of overall regularity in the processes of nature that they believed that everything could be expressed in terms of universal scientific laws
or principles. But if this is so, what about human beings? One half of the answer is straightforward and obvious. My body is composed, Plato said, of physical substances, some hard and some soft, some solid and some liquid, and these physical components exhibit the same regularities as do the corresponding physical substances in the world outside me. In modern terms the laws of physics and chemistry apply to living bodies as well as to non-living bodies, and they can be discovered by the application of reason to the study of the available evidence in the same way as we do in the case of the rest of physics and chemistry.

But what of consciously controlled human behaviour? Here the position as seen by Plato was expressed by Socrates in a famous passage in the *Phaedo* 98b–99b. The reason why Socrates was sitting talking in prison was not to be explained in terms of the relation between the bones and sinews in his body, and the vocal sounds and air-currents involved in speech. It was rather because the Athenians had judged it better to condemn him, and that he in turn had judged it better to sit there because he thought it more just and honourable for himself not to escape and run away. The physical arrangements were the necessary conditions for what Socrates was doing—if he had not had a body he would not have been sitting in prison—but in addition he had made a choice as to what is best, and this was the real cause of what he was doing when he sat talking in prison.

'A choice as to what is best' raises the question how do we know or how do we tell or decide what is best. The search for what is right and what is good is clearly a central question in ethical thought and the first problem is not so much what should be our answer to this question, but rather in what direction we should first look in our search for an answer. Here there has been, for historical reasons, a fairly fundamental difference between the Greek and the post-Greek approach. Under the influence of Christianity and above all of the Judaic or non-Hellenic stream in Christian thought the tendency in the post-Greek period has, I think, been to regard the attempt to discover what is right as the attempt to discover what one ought to do, where 'ought' is seen as involving a command or imperative. The concept of a command or imperative in turn leads to the concept of a
commander or imperator as the giver or source of the command or imperative. It follows that the task of reason in such cases is to discover or identify the commander or imperator and then the commands and imperatives that emanate from such commanders and imperators if there be more than one. So in this world attention is directed first to parents, to the state, to the church and to society and the traditions to which they give expression as sources of moral obligation. Behind, above and beyond these, however, stands the Divine, and the ultimate source of the moral imperative is to be found in the Will of God. Earthly imperatives are to be judged accordingly as they give correct expression to the divine will. Of course, since God himself is supreme Reason, his Will is itself rational, but its authority on this view springs not so much from its rationality as from the fact that it is willed by God. It follows that the erosion and eventual elimination of the concept of an ultimate imperator as the source of the moral imperative leads to doubt and disbelief in the validity of all and any moral imperatives. We are left either with no imperatives at all, or each with our own individual self-given imperatives, and there then seems to be no reason why anyone else but ourselves should accept or obey such private imperatives.

The Greek approach from the start (and throughout) was different. The first achievement of Greek rationality had been the discovery of regularities in the external physical world, arrived at by close inspection of the nature, structure and behaviour of the physical world. So, perhaps, when the problem was to be the principles governing the behaviour of human beings, attention should be directed first to the nature, structure and behaviour of human beings, not in their physical constitution, but in their constitutions as human beings. The first step in such an investigation was through the application of the concept of ergon or function, as expounded with perfect clarity by Socrates right at the end of the First Book of Plato’s Republic 352d–354c, and adopted whole-heartedly by Aristotle in the first book of his Nicomachean Ethics 1.7.1097b22 ff., as well as at the beginning of the second book of the Eudemian Ethics. On this view, everything which does something or produces something can be described
as performing a function. But particular things have particular functions peculiar to themselves. Thus the function of a knife is to cut. The specific function of a thing is the performance of something which is performed by it alone or which it performs better than anything else. So a knife is either a unique cutting instrument or, at least, it cuts better than anything else.

To this must be added a further concept, that of the aretē, which is the virtue or peculiar excellence of a thing which enables it to perform this function well. So the function of the eye is to see and that of the ear is to hear, and their virtues or aretai are their powers to see well and to hear well. Contrasted with their virtues are their vices—in the case of the eye or the ear these might be whole or partial blindness or deafness. Where blindness or deafness is present, eyes and ears see and hear badly rather than well, and in extreme cases they see and hear not at all. Now apply this way of looking at things not to particular parts of the body but to a human being as a whole. The function of a human being is to live, and since plants and animals also live, the specific function of a human being will be to live the life of a human being, not that of an animal or plant, since it is living the life of a human being which is unique to human beings. If such a life is lived well, this will be because the human being in question possesses to a high degree the peculiar excellence or virtue of a human being.

This way of looking at things, however, is very sharply in contrast with the usual way of looking at things at the present day. In fact it takes us right back into a different world from ours, the Hellenic world. For we tend to think of function as something designed and built into a thing or imposed on a thing by someone other than the thing itself. In other words, we tend to regard function as the expression of an imperative, and if we need clarification of the nature of this imperative we are tempted to turn to an analysis of the mind and purposes of the giver of the imperative. This was not the Greek way, for the most important single implication of what has been said above, is the belief that it is possible to infer function from evidence wholly internal to the thing in question. Simply by examining the thing itself and the way it behaves, we can arrive at an understanding of its function. By reflection on this function we can further arrive at an under-
standing of its specific excellence or virtue. The good for man can be discovered by an investigation into the nature of man and nothing else is required beyond such an investigation.

This process of investigation may be said to have begun with Socrates and the sophistic movement in the fifth century BC. But the first full-scale investigation along these lines which has come down to us is found in Plato's Republic. It illustrates already some of the strengths and some of the weaknesses of this way of looking at human behaviour. In the second part of Book IV of the Republic Plato presents a brilliant and famous, but I would say an as yet inadequately appreciated, analysis of the human soul into three behavioural aspects. These are Reason, Desires and a third aspect which Plato calls Thumos or the Thumoeidic Aspect. These for Plato constitute three different kinds of human behaviour, each observably distinct from the other, and he infers that all three kinds of behaviour must be rooted in forces that are present in the structure of the human soul. At the present day we usually can identify and accept without difficulty first the concept of rational activity including both the ability to understand and think before we act and also the ability to take rational decisions, and second the concept of desire or appetite. The third behavioural aspect, which Plato calls Thumos, has caused more difficulty but the problem is basically one of translation only. Thumos for Plato is that urge or impulse to action which is seen in all thrusting, ambitious and aggressive behaviour, and the nearest English equivalent is the word 'Will' when used in the sense of Will power, seen as the concentrating of one's powers and resources into or towards a specific act.¹ Within the soul Plato supposes that there can be conflict between Reason and Desire. There can also be conflict between Will and Desire. Finally, while Will is a natural ally of Reason (cf. Rep. 440e4–7, 441a2–3) it can also, at least when corrupted, take the side of Desire against Reason.²

Plato is next able to argue plausibly that a soul that is at war with itself is likely to be self-frustrating. A soul is only able to

¹See e.g. R. S. Woodworth, Psychology (12th edn., London, 1940), p. 398.
²This last has been a matter of some controversy. The view I have expressed can be supported from 440c1–d4, 441b3–c3, e5–7, 572a4–b2. See also T. M. Robinson, Plato’s Psychology (Toronto, 1970), pp. 44 ff.
secure self-fulfilment when its functions are in a state of internal harmony, and this involves each part performing its own function according to a rational pattern. A rational pattern of activity for the soul as a whole, however, is achieved only when reason is in control and can co-ordinate the activities of the whole soul. Finally (444c5–e6), Plato appeals to the analogy of physical health. Health, he tell us, is produced by the establishment of a natural relation of control and subordination among the constituents of the body, disease by the establishment of an unnatural relation. Aretē or fulfilment of function in the soul is a kind of mental health or beauty or state of well-being, and vice or non-fulfilment is a kind of illness or deformity or weakness.

Now it is not too difficult, I suggest, for us to accept that mental health involves psychic harmony, and that this in human beings is only likely to be achieved in a rational personality, that is a personality whose activities are subject to the control of reason. But Plato goes further than this in that he is suggesting that such a person is just and morally good, in other words a person who is behaving rationally is necessarily behaving morally. This, however, seems open to a major objection. Why should the mere fact that a person is behaving rationally mean that he is acting morally? Might not a devastating alternative also arise, namely the possibility of a completely rational villain or criminal, an alternative that is devastating in that a criminal with a completely rational integrated personality would be extraordinarily effective as a criminal. Indeed the scientific, philosophic gangster, still more a group of such persons, might prove both irresistible and also almost infinitely destructive of society. In modern times this topic has seen much debate, expressed in the question does Platonic Justice (defined as justice which consists in the right ordering of the parts of the soul) also involve even to a minimal degree Vulgar Justice (defined as that justice which consists in the non-performance of anti-social acts).¹

One possible answer to this question would clearly be that there is simply no connection. Platonic Justice does not or need

not involve any degree at all of Vulgar Justice and this simply does not matter. Indeed if we define Justice as self-fulfilment, and self-fulfilment turns out to involve Vulgar Injustice, it is still self-fulfilment and so is still Justice. It would follow that Vulgar Justice is not Justice properly so-called at all. This is exactly the position maintained by Thrasymachus in Book I of the Republic, and also substantially the position attributed by Plato to Callicles in the Gorgias. But, of course, it is not a position which Plato himself is prepared to accept. For Plato in some sense Platonic Justice must also involve Vulgar Justice.

What, then, are we to suppose was his position on this matter? There was, indeed, one relatively easy path of escape open to him, but this he never mentions, and it would seem that he simply never considered it. Suppose that in addition to the three behavioural aspects of the soul already distinguished, Reason, Will and Desire, one were to add a fourth, namely what the eighteenth century came to call the principle of Benevolence, understanding by Benevolence an impulse to do good to one's fellow human beings and to to avoid doing harm or evil to them. It would then follow that self-fulfilment according to a rational pattern would involve at least some of the elements of Vulgar Justice. But no, this was not a path which Plato followed. What then?

A number of modern critics\(^1\) have tried to defend Plato by arguing that some or all of our anti-social activities i.e. Vulgar Injustice, spring from uncontrolled cupidity and so on. Once cupidity is controlled by Reason then Vulgar Injustice will simply not occur. In other words a soul which achieves internal psychic harmony will simply as it were happen to practise Vulgar Justice. May be! But how can we know that this is the case? Only if we could show that there was something about psychic harmony which actually excluded Vulgar Injustice and more importantly which actually involved of necessity Vulgar Justice. Yet once Benevolence is excluded there seems nothing at all in the concept of psychic harmony as such which requires either of these conclusions.\(^2\) But psychic harmony for Plato involves the com-

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\(^1\)For a survey see Julia Annas, op. cit.

\(^2\)Another line or argument would transform Vulgar Justice in Plato's eyes to such an extent that many of the traditional elements in Vulgar Injustice simply
plete rationality of the agent in question. Can we, then, say that the mere fact of being reasonable involves Vulgar Justice? Clearly this would be a most desirable conclusion and this also has been suggested as a defence on Plato's behalf by modern critics. Regrettably no one has yet succeeded in showing, I believe, that Vulgar Injustice conflicts with Reason as such, e.g. by introducing a contradiction or in any other way which conflicts with the principles of rationality. Rational self-fulfilment will sanction whatever is needed for self-fulfilment, and if self-fulfilment requires the exploitation of others for one's own ends, then such exploitation will in such a case be rational. And exploitation of others for one's own ends is the distinguishing mark of Vulgar Injustice. Have we not here a major limitation or even failure emerging in the appeal to Reason as a guide to conduct? If Reason can actually lead to or require immorality then the dream of resting morality upon reason has indeed evaporated.

However that may be, there is, I think, no evidence that Plato made any attempt to infer Vulgar Justice from the mere presence of rationality in the psychically harmonious soul. His approach to the problem was rather the following. Reason in the soul has not merely the function of bringing harmony to the various functions of the soul. The central books of the Republic makes it clear that for Plato its power to do this rested upon knowledge and this knowledge is not only or even primarily knowledge about the soul. It is above all knowledge of the Platonic Forms that is the distinctive feature of the rational element in the human soul at its fullest stage of development. Now someone who knows the Platonic Form of Justice knows what Justice is. Indeed the Form of Justice consists solely and wholly of what Justice is—this is what makes it the Form of Justice. Nor for Plato was the Form of Justice a vacuous or empty existential entity—it was an entity with a content, and anyone who could inspect this content would be in a position to see what Justice is in the sense that he would be able to see that Justice involves significant elements of Vulgar Justice. Such in all probability was Plato's solution. And more than this. When the Platonic philosopher surveys the Forms, he is invited to

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cease for Plato to constitute injustice at all. But this cannot be true for Plato in all cases, see Rep. 442d7–443b6.
undertake a somewhat mysterious process given the name Dialectic. This involves (Rep. 511b, 531d ff.) treating the Forms as starting points and steps for an ascent to some single ultimate principle, to be identified with the Form of the Good, and then descending again from it through dependent Forms to a final conclusion. We should hardly be surprised that in antiquity the Platonic Form of the Good became a byword for a hopelessly obscure doctrine. But it does look as if Plato supposed that the ascent to the Form of the Good through the process of dialectic established the goodness and so, as we would say, the morality of the Form of Justice and of its content.

Assuming, however, that this view is correct, and not all would agree that it is so, we can hardly be expected to follow Plato along the path of his private escape-route upwards to the Forms and beyond to the Form of the Good. Nor for that matter could Aristotle, for Aristotle rejected the whole doctrine of separate Platonic Forms including, of course, the doctrine of the Form of the Good. Yet for him as for us the problem remained. If reason is to act as a guide to conduct how can it tell us what actually we are to do and what actually we are not to do. Apart from his rejection of the doctrine of separate Forms Aristotle's approach and starting point was indeed very much the same as that of Plato. To anticipate a conclusion, it might be said that if anything Aristotle's analysis sharpened the terms of the problem without contributing significantly to its solution. The first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* gives us a firm starting point. Happiness (Eudaimonia, perhaps better translated ‘Success in life’) and the good for man consists in the virtuous activity of the human soul, and the virtuous activity of the human soul lies in the successful fulfilment of its function. To understand in what this consists we must first consider the soul of man, and Aristotle proceeds to a description of the functions of the human soul based on a primary division into rational functions and functions which are irrational, which last (EN I.13.11–14) include what are traditionally called the vegetative and nutritive functions which are not confined to man and consequently have no part in the function of being a human being as such. Opposed to these functions is the rational activity of the soul, and, in addition, in a kind of intermediate position
there is a function, part rational and part irrational, this being the function of desire and appetite which is able to obey reason and so participate in rationality and yet also can oppose and run counter to reason (EN 1.15–19). This is essentially the analysis of Plato, except that we no longer have thumos as exercising a separate and distinct function from desire. The whole implication of Book I is that control by reason over the functioning of the soul is essential for the achievement of Eudaimonia. This would seem to be confirmed in Book X where Eudaimonia seems to be identified with rational contemplative activity, i.e. the activity of the rational part of the soul, called Theorētikē (EN X.7).

In Book Two of the Nicomachean Ethics, however, Aristotle proceeds to discuss the virtues or Aretei no longer in terms of their functions in relation to the parts or aspects of the human soul, but in terms of their objective content as describable actions. There follows the famous Aristotelian doctrine of the mean, according to which each virtue is a mean between two extremes. Thus Courage (Andreia) is a mean between excess of fear which is called Cowardice, and excess of confidence which is called Rashness, and a virtue in general can be described as a mean inasmuch as it is a mean that it aims at hitting (1106b28–29). It is clear from this that the mean involves the rejection of each extreme while adopting a quantitatively intermediate position. But how do we discover the mean? On one interpretation we do so by inspecting the extremes and from them we infer the mean, even although we cannot do this on any mere mathematical calculation since there is no absolute or precise relation between the extremes and the mean in each particular case. The importance of this interpretation for my present purposes would be that it imports a new way in which reason might discover what is right and wrong, not now by considering the function of the human soul, but independently, by a direct inspection of the objective characteristics of the actions with which we are concerned in any particular case. Unfortunately, however, as an interpretation of Aristotle this is very far from certain, and it may very well be that

what Aristotle here had in mind was something entirely different. For after giving the example of courage, he proceeds to a definition of moral virtue, according to which (1106b36-1107a2) it is a disposition involving choice, lying in a mean in relation to us, which is determined by logos, and in the way in which (or perhaps 'by that logos by which') the man of practical wisdom (the phronimos) would determine it.

Every phrase in this sentence has provided matter for controversy and difficulty, and the Greek text itself is given in two of the ancient Greek commentators with slight differences of wording from the way in which it appears in the surviving manuscripts of Aristotle. We now seem to have the doctrine of the mean as a criterion for action related to two further criteria, those of the logos and the test constituted by the behaviour of the phronimos or man of practical wisdom. One of these two supposed extra criteria can probably be eliminated without too much difficulty. To say that right action is to be judged by comparison with the actions performed by the phronimos may be of some use to the man who is genuinely in doubt about what to do in a particular situation, but from a theoretic or philosophical point of view it is merely circular. For the phronimos or man of practical wisdom is just the man who has the power to deliberate well concerning the things that are good and advantageous to himself (1140a24 ff.). In other words he is the man who knows how to act rationally and if we are asked what is it that constitutes action rationally we are not helped at the theoretical level if we are merely told that acting rationally consists in acting in the way in which a man acting rationally will act.

What then of the second 'extra' criterion, that of acting in accordance with logos? It is just possible to suppose that Aristotle's meaning may have been, as we have seen, that we are able to arrive at a knowledge of the mean by direct inspection of the extremes. In that case the logos which is found in the definition of moral virtue might be quite simple a ratio—the ratio in fact between the two extremes, and it would be this ratio which the man of practical wisdom would be using in order to discover the mean. Much more probable, however, is the view that by logos here in his definition of moral virtue Aristotle is referring to
what he has earlier called 'right reason' (orthos logos in 1103b32). At the beginning of Book Six Aristotle states outrightly that it is the function of just this right reason to tell us what is the mean (1138b19–20) and he proceeds to explain that this right reason is the virtue of the rational part of the soul when that rational part is concerned with calculations directed towards action. But if the mean is to be determined by right reason we cannot treat direct inspection of the extremes in relation to the mean as informative in relation to questions about right action. We need to refer the mean for its determination to 'right reason' and this in turn leads to the elimination of the doctrine of the mean as an independent source of moral knowledge.1 What we need is some further unexplained external criterion of what is rational and so in accord with 'right reason', or else we are driven back to principles which are interior to the individual.2

But if this last is the case, it is hard to say that Aristotle has made any real advance on Plato in relation to the particular problem with which I am presently concerned. He is left with human nature as the sole source of moral obligation. He is able to go considerably further than Plato in his arguments to show that it is essential for the right functioning of the individual agent that his activities should be rational and should all be controlled by reason. In the Politics he did develop the theme that man is by nature a political animal, meaning by this that he is by nature a member of human societies. But he stopped short of including any principle of Benevolence in the nature of man. His ultimate ideal of human activity as described in Book X of the Nicomachean Ethics is contemplation, that is contemplation by the individual of unchanging truths of which he already possesses knowledge. Aristotle seems simply to assume without the help of an appeal to the Platonic Form of the Good that a man who follows or obeys his reason will also act in accordance with the moral virtues or in Platonic terms practise Vulgar Justice as well as Platonic Justice. But it is hard to find in Aristotle any detailed

1 As is done e.g. by Jonathan Barnes, in Aristotle The Ethics (Penguin Books, revised edition, 1976), Introduction, pp. 23–6.
2 For this last point see, by way of example, J. D. Monan, Moral Knowledge and its Methodology in Aristotle (Oxford, 1968), pp. 83–8.
arguments or proofs as to why this should be so. As the Platonic philosopher might be supposed likely selfishly to be tempted to refuse to return to the Cave, so the Aristotelian good man might be so committed to the satisfaction of his own psychic needs through contemplation that he would simply not be interested in justice directed towards other people. Indeed, his personal needs as a contemplative philosopher might best be satisfied by positive exploitation of his fellow-citizens, in other words by the practice of Vulgar Injustice.

Thirdly and lastly I turn to the Stoics. Their view of the nature of reason was different both from Plato's and Aristotle's view in that for them reason was a single universal cosmic principle in man, in other living creatures, plants or animals, and the whole of the inanimate physical world around us. As is well known, Stoic physics posited simply two Archaí or primary principles, referred to as the active principle and the passive principle, and both principles are material and corporeal. The passive principle as far as concerns itself lacks both any quality and any activity—these come to it simply and solely from the action upon it of the active principle which is divine, rational and the source of all the activity and all states. Reason in man is simply one local manifestation of the universal divine active principle which is interfused with the passive principle throughout the whole of the universe.¹

This way of looking at things significantly altered the terms of the debate about the appeal to reason as a guide to conduct without solving the basic problem involved. For Plato and for his successor Aristotle the problem was this. Suppose that by a study of the nature of an individual human being we can hope to discover what is in accordance with the needs of his individual nature, how can we show that the fulfilment of these needs is also good for others? Or, in the way in which it has seemed convenient to express the problem in this present paper, how can we show that Platonic Justice involves Vulgar Justice? The Stoics solved at least the theoretic aspects of this problem by arguing that the reason in the individual is itself part of the universal divine reason.

¹I attempted to discuss certain special applications of these doctrines in my earlier Rylands lecture, 'The Origin of Evil in Stoic Thought' (Bulletin, lx (1977–8), 482–94).
Consequently if we study the requirements of the reason which is in the individual soul we are at the same time studying what is required by the universal reason. There are not two reasons or a multiplicity of reasons but only the one universal reason which is present everywhere throughout the whole of reality. What is true of the part will (in general) be true of the whole, and what is true of the whole will be true of the part.

One of the first fruits of this new way of looking at things was the Stoic doctrine of Oikeiōsis\(^1\)—this was in essence a process of 'coming to belong' and was both inward looking and outward looking. When inward looking it was the process by which a person or an organism became conscious that it belonged to itself. Another way of putting this is to say that it became increasingly conscious of its own identity as a rational being. This process of discovery was also in a sense a kind of creation—by discovering one's rational nature one in a way creates the conscious self. The outward facing aspect of oikeiōsis was the process whereby the organism came to understand its own relation with the universal rational principle in the universe and conversely the relationship in the reverse direction, that between the universal rational principle and its own individual reason or in other words with its own self.

The outward facing activity of oikeiōsis came to be expressed as the consciousness of one's place at the centre of an ever-widening series of concentric circles. By the first circle the individual relates himself to his own body, and his immediate personal possessions needed for the satisfaction of his immediate physical needs—e.g. clothes, toilet articles and perhaps implements used in eating. The second circle involves consciousness of one's relation to parents, brothers, wife, and children, the third to aunts, uncles, grandparents, nephews, nieces and cousins, the fourth to other, more remote relatives, and the fifth to demesmen, fellow-tribesmen, citizens, neighbouring towns, fellow-countrymen, and then to the entire human race. This ever-widening series of relationships at the conscious level involves an expansion of human personality and consciousness in the

\(^1\)See my treatment in Bulletin, lv (1972–3), 177–96, where references to the sources are given.
process. Any attempt to reverse the process would involve a deprivation of the person, depriving him of what belongs to him and of that to which he belongs, and such a deprivation is to be resisted as involving a loss or diminution of his own personality.

Here it should already be possible to see that the process of oikeiōsis when described in this way is indeed seen by the Stoics as in some sense a development in accordance with reason, not simply because it is not contrary to reason, but because it has through and through a positive relation with the structure, nature and activities of the universal reason which is the active principle that penetrates the whole of the universe. By positing a single universal reason, to which the multiplicity of individual human reasons are related as parts, the possibility of conflict between my individual reason and the universal reason is removed. Any conflict between myself and the universal reason can result only from a failure in rationality on my part. If I am completely rational then my reason will accord perfectly with the processes of the universal reason. Of course it will remain possible for me to doubt the existence of any such Stoic universal reason, but if its existence and nature is granted then the conclusion does seem to follow—my reason and the universal reason are ultimately one and the same thing.

Despite this, however, the basic problem, which I have raised in the cases of Plato and Aristotle, remains to confront the Stoics also. How can one proceed from the concept of reason in general to principles applicable to particular classes of actions and situations? Above all if we do so proceed, might it not be the case that universal reason left us simply at the same position as individual reason? Might it not be in accordance with universal reason that each individual should rightly be in perpetual conflict with each other individual, thus setting up the ideal of homo homini lupus? In that case Vulgar Injustice might involve not only the fulfilment of the rational needs of the individual, but also the fulfilment of the requirements of cosmic reason itself. For this to be disproved and the contrary established, we need to show that reason itself, whether in the individual only, or in the universe as a whole, involves the elements of Vulgar Justice. This in turn requires that we can somehow proceed from the concept of
reason as such to more detailed principles, e.g. the requirement that men should respect other men and reject the concept of unremitting mutual hostility and enmity as a principle of action. What seems to be called for is first the formulation of propositions true of the universal reason itself, then the derivation from these propositions of further propositions with positive content which we can then apply first to classes of actions and ultimately to particular actions and situations. Best of all would be if this could be done by a process of formal deduction, but this seems to be impossible without the addition of further premisses, not themselves deducible from the first premisses, and so involving the introduction of propositions whose truth cannot be established by the primary propositions alone. It is certainly possible to add to primary propositions further propositions which are compatible with (not logically in contradiction to) the primary propositions, but these also will require independent evidence if they are to be accepted as true.

At first sight it would seem that this is a difficulty of such dimensions that it threatens to remove the whole basis of an appeal to reason as a guide to conduct. Yet clearly a great deal is here at stake, for historically the Stoic doctrine of universal reason became the source of three great doctrines or sets of doctrines. It was from the Stoic doctrine of the universal reason that there flowed the doctrine of Natural Law—that is, Law based solely on universally applicable reason, a doctrine which flowed from the Stoics through Cicero to be incorporated in Roman Law. From the theory of Natural Law in its medieval Christian form there developed in the period of the Renaissance and the Reformation the theory of Natural Rights appertaining to the individual. In its classic expression by John Locke in his Second Treatise of Government published in 1690 the theory held that it is self-evident to human reason that all men are equal and independent and consequently that no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions. Thirdly, Natural Theology, while largely concerned to establish by Reason the existence of God and the Divine Attributes, through the doctrine of Divine

\footnote{For a fuller account see R. Tuck, \textit{Natural Rights Theories, their origin and development} (Cambridge, 1979).}
Providence attempts to discover by reason the principles of right and wrong conduct. All three of these doctrines, Natural Law, Natural Right and Natural Theology, continue to exercise intellectual fascination. Yet all are to some degree held back or even frustrated by the same difficulty which confronted the Stoics, namely that of establishing by reason the actual contents of a system of ethics.

With so much at stake we must surely continue to search for a solution to the difficulty which seems to stand in our way, and it may perhaps be of help to look at the actual way in which Stoic thinkers proceeded. But a preliminary point or two may be worth mentioning first. When moral principles are seen as imperatives it is natural to expect that they will be capable of expression in precisely expressed formulae—so Do this, Do not do that. If we are operating with the concept of fulfilment of function, however, it may not be necessary to call for quite this degree of precision. Aristotle had already argued that the science of right conduct could not and should not be a precise science (EN I.1094b11–27) — it is the mark of a trained mind to seek only that degree of precision which the nature of the subject allows, and it is as unreasonable to ask for logical demonstrations from a teacher of rhetoric as it is to accept mere plausibility from a mathematician. Here Aristotle seems to be suggesting that logical deductions (apodeixesis) are not to be sought in ethics any more than they are to be sought in rhetoric. What then is the alternative? Both for Aristotle and the Stoics we seem often to be striving after an intuitive understanding of the nature of the life guided by reason, an understanding which will understand the range and coordination of the parts and various aspects of such a life, but which at the end will present us with a view of appropriate kinds of actions rather than precise imperatives applicable without exception in all circumstances. All I can suggest is that it just might be helpful to look at some of the positive conclusions which some of the Stoics did arrive at as a result of looking at universal reason in this way.

First an interesting piece of psychology. According to Hierocles' Summary of Stoic Ethics, recovered from a papyrus and published in 1906 (Co. 7.5–15), fear of the dark in children is due to the removal of the external stimuli received through sight and this
makes the children think or feel that their personalities—i.e. they themselves—are in process of being extinguished. More technically, oikeiōsis in their case seems to have been put into reverse. The remedy to be used by a nurse in charge of children is to tell them to shut their eyes—they will thus learn that the removal of light has not affected their personalities. A trivial example perhaps, but sensory deprivation is a modern technique used to impair or weaken the personality, and it may indeed seem to be wrong as an infringement of the natural right of the individual. Self-mutilation and amputation of parts of the body also offend against the requirements of oikeiōsis—they also involve diminution from what we have come to perceive as parts of ourselves. But here we are concerned, not with an imperative in the form of a prohibition laid down for us by some external source, but with our own intuition of what constitutes ourselves. In other cases also, when the Stoics present supporting arguments in favour of conclusions concerning conduct, they are probably arguing, not that certain types of behaviour would be inconsistent with specific imperatives, but rather that they would be inconsistent with our intuitive perception of what is involved in a rational life seen as a co-ordinated whole. This co-ordinated whole will necessarily possess an internal interconnexion and correlation. It is probably this that Cicero has in mind when he translates the Stoic term homologia by the Latin word convenientia, which refers not primarily to the accord of actions with nature, but rather to the mutual inter-relations within nature and reason itself.¹ On this view what the Stoic is concerned with is not the attempt to derive subordinate principles from the concept of nature, least of all to derive such principles expressed in the form of imperatives, but rather to arrive at an appreciation of the nature of rational action as such. Such convenientia when achieved in an individual rational soul would, of course, be paralleled by the convenientia within cosmic reason taken as a whole, so that it could then also itself be described as being ‘in accord’ with universal reason,² and

¹Cf. Cicero De Finibus III.21 with his De Natura Deorum III.28.

²It may indeed have been a realisation that this was the case which underlay the expansion of Zeno’s formula zên homologoumenós into the full expression among his successors namely zên homologoumenós têi phusei, for which cf. Stobaeus II.75W.
so introducing a third aspect of convenientia. But it is likely that throughout the history of Stoicism we are really concerned only with a single concept of ‘living consistently’.¹

A series of examples (taken from Cicero, *De Finibus* III.62 ff.) may help to make this clearer. The structure and parts of the human body, male and female, by themselves are enough to show that the rational pattern which is nature’s scheme includes the procreation of offspring. In addition, it is nature which prompts parents to love their children. These two principles belong together, we are told, in that it would be inconsistent if nature should intend that offspring should be born and yet at the same time should take no steps to see that offspring when born should be the objects of affection. It should be noted that the kind of consistency here posited is not based on any formal logical relationship between propositions, it is rather the consistency appropriate between a pair of impulses in order that neither impulse should be frustrated in its effect by the failure or the positive opposition of the other impulse. What we are dealing with is the picture of a harmonious and so consistent series of impulses flowing from a single self-consistent rational principle. For the Stoics, indeed, the impulse to love those to whom we have given birth is also the source of the sense of mutual attraction which obtains between human beings as such, inasmuch as the process of oikeiōsis leads to the perception of a kind of kinship between all men which leads eventually to the concept of a community of the whole human race. This concept in turn is widened into that of a single city or community embracing both men and gods. Once we have understood that each of us is a part of this universe it is a natural consequence, we are told, that we prefer the general advantage to our own.

From this concern for the universal community various consequences follow. That our concern is not limited by the expected duration of our own lives is shown by the practice of making wills and establishing trusts when we are dying. With this doctrine a passage in Stobaeus, II.120.3W, in a Peripatetic context, associates concern for children in the womb as yet unborn and

the appointment of guardians for these and other children. No one would wish to pass his life in absolute solitude, no matter how abundant the pleasures available, and this also shows that we have been born in order to combine and associate with our fellow men in a natural partnership. From this follows a natural urge to help as many men as possible, and in particular to teach and impart principles of right behaviour. Despite the overriding claims of the community the retention of private property is defended on the analogy of the theatre—while the theatre belongs to all it is still right to say that the particular seat which a man has taken belongs to him.

Finally, it may be of interest to consider the rationality of suicide as seen by the Greeks, concluding with some remarks on the famous Stoic doctrine. The traditional Greek view of suicide shows considerable variation both in time and in place. In the Homeric poems suicide seems not to have attracted any particular condemnation—Odysseus when things were not going well could contemplate suicide for himself as something in no way out of the ordinary (cf. Od. X.49). But at Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BC it was regarded as a crime against the state and attempts (possibly only successful attempts) could be punished by amputation of the right hand and burial apart from others (Ar. E.N. 1138a9–14, Aeschines III.244). In Plato's Phaedo it is condemned on religious grounds in that it involves frustrating the intention of God who has given us life on such terms that he alone can take it away from us and decide when this should occur (62b6–8). Life is the gift of God. Despite this, Socrates expounds the doctrine that philosophy will as far as possible lead to a separation of the soul from the body, and so may properly be described as a kind of cultivation or practice in dying (81a1–2), and according to the story this so influenced one of Socrates' associates, a man named Cleombrotus, that he did in fact commit suicide, though his life was entirely happy, by hurling himself from a high wall or cliff in Ambracia (Callimachus Epigr. 23 Pfeiffer; Milton, Paradise Lost, III.473).

As is well known, the Stoics regarded suicide as justified by reason under certain conditions. The general principle involved seems to have been that stated by Cicero (De Finibus III.50).
According to this principle 'when there is a majority of things in accordance with nature in a man's life, then it is appropriate for him to remain alive. When the balance is on the other side or seems likely to be so, then it is appropriate for a man to quit life. From this it is clear that it is sometimes appropriate for the wise man to quit life, although he is happy, and for the foolish man to remain in life, although he is unhappy.' It is clear that it is not happiness or unhappiness which is the test for determining whether on the Stoic view a man should commit suicide or not. For the Stoic many of the things which make an ordinary man unhappy do so only because he does not understand their complete irrelevance to true happiness. Likewise we are explicitly told that the wise man will sometimes rightly commit suicide even when he is happy. In his case also the principle is clear—he will commit suicide when the conditions for his leading a rational life are no longer present or are about to be no longer present, and this is something which the wise man will be able to know by the exercise of his own powers of judgement and reasoning.

Less clear is the Stoic position about the man who is not wise, and two views have been put forward. The wise man clearly is equipped with powers of judgement which are lacking in the case of the man who is not wise. So the view has been put forward\(^1\) that the ordinary man, who is unwise, should never commit suicide on the basis of his own judgement—the only case when he might be justified in committing suicide would be perhaps when he had received a special divine sign or signal. Thus, according to Diogenes Laertius (VII.28), when Zeno (the founder of the Stoic sect) was leaving the school he tripped and broke either a toe or a finger. He struck the ground with his hand and quoted the line from the (non-extant) tragedy, the Niobe 'I am coming—why are you calling me?' and died forthwith through holding his breath. Others said that he first went home before killing himself, and according to one account he did so by starving himself to death. On the basis of the quotation from the Niobe it has been suggested that Zeno read the accident which happened to him as a divine call, i.e. a signal to depart from life. As against this view,

however, it has been pointed out that even if the story is true, which is doubtful, the breaking of his toe may have been the last straw in a sum of disabilities rather than a divine sign.\textsuperscript{1} Even if Zeno did choose to see his accident as a divine sign, it can hardly provide a sufficient base for a general theory to the effect that a divine sign was the only situation which would justify suicide in a man who was not wise. It is true that Plutarch makes it clear (SVF III.751) that Chrysippus held that while virtue was no reason for our continuing to live, likewise vice (absence of virtue) was no reason why we need depart from this life. But this does not exclude the possibility of there being other reasons why the non-wise man on occasion might commit suicide.

However that may be, it is perhaps more profitable to enquire what are the circumstances in which a wise man ought to commit suicide. The general principle has been stated already, namely when the possibility of leading a rational life has been removed or is about to be removed. The fullest account of Stoic doctrine happens also to be the most colourful.\textsuperscript{2} It involves the comparison with a banquet or dinner party (a Symposium). Five separate good reasons are given why it may be right to break up the party and depart: 1. a sudden great need (or demand) as through the arrival of a friend after a long interval, 2. disreputable behaviour and disreputable language at the dinner-party, 3. the provisions are rotted and diseased, 4. there is not enough to eat, or 5. drunkenness. So in the case of life itself the rational conditions for its continuance may disappear in five separate cases: 1. in the case of a sudden great need, e.g. if the oracle at Delphi gave instructions to a man to kill himself for the sake of his own city when destruction was hanging over that city, 2. if tyrants started playing the fool and proceeded to force us to do shameful acts or to say or reveal things that ought not to be said, 3. prolonged disease effectively preventing the soul from controlling


\textsuperscript{2} One version is given in Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta, ed. Von Amim, III.768, but rather better versions are found in Olympiodorus' Commentary on Plato's Phaedo, ed. Norvin, pp. 5–6, and Elias in Porphyrii Isagogen 15.1 in Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, vol. XVIII. For other references see Norvin, ad loc.
the body for its purposes (corresponding to rotting food-stuffs at the dinner party), 4. poverty, and 5. madness since madness is nothing else but drunkenness in one's very nature (physikê methê) just as drunkenness is elective madness (proairetikos lêros).