THE INVENTION OF DUTY:
STOICISM AS DEONTOLOGY

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Abstract

Philosophers today generally believe that duty-based (deontic) ethics was an innovation of the Enlightenment, spearheaded by the work of Immanuel Kant in particular. According to this prevailing scholarly opinion, while the ancient Greeks and Romans had notions of civic, military, and religious duty, they lacked a notion of purely moral duty as well as a duty-based system of ethics. In this dissertation, I argue that the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers of the Stoic school did in fact develop a notion of moral duty as well as a sophisticated, deontic ethical theory built around that notion. The deontic aspect of the Stoic system has hitherto gone unnoticed for a number of reasons, including the paucity and fragmentary nature of the extant evidence from early Stoic writers. Throughout the first three chapters of my thesis, I try to piece together the surviving evidence in order to reconstruct the Stoic theory of duty.

In the first chapter, I argue that the important Greek term καθῆκον (kathêkon), which the Stoics coined and which recent scholars have assumed means “appropriate action,” actually means something like “required/prescribed action” and approximates our notion of “duty.” I do this through a detailed philological study of the earliest surviving texts in which either the term itself or the verb from which it was derived (καθήκειν) appears. My second chapter argues that, while the Stoics spoke of (morally) “prescribed actions,” they rejected all fixed rules of conduct on the grounds that no rule – no matter how carefully formulated – can be without exception. My third chapter attempts to explain how, in lieu of a set of rules, the Stoics offered a kind of formula by which every rational agent can calculate his/her precise duty in any given situation. The fourth and final chapter explores the various avenues through which Stoicism influenced Kant and offers a comparison of Stoic καθῆκον with the Kantian concept of duty.
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List of Common Abbreviations

Classical Texts and References

*Adv. math.*  Sextus Empiricus *Against the Mathematicians (Adversus Mathematicos)*

*Ben.*  Seneca *De Beneficiis*

*Comm. not.*  Plutarch *On the Common Notions against the Stoics (De communibus notitiis)*

*D.L.*  Diogenes Laertius *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*

*Diss.*  Epictetus’ *Discourses* compiled by Arrian

*Ep.*  Seneca *Moral Epistles to Lucilius*

*Fin.*  Cicero *De Finibus*

*Leg.*  Cicero *De Legibus*

*LS*  Long and Sedley *The Hellenistic Philosophers*

*LSJ*  Liddell-Scott-Jones Lexicon of Classical Greek

*M.A.*  Marcus Aurelius *Meditations*

*Off.*  Cicero *De Officiis*

Stobaeus  Stobaeus *Anthology, ed. C. Wachsmuth and O. Hense.*

*Stoic. repugn.*  Plutarch *On the Self-Contradictions of the Stoics (De Stoicorum repugnantiiis)*

*SVF*  Hans von Arnim *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*

*TLG*  Thesaurus Linguae Graecae

Works by Immanuel Kant

*Ak.*  *Immanuel Kants Schriften. Ausgabe der königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1902-).* All writings of Immanuel Kant will be cited by volume:page number in this edition.

*C*  *Lectures on Ethics* (compiled by Collins; Ak. 27)

*G*  *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*

*KpV*  *Critique of Practical Reason*

*KrV*  *Critique of Pure Reason*

*MS*  *Metaphysics of Morals*

*R*  *Religion within the Bare Bounds of Reason*
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You can’t always get what you want.

But if you try sometime,

You just might find,

You get what you need.

– The Rolling Stones

[Determinists such as the Stoics] reduce humans to being mere rolling stones.

– Plotinus (Enn. III.1.5.18)
About 2300 years ago, a wealthy merchant from Cyprus was shipwrecked off the coast of Greece. Making it to Athens alive, and there recuperating from his misfortune, he met philosophers, some of whom were old enough to remember the lectures of Plato and Aristotle from their youth. These encounters had such a profound effect on him that he abandoned the pursuit of money and settled in Athens, devoting himself wholeheartedly to philosophical inquiry. Although a mere couple of decades had elapsed since Aristotle’s death, the world had been drastically transformed during that time, following the conquests of Alexander. The ethical systems of Plato and Aristotle, rooted as they were in the context of the city-state, had lost much of their appeal in the new cosmopolitan, interconnected network that stretched from India to Marseilles. In time, the former merchant started his own school, teaching a radically new ethics for a changed world. His name was Zeno, and his school became known as the Stoa.

All humans everywhere, Zeno taught, are citizens of one cosmic city. Furthermore, he claimed that for every one of us, at every moment in time, there is a particular action that we are obligated to do (doing anything else would be a mistake or ἁμάρτημα). This normative concept, which he called καθῆκον (kathêkon) in Greek passed into the Roman world as the concept of officium, and then, mediated by the Christian Middle Ages, eventually influenced the modern notion of moral duty. However, virtually everything written by Zeno and his Stoic followers over the next 250 years was eventually lost during the Middle Ages. My dissertation aims to uncover
what this influential concept of καθῆκον meant exactly and how it relates to our modern notion of duty.

The concept of duty, or moral obligation, is an essential part of modern discussions of morality. Most historians of philosophy today think that the idea of moral duty (as opposed to civic, military, or religious duty) did not exist in the ancient Greco-Roman world, but was an innovation of the Enlightenment, spearheaded by the work of Immanuel Kant in particular. The ancients, it is often claimed, did not have a duty-based (deontological) ethics, like that of Kant. In other words, they did not offer a system for evaluating “which choices are morally required, forbidden or permitted.” Instead, their ethical systems were founded on the question, “How can I lead a good and/or virtuous life?” While the Stoic concept of καθῆκον is taken to be a forerunner of the modern notion of moral duty, it is thought to have merely denoted actions that are appropriate (sc. not morally required). But is all of this really true? There does not seem to be in the existing literature any in-depth investigation specifically about the origins of the notion of duty in antiquity, to see to what extent there was or was not such a concept in use. As I show in the present work, rather than denoting merely “appropriate action,” the Stoic notion of καθῆκον (or officium in Latin) actually constitutes a well-developed concept of duty, which is much closer to our modern notion than has been recognized until now.

Καθῆκον is a new term that the early Stoics introduce into philosophical discourse. Using language echoing a phrase from Plato’s Crito, they define καθῆκον as that which “reason

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1 See e.g. Adkins 1960, 2-3; Williams 1993, 41; and Hallpike 2017, 206-10.
2 This definition is taken from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy’s entry for “deontological ethics” (Alexander and Moore 2016). While the article does not explicitly claim that there was no deontological ethics in the ancient world, like virtually all treatments of the subject it does not mention any ancient theory that might have exhibited a kind of deontological approach to ethics.
4 Scholars have assumed that the word’s original meaning was “appropriate.” I demonstrate in the next chapter, via a detailed philological study, that it originally meant “required/prescribed.”
demands that one do” (λόγος αἱρεῖ ποιεῖν). Perhaps influenced by Socrates’ subsequent interrogation by the personified laws in the Crito, they also describe καθήκον as an action which, when done, admits of a defense that stands to reason (ὁ πραχθὲν εὖλογον ἀπολογίαν ἔχει). Echoing Socrates’ final words in the Crito that he must follow where god leads him, the Stoics also imply that to do one’s καθήκον is to obey the mind of Zeus. Already we can see that the Stoics, while evidently taking cues from Plato’s Socrates, are doing something new in attempting to unify the various deliberative strands in the Crito into one normative concept.

The Stoics go further. They equate the perfect performance of one’s καθήκοντα with living on the basis of virtue, which (they claim) is also the same as living in accordance with nature, which is the same as obeying the common law (κοινὸς νόμος) that binds all rational beings, which is the same as following the right reason which permeates all things and is identical to Zeus (ὁ ὁρθὸς λόγος, διὰ πάντων ἑρχόμενος, ὁ αὐτὸς ὃν τῷ Δί). Moreover, they ground this series of equivalences in a sophisticated theory of nature, of rationality, and of human motivation. This attempt to unify all sources of normativity into one concept is what makes καθήκον different from any normative notion found in pre-Stoic Greek philosophy and similar, in important ways, to the modern notion of moral duty. Taken individually, none of the aspects of καθήκον seen in the series of equivalences above represents a radical innovation on the part of the Stoics. What is new is the claim that all moral considerations point us in one direction: to our duty (καθήκον). Furthermore, the Stoics developed both a robust ethical theory

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6 Stobaeus 2.7.8.3. Cf. the similar formulation: ὃ πραχθὲν εὖλογον ἱσχει ἀπολογίσμον (D.L. 7.107.9).
7 Crito 54e1.
8 D.L. 7.88.5.
9 The Stoics were influenced both by Plato’s Socrates and, perhaps even more, by Xenophon’s Socrates in formulating their ethical theory. For the influence of Plato’s Socrates see Striker 1994. For Xenophon’s Socrates see DeFilippo and Mitsis 1994.
10 D.L. 7.88.5.
11 E.g. their idea that there is a common law, which is identified with the rationality of the universe, is anticipated in important ways by Xenophon’s Socrates. Cf. DeFilippo and Mitsis 1994, 255-65.
built around this notion and, as I intend to show, a sophisticated method of moral deliberation for finding one’s καθῆκον.

If I am right that the Stoics had a well-developed concept of moral duty, why has it been overlooked by scholars until now? A confluence of factors may explain this oversight. First of all, virtually all the writings of the Stoics during the first 250 years of their school’s existence have been lost, including many books dedicated to the duty-like concept examined in this monograph. In fact, very few prose texts in Greek or Latin from this period (c. 320-70 BC) survive at all, making it perhaps the least well understood period of Greco-Roman antiquity. Our knowledge of Stoicism during this period is based on fragments, often preserved in later, anti-Stoic sources.12 Second, the main dictionaries of ancient Greek today perpetuate the idea that the word καθῆκον often means “appropriate.” But these dictionary entries were written in the nineteenth century and have gone largely unrevised since then. Finally, the duty-free picture of antiquity harmonizes with a prevalent trend in modern philosophy that Bernard Williams called “progressivism” – the belief that older civilizations lacked many of our hard-won concepts, such as “the will” and the category of “the moral.”13 However, such progressivist views have come under increasing scrutiny and have been shown in many cases to be simplistic or problematic.

These various factors come together in a seemingly self-perpetuating cycle. The dictionary entries of καθῆκον (or its parent verb καθῆκειν) are not revised because the philologists defer to specialists in ancient philosophy, who continue to translate the term as “appropriate action.” But these scholars of ancient philosophy rely on the outdated dictionaries that tell them that the original sense of the word denoted appropriateness. Moreover, their

12 Much of this material is preserved in Plutarch, Sextus Empiricus, and various early Christian writers. All of these writers are philosophical and/or ideological opponents of the Stoa and they often report supposedly Stoic arguments in misleading ways.
13 Williams 1993, 5-8.
colleagues in modern philosophy maintain that there is no deontological ethics to be found in the pre-modern period. Finally, modern philosophers see in the classical dictionaries and in the scholarship on ancient philosophy nothing to destabilize the standard view that there was no ancient concept of moral duty. The only way to objectively reassess the situation is to face the problem from all three disciplines simultaneously: philologically, philosophically, and historically. It is this that I attempt to do in the present dissertation.

In the first chapter, I try to establish the precise meaning of the word καθῆκον. I start by examining why it has been assumed to denote appropriateness and show that the reasons for this interpretation are unconvincing. Much of the chapter then consists in a survey of the extant, pre-Stoic occurrences of the term and its parent verb (καθήκειν) in order to determine the meaning(s) of καθῆκον before the Stoics adopted it as an ethical term. It will become clear that the word usually denoted something that was required or prescribed (by decree, nature, or tradition). Moreover, it was this strongly normative usage of the word that the Stoics availed themselves of when they adopted it. Thus, the Stoic concept does not mean “appropriate action” but rather “required/prescribed action.” Next, I explore the puzzling etymology of καθῆκον offered by Zeno, the meaning of which has never been satisfactorily explained. I offer a reading of Zeno’s phrase that is both grammatically sound and corroborated by passages in later Stoic writers. I conclude with suggestions on how to translate καθῆκον so as to avoid confusion with the Stoic concept of πρέπον/decorum, which does denote appropriateness.

In the second chapter I address the current debate in the scholarship about whether καθήκοντα are like rules/commandments or not. While the standard assumption for centuries has been that καθήκοντα are rules (with some philosophers faulting the Stoics for not laying down enough rules), I take the side of a few recent scholars who have rejected this view. Building on
the work of Brad Inwood and Katja Vogt in particular, I offer an explanation for why there can
be no fixed rules of conduct in the Stoic ethical system. I then turn to a related scholarly
problem: how the different categories of καθήκοντα mentioned by different sources relate to one
another. I show that the various types of καθήκοντα all fit into one neat classification scheme,
which further elucidates how καθήκοντα differ from rules. Finally, I offer new and improved
translations of the passages dealing with καθήκον in the two Greek epitomes of Stoic ethics,
putting to use the philological and interpretive work of the first two chapters.

The purpose of the third chapter is to explain how one is supposed to figure out his or
her καθῆκον/officium, given that there are no fixed rules of conduct to rely on. Answering this
question is notoriously difficult, since the vast majority of Stoic writings on καθήκον have
perished. Nevertheless, there are hints in the extant texts that the Stoics had offered a method of
moral deliberation, which ordinary people – not just sages – could implement. By collating what
Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius say about duty, I try to piece together what this
method was. What emerges is a remarkably rigorous, yet flexible, system that assigns to each
individual in any given situation a custom-tailored duty based on that person’s natural, acquired,
and chosen roles in life. While some scholars see such “role ethics” as a late innovation of
Epictetus, I argue that roles are already crucial in the system of Panaetius, if not earlier.

In the final chapter, I explore the relationship between Stoic καθῆκον and Kant’s notion
of duty. I argue that Kant may have been more influenced by Stoic philosophy than has been
widely recognized. Kant’s conception of the will, of duty, and of the categorical imperative all
exhibit interesting points of similarity with antecedent Stoic notions of practical reason, of
καθήκον, and of the “common law” (κοινός νόμος). In the second half of the chapter I compare
the demands that καθήκον and Kantian duty each place on our actions. I show that, with one
notable exception, the demands of Kantian duty are generally included in the demands of καθῆκον. However, the Stoic normative concept is much broader. For the Stoics, one is never free from the demands of καθῆκον, while for Kant, there are situations where duty is not at stake. Furthermore, the Stoic system is more flexible because, unlike the Kantian one, it does not require that duties be universalizable. In other words every person at every instance has a unique καθῆκον which depends on their personal nature and the situation they find themselves in. Both the Stoic and the Kantian systems are built on the recognition that all humans share a common rationality. Moreover, both claim that, when we do our duty, we are doing what is best for us and for humanity.
Chapter One

Did the Stoics Have a Concept of Moral Duty?

A story has come down to us that Plato once pleaded in court for the Athenian general Chabrias at a time when there was popular outrage against Chabrias and no one else had the courage to speak up for him. The undefeated general stood accused of treachery and was facing the death penalty if convicted. Right before the trial, a notorious informer accosted Plato, asking if he did not see that the hemlock of Socrates awaited him too if he did not hold his tongue. Undeterred, Plato replied:

καὶ ὅτε ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος ἐστρατευόμην, ὑπέμενον τοὺς κινδύνους, καὶ νῦν ὑπὲρ τοῦ καθήκοντος διὰ φίλον ὑπέμενον. (D.L. 3.24.4-6)

As I faced dangers when serving in the cause of my country, so I will face them now in the cause of duty for a friend. (tr. Hicks)

An interesting aspect of this story is that, while Plato may have indeed risked his life in defending his friend, he almost certainly did not utter the words transmitted to us in the quotation

1 D.L. 3.24
2 Although this story from Diogenes Laertius does not mention the specific charge against Chabrias, the trial referred to is likely the one mentioned by Demosthenes (In Midiam 64.2) regarding the Oropus affair of 366 BC. By collating this passage of Demosthenes with what the scholiast says (scholia vetera, ad loc.) as well as one passage in Aristotle (Rhet. 1364a.21) and one in Plutarch (Demosthenes 5), one can put together the following fragmentary picture of the trial and its context. After the loss of Oropus to Thebes in 366 BC, Chabrias and Callistratus, who had both been involved in the negotiations over the disputed territory, were accused of betraying it to the Thebans. There was great public outrage at Athens about the loss of Oropus, and the trial(s) thus generated a lot of excitement in the city. Callistratus' defense on this occasion became famous as the speech that inspired Demosthenes to dedicate himself wholeheartedly to oratory. Little is known about Chabrias' defense, except that he had many accusers (including the skilled orator Leodamas), that the prosecution sought the death penalty, and that he was probably acquitted (since he was not executed in the end and no other penalty is mentioned). The reasons for identifying this trial as the one alluded to in the anecdote about Plato are: 1) no other capital case involving Chabrias is known 2) the Oropus affair was famous enough to be alluded to in passing, and 3) the details of the case, such as the public excitement and large number of accusers, fit well the information given in the anecdote. If the story has any truth to it, Chabrias may have owed his life in part to Plato, who would have been just over sixty years old at the time.
above. The word καθῆκον (here translated as “duty”) is an ethical term introduced by the Stoics at least half a century after Plato’s death. It never appears in the works of Plato or Aristotle.

Although the verb καθήκειν – of which καθῆκον is formally the neuter participle – already existed in the Classical period, it was in the Hellenistic period that the Stoics first established its participial form as a de facto noun with an ethical meaning. Before the Stoics, substantival use of the participle was rare, occurring only twice in extant pre-Hellenistic literature, and in both cases without any apparent ethical meaning. In the above quotation, both the use of καθῆκον as a noun and the fact that it is found in an ethical context (providing the justification for an action) are characteristic of Stoic usage of the term and indicate a post-Classical origin of this anecdote. This quotation can hardly contain the ipsissima verba of Plato but, rather, appears to be from a later (likely Stoic) telling or retelling of a story about Plato.

We may wonder if this anecdote preserves a paraphrase of something Plato actually said. The concept of καθῆκον evidently had such a loaded ethical meaning that by appealing to it alone the anecdotal Plato could, in the compass of a single word, provide an ethical justification for risking his life. Did the historical Plato have any single concept that covered the semantic range of καθῆκον? Or does this story exhibit a new normative concept that was only developed after Plato and Aristotle? Answering this question is difficult, largely because there is disagreement concerning what καθῆκον means exactly and how to translate it.

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3 The original meaning of this verb was, “to have come down to.” Its other meanings will be discussed below.
4 viz. the period between 323 and 31 BC. Since Zeno founded his school towards the beginning of the Hellenistic period (c. 300 BC), the terms “pre-Hellenistic” and “pre-Stoic” are roughly synonymous.
5 Both occurrences will be analyzed below.
6 There are a number of other statements and anecdotes about Plato preserved in late sources which have a strong Stoic flavor (see e.g. Seneca De Ira 3.12 and D.L. 3.78.1-79.4). Considered collectively, these passages suggest that the Stoics may have crafted their own version of Plato the character, just as they crafted their own version of Socrates. Cf. Barnes 1991, 120-22.
7 Frede, Cooper, Inwood, Vogt, and Johnson – to name a few – translate it as “appropriate action,” Pomeroy as “the appropriate,” Tad Brennan as “befitting action,” and Long and Sedley as “proper function.”
period, but that it did not approximate our modern notion of moral duty/obligation. Although the term is sometimes translated as “duty” (as in Hicks’ translation above), scholars of philosophy today resist this translation for two reasons. First, the ancients are generally believed to have lacked a concept of moral duty (as well as any deontological system of ethics). Second, the literal meaning of the word καθήκον is thought to be something like “appropriate” [action], without a strong sense of obligation.

It should be noted that, while most scholars now use “appropriate action” (or something similar\(^8\)) to translate καθήκον, several of those same scholars have expressed reservations about such usage.\(^9\) Nevertheless, “appropriate action” has become a kind of common currency for discussing καθήκον in English, even among scholars whose explanations of what the concept actually means diverge from what the English term might suggest. For example, John Cooper writes:

> So an ‘appropriate act’ is not simply one that fits well with the circumstances in some unspecified way or because it gets you what you want; it is one that it is incumbent upon the one doing it to do, because in those circumstances it is assigned to it by its nature and by the nature of things in general.\(^{10}\)

While Cooper adopts the common label for καθήκον – an “appropriate act” – he points out that the meaning behind this label is actually something obligatory (“incumbent upon us”) and prescribed (“assigned”) to us. In view of this explanation, “appropriate action” seems to be an

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9. John Cooper and Katja Vogt have both told me in conversation that they are not fully satisfied with “appropriate action” as a translation, but that they use the term as a kind of common currency for scholarly discussion. Brennan, who calls καθήκοντα “befitting actions,” acknowledges that this is an imperfect translation but thinks it is better than the alternatives. He writes, “I shall employ this last term, as having the fewest misleading connotations.” See Brennan 2005, 170.
unfortunate translation of the Greek concept,\textsuperscript{11} which appears to have a stronger normativity than the word “appropriate” would suggest. But if the concept is strongly normative, how different is it from our notion of duty?

**The Standard Case against Translating Καθῆκον as ‘Duty’**

Let us consider the two aforementioned reasons why scholars generally resist translating καθῆκον as “duty.” First of all, there is the commonly accepted modern view that there was no deontological ethics before Kant. This idea depends in part on the assumption that the modern notion of moral duty is essentially the Kantian notion. Such a case was made by Adkins, who claimed that “we are all Kantians now” in terms of how we think about moral duty (and that no such concept can be found in the ancient Greek world).\textsuperscript{12} However, this assertion is unconvincing, as was pointed out by Kenneth Dover in the following humorous reply to Adkins’ claim.

> I cannot recall experiencing a temptation to use the word ‘duty’ in its Kantian sense (except, of course, when talking about Kant) and, at least in the course of the last five or six years, I do not think I have heard the word so used. Unless I am seriously deceiving myself, I and most of the people I know well find the Greeks of the Classical period easier to understand than Kantians.\textsuperscript{13}

Thus, is it not absolutely clear that the modern notion of moral duty (if there is only a single such notion) is a Kantian invention.

Furthermore, the claim that the ancient Greeks did not have something like the modern notion of moral duty does not imply that there was no prior concept of duty at all, but only that there was no concept of specifically *moral* duty (as opposed to, for example, religious or civic

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\textsuperscript{11} John Cooper and Katja Vogt have both told me in conversation that they are not fully satisfied with “appropriate action” as a translation, but that they use the term as a kind of common currency for scholarly discussion.

\textsuperscript{12} Adkins 1960, 2-3.

\textsuperscript{13} Dover 1974, 2 n.3.
duty). After all, the English word “duty,” the German Pflicht, the French devoir, the Russian dolg, the modern Greek καθήκον etc., each of which can be used today in the philosophical discourse of its respective language to refer to Kantian conceptions of moral duty, all existed before Kant. In English, as in other languages, one speaks of duties as things that are owed or should be done, and such usage did not originate with Kant. Every language has ways of expressing “oughts,” and ancient Greek had many ways of doing so.

Common notions of duty can be found throughout archaic and classical Greek literature, as can be surmised from the prevalence of the word “duty” in English translations of all manner of Greek texts from Homer to Euripides. For the most part these translations are legitimate, and their legitimacy in no way hinges upon the question, whether or not the Greeks had a secular notion of moral duty à la Kant. For example, Thucydides famously has Pericles say that Athens’ empire was acquired by men who knew and dared to do their δέοντα. Translators from Hobbes in the seventeenth century to Jowett in the nineteenth century to Richard Crawley, Rex Warner, and Steven Lattimore more recently all translate the Greek word as “duty” or “duties.” This is a reasonable translation and it clearly does not entail or require a Kantian sense of moral obligation (Hobbes, for one, died before Kant was born).

There are several other words/phrases in Greek that can denote simple notions of duty as well. But, of course, one need not pinpoint a specific word for a concept in another language in order to prove the concept’s existence in that language. Aristotle had a grasp of (in fact, invented) the concepts of material cause and final cause, even though he did not have specific

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14 For the etymologies of “duty,” “ought,” and “should” (which all have to do with a sense of “owing”), see Hallpike 2017, 33.
15 χρή/χρεών ἔστιν c. inf., δεῖ/δέον ἔστιν c. inf., ἔργον τινι ἔστιν c. inf., ὀφείλειν c. inf., and verbal adjectives ending in –τέον, to name a few. As is often the case, early Greek tends to employ verbal constructions where later Greek (and modern European languages) prefer to use abstract nouns. Cf. Χ. Ἀν. 2.3.6 “ἄλλος τις ὁ ἐπετέτακτο ταῦτα πράττειν” which W. H. D. Rouse translates as “someone whose duty it was to arrange things.”
16 Th. 2.43.1.
17 See n.15.
terms for them but called them “that out of which” (τὸ ἐξ οὗ) and “that for the sake of which” (τὸ οὗ ἑνεκά), respectively.¹⁸ These examples illustrate an interesting aspect of ancient Greek, namely that concepts can be referred to by substantive phrases that do not contain any noun. Thus, pace Adkins, to look only for individual nouns in Greek that correspond to the English noun “duty” is not a comprehensive approach, since it potentially overlooks part of the Greek phraseology for expressing oughts and obligations.¹⁹

In fact, the idea of duty is sometimes denoted in Greek texts by noun-less, substantival phrases, like the ones Aristotle uses in the examples above. For instance, in another passage from Thucydides, Spartan commanders rouse their men before a naval battle by exhorting them to “take courage and let each man, pilot or sailor, do the [task] before him (τὸ καθ᾽ ἑαυτόν) and not abandon the station assigned to him.”²⁰ Here again, all the translators mentioned above (except Hobbes²¹) translate τὸ καθ᾽ ἑαυτόν as “duty.” Thucydides’ turn of phrase here is not unlike how one might say in English, “let every man do his part,” meaning, “let every man do his duty.”²² Interestingly, Thucydides’ phrase calls to mind another commander’s famous words before a naval battle, namely Lord Nelson’s, “England expects that every man will do his duty,” signaled before the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. It is hardly believable that Nelson was invoking a Kantian conception of duty. On the other hand, it is not implausible that his words could have been inspired (directly or indirectly) by this scene from Thucydides. At any rate, the Spartans, it seems, just like the British, understood what a basic sense of duty was even in a pre-Kantian world.

¹⁸ Arist. Physics 194b23-195a2, 198a24; Metaphysics 1023a24-1013a35.
²⁰ Th. 2.87.8.1; tr. mine.
²¹ Hobbes seems to misunderstand the Greek here. His translation, “With courage therefore, both masters and mariners, follow every man in his order,” is hard to reconcile with any potential reading of the Greek text.
²² See the Oxford English Dictionary s.v. “part” 11.
Thus, there is no lack of ways in ancient Greek of expressing (non-Kantian) notions of duty, whether with a single word or a turn of phrase. On the other hand, this very plurality of ways that the concept is denoted in Greek highlights an interesting difference between ancient and modern ways of talking about duty. For, it is true that no specific word in classical Greek for "duty" exists, viz. there is no word which primarily and consistently means "duty" – at least not before the Hellenistic period. Both Greek expressions mentioned above (δέον and τὸ καθ’ ἑαυτόν), which can mean "duty" in certain contexts, more often than not do not mean "duty." In fact, the word δέον, while used to form the modern words “deontic” and “deontology,” usually has little to do with duty and just means what is necessary or needed. Why the early Greeks did not have a dedicated word for a concept they made ample use of is indeed an interesting question which could be explored further. In any case, the point argued here is merely that common notions of duty appear throughout early Greek texts, and one should have no initial prejudice against translating a Greek word as "duty" just because the Greeks may not have had a concept of strictly moral duty. The further question of whether the Greeks had any way to express specifically moral duty still needs to be explored and will be revisited later.

The second argument against translating καθῆκον as "duty" is based on the idea that the word originally meant "appropriate." Interestingly, this belief seems to have arisen in the late nineteenth century. While the main German and English dictionaries of ancient Greek since the early nineteenth century have included both "duty" and "what is appropriate" in their definition of καθῆκον, it was towards the end of that century that scholars in both Germany and Britain

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23 This is true of LSJ (1843) as well its two German predecessors: Johann Gottlob Schneider’s *Kritisches Griechisch-Deutsches Handwörterbuch* (1805; which defines καθῆκον as “was sich schickt, Pflicht, Schuldigkeit”) and Franz Passow’s *Handwörterbuch der griechischen Sprache* (1819).

24 James S. Reid, who translated several of Cicero’s works, wrote the following about καθήκον and its Latin equivalent officium in 1880: “It is important to select for rendering the word ‘officium’ καθήκον (as used by the Stoics) some phrase which shall not imply moral obligation. The ‘officium’ is an action which has nothing to do with the idea of virtue; the word ‘duty,’ commonly used to represent it, is therefore wholly unsuitable” (Reid 1880,
seem to have moved toward the latter interpretation. Until then, English and German editions of Stoic texts regularly translated καθήκον as “duty” and “Pflicht,” respectively. In Germany the shift in the way καθήκον was understood seems to have been based largely on the explanatory (pseudo-)etymology which Zeno offered for καθήκον (viz. that it is derived from the phrase: κατά τινας ἥκειν\(^{25}\)). In the 1890s the influential scholars August Schmekel and Adolf Bonhöffer inferred from this phrase that the Stoic term signifies what is “in accordance with someone” (gemäss jemandem)\(^{26}\) while Adolf Dyroff took the phrase to mean “what approaches/confronts someone” (das an irgend jemand Herantretende) and from there concluded that καθήκον must mean “what is appropriate/seemly” (das Geziemende).\(^{27}\)

When I discuss Zeno’s etymology later in the chapter, I will explain why both of these readings are mistaken. What really matters here though is that Zeno’s creative “etymology” cannot tell us the original meaning of καθήκον. While Zeno was the first to introduce the word into philosophical discourse, he did not invent it – the word already existed before him. In order to determine what Zeno’s contemporaries would have understood when he spoke about καθήκον, we need to look at the pre-Stoic usage of the term. Zeno’s etymology may indeed be helpful in revealing some important (or hidden) aspect of the term’s new ethical signification, but it will not tell us its original meaning. In sum, the shift from translating καθήκον as “duty” to translating it as “appropriate action” does not seem to have been occasioned by a comprehensive philological study of the term’s origins, nor does there seem to have been any such study in the more than one hundred years that this convention has persisted.

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\(^{96}\) I do not think there are many scholars today who would agree with Reid’s assessment that καθήκον/officium “has nothing to do with the idea of virtue.” As we shall see throughout the present monograph, it has much to do with virtue.

\(^{25}\) D.L. 7.108.2. This pseudo-etymology will be discussed later in the chapter.

\(^{26}\) Schmekel 1892, 360 and Bonhöffer 1894, 208.

\(^{27}\) Dyroff 1897, 134-35.
I do not mean to suggest that scholars have been inattentive to etymology (I am merely saying that a comprehensive study is needed). In fact, there are good etymological reasons for suspecting that καθῆκον means something other than duty. Unlike the words in modern European languages for “duty,” most of which are derived from words denoting debt or owing, the word that the Stoics chose for their new normative concept has a very different etymology: its literal meaning is “to have come down.” Thus, the Stoic term may seem to lack both the sense of obligation inherent in the concept of duty as well as the word’s connotations of debt and owing. Regarding this latter point, Tad Brennan writes (referring to καθήκοντα as “befitting actions”):

It is important to keep in mind the great variety of befitting actions, so that we can reject the view that the theory of befitting actions has any special reference to actions that we owe to each other as human beings, or actions that are other-regarding, or virtuous in more familiar ways.  

and again:

...among the actions that are befitting for human beings, there are actions like honoring one’s parents and one’s country. But they have no privileged place in the system. If we come to this material thinking that the Stoics have a theory of ‘duties’, then we may think that actions like honoring one’s parents are the central and paradigmatic cases of ‘duties’, that is, things that are due to other people, moral obligations and ethical demands. Then we may think that the other actions mentioned, e.g. taking care of one’s health, should be included into the system as secondary or derivative instances of ‘duty’, perhaps ‘duties to oneself’. But this would be to get the picture backwards.

Brennan is right that the Stoics do not build their theory of καθήκον starting from a notion of duties owed to others. However, it absolutely is the case both that καθήκοντα are often spoken of

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as actions owed to others and that honoring one’s parents and one’s country are paradigmatic cases of καθήκοντα.30

Cicero says explicitly that different officia (his translation of καθήκοντα) are owed to different people in different degrees (suntque officia, quae alii magis quam aliis debeantur) and that we may become good calculators of officia (boni ratiocinatores officiorum) and thus know how much is owed to whom (quantum cuique debeatur).31 Over one third of the instances in Epictetus’ Discourses where the words καθήκον or καθήκειν appear involve discussions of interpersonal relationships or the relationships between humans and gods and the actions that are required by those relationships.32 Furthermore, Epictetus uses “καθήκοντα” as the direct object of the verb ἀποδίδωναι,33 which usually means “to give back what is due.” Again and again, Epictetus reminds us to call to mind our relationships as a way to discover our καθήκοντα. He and Cicero both say that country and family come first.34 One might object that these are late sources, but Diogenes Laertius, who draws from earlier works, also lists honoring one’s country and parents as paradigmatic cases of καθήκοντα.35 Thus, although the etymology of καθήκον is not related to any word of debt/owing, it can, just like our word “duty,” refer both to things that are owed, in a sense, to other human beings and to actions that should be done in and of themselves.

In the anecdote with which we began this chapter, it was not on the basis of some absolute ought that (the perhaps fictional) Plato decided to risk his life, but because of καθήκον for a friend (διὰ φίλον). Moreover, in that example, “Plato” makes vivid the strong normativity

30 Cicero says explicitly that duties to one’s country override other duties (Off. 1.57).
32 Diss. 1.22.15; 2.7.1; 2.7.3; 2.10.1; 2.14.18; 2.17.31; 3.2.4; 3.22.69; 4.4.16; and 4.12.16. Cf. Marcus Aurelius Meditations 1.12.1.4.
33 Diss. 2.14.18.
34 Diss. 2.17.31 and Off. 1.53-58.
35 D.L. 7.108.
of the notion of καθῆκον via a military analogy, comparing its fulfillment to standing one’s ground in defense of one’s country. That sounds much more like our familiar sense of duty than like some notion of appropriate action. If one were to translate καθῆκον there as “appropriate action” it would render the passage incomprehensible to readers unfamiliar with the scholarship on Stoicism. This anecdote provides a compelling reason to reevaluate the claim that καθῆκον lacks a strong sense of obligation and that “duty” is therefore an inadequate representation of the Greek term.

**Determining the Precise Meaning of Καθῆκον**

The reason such uncertainty regarding the precise meaning of καθῆκον exists in the first place is the dearth of source material on the subject and the extreme out-of-dateness of the modern dictionaries upon which scholars must rely. Since καθῆκον was introduced as an ethical term by the Stoics in the Hellenistic period, and since almost all Hellenistic literature has perished, the evidence available is severely limited. None of the many Hellenistic treatises devoted exclusively to this concept has survived. The earliest extant treatment of the subject is found in Cicero, writing two and a half centuries after Zeno first introduced the term and in a different language. Cicero does not explain what the original meaning of the Greek word is, nor does he give a complete definition of officium for that matter. No extant source offers any helpful philological explanation of the word καθῆκον and how the word’s primary meaning relates to Stoic usage. Our earliest Greek dictionaries, which are from the Byzantine era, associate

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36 We know of dedicated treatises περὶ τοῦ καθήκοντος by Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus, Sphaerus, Panaetius, Hecato, and Posidonius. None are extant. See n.1 in the next chapter for more details.
καθῆκον with both δέον and πρέπον. The question before us is, how strongly normative was this concept when the Stoics started using it? Did καθῆκον have more of a meaning of obligation or of mere appropriateness?

In order to answer this question one must first survey the uses of the verb καθήκειν which antedate the Stoics. Luckily for the present task, the word was not very common in the Classical period and so the number of surviving instances is small enough to be covered in this chapter. In the following section, I provide a comprehensive survey and analysis of all relevant, pre-Stoic instances of the verb καθήκειν and its participle, as well as the instances cited in LSJ where it supposedly denotes appropriateness. It will be shown that the term is strongly prescriptive in most cases. More specifically, the relevant usages of καθήκειν denote something that is required because it has been established, prescribed, or ordained by some external source of authority (e.g. nature, tradition, or decree). The point of this study is to show that when the Stoics adopted this term, it already had an established meaning of obligation/prescription, and that the writers of the Hellenistic period (both in and out of the Stoa) availed themselves of this prescriptive usage. 

Pace LSJ there is little linguistic or philological evidence from the Classical period that the term was used to denote what is merely appropriate.

As things now stand, there are three important Stoic terms – καθήκον, προσῆκον, and πρέπον – that are all translated as “appropriate” (or “befitting”) and are thus indistinguishable from one another in English translations of the Stoic texts. But the Stoics made a careful distinction between καθήκον, on the one hand, and the other two terms, on the other hand. In

37 N.b. πρέπον by this late stage had shifted semantically closer to δέον, a trend that eventually resulted in the modern Greek usage where πρέπει has replaced δεῖ as the standard way of saying “one must…” or “it is required that…”

38 See, e.g., Vogt 2008, 35-36, where in translating a passage on the Stoics from Sextus Empiricus, she renders both καθήκοντα and πρέποντα as “appropriate.”

39 προσῆκον and πρέπον are more or less synonyms, denoting what is fitting, appropriate, or seemly.
fact, Cicero employs different Latin words (officium and decorum) to translate these different concepts from Greek. Thus, distinctions that are clear in the original texts are being lost in translation under the current scholarly conventions. If nothing else, this study will help clarify the distinction between these terms and find ways of translating them into English without information-loss from the original.

It should be noted that the conflation of the terms καθῆκον and προσῆκον was already happening to some degree in antiquity (though rarely and only among late non-Stoic authors writing about the Stoics, as far as our sources show). The well-known anonymous commentary on Plato’s Theaetetus found on a papyrus dated to the second century AD equates καθῆκοντα with προσῆκοντα. Clement of Alexandria also suggests they are synonyms. The fact that conflation of the terms did happen (albeit rarely) in antiquity may indicate that there was some overlap in their meaning. However, the Stoics’ (and most other authors’) consistency in using the terms in different ways from one another indicates that there are important differences in meaning between them. By contrast, the term προσῆκον is associated with πρέπον consistently, frequently, and across all time periods, thus indicating a much closer semantic link. These two terms are used so often in the same sentence or in consecutive sentences and in obviously synonymous ways that it seems they can be used interchangeably. Thus, it is not problematic that the words προσῆκον and πρέπον in the Stoic texts are both translated in the same way into

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40 There are also other confusions that result as well. E.g. as Brennan (2005, 227) points out: “Befitting actions are called ‘proper functions’ in LS… IG2 [sc. Inwood and Gerson 1997] calls them ‘appropriate acts’… this means that ‘appropriate’ in IG2 and ‘appropriate’ in LS are translating two different things.”
41 Bastianini and Sedley 1995, 246-56.
42 Paedagogus 1.13.102.2.
43 About 215 times, according to a TLG search.
44 There are endless such examples. A few particularly illuminating ones are Th.2.87.9.5, Pl. Laws 783c3, and Plutarch, Quomodo adolescens poetas audire debeat 26b12 (where οὐ προσηκόντος is used as the opposite of πρέποντος). Cf. X. Anabasis 3.2.16.
English. However, we should be cautious about translating καθήκον as if it were also interchangeable with these terms, since the Stoics maintained a distinction between them.

Before commencing our philological study of the original meaning of καθήκον, a few examples may serve to highlight the inadequacy of the current rendering (“appropriate action”) and the need for a better understanding of the term. In one of the precious few surviving fragments of Chrysippus, the greatest of Stoic philosophers makes plain that καθήκον must denote something stronger and more binding than what is merely appropriate:

οὕτως δὲ καὶ τὸ χρεὼν εἰρῆσθαι τὸ ἐπιβάλλον καὶ καθήκον κατὰ τὴν εἰμαρμένην.
(Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 6.8.9.3)

Likewise, that which is imposed and *ordained* according to fate is called “necessity.” (tr. mine)

This sentence is found in a passage in which Chrysippus argues that the idea of fate/providence is latent in many of our basic concepts. Without going into the details of the argument and its context, what should be apparent is that καθήκον here cannot mean “appropriate,” and must carry a stronger sense of normativity or requirement.

Another instance of καθήκον (in a Stoic-inspired writer) that vividly brings out the sense of something being necessary by virtue of its being established or prescribed, is the following from Diodorus Siculus about the ancient (from his perspective) Egyptian kings:

διατεταγμέναι δ’ ἦσαν αἱ τῆς ἡμέρας καὶ τῆς νυκτὸς ὥραι, καθ’ ἂς ἐκ παντὸς τρόπου καθήκον ἦν τὸν βασιλέα πράττειν τὸ συντεταγμένον, οὐ τὸ δεδομένον ἑαυτῷ.
(*Bibliotheca historica* 1.70.3-4)

And the hours of both the day and night were laid out according to a plan, and at the specified hours it was absolutely required of the king that he should do what the laws stipulated and not what he thought best. (tr. C. H. Oldfather)
Here καθῆκον seems to be something which is required of an agent because it is established by an external standard or authority. This interpretation harmonizes with the way Cooper described the term’s meaning above (“it is assigned to one and incumbent upon him/her to do”). As seen in this passage, and as shall be seen again, the verb καθήκειν appears in conjunction with verbs of command (such as τάττειν) and of necessity (e.g. δεῖν) in ways that προσήκειν and πρέπειν do not. Moreover, καθήκειν, unlike πρέπειν or προσήκειν, appears frequently in connection with mention of laws, decrees, or hereditary custom (as it does here), further suggesting its connotations of what is established/prescribed.

The various examples above are not offered as definitive proof of the meanings suggested for these words, but as an illustration of what is at stake in differentiating between the different connotations of these words. It should now be clear that current ways of translating καθήκον (as if it were interchangeable with προσήκον or πρέπον) are inadequate and inaccurate, and that a better understanding of the term is required. It is thus appropriate to now turn to a full survey of the relevant pre-Stoic uses of the verb καθήκειν in order to determine its primary meaning.

i. Impersonal Use of Καθήκειν with Infinitive in the Classical Period

The two main constructions of the verb καθήκειν that we must investigate are the impersonal καθήκει τινί plus infinitive (sometimes τινά c. inf.) and the participle, since these are the two usages which the Stoics adopt. For them, that which καθήκει τινί is equivalent to that person’s καθῆκον (despite what might be suggested by the alternative etymology attributed to Zeno\(^45\)). As it happens, these are two of the three constructions where, according to LSJ, the verb can denote appropriateness. The third is the use of καθήκειν in relation to time. By surveying these three

\(^{45}\) DL 7.108, which has already been mentioned and will be discussed below.
usages in the Classical period, we can reassess whether appropriateness is indeed what the verb primarily signified when the Stoics adopted it.

Let us start with the impersonal construction (καθήκει τινί/τινα c. inf.). The passages cited in LSJ for this construction from the Classical period are correctly said to have a binding force (“it belongs to me, is my duty,” s.v. καθήκω B.2.). Take, for example, this passage in Xenophon’s *Anabasis*:

[ὁ Κῦρος] στρατηγὸς δὲ καὶ πάντων ἀπεδείχθη οἷς καθήκει εἰς Καστωλοῦ πεδίον ἀθροίζεσθαι (1.9.7)

[Cyrus] was also appointed commander of all the troops whose duty it is to muster in the plain of Castolus. (tr. Brownson)

It is not merely “appropriate” to these people to assemble and report for military service. It is *required* of them, *prescribed* to them, *appointed* to them. The soldiers in the passage have an appointment to keep, and failing to show up is not an option.

There are four more occurrences of this construction in extant pre-Stoic literature: two in Xenophon, one in Herodotus, and one in Lysias. One of the passages from Xenophon is also mentioned in LSJ under the same definition as the passage cited above and carries an unambiguously prescriptive force. The other (not mentioned in LSJ) serves as an even clearer illustration of the sense of obligation inherent in the word:

ό δὲ δὴ μέγιστος τρόπος τῆς ἀνάγκης ἢν, εἰ τούτων μηδὲν τις ύπακούοι, ἀφελόμενος ἂν τοῦτον ἄ ἐχοι ἄλλω ἐδίδον ὅν ὅτο [δύνασθαι] ἂν ἐν τῷ δέοντι παρεῖναι· καὶ ὁὐτώς

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46 From here on, whenever I speak of “extant Greek literature,” I am referring to the TLG.
47 *Cyrl.8.1.4* (s.v. B.2.): ὥσπερ τοῖνοι αὐτοὶ ἄξιόσπετο ἄρχειν τῶν ύπ’ ὑμ.’, ὁμός καὶ αὐτοὶ πειθόμεθα οίς ἂν ἠμῶς καθήκη, which Walter Miller translates in the Loeb as, “Therefore, as you yourselves will expect to exercise authority over those under your command, so let us also give our obedience to those whom it is our duty to obey.” Interestingly, here the verb goes with an accusative pronoun (ἡμᾶς) instead of a dative – a construction we also find in some later (non-Stoic) authors. Whether this differs at all in meaning from the dative construction is perhaps impossible to tell from the paucity of evidence available to us. Perhaps Xenophon uses an equivalent accusative construction here to distinguish the pronoun that goes with καθήκη from the nearby dative οἷς governed by πειθόμεθα. In any case, the important point, that the verb carries a prescriptive force, seems generally agreed upon.
ἐγίγνετο αὐτῷ φίλος χρήσιμος ἀντὶ ἄχρηστου. ἐπιζητεῖ δὲ καὶ [ὁ] νῦν βασιλεύς, ἢν τις ἀπῇ ὁ ἄλλος παρέθναι καθήκει. (Cyr. 8.1.20)

But the surest way of compelling [his ministers to come to court] was this: if a man did not respond to any of the three former methods [of compulsion], Cyrus would take away his property and give it to someone else whom he thought would be present when he was required; and thus he would get a useful friend in exchange for a useless one. And the king to-day likewise makes inquiries if any one absents himself whose duty it is to be present. (tr. Miller, modified 48)

A more literal translation of the last phrase would perhaps be: “who are required to be present” (certainly not “for whom it is appropriate to be present”). The passage is saturated with the ideas of compulsion and command, and Miller’s supplying the word “duty” brings out the sense of obligation that is felt in the Greek phrase.

Xenophon also has a single use of the participle καθήκοντα as a substantive, which provides further corroboration that the verb refers to requirements that are in some way ordained or established.

ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖς τελείοις ἀνδράσιν οἳ ἂν δοκῶσι παρέχειν αὐτοὺς μάλιστα τὰ τεταγμένα ποιοῦντας καὶ τὰ παραγγελλόμενα ὑπὸ τῆς μεγίστης ἀρχῆς· εἰσὶ δὲ καὶ τῶν γεραιτέρων προστάται ἡλικιαὶ, οἳ προστατεύουσιν ὥσπερ καὶ οὗτοι τὰ καθήκοντα ἀποτελῶσιν. ἂ δὲ ἐκάστη ἁλικια ἐνεπτέταιται ποιεῖν διηγησόμεθα... (Cyr. 1.2.5)

To preside over the mature men, those are selected who seem most likely to fit them best to execute the orders and instructions of the highest authorities; and of the elders also chiefs are selected who act as overseers to see that those of this class also do their duty.

And what duties are assigned to each age to perform we shall now set forth...” (tr. Miller)

This is an important passage because it contains one of only two extant pre-Hellenistic usages of the participle of καθήκειν as substantive (the way the Stoics later use it). The participle is found here in parallel to τὰ τεταγμένα and τὰ παραγγελλόμενα, both verbs of command. All three

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48 I modified, *inter alia*, the translation of “ἐν τῷ δέοντι” from “when he was wanted” to “when he was required,” which is closer to the Greek. The word “duty” is retained from Miller’s original version.
participles seem to be alluded to by προστέτακται in the next sentence, which further indicates a prescriptive force that the translation “appropriate actions” would miss. Moreover, the perfect tense of the participles τεταγμένα and παραγγελλόμενα, as well as of προστέτακται, fits with the perfective aspect of καθήκον (which is a present participle in form but perfect in meaning) and its connotations of something established or ordained. Once again, “prescribed actions” seems more appropriate. In fact, the participle almost seems to do the work of a passive participle of a verb of command. In other cases as well, it will appear to stand in for the passive of other prescriptive verbs.

The other surviving classical use of the participle as a substantive is in Demosthenes in the following passage.

Then has each one of you, men of Athens, the gift of deciding what ought to be done, and does each know how to state the duties of the rest, while he is reluctant himself to do his own? Then again, does each man as an individual, as if to give the impression of being one who would of course promptly do what is best, find fault with everyone else, but as a body are you committed to fighting shy of voting such measures as will ensure that you will one and all become engaged in performing some duty to the State? (tr. N. W. De Witt, N. J. De Witt, modified)

Here the καθήκοντα are in parallel with τὰ βέλτιστα and τὰ δέοντα, and all three refer to the things that are to-be-done. Moreover, the καθήκοντα seem to refer to what will be decided/appointed/established by vote – what the citizens in question will be committed to once

I separated the sentence into two questions to make it (slightly) easier to follow.
the vote has passed. Once again, there is a prescriptive force and a close association with verbs of necessity (δεῖν) and appointing (ψηφίζειν).

Another instance of the impersonal καθήκειν c. inf. from the Classical period appears in Herodotus in the following context. The Eleans, as hosts of the Olympic games, take pride in the supposed fairness with which they organize them. They send an embassy to Egypt to ask the wise men there if they can think of a more just way to organize the games:

συνελθόντες δὲ οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι ἐπυνθάνοντο τῶν Ἡλείων λεγόντων ἄπαντα τὰ καθήκει σφέας ποιέειν περὶ τὸν ἀγῶνα· ἀπηγησά ἐπεξευρεῖν. (Hdt. 2.160.10)

[The Egyptians] assembled, and inquired of the Eleans, who told them of the rules of the games which they must obey, and, having declared these, said they had come that if the Egyptians could invent any juster way they might learn this too. (tr. Godley)

While Godley overtranslates slightly by supplying the word “rules,” he is bringing out the prescriptive force that is felt in the Greek. It would suffice to translate “[the Eleans] told them all the things that they are required to do.” On the other hand, to say here that “the Eleans told them all the things that it is appropriate for them to do” would destroy the meaning of the passage. The Eleans are asking the Egyptians whether their rules are appropriate or not. And in fact, the Egyptians tell them their rules are flawed (because by organizing and also competing in the games themselves they create a conflict of interest and can no longer be impartial enforcers of their rules).

The one remaining occurrence of this impersonal construction of καθήκειν in the extant classical literature is found in Lysias and diverges somewhat from the previous examples. Here, the speaker is urging the jury to disqualify a supposedly unscrupulous politician from becoming archon:
It therefore behooves you to be stricter in your scrutiny for this office than for any other one. Else, what do you suppose will be the attitude of the great body of the citizens, when they become aware that the man who ought to have been punished for his offences has been approved by you for this high post? (tr. W. R. M. Lamb)

Coincidentally, both καθήκειν and προσήκειν appear in this passage. In this case, context alone is not enough to allow us to determine whether καθήκειν here means “it is appropriate” or “it is necessary” (i.e. “you must”). Both readings would make sense. In any case, this is the only ambiguous example from the Classical period. In all the other cases, the verb clearly denoted things that were required/prescribed.

So far there is no contradiction with the information provided by LSJ concerning the Classical period or with existing translations of the texts in question. However, LSJ also lists three similar constructions from later periods which supposedly do denote mere appropriateness. However, upon closer inspection, two of the three clearly do not, and the third is unclear. The two that do not are both from the New Testament and are grammatically negative constructions (with οὐ or μή). As corroborated in the more recent translations of the Bible, these phrases denote much more than a descriptive claim of (in)appropriateness and are, in fact, strongly prohibitive – even proscriptive. The third citation in LSJ for this meaning is from the “Letter of
Aristeas” (the chief source for the story of how the Septuagint was created), usually dated to the second century BC.

The “Letter of Aristeas” has not seen a new English translation in over a hundred years, and the older translations follow LSJ in rendering “οὐδ’ ἄψασθαι καθῆκεν” along the lines of “it is considered unseemly even to touch [such unclean animals].” While translating καθῆκεν here as “inappropriate” or “unseemly” yields a sensible translation, the construction could just as sensibly carry the sense of obligation seen in previous examples, which here would amount to something like “one must not even touch.” After all, this excerpt is from a discussion of what is allowed and what not allowed by Mosaic Law, and the same animals are referred to earlier in the letter as “the birds that are forbidden [to handle].” In the absence of a strong argument that the meaning here must be “it is unseemly to touch” and cannot be “one must not touch,” I see no sufficient reason to posit a new meaning here that is different from the other instances of this construction.

While LSJ mentions these occurrences of καθήκειν/καθῆκον in the Letter of Aristeas and the New Testament, it does not mention that the word occurs 32 times in the Greek Old Testament. Many of these occurrences are in the Apocrypha, and thus cannot be compared to a Hebrew or Aramaic version. However, ten of these instances can be compared with the Hebrew Bible. This bilingual resource is a godsend (no pun intended) for checking the meanings of the Greek word. I, however, am not fully qualified for such a task, especially since the Greek word never seems to specifically translate a single word in the Hebrew text. Nevertheless, the verb euphemistic “it is not fit that he should live.” For the “μὴ καθήκοντα” at Rom. 1.28, the NET gives “what should not be done.” “Inappropriate” would not quite fit with the acts referred to, which include murder. The King James Version has “those things which are not convenient”(!)

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52 Aristeas 149, tr. R. H. Charles (Clarendon 1913). Similarly, Thackeray (Macmillan 1903): “it is not meet even to touch.”
53 Aristeas 146: “Περὶ δὲν ἄφηγορεύεται πτηνῶν, εὐφήσεις ἄγρια τε καὶ σαρκοφάγα”
καθήκειν in the Septuagint seems to be most frequently used in phrases that mention custom, law, or ordinance.

We have now exhausted all instances of the construction of καθήκειν with the infinitive from the Classical period, as well as all the later instances cited by LSJ as evidence for the “it is appropriate to” definition. None of these passages constitute strong evidence for a non-prescriptive, merely evaluative meaning of “appropriateness.” On the contrary, the force of obligation (or prohibition) based on what is established or ordained is consistently felt. It now remains to examine the other constructions of καθήκειν that have been assumed to signify appropriateness, namely the participle as adjective, and the verb referring to time.

ii. Καθήκων Used Adjectivally and Καθήκειν with Time

The most common use of the participle καθήκων in the Classical period is as an adjective modifying words of time (e.g. καθήκων χρόνος or καιρός). This idea of a time that is καθήκων can also be expressed by the verb, often with “time” as the (stated or implied) subject. For example, in Demosthenes we find: ἐκκλησίαν ποιῆσαι, καὶ ταύτην ὅταν ἐκ τῶν νόµων καθήκῃ. In both of these cases, the time at which the assembly or sacrifice is to take place is not merely “appropriate.” In the first case, it is explicitly prescribed by law. In the second, there seems to be a prescriptive force as well, paralleled by the verb δεῖ.

LSJ correctly cites the first passage as meaning, “when it is legally due,” but implies that in the majority of cases καθήκειν construed with time indicates the “regular,” “proper,” or “normal” time. Employing these terms usually yields translations that make sense, partly because

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54 De falsa legatione, Section 185, line 6
55 In Aristocratem, Section 68, line 5
the terms are conveniently vague. But what does it mean for a time to be “regular” or “proper?” What becomes clear from surveying the surviving time-constructions with καθήκειν is that they usually imply that there is one specific correct/required/appointed time for whatever is being talked about, and any other time would not be right. Moreover, these construction often appear with reference to laws or customs on the basis of which a certain time is καθήκων or not. Therefore, this usage of καθήκειν seems to carry the same connotations of requirement based on established law, custom, or ordinance as did the previously examined constructions of the verb.

Demosthenes in his First Philippic provides the strongest confirmation that something like “appointed time,” rather than “appropriate time,” is the intended meaning in such constructions:

υμεῖς δ᾿ οὔτε ταῦτα δύνασθε κολύειν οὔτ᾿ εἰς τοὺς χρόνους, οὐς ἃν προθήσῃς, βοηθεῖν. καίτοι τί δήσοτ᾿, ὦ ἀνδρεῖς Αθηναίοι, νομίζετε τὴν μὲν τῶν Παναθηναίων ἐορτήν καὶ τὴν τῶν Διονυσίων ἂεί τοῦ καθήκοντος χρόνου γίγνεσθαι (Demosthenes 4.35)

Neither are you able to prevent these [offences] nor to send your expeditions at the times which you fix upon. And yet, men of Athens, how do you account for the fact that the Panathenaic festival and the Dionysia are always held on the appointed date? (tr. mine)

Here “καθήκων χρόνος” seems to be, if not synonymous, at least a close match to “χρόνους οὕς ἃν προθήσῃς” (otherwise the comparison would be pointless), where the verb προτιθέναι (προτίθημι) means “to appoint, fix, set.” The time at which a major civic festival is supposed to take place is καθήκων because it is established by law and custom, not because it is appropriate for the occasion for some other reason.

Just as we found earlier that the impersonal construction of καθήκειν appears in connection with verbs of ordering, compulsion, or voting-to-do (τάττειν, δεῖν, ψηφίζειν), so too

56 In addition to the passage in the previous paragraph, cf. Polybius 4.7.1.1, [Demosthenes] In Neaeram 78.11, and Cassius Dio 55.3.5.3.
the time-construction appears in connection with verbs of appointing (προτιθέναι) and ordering (τάττειν, again). A few lines down, Demosthenes explains that the reason the festivals are always on time is that “everything is ordered by statute” (ἀπαντα νόμω τέτακται). Similarly, Aeschines uses the phrase “ἐν τοῖς τεταγµένοις χρόνοις ὑπὸ τὸν προγόνων” somewhat synonymously with “τοῦ καθήκοντος χρόνου.” In sum, there are at least five Classical instances where καθήκειν is used alongside verbs of ordering or deciding. Considered collectively, these passages constitute strong evidence that the verb denotes what is required or established and not what is merely appropriate.

Turning now to Aristotle, one finds the time construction four times in Historia Animalium. For example, he writes:

’Ηδη δὲ καὶ δίδυµα κύουσά τις ἐπεκύησε τρίτον, γενοµένου δὲ τοῦ χρόνου τοῦ καθήκοντος τὰ μὲν τελεόγονα τῷ χρόνῳ ἔτεκε, τὸ δὲ πεντάµηνον καὶ τοῦτ’ ἀπέθανεν εὐθὺς. (585a16-22)

And a woman already pregnant with twins conceived a third by superfetation, and when the due time had come she delivered the twins fully developed at term, but the third as a five-month child which died immediately. (tr. D. M. Balme)

While reading “proper time” or “normal time” here would make sense, what makes the time normal? The idea seems to be that there is a time established/appointed by nature. The same can be said of the similar construction at 573a30. At 568a17, it is said of carp that they “τίκτουσι δ’ ἐν τῇ καθηκούσῃ ὥρᾳ,” which Balme renders “the carp spawns at the appropriate season.” Again, what makes a season appropriate? The answer is given in the next line. The fish are in sync with the rising and setting of certain stars. The implication is that there is a time for the fish to spawn that is appointed by the natural order of things. Likewise, at 591a8 Aristotle writes that

57 Against Ctesiphon 126-7.
58 Except for one instance in Eudemian Ethics and one in Politics, καθήκει as verb in Aristotle occurs only in Historia Animalium, sometimes describing how different animal parts are connected and other times referring to time.
all fish feed on spawn “ὃταν οἱ χρόνοι καθήκωσιν οὗτοι,” which Balme renders as, “when the times for this come round.” Does the time at which fish eat spawn just “come round” eventually, sooner or later? Presumably not. All of these examples in Aristotle refer to times that are fixed, as it were, by nature. It is therefore perhaps better to translate this construction, “when the appointed time for this comes.” A grammatically similar construction occurs at Xenophon Hellenica 4.7.2, which C. L. Brownson translates as “when the appointed time came.”

Next, consider the only relevant instance of καθήκειν in Attic Tragedy. In the opening of Oedipus Rex, Oedipus has sent Creon to the oracle at Delphi, and Creon has not returned in a long time. Oedipus says of Creon, “τὸῦ γὰρ εἰκότος πέρα/ ἀπεστὶ πλείω τοῦ καθήκοντος χρόνου.” L.S.J translates the final phrase as, “the normal time.” That is certainly not incorrect. But what or who determines what the appropriate amount of time is? In this case, it can only be custom or decree. Presumably embassies to Delphi happen frequently and there is a standard time for such missions, established by custom (νόμος) over the years. Or perhaps the time for this particular embassy was decreed to Creon by Oedipus as king. Either way, one could translate, “he is gone for more than the appointed time,” or even, “the time fixed [for the journey],” and thus get a richer translation of the passage.

The participle καθήκων can also be used as an adjective modifying nouns that do not indicate time, though this construction is less common. There are two such passages in Aristotle which need to be looked at because they are often translated using the “appropriateness” definition. One such passage is in the Politics:

59 Euripides never uses the word, while Aeschylus does once in an unrelated sense at Choephoroi 455.
60 Sophocles OT 74-75
61 s.v. καθήκον I.4.
62 David Grene translates
διοίσει μέντοι τῶν ταττομένων ἐνια νομίμων· καὶ τούτο τῆς νομοθετικῆς ἐστὶν ἰδεῖν, ἓν
τινες ὑπάρχοσι γειτνιῶτες, ποῖα πρὸς ποίους ἀσκητέον ἢ πῶς τοῖς καθήκουσι πρὸς
ἐκάστους χρηστέον.

Some however of the [military] regulations laid down will vary; and in case there exist
any neighbour peoples, it is the business of the legislative art to consider what sort of
[military] exercises should be practiced in relation to what sort of neighbours or how the
state is to adopt the regulations that are suitable in relation to each. (tr. Rackham)

This translation by Rackham, in rendering καθήκουσι as “suitable,” makes the two last clauses,
separated by ἢ, mean almost the same thing and thus seem pleonastic. Even if one maintains that
there is a subtle but important difference between the two clauses, the question remains, why are
they separated by “or” and not by “and.” This difficulty has led at least one editor to consider an
emendation of ἢ to καὶ.63 However, under the interpretation of καθήκειν that has been maintained
throughout this chapter, the two clauses mean very different things and the disjunction makes
perfect sense. First, it is important to note that καθήκουσι here functions as an adjective
modifying an implied νομίμως. Furthermore, under the proposed meaning (viz. something
appointed/ordained), καθήκων is synonymous with ταττόμενος. Thus, the καθήκουσι [νομίμως]
refers back to the ταττομένον νομίμων. The meaning of the passage thus becomes:

However, some of the [military] policies laid down will vary; and in case there exist any
neighboring peoples, it is the business of the legislative art to consider what sort of
policies should be practiced in relation to what sort of neighbors or how to apply the
established/prescribed policies in relation to each.

The disjunction now makes sense since there may be cases when suitable policies toward a
certain neighbor need to be formulated and other cases when policies toward a neighbor already
exist and need to be applied effectively.

63 Herbert Richards originally suggested this in his Aristotelica (1915), and he is cited in the Loeb edition’s
apparatus criticus.
The other passage from Aristotle where such a construction appears is found in the *Eudemian Ethics*:

δεῖ δὴ ὡςπερ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις πρὸς τὸ ἄρχον ζῆν, καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἔξιν καὶ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τὴν τοῦ ἄρχοντος, οἷον δοῦλον πρὸς δεσπότου καὶ ἕκαστον πρὸς τὴν ἕκάστου καθήκουσαν ἄρχην. (1249b9)

It is proper, therefore, here as in other matters to live with reference to the ruling factor, and to the state and the activity of the ruling factor, as for example slave must live with reference to the rule of master, and each person with reference to the rule appropriate to each. (tr. Rackham)

What does it mean to live with reference to the ruling factor appropriate to us? Do we have a choice in the matter of where our ruling part lies? Where a body’s ruling part lies or who a slave’s master is are things decided by nature or chance. Once again, this idea of something fixed/established by external circumstances seems to be what is intended here. It seems better to translate: “each person with reference to his appointed ruling part.”

The final example from the Classical period of καθήκειν is from the Hippocratic Corpus:

προητοιµάσθω δὲ καὶ τὰ πρὸς φαρµακὴν ἐς τὰς καθάρσιας, εἰληµµένα ἀπὸ τόπων τῶν καθηκόντων, ἐσκευασµένα ἐς ὃν δεῖ τρόπον (Decorum 10)

“One must make ready beforehand purgative medicines also, taken from the established sources, prepared in the proper manner.” (tr. W. H. S. Jones, modified)

Here, admittedly, translating “appropriate sources” instead of “established sources” would also make sense. In any case, whether the word here means “established” or “appropriate” does not significantly affect the overall weight of the evidence.

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64 The text printed is that of Rackham’s Loeb edition. The καὶ here is an emendation of κατὰ in the MSS.
65 MSS. ἐκάστου.
66 I am not counting instances of καθήκειν in works attributed to Classical authors but generally deemed to be spurious.
67 Jones’ original translation is: “You must make ready beforehand purgative medicines also, taken from suitable localities, prepared in the proper manner.”
iii. Conclusions About the Pre-Stoic Meaning of Καθήκειν

All classical instances of the verb καθήκειν in the relevant constructions (including all instances which have been thought to signify some sort of appropriateness) have now been considered. In most of these cases, there is strong reason to think that the meaning of the word goes beyond a mere sense of appropriateness, indicating something required, prescribed, or ordained. Moreover, καθήκειν is frequently coupled with other prescriptive verbs like τάττειν, δεῖν, ψηφίζειν, and προσθέναι. In several cases, translating the term as “appropriate” yields a perfectly understandable translation. However, translating these same instances as “established” or “appointed” in no way detracts from the meaning of the text, and often seems to clarify it. Even if καθήκειν does denote appropriateness in some cases, the instances where it denotes something prescribed/appointed are far more numerous.

The passages collected above also illustrate the difference in meaning between καθῆκον on the one hand and προσῆκον/πρέπον on the other. The latter two, just like the English word “appropriate,” are polysemous and can indicate various different kinds of appropriateness. However, καθῆκον seems to specifically indicate that which is prescribed, appointed, or established (by custom, law, decree, or nature). If something to-be-done is said to be καθῆκον, it is something fixed/appointed – there is no alternative available and, therefore, it is necessary and obligatory. Thus, the strong normative force that καθῆκον can exhibit seems derivative of this primary meaning of what is prescribed/established. By contrast, saying that something is προσῆκον or πρέπον does not imply that there are no other appropriate options as well (there could be any number of other equally appropriate ones). Nor is something προσῆκον/πρέπον necessarily appropriate because of some external source of authority (e.g. law or nature). These
significant differences in meaning between καθήκον and προσήκον/πρέπον should be reflected in translations, which often translate all three terms as denoting appropriateness.

The Stoic Use of the Term and Zeno’s Etymology

By the time the Stoics adopted καθήκειν and its participle καθῆκον as ethical terms, the verb was primarily used (in the relevant constructions) to denote what is prescribed/appointed/ordained and, by extension, obligatory (if it is an action). If the Stoics then used this term to signify mere appropriateness, one must assume that they departed significantly from its primary and established meaning. Moreover, if they wanted to express appropriateness, there was a rich vocabulary of appropriateness already available to them, in words like προσήκον or πρέπον. In fact, all indications show that the Stoics maintained an important distinction between καθῆκον/officium, on the one hand, and πρέπον/decorum, on the other, as is explained at De Officis 1.94: What is truly and perfectly πρέπον will coincide with what is truly and perfectly good (quod honestum est). As a result, our intuition of what is seemly/appropriate (πρέπον) can help us discover our καθῆκον/officium in certain situations. However, these two concepts are conceived of differently and the Stoics do not use them interchangeably.

In the previous section, I held off from discussing the etymology that Zeno himself is said to have offered for καθήκον because my object there was to determine, as best as possible, what καθήκειν meant to literate Greeks before and beyond the Stoa. Now that the original and primary meaning of καθήκον has been established, we may consider what Zeno’s claim about its origins entails. Diogenes Laertius (our only source for Zeno’s etymology) writes:

κατωνομάσθαι δ’ οὐτώς ὑπὸ πρώτου Ζήνωνος τὸ καθήκον, ἀπὸ τοῦ κατά τινας ἥκειν τῆς προσονομασίας εἰλημμένης. (D.L. 7.108)

68 This will be explained more fully in the third chapter.
Zeno was the first to use this term καθήκον of conduct. Etymologically it is derived from κατά τινας ἥκειν, i.e. reaching as far as, being up to, or incumbent on so and so. (tr. Hicks)

It is difficult to translate, let alone understand, Zeno’s formulation κατά τινας ἥκειν because it is an unusual phrase and appears nowhere else. In fact, there is no similar construction of this verb (with κατά plus accusative referring to a person) anywhere else in extant Greek literature.

In practice, the Stoics consistently equated one’s καθήκον to that which καθήκει τινί (the long-established, impersonal-plus-dative construction), and nowhere else but here (in the surviving material) to that which κατά τινας ἥκει. Greeks outside the Stoa would have found their normal usage familiar and would have thus been surprised to hear the new derivation offered by Zeno. What they understood by Zeno’s formulation is difficult to reconstruct without the original context. The preposition κατά with accusative can have various different meanings, and we are given no indication in our text as to which meaning is intended. Presumably, Zeno did explain his meaning to his audience, for whom his wordplay was likely intended to come with an element of surprise or provocation. But any such explanation is lost.

Another difficulty in interpreting Zeno’s etymology is that we do not know what importance to attach to it. Did it serve to introduce a major argument about καθήκον in which it constituted an important premise? Or was it a witticism meant to offer confirmation of a view argued for independently? One might imagine, for the purpose of analogy, that we only had a few surviving lines of Lucretius’ De Rerum Natura, which happened to include his derivation of the word officium from officere. Through ignorance of the original context, one might be tempted to attach undue importance to this “etymology.” However, having the full text available

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69 Officere meaning “to obstruct.” See De Rerum Natura 1.336-338.
to us, we see that it is just one of many other puns found scattered throughout the poem\textsuperscript{70} which, taken by itself, is not crucial to any argument in particular. Whatever the importance of Zeno’s derivation, what seems clear is that it is not intended to uncover the actual history of the word, but to reveal something new or important about the Stoic use of the term. As Cooper points out, “such a derivation is intended to reveal something that is hidden.”\textsuperscript{71} The question is what that hidden thing is.

Several translations of Zeno’s formulation have been proposed by scholars, which may be grouped into three basic interpretations. The phrase is variously taken to mean 1) “extending [or applying] to certain people,”\textsuperscript{72} 2) what “comes down on a particular person [to do],”\textsuperscript{73} or 3) what has “arrived in accordance with certain persons.”\textsuperscript{74} I think the first of these can be ruled out, on philological grounds alone, if we look at the reasoning behind such a translation. In a footnote to this passage, Hicks writes:

The ordinary meaning of the verb καθήκειν is well seen in Hdt. vii. 22 ο γάρ Ἀθως ἐστὶ ὁ ἄτοσ μέγα τε καὶ όνομαστόν ἐς θάλασσαι κατῆκον (“for Athos is a great and famous mountain, reaching down to the sea”). The term seems to have passed from this meaning to signify figuratively that which extends to, affects, or is incumbent on us.\textsuperscript{75} The problem with this reasoning is that κατά τινας ἥκειν is not equivalent to καθήκειν ἐξ τινα. One cannot just appeal to “the ordinary meaning” of what is in fact a different verb and construction. The preposition κατά never means “as far as,” and ἥκειν, by itself, does not mean “reaching” or “extending.” Taken together, ἥκειν κατά plus accusative is never found with a

\textsuperscript{70} See Snyder 1980, 87.
\textsuperscript{71} Cooper 1999, 436 n.22.
\textsuperscript{72} Inwood and Gerson 1997, 196, as well as Hicks (translation quoted above) in the Loeb edition of D.L. This general interpretation can be traced at least as far back as Dyroff, who understood Zeno’s phrase to mean “das an irgend jemand Herantretende” (Dyroff 1897, 134).
\textsuperscript{73} Cooper 1999, 436.
\textsuperscript{74} Long and Sedley (LS 59C). This is roughly the same interpretation found in Schmekel 1892, 360 and Bonhoffner 1894, 208.
\textsuperscript{75} Hicks 1931, 212 b.
meaning like “extending to.” Zeno’s choice of this particular formulation seems intended to reveal something that is not apparent from the ordinary meaning of the prefixed verb καθήκειν.

In interpreting this passage, Cooper makes use of LSJ, who (s.v. καθήκω 2) cite (in Cooper’s words):

> the use of κατά (s.v. κατά B.1.3), in which Epictetus speaks (Enchiridion 15) of a guest at a feast who must wait quietly until the wine or whatever ‘gets down to you’ (gignesthai kata se), until it is your turn.77

Accordingly, Zeno’s phrase is taken to indicate what “comes down on a particular person to do” or “what it is your turn or your place to do.”78 While I find this to be the most helpful explanation yet of the passage, I think it needs to be modified. As LSJ say in the definition quoted by Cooper, this particular use of κατά means “opposite,” “over against” (or “in front of”), without a sense of motion and without a sense of anything going down.80 Thus, while the prefixed verb καθήκειν does have a meaning of “what comes down to you in turn” (LSJ, s.v. καθήκω 1.3), the unprefixed ἥκειν κατά plus infinitive does not. Bearing this in mind, it is worthwhile to reexamine the passage in question from Epictetus:

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76 There are only three instances of ἥκειν with κατά plus accusative in extant Greek literature that are relevant (where the κατά indicates something about where the motion that is implied by the verb is happening). Two of these have the meaning “coming down through,” e.g. κατά ῥῖνας πύον ἥκε (Epidemics 4.168). See also the similar construction “ἀχρί τῆς μέσης κοιλίας τῶν κατά τὸν ἐγκέφαλον ἥκόντων” in Galen, De anatomicis administrationibus (ed. Kühn, vol. 2, p. 719, line 5). The other place where ἥκειν is found near a κατά plus accusative is from Plutarch, Theseus 27.4: τῷ δὲ δεξιῷ πρὸς τὴν Πύνα κατά τὴν Χρύσαν ἥκε, which I take to mean, “with the right wing [of their army, the Amazons] reached up against the Phyx, opposite Chrysa.” Perrin, in the Loeb edition, translates this passage: “with their right [wing] they touched the Phyx at Chrysa.”

77 Cooper 1999, 436 n.22.

78 Cooper 1999, 436 (emphasis added).

79 This is my phrase, based on the definition provided by LSJ. In introducing this phrase, I am not modifying or going against LSJ. The passages cited by LSJ for this definition include clear cases of something “facing” or being right “in front of” something else, which phrases are similar to “opposite” and “over against,” as is reflected in existing translations of the passages. Definitions in LSJ are often minimalist, and classicists use synonymous phrases not included in LSJ in their translations all the time.

80 This last point is not spelled out explicitly by LSJ. However, the other eight passages they cite for this definition all refer to things that are not moving. I will argue that the same applies here.
Mémuñiso, ótì òw ën soumpòsì ño ñe deì ãnàstréphèsthai. periùferómënon ñégonë ti kata sè: ékpteìnòs ñèn ñeîra koðiùs métablabe. parèrçètai' ñì' kàtëçè. ouòso ñì' ñì' épîballe pòrro ñèn ñrèzèn, ãllà perìmènè, méçhìs ãn gènìtai kata sè. (Enchiridion 15.1)

Remember that you ought to conduct yourself [in life] as you would at a banquet. Something being passed around has ended up in front of you; stretch out your hand and politely take a portion. It is passing by you: do not detain it. It has not come yet: do not project forth your desire, but wait until it has come [to rest] in front of you. (tr. mine)

That kata sè here means “in front of you” is consistent with LSJ and corroborated by Oldfather’s translation. Moreover, the completed aspect of both the perfect ñégonë and of the aorist subjunctive gènìtai indicate that the thing that was being passed around is no longer moving in those cases. The antithesis set up between these two perfective forms, on the one hand, and the continuous present parèrçètai, on the other, brings out the contrast between rest and motion. Presumably, something could be passing by you (parèrçètai) and come momentarily right in front of you, but as long as it is moving (indicated by the present tense of the verb), you are not to detain it. It must come to a stop before you take it. While the image that Epictetus is presenting to us is indeed of something that, in a sense, “gets down to you” and comes to you “in turn,” that isn’t what he says. All that his frugal use of words explicitly indicate is that “it has arrived [and stopped] before you.” Zeno’s formulation ñìkeûn kata tìnaç, if understood analogously to this passage, must be taken to similarly privilege the fact that something has come [to rest] in front of you. Any final interpretation of Zeno’s etymology should take this emphasis into account.

This interpretation of the transmitted etymology seems convincing for two reasons. First, the idea of something “having come right in front of you (for you to do)” fits well with the pre-Stoic meaning of kàðhìkon as something appointed to you to do by some external authority or standard. As already mentioned, an agent’s kàðhìkon is to-be-done because it is assigned to it by
nature (not because it is a means to a desired end). The second reason in favor of this interpretation is that there seems to be a natural association in Greek between “what lies before you” and “something that must be done.” As noted earlier, Thucydides uses the phrase τὸ καθ’ ἑαυτόν (literally “that which is in front of [each man]”) to mean “duty.” Moreover, other Greek idioms also associate what lies in front of one with what is to be done. For example, the construction πρόκειται τινι c. inf. (literally, “it lies before you to do”) is often used to express what must be done. The Stoics maintain these usages, sometimes using πρόκειται τινι as well as ἐπιβάλλει τινί (literally, “it is imposed on one to...”) synonymously with καθήκει τινι.

The association between “what lies before one” and “what one must do” is most clearly felt in the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius. For example, regarding reason and the art of reason (ὁ λόγος καὶ ἡ λογικὴ τέχνη), Marcus writes:

> ὡς καταρθῶσεις αἱ τοιαῦται πράξεις ὀνομάζονται τὴν ὀρθότητα τῆς ὁδοῦ σηµαίνουσαι.

(M.A. 5.14.1.3-4)

Starting from a principle peculiar to them, they journey on to the end set before them. Wherefore such actions are termed right acts, as signifying that they follow the right way.

(tr. Haines)

The implication is that our purpose in life (living virtuously and performing all of our καθήκοντα) is set before us by the providence of nature. Elsewhere, he writes that those who

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82 Th.2.87.8.2 (see n.21 above). Cf. Th.7.44.1.5 for a similar usage of κατά.
83 See e.g. Sophocles OT 865 and Herodotus 8.98.9.
84 E.g. Epictetus Diss. 4.5.6.1; Plutarch Comm. not. 1064e-f; Marcus Aurelius 6.26.1.4 and 7.7.1.1. The connection between καθήκον and ἐπιβάλλει is discussed most fully in Dyrhoff 1897, 137-9. Cf. LS (II) 356 (59C).
85 The τέλος in life is formulated in different ways by different Stoics, but these various formulations are meant to amount to the same thing. Some express the τέλος as “to live on the basis of virtue,” others as “to live in accordance with nature,” while Archedemus gives it as “to perform all of one’s καθήκοντα in life” (τὸ πάντα τὰ καθήκοντα ἐπιτελοῦντα ζῆν). See D.L. 7.88.
err (sc. fail to do their καθήκοντα\textsuperscript{86}) “miss the mark that is set before them” (πᾶς γὰρ ὁ ἁμαρτάνων ἁφαμαρτάνει τοῦ προκειμένου).\textsuperscript{87} In another passage Marcus seems to identify his καθήκον with what is set before him (προκειμένον):

οὕτως οὖν καὶ ἐνθάδε μέμνησο, ὅτι πᾶν καθήκον ἐξ ἁρμοδίων τινῶν συμπληροῖται. τούτους δὲ τηροῦντα καὶ μὴ θορυβούμενον μηδὲ τοῖς δυσχεραίνουσιν ἀντιδυσχεραίνοντα περαιεῖν ὁδῷ τὸ προκειμένον. (M.A. 6.26.1.4-7)

So recollect that in life too every duty is the sum of separate items. Of these thou must take heed, and carry through methodically what is set before thee, in no wise troubled or shewing counter-irritation against those who are irritated with thee. (tr. Haines)

There are numerous other instances where Marcus writes that one must do “the task at hand”\textsuperscript{88} and implies that the things we are supposed to do have been set before us (sc. by the providence of nature).\textsuperscript{89}

In light of this evidence, taking Zeno’s phrase to mean “what has come in front of someone” seems highly plausible. Moreover, this interpretation offers clues as to why Zeno offered his creative etymology for καθήκον. As explained earlier, the word already had an established meaning of something “prescribed/appointed by some external authority.” Moreover, the term could function like a past passive participle of a verb of command. Both of these aspects of the term were useful to the Stoics, who wanted a strongly normative concept rooted in the authority of nature. Through his creative etymology, Zeno also created a link between καθήκον and the common Greek way of conceiving of duties as “what lies before us” to do. As will become clearer in the third chapter, this idea of the “task before us” fits well with the importance of roles (personae) in the Stoic system. Every human has a place in society determined by a

\textsuperscript{86} An error (ἁμάρτημα) is a failure to perform one’s καθήκον, as explained at Stobaeus 2.7.8a.7: Πᾶν δὲ τὸ παρὰ τὸ καθήκον ἐν λογικῷ γεγονόμενον, ἁμάρτημα εἶναι.
\textsuperscript{87} M.A. 9.42.2.5.
\textsuperscript{88} M.A. 2.5.1.2.
\textsuperscript{89} E.g. M.A. 1.15.2.1 and 8.60.1.3.
combination of nature, chance, and choice. According to the Stoics, we should not feel dissatisfied with our own station, nor try to do the duties required of other roles, but should perform the task which is before us, based on our own roles.

Returning to the passage from Epictetus, if one can understand an implied κατὰ σέ with ὁδὲ ήκει, then this would be the only other instance in extant Greek literature, besides Zeno’s phrase, where the verb is found construed with (an implied) κατά plus accusative, where the accusative refers to a person. Such a coincidence might suggest a connection between the two passages. It is thus tempting to take this passage from a later Stoic as not just grammatically helpful but also as potentially illuminating philosophically. However, attempting to use this passage for philosophical elucidation of Zeno’s phrase complicates the picture as much as it seems to clarify it. Right after this passage, we find the claim that while it is proper to only partake of whatever has come before you, it is even better to not partake of such things at all! But while the things that come before one at a banquet (being neither good nor bad but indifferent according to the Stoics) are sometimes to be spurned, a καθῆκον qua something that has come before one to be done, is presumably not to be spurned. This apparent asymmetry does not, in itself, imply that Zeno’s phrase could not have derived from a sympotic metaphor or some other similar context. In fact, the point could have been that, just as with appearances (φαντασίαι) that this or that object is to be selected, so too with appearances of things as to-be-done (καθήκοντα), only a minority of them are true impressions that we should assent to.

This modified version of Cooper’s reading seems the most compelling of the three translations of Zeno’s formulation mentioned earlier. However, the third interpretation (“to have arrived in accordance with certain persons”⁹⁰) has not been sufficiently explored yet. One should bear in mind the possibility that Zeno’s etymology may have had a double meaning. Thus, Zeno

⁹⁰ Long and Sedley (LS 59C). Similarly Schmekel 1892, 360 and Bonhöffer 1894, 208.
could have intended his phrase to do double duty as both that which “has come before one” and that which “has come to be in accordance with one’s character.” Long and Sedley themselves do not offer much by way of explanation for their translation, except that Zeno’s phrase implies “accordance with ‘people’s natures.’” In fact, they claim that Zeno’s etymology “has never been satisfactorily explained.”

In order to explore the merits of this alternative reading, we must consider the usage of κατά with an accusative pronoun or personal name (LSJ, s.v. κατά B.IV.3.) which means, “in the style/manner/rank of” someone. As an example, this usage appears in Plato’s Gorgias (467c), where Socrates tells Polus, “ἵνα προσείπω σε κατὰ σέ” (that I may address you in your own style). Turning to the Stoics, Epictetus proves, once again, most helpful. For him, that which is κατά τίνα is an important ethical category, and, luckily, he tells us almost explicitly what it means in the following passage (the question under discussion is whether one should do demeaning things if compelled by threat of force):

εἰς δὲ τὴν τοῦ εὐλόγου καὶ ἄλογου κρίσιν οὐ μόνον ταῖς τῶν ἐκτὸς ἄξιαις συγχρώμεθα, ἄλλα καὶ τῶν κατὰ τὸ πρόσωπον ἑαυτοῦ ἐκάστους….ἀν οὖν μου πυνθάνῃ “παρακρατήσω τὴν ἁμίδαν ἢ μή;” ἐρώ τοι ὅτι μείζονα ἄξιαν ἔχει τὸ λαβέιν τροφὰς τοῦ μὴ λαβέιν καὶ μείζονα ἀπαξίαν τὸ δαρῆναι τοῦ μὴ δαρῆναι ὡστε οἱ τούτως παρακρήτει τὰ σαυτοῦ, ἀπελθὼν παρακράτει. “ἄλλα’ οὐχ ἂν κατ’ ἐμὲ.” τοῦτο σὲ δὲ συνεισφέρειν εἰς τὴν σκέψιν, οὐκ ἐμέ. (Diss. 1.2.7 ff.)

But for determining the reasonable and the unreasonable, we employ not only [our reckoning of] the value of external things, but also the criterion of that which is in keeping with one’s own character….If you ask me, then, “Shall I hold the chamber pot [for my master] or not?” I will tell you that to get food is of greater value than not to get it, and to be flayed is of greater detriment than not to be; so that if you measure your interests by these standards, go and hold the pot. “Yes, but it is not in accordance with my character.” That is an additional consideration, which you, and not I, must introduce into your reasoning. (tr. Oldfather, modified)

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91 LS (II) 356 (59C). One should bear in mind that this claim was made in 1987, before Cooper published his interpretation.
Here, κατ᾽ ἐμὲ near the end refers back to κατὰ τὸ πρόσωπον ἑαυτοῦ. By supplying the word πρόσωπον, Epictetus makes it clear that what he is speaking of when he uses the phrase κατὰ τινὰ is (what we might call) one’s character.

Reading this usage into Zeno’s etymology, we may understand κατὰ τινὰς ἥκειν to mean something like “to have come [to be] in accordance with one’s character.” This is slightly different than the reading of Schmeckel, Bonhöffer, Long and Sedley: “to have come [to be] in accordance with one’s nature.” Their reading (supplying “nature” instead of “character”) perhaps makes more philosophical sense in the context of the passage in Diogenes Laertius, though I am not sure it is philologically sound. In any case, a problem with both of these readings is that they require taking ἥκειν to mean “to be” (or supplying an implied “to be”), which is questionable. It is hard to see what explanatory value either reading would have had for Zeno.

Under the interpretation of the four scholars mentioned above, Zeno’s phrase would seem to have something to do with the theory of οἰκείωσις (oikeiôsis). According to this theory, at every new stage of development after birth, one acquires new οἰκεῖα (things endeared to one), which come with new καθήκοντα that correspond to them. For example, the first οἰκεῖον of an infant is itself, and its first καθῆκον is for it to preserve its own constitution. As new καθήκοντα arise through the process of οἰκείωσις as one grows up, it is conceivable that the Stoics might say that these prescribed actions come to be “in accordance with our nature.” For an adult (i.e. fully rational) human, it is conceivable that they might say that καθήκοντα come to be “in accordance

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92 Best translated here as “character,” though the word originally meant a “face” or “mask.” Cicero translates it into Latin as persona.
93 Cf. Diss. 1.28.5, where “τὸ κατ᾽ ἐμὲ” appears again in a similar sense and context.
94 My paraphrase of their readings. Cf. LS (II) 356 (59C); Schmekel 1892, 360; and Bonhöffer 1894, 208.
95 As already pointed out in Dyroff 1897, 134 n.2. His further claim that κατά meaning “in accordance with” is primarily found with nouns like φύσις, εἰμαρμένη, ἄρετή does not discredit this interpretation. There are similar cases of κατά being used with personal pronouns, as seen in the examples above.
with his/her character.” Zeno may have thus intended his etymology to explain how καθήκοντα are established through οἰκείωσις, though we can only speculate.

This kind of interpretation cannot be definitively ruled out at this point, especially given the loss of Zeno’s work. Nevertheless, the previous interpretation of the etymology is supported by much more evidence, both philological and philosophical. It is, of course, possible that Zeno intended his etymology to be a double entendre. In other words, he may have exploited the ambiguity of the phrase to have it mean both “what has come before you” and (in a separate context) “what has come to be in accordance with your nature.” Even so, the latter reading must constitute a second layer of meaning, ancillary to the former interpretation.

**Final Remarks About Translating Καθῆκον**

In the scholarship on Stoicism, καθῆκον is usually translated as “appropriate action.” Some scholars, while adopting this common label, point out that the actual meaning of the word is something different than what the English phrase suggests. Nevertheless, for the sake of convenience and consistency this label has been accepted as a kind of common currency, even by those who have a different or more nuanced understanding of what the Greek term means. Scholars have settled on this translation based on the assumption that the original meaning of the word καθῆκον was indeed “appropriate.” However, as shown in this chapter, the most common meaning of καθῆκον before the Stoics took it up was not “appropriate” but “prescribed/appointed/established.” Whatever semantic evolution of the term the Stoics may have effected over the years, the normative force of the word was already well-established when they adopted it.
If, as I have argued, the ancient Greek language had plenty of ways of expressing oughts and obligations, one may wonder why Zeno felt the need to introduce a new technical term to express his normative concept. Why not, for example, use δέον or χρεών? Actually, the Stoics had no problem occasionally using other words (such as δέον, ἐπιβάλλον, or προκείμενον) to refer to καθήκοντα.\textsuperscript{96} Nevertheless, there seem to be good reasons why they preferred καθήκον as their standard term. For one, words like δέον and χρεών have a very broad semantic range and can express any kind of necessity, including conditional or instrumental necessity. However, the Stoic normative concept is emphatically not one of conditional or instrumental necessity. We are required to do our καθήκον, not because of any positive results that we may thereby obtain, but because performing a καθήκον is its own reward\textsuperscript{97} and is prescribed by nature. Thus, καθήκον seems to be an especially convenient word for such a concept, since it does not appear to have been used to denote conditional or instrumental necessity but, rather, something prescribed/appointed/established, usually by some external authority (which, in the Stoic case, is nature). Furthermore, since the word καθήκον could sometimes carry the force of a past passive participle of verbs of command, it also fits well with the Stoic conception of the “common law” (κοινὸς νόμος) that governs all rational beings in the universe. To do one’s καθήκον is to do what has been prescribed/ordained by the common law.\textsuperscript{98}

In light of the evidence presented in this chapter, how should καθήκον be translated? The two standard objections against translating it as “duty” (viz. that the Greek term carries neither the sense of obligation inherent in the English word, nor its connotation of actions owed from one human being to another) do not seem to be valid. The weight of the evidence shows that the

\textsuperscript{96} For δέον see D.L. 7.171.8-9. For ἐπιβάλλον and προκείμενον see n. 84.

\textsuperscript{97} Cicero Fin. 2.72.15: id contendimus, ut officii fructus sit ipsum officium. Cf. Leg. 1.48.3: omne honestum sua sponte esse expetendum.

Greek term carries a strong sense of obligation. Moreover, while the term bears no etymological link with any word of *debt* or *owing*, in practice the Stoics explicitly state that καθήκοντα are owed to other human beings (and to God), and such “interpersonal” καθήκοντα have a privileged place in their ethical system. Therefore, it does not seem unreasonable or incorrect to translate καθήκον in most cases as “duty,” provided we do not equate the term with a kind of Kantian moral duty.

Still, there are rare cases where translating καθήκον as “duty” goes against English idiom, as in the case of καθήκοντα of plants and animals (which would be best translated as “prescribed activities”). Moreover, there are times where a translator may want to bring out the term’s literal meaning of something *prescribed, appointed, or required*. Unfortunately, there is no single English expression that fully captures the meaning of the Greek word. Translating it as “prescribed action” does not capture the strong normativity of the term, which often clearly indicates a *required* action. But “required action” is even more problematic since there are many things that could be called “required actions” which would not qualify as καθήκοντα. Like other hard-to-translate Greek concepts (e.g. ἀρετή and εὐδαιμονία), it is perhaps best left untranslated in many cases. In the interest of clarity and accuracy, I will adopt a threefold approach to discussing καθήκοντα in the remainder of this dissertation. I will often leave the term untranslated, especially when discussing aspects of καθήκον that are unique to Stoicism (and would not apply to, say, Kantian duty). In other cases, especially where familiar types of duties are discussed, I will render the term as “duty” or “Stoic duty.” Finally, in cases where spelling out the term’s original meaning is necessary in order to make sense of a passage (as in the case of the καθήκοντα of plants and animals), I will translate the term as “prescribed activity” or “prescribed/required action.”
Chapter Two

Rules Are for Fools

The theory of duty (καθήκον/officium) that the Stoics pioneered in the third century BC formed a crucial part of their ethical system. Yet it is difficult for us today to reconstruct what this theory was exactly, since virtually all texts from the first two centuries of Stoicism have perished. Much of the meagre extant evidence for early Stoicism consists of quotations preserved in later texts written by opponents of the Stoa, who tend to deliberately misrepresent Stoic positions. Another difficulty in reconstructing the Stoic theory is that scholars disagree on basic questions about the nature of καθήκοντα, such as whether they are like rules or not, and how many different types there are. A reconstruction of the Stoic theory is not possible until these fundamental disputes are settled. Moreover, the positions one takes on these points inevitably and profoundly affect how one translates key terms in the ancient texts discussing Stoic duty. As things stand, the various existing translations of the disparate sources, usually done by different scholars, carry different embedded assumptions/positions that remain controversial. Thus, settling these debates about the nature and classification of καθήκοντα is also necessary in order to produce reliable and consistent translations of important passages in Cicero, Diogenes Laertius, Stobaeus and others – something that would be of great utility to scholars and future translators alike.

The three main objectives of this chapter are 1) to settle the fundamental disputes on the nature of Stoic duty, 2) to reconstruct the Stoics’ classification of καθήκοντα, and 3) to offer new translations of the main passages in the epitomes of Diogenes Laertius (D.L.) and Arius Didymus.
Although the first two objectives can only be accomplished by a close reading of these passages, I will not present their translations until the end of the chapter since they will depend on the conclusions reached in pursuing the first two objectives. In the following discussion, I will argue that, contrary to the common assumption, the Stoics did not conceive of καθήκοντα as rules. In fact, the Stoics did not believe there were any fixed rules of conduct. Instead of rules, their theory of duty offered a highly flexible formula for determining what action one should take that was both agent- and situation-specific. Furthermore, I argue that the various types of καθήκοντα mentioned across the different sources all fall under two main types: perfect duties (which only the wise can accomplish) and middle duties (which anyone can perform). Establishing these facts will have crucial implications in our reconstruction of the Stoic theory.

The Nature of the Evidence

At least seven major Stoic philosophers, from Zeno in the third century down to Posidonius in the first century BC, wrote dedicated treatises περὶ τοῦ καθήκοντος or “on duty.”1 Although these “technical treatises were, it seems, a central feature of Stoic ethics,”2 καθήκον was a concept “which generation after generation of Stoics so laboriously classified and analysed,”3 none of these books survive. The only extant complete works that preserve Stoic thought on duty

1 Zeno, Cleanthes, Sphaerus, Chrysippus, Hecaton, and Posidonius all wrote such treatises, according to Diogenes Laertius, as did Panaetius, whom Cicero emulated in his De Officiis. Chrysippus’ treatise was probably the most extensive, comprising at least seven scrolls (Plutarch, Stoic. Repug. cp.30 p.1047f – SVF 3.688). Hecato’s was at least six scrolls in length (Off. 3.89.1). Cleanthes’ writings on καθήκον filled three scrolls (D.L. 7.175.6.). All of these philosophers used the standard title Περὶ τοῦ καθήκοντος or Περὶ καθήκοντος except Posidonius and perhaps also Hecato. The former, foreshadowing Cicero, seems to have entitled his work Περὶ καθηκόντων, using the plural (D.L. 7.124.2). D.L. is admittedly inconsistent on Posidonius’ title and elsewhere reports it as Περὶ καθηκόντος (D.L. 7.129.8). However, the latter is probably an error, since it is more likely that D.L. would have mistakenly referred to Posidonius’ work by the standard Stoic title than that he would have mistakenly referred to it with a title was rarely, if ever, used elsewhere. It is possible that Hecato also used the plural title, since Cicero refers to Hecato’s work as “de officiis” (Off. 3.89.1).
2 Sedley 1999, 137.
3 Sedley 1999, 128.
are the later writings by Cicero and the so-called Roman Stoics: Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius. Although these authors have much to say about καθΗκον/ officium, nowhere in their works do they fully explain what it means. They evidently assume a prior familiarity with the concept on the part of their audience. Even Cicero’s Stoic-inspired work On Duties (De Officiis) -- the sole surviving ancient treatise dedicated to the topic -- falls short of offering a clear-cut definition of officium.4

Of equal importance to the works of these four authors for the purpose of reconstructing the theory of καθΗκον are the two extant Greek epitomes of Stoic ethics -- the one in Diogenes Laertius (D.L.) and the other in Stobaeus. The material in these Roman-era epitomes was probably culled from the writings of the Early and/or Middle Stoa,5 and thus may transmit more “orthodox” Stoic doctrine than do the Roman Stoics. These epitomes include passages focusing on καθΗκον which, although brief, contain valuable information not preserved in any other source. But in these texts too, a full definition of the concept is lacking, though there are various partial definitions and defining properties of it listed.

There is other evidence concerning the Stoic theory of duty, but it is meagre compared to the aforementioned material and often problematic. For example, many of the extant fragments from Early and Middle Stoicism survive only as quotations in much later writers who happen to be hostile to the Stoa. Perhaps unsurprisingly, some of these quotations are presented in misleading ways and thus serve more to obfuscate the picture of Stoic ethics than to clarify it. In particular, Plutarch, Diogenes Laertius, Sextus Empiricus, and several early Christian writers

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4 Ironically, Cicero criticizes Panaetius for failing to offer a definition of καθΗκον (at Off. 1.7.2).
5 This was the conclusion of von Arnim, who attributed much of the material to Chrysippus and earlier figures, and it has been generally accepted ever since, no doubt because of the abundance of direct quotations from and references to early Stoic figures in the epitomes. The relative chronology of the Greek epitomes with respect to each other will be discussed briefly at the end of this chapter.
mention various disturbing theses\textsuperscript{6} that the Stoics supposedly held. According to these authors, the Stoics sanctioned – and even morally justified – all kinds of abhorrent acts, including cannibalism\textsuperscript{7} and incest.\textsuperscript{8}

Many of these fragments seem so outrageous and so at odds with what we know of Stoicism from the extant, complete works of the Roman Stoics that one might be tempted to discard them outright as misrepresentations of Stoic beliefs. However, Sextus and the other authors who include these passages sometimes explicitly state that they are quoting verbatim from such august figures as Zeno and Chrysippus. Thus, these fragments pose a real challenge to anyone trying to understand Stoic ethics. It is only recently that scholars (particularly Malcolm Schofield and Katja Vogt) have managed to make sense of them. As I shall explain below, these disturbing theses are only disturbing under the assumption that καθήκοντα must be like fixed rules or commandments. In fact, the disturbing theses constitute good evidence that the Stoics did not conceive of καθήκοντα as fixed rules.

\textbf{Are Καθήκοντα Rules?}

In the past decades, scholars have come up with increasingly sophisticated and sympathetic interpretations of Stoic ethics. Although no monograph specifically on καθήκον has appeared, this wealth of recent scholarship has included fruitful discussions on various aspects of καθήκον, since at least some treatment of the concept is unavoidable in any study of Stoic ethics. However, as a result of the dearth and confusing nature of our evidence, there is much lingering disagreement on fundamental questions about the Stoic notion of καθήκον. For example, were

\textsuperscript{6} I follow Vogt (2008) in using this label. These disturbing claims can be found in von Arnim in two sections (labelled “Cynic precepts” or \textit{praecepta Cynica}): SVF 1.250-57 and 3.743-56.
\textsuperscript{7} SVF 1.254, 3.749-50, 3.752-53.
\textsuperscript{8} SVF 1.256, 3.743-46.
καθήκοντα akin to commandments and/or prohibitions? And if so, could they be codified into a list of moral rules, as some scholars believe?9 Or, as others have argued,10 were καθήκοντα actually unlike rules in that any statement of a καθήκον (viz. a morally required/prescribed action) depends on the situation in question and the person involved and cannot be generalized into a universal rule. According to the latter view, there are no substantively action-guiding, exceptionless καθήκοντα.11 From this basic controversy, one can see why some scholars have called attention to the fact that the Stoic theory of καθήκον is still not well understood.12

Until recently, the majority of scholarship on the Stoics has either claimed or, more often, assumed that Stoic καθήκοντα are rules of conduct that the rational deliberator will make use of. In fact, such a “picture of rule-following has sometimes been assumed to be the only one possible.”13 However, there have been increasingly powerful challenges to this interpretation in the scholarship, starting with Paul Vander Waerdt’s 1994 paper “Zeno’s Republic and the Origins of Natural Law,” in which the author claimed that the Stoic conception of natural law did not include any “immutable rules of conduct not subject to exception.”14 The topic was explored at greater length by Brad Inwood in his 1999 paper “Rules and Reasoning in Stoic Ethics,” where he argued convincingly that καθήκοντα are not fixed rules, and that there are no substantive, exceptionless commandments (or prohibitions) in the Stoic system. More recently, Katja Vogt has presented an updated and expanded case against the “rules interpretation.” As an alternative, she builds on the interpretation of Vander Waerdt and others (which she labels the

11 I borrow this terminology from Inwood (1999), who uses “substantive” to refer to prescriptions that clearly spell out a specific course of action (as opposed to general or vague injunctions that tell you how to act).
14 Vander Waerdt 1994, 274.
“prescriptive reason interpretation”\textsuperscript{15}), and modifies it in an important way (to be discussed below). For now, I will refer to the interpretations of Vander Waerdt, Inwood, and Vogt collectively as the “no-rules interpretation,” and will revisit the differences between them later. They are all similar to the extent that they see in Stoicism “a theory of moral reasoning which emphasizes flexibility and situational variability,”\textsuperscript{16} According to this model, individuals calculate their unique $\kappa\alpha\theta\eta\kappa\omicron\nu\tau\alpha$ based, in part, on their own peculiar qualities and the situation they are in. While it may seem the less intuitive interpretation, I believe these scholars are correct in thinking that understanding how $\kappa\alpha\theta\eta\kappa\omicron\nu\tau\alpha$ are different from rules is crucial for reconstructing the Stoic theory.

It is not difficult to see why $\kappa\alpha\theta\eta\kappa\omicron\nu\tau\alpha/\textit{officia}$ have so long been assumed to be like rules. For one, in modern ethical discussions (since at least the time of Kant) “duties” are generally spoken of as rules. Despite some scholarly attempts to distance the concept of $\kappa\alpha\theta\eta\kappa\omicron\nu$ from “duty” (e.g. by translating the term as “appropriate action”), it is obvious that modern notions about duty have colored interpretations of the ancient concept, especially in older scholarship and in popular translations of the Roman Stoics. Moreover, there is nothing in the extant Stoic literature that clearly and directly controverts such a modern reading. Nowhere is it explicitly stated that $\kappa\alpha\theta\eta\kappa\omicron\nu\tau\alpha$ are not rules. Nor, for that matter, is it explicitly stated that they \textit{are} rules, but there are numerous passages that could be taken to support such a view. For instance, both D.L. and Cicero give examples of $\kappa\alpha\theta\eta\kappa\omicron\nu\tau\alpha/\textit{officia}$ that look very much like commandments, e.g. “to honor one's parents, siblings, and country.”\textsuperscript{17} Furthermore, both writers

\textsuperscript{15} Vogt 2008, 15 and 162-63.
\textsuperscript{16} Inwood 1999, 95.
\textsuperscript{17} D.L. 7.108.
state that καθήκοντα/officia are actions which reason dictates or demands that we do.\textsuperscript{18} Aren't things that are demanded of us, by definition, commandments? Finally, there is a connection in Stoicism between duties and the “common law” (κοινὸς νόμος) that binds all humans. The Stoics (or at least Chrysippus\textsuperscript{19}) claimed that there is a common law, which they identified with “right reason” (ὀρθὸς λόγος), and which prescribes (προστακτικόν) to us what we should do and prohibits (ἀπαγορευτικόν) what we are not to do.\textsuperscript{20} Can there be any doubt, then, that the Stoics offered a moral framework consisting of firm commandments and prohibitions?

While such a conclusion may seem straightforward – and has been championed by some eminent scholars\textsuperscript{21} – there are several problems with it. First and foremost, there is nowhere to be found in the extant Stoic literature any substantive commandment or prohibition that holds under all circumstances. At least no scholar has identified one yet. This may seem strange given that Diogenes Laertius explicitly states that there are some καθήκοντα that always hold (ἀεὶ καθῆκει).\textsuperscript{22} However, the only example he gives for such a universal duty is “to live on the basis of virtue.”\textsuperscript{23} This type of duty seems to correspond to the class of “perfect duties” (τέλεια καθῆκοντα) mentioned in Stobaeus, who gives two examples: “to be wise” and “to act justly.”\textsuperscript{24} Such vague injunctions that make “intrinsic reference to virtue,” as Inwood puts it,\textsuperscript{25} certainly do always hold – neither side of the debate questions that – and they are important to the Stoic

\textsuperscript{18} The Greek is λόγος ἀρετῆς ποιεῖν (D.L. 7.108), which Cicero seems to be translating at De Finibus 3.58 as ratio postulet agere. The translation of the Greek as “reason dictates” is borrowed from Vogt 2008, 175. I shall have more to say about the Greek phrase when I offer my own translation later in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{19} Vander Waerdt 1994, 287 writes, regarding Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus, that “we have no reason to doubt their doctrinal consistency” on the topic of natural law.

\textsuperscript{20} Cf. the famous opening lines of Chrysippos’ On Law (Marcian 1 = SVF 3.314 = LS 67R) in conjunction with Stobaeus 2.7.11i.30 and D.L. 7.88.5.


\textsuperscript{22} D.L. 7.109.10

\textsuperscript{23} A couple of scholars have claimed that D.L. also includes “to honor one's parents, one's brothers, and one's country” in the category of universal commandments. That this is a mistake is clearly shown by Inwood 1999, 103 n.28.

\textsuperscript{24} Stobaeus 2.7.8.11.

\textsuperscript{25} Inwood 1999, 102 ff.
theory on a theoretical level. However, they are of limited practical value to the rational deliberator in the moment of deliberation.

The reason for their limited usefulness is that they require unpacking on the part of the deliberator, who must figure out what the demands of the virtue mentioned are on the situation in question. Such virtue-referencing injunctions can indeed be useful in the deliberation process (as will be discussed later in the chapter). However, they do not spell out a clear course of action to be followed. The same can be said of Epictetus’ “rule of life” (βιωτικὸς νόμος) that we must “do what is in accordance with nature.” In fact, Epictetus’ law is equivalent to Diogenes Laertius’ universal καθήκον above, since living on the basis of virtue is explicitly equated with living in accordance with nature. Duties to god(s) can also be placed in the category of exceptionless καθήκοντα. Such duties include 1) believing in the gods, 2) acknowledging their majesty and goodness, 3) knowing that they are supreme commanders of the universe and are guardians of the human race, and 4) being a good person. In all such cases, the supposed universal rule is “vacuous” or “not substantive” in terms of practical action-guidance. It may tell you how to act, but it does not tell you what to do.

The alternative to the rules interpretation, namely the no-rules interpretation mentioned above, acknowledges that these kinds of vague moral injunctions always hold, but maintains that there are no substantively action-guiding rules of conduct in the Stoic system which a rational deliberator can always rely on without fail. In other words, there is no statement of a καθήκον (made without intrinsic reference to virtue) that does not admit of exceptions. Proponents of this view also point out that although the Stoics speak of the common law (κοινὸς νόμος) which

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26 Diss. 1.26.2
28 Seneca Ep. 95.50.
29 These terms are borrowed from Inwood 1999.
applies to all rational beings, they never speak of universal *laws* in the plural\(^{30}\) (at least not in the surviving material). There is no indication in the sources that the Stoics conceived of universal laws that could be compiled into something like a legal code.

The simplest way for proponents of the rules-interpretation to debunk the no-rules interpretation would be to produce one example of a practical injunction by a Stoic philosopher that always holds (and does not make intrinsic reference to virtue). However, while the Stoics provide many examples of practical duties or “rules of duty”\(^{31}\) throughout their writings, it is hard to find one anywhere that can be universalized for all people and in all cases. In fact, even the duties that appear to be the most universal, and thus seem to be the best candidates for exceptionless commandments or prohibitions, are shown by the Stoics themselves to have exceptions. For example, a few scholars have taken the injunction to obey one's parents to be a universal duty for the Stoics.\(^{32}\) However, we find exceptions to this “rule” in Hecato (according to Cicero), Epictetus, and Musonius.\(^{33}\) The latter, in his *Diatribe* 16, lists various conditions under which one may act against the commands of one's father.\(^{34}\) Cicero reports Hecato's claim


\(^{31}\) Cicero speaks several times of *officii praecepta* or *officiorum praecepta* (see e.g. *Off.* 1.6.5 & 1.7.14). Seneca discusses *praecepta* in his famous letters 94 & 95. The term need not mean “rules,” but rather “teachings.” For a discussion of why translating the term as “rules” is problematic, see Inwood 1999, 106 ff.

\(^{32}\) See Mitsis 1994, 4837 as well as Defilippo and Mitsis 1994, 267 n.23. In the latter instance, the authors claim that honoring one’s parents is “a star example of a Stoic determinate moral rule or a ‘proper function that admits of no exception’ (*ἀεὶ καθήκον*),” citing as evidence D.L. 7.108-9. However, as pointed out by Vander Waerdt (1994, 274 n.10) and Inwood (1999, 103 n.28), D.L. does not say that honoring one’s parents always holds. As mentioned previously, the only example he gives there of an exceptionless rule (*ἀεὶ καθήκει*) is “to live on the basis of virtue.” See also Sedley 1999, 129, where too this injunction is mentioned as an example of a universal rule. Sedley (who assumes that *καθήκοντα* are rules) writes that to “always respect one’s parents” is an “unconditional obligation” according to the Stoics. This is probably true, since the commandment makes intrinsic reference to virtue (acting respectfully is a virtue), and thus contains a built-in proviso that the act be performed well. But once again, this is not a substantive command. If we removed the reference to virtue and tried to extract a practical command, we might end up with something like, “Always obey your parents.” However, as explained below, this does not always hold by the Stoics' own admission.

\(^{33}\) For a very helpful list of Stoic passages dealing with the limits of one’s obligations to one’s parents, see Inwood 1999, 28.

\(^{34}\) There is also a fragment of Musonius where he writes, “If you obey your father, you will follow the will of one man; if you choose the philosopher's life, the will of God” (frag. 16.106.4-5). Cf. Epictetus, *Diss.* 3.3.5-10.
that one may even kill one's father in the exceptional case that he be making an attempt at tyranny or betraying the fatherland.\textsuperscript{35} As Cicero explains elsewhere, duty to one’s country overrides duties to parents, kin, and other humans.\textsuperscript{36}

Could, then, duty to one's country entail any fixed, universal rules of conduct? No, since even this duty may be trumped by other considerations. For instance, again according to Cicero, Posidonius compiled a list of actions that are “so repulsive or so wicked, that a wise man would not commit them, even to save his country.”\textsuperscript{37} Then, could these actions be examples of unconditional prohibitions, and thus constitute fixed, universal rules? While we cannot know for sure (because Cicero deems them too indecent to mention), it is extremely doubtful. These actions were most likely defined with intrinsic reference to virtue and/or vice, since only virtue and vice constitute the unconditional good and bad according to the Stoics. One final promising candidate for a universal duty is the injunction against suicide. However, once again, there are exceptions to this “rule.” There are circumstances in which a wise person (like Socrates or Cato the Younger) would, and should, make a “rational exit from life” (ἐὔλογος ἐξαγωγή).\textsuperscript{38}

In short, the Stoics do not seem to have laid down any substantive, exceptionless commandments or prohibitions. Moreover, they themselves provide examples of cases in which their own strictest injunctions are overruled. These considerations in themselves do not prove that there were no universal commands put forth in other, now lost, works of Stoicism. The absence of evidence is, of course, not the evidence of absence. However, if any of the major

\textsuperscript{35} Cicero puts this euphemistically: \textit{patriae salutem antepon et saluti patris} (Off. 3.90.15).
\textsuperscript{36} Off. 1.57.
\textsuperscript{37} Off. 1.159.5 (tr. W. Miller).
\textsuperscript{38} Fin. 3.60 (= SVF 3.763); Plutarch, \textit{De Stoic. Repugn.} 1042D (= SVF 3.759), and \textit{De Comm. Not.} 1063C–1064C (= SVF 3.762). When I say “wise person” here, I do not mean that one must be a perfect sage in order to justifiably make a rational exit from life. Cicero never claims that Cato was a sage, and there are good reasons to think that the Stoics did not hold perfect sagehood to be a necessary criterion for making an εὔλογον ἐξαγωγήν. Cf. Brittain 2001, 255-6.
Early or Middle Stoics had put forth universal commandments, it is hard to imagine how they would have been missed by both the Roman Stoics and the Greek epitomists. It seems more plausible that the Stoics are simply not offering a rule-based system of ethics. That is the contention of the no-rules interpretation, and there are further positive arguments in favor of this view. Perhaps most notably, the no-rules interpretation solves one of the long-standing difficulties in the scholarship on Stoicism: what to make of the disturbing theses attributed to the Stoics by various non-Stoic authors.

The Disturbing Theses as Evidence Against the Rules Interpretation

According to several late, non-Stoic sources, the Stoics advocated all kinds of horrendous acts, such as cannibalism, incest, and even eating one’s own amputated limbs.39 While these claims appear so extreme as to look fabricated, they are impossible to dismiss off hand because they are sometimes presented by these late authors as being direct quotations from Zeno or Chrysippus. These disturbing theses (as Vogt has dubbed them) have often left even the most sympathetic readers of Stoicism dumbfounded as to what to make of them. More recently, Schofield and Vogt have done illuminating work on them and the polemical contexts in which they were preserved. They have shown that most of the disturbing theses were originally collected and compiled into lists by Skeptics for the purpose of criticizing Stoicism. The Skeptics took quotations from Stoic works out of context and presented them in ways that suited their own arguments but often gave a distorted picture of Stoicism.40 These lists, originally compiled by Skeptics, provided easy fodder for later authors such as Plutarch and some early Christian writers, who reproduced them in their own anti-Stoic critiques.

39 SVF 3.743-56.
As a result of the way that these quotations were compiled and then propagated, the original words of the Stoics often came to be distorted in subtle ways which profoundly altered their meaning. As every classical scholar knows all too well, there are no quotation marks in ancient Greek or Latin, and there is often some uncertainty in quoted passages as to where the exact quotation begins and ends. In examining the disturbing theses, Vogt has argued that in several instances where we are supposedly given quotations of Zeno and Chrysippus advocating horrible acts, there are phrases like “one should” or “one must” which, upon careful examination, do not seem to be part of the quoted text, but to have been supplied by the person quoting them. Thus, in some cases the actions that these sources claim the Stoics advocated seem to be things that the Stoics merely said might be prescribed in very specific situations and under extenuating circumstances.

In light of the work of Schofield and Vogt, it seems clear that none of the supposedly prescribed activities within the disturbing theses were presented by the Stoics as rules or as generally advisable courses of action (despite what the authors who quote them would want us to believe). Nevertheless, the Stoics do seem to have argued that some of these actions, while generally not advisable, may be called for under extreme circumstances. The question thus remains, why they took the trouble to argue for the occasional permissibility of their societies’ most entrenched taboos. What did they stand to gain by making such shocking claims? Such provocations can be partially explained as a way for the Stoics to present their ethical theory as more radical and revisionary than it actually was. Perhaps more importantly, these disturbing theses were often found in the context of discussions about καθῆκον. So the question then is,

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41 Vogt 2008, 34, 39, and 43.
42 Vogt 2008, 34 and 38.
43 Vogt 2008, 55. Cf. Cicero's claim that Zeno agreed with Aristotle in substance but differed in terminology (Fin. 4.72).
what do they tell us about the Stoic theory of duty? In particular, for the purpose of the present discussion, can these provocative claims help us choose between the rules interpretation and the alternative no-rules approach?

In fact, the disturbing theses seem to deal a further blow to the rules interpretation. Not only, as we saw above, are there no universal, positive commandments to be found in the Stoic system, but now there seem to be no universally prohibited actions either, since even the strictest taboos turn out to be violable under certain conditions. Thus, the disturbing theses only make the rules advocate’s task of finding fixed rules of conduct (whether prescriptions or prohibitions) in the Stoic system even more difficult. By contrast, under the no-rules interpretation, these disturbing theses make perfect sense as illustrations of the fact that a moral reasoner cannot simply rely on rules, precisely because society’s most stringent prohibitions (against things like incest and eating human flesh) have conceivable exceptions (e.g. in various post-apocalyptic scenarios where the survival of the human race depends on breaking these taboos44). In other words, the motivation behind the Stoics’ discussion of some of the disturbing theses may have been to argue against a rules-based system.45 We cannot know for sure, because the original context of these theses has been mostly lost. However, it is entirely in keeping with what we know of the Stoics that they should argue that, since societal prohibitions and taboos generally do not make intrinsic reference to virtue or vice but only to indifferents, they cannot really be bad per se, and there are conceivable situations in which it is καθῆκον to do these normally abhorrent things.

44 Origen (Contra Celsum 4.45.29 = SVF 3.743) reports that the Stoics presented the hypothetical scenario of a sage and his daughter being the only humans left alive after a major cataclysm. The Stoics then “ask whether the father may, in accordance with duty (καθηκοπντως), have intercourse with his daughter in this scenario in order to prevent the extinction of mankind.” Notice that the Stoics are not advocating incest. They are offering a Gedankenexperiment and challenging the reader with a difficult question. In light of the rhetorically subtle way the Stoics set this up, the claims of other Christian writers (such as Epiphanius in Against Heresies III.39 = SVF 3.746) that Chrysippus said that fathers and daughters must (δείν) have intercourse with each other are highly suspect.

45 This was already suggested in Vander Waerdt 1994, 300-301.
Duties in Dire Circumstances (Περιστατικά Καθήκοντα)

The shocking/taboo καθήκοντα found in some of the disturbing theses seem to correspond to a special category of duties mentioned in Diogenes Laertius, namely περιστατικά καθήκοντα or καθήκοντα κατὰ περίστασιν. While this term has often been translated as “circumstantial” καθήκοντα or as καθήκοντα that “depend on circumstances,” I believe both renderings are incorrect and confusing. The word περίστασις can mean various things, including “situation/circumstance” but also “emergency/crisis/difficulty.” The use of the term in the latter, narrower sense seems to have been particularly important to Stoic ethics. For example, there is a Stoic proverb, “δὸς περίστασιν και λαβὲ τὸν ἄνδρα,” which clearly means “provide an emergency and apprehend [what kind of] man [someone is],” and would not make sense if translated, “provide a situation and discern the man.” Furthermore, the term appears in the title of two of Epictetus’ discourses, where it clearly does not refer to just random situations but to dire or difficult ones. Interestingly, Epictetus explicitly discusses the two possible meanings of περίστασις in a passage about how most people foolishly fight against necessity:

κλάοντες καὶ στένοντες πάσχομεν ἃ πάσχομεν καὶ περιστάσεις αὐτὰ καλοῦντες. ποίας περιστάσεις, ἄνθρωπος; εἴ περιστάσεις λέγεις τὰ περιεστήκοτα, πάντα περιστάσεις εἰσίν· εἰ δ’, ὡς δύσκολα καλεῖς, ποίαν δυσκολίαν ἔχει τὸ γενόμενον φθαρῆναι; (Diss. 2.6.16-18)

with cries and groans we suffer the things we suffer and call them περίστασις. Man, what περιστάσεις [are you talking about]? If by περιστάσεις you mean the things around you, then everything is a περίστασις. If you mean hardships [then I ask], what hardship is involved when something that has come into being passes away? (tr. mine)

47 E.g. Sedley 1999, 132.
49 Proclus in Plat. Timaeum p. 18 C. Schneider (= SVF 3.206).
50 Epictetus provides another formulation of this same idea: Αἱ περιστάσεις εἰσίν αἱ τοὺς ἄνδρας δεικνύουσαι (Diss. 1.24.1).
51 One is “Πῶς πρὸς τὰς περιστάσεις ἀγωνιστέον;” (Diss. 1.24), which Oldfather rightly translates as, “How should we struggle against difficulties?” The other is “Τί δεῖ πρόχειρον ἐχεῖν ἐν ταῖς περιστάσεσιν;” (Diss. 1.30), which Oldfather renders, “What aid ought we to have ready at hand in difficulties?”
This passage is helpful for two reasons. First, it suggests that the word περίστασις was commonly used by ordinary people to mean specifically difficult or dire circumstances. Second, Epictetus acknowledges that the word can also be used to mean what its etymology suggests, but shows that this usage is too general and vague to be useful in the types of ethical discussions he is interested in.

Going back to D.L., the two examples given for περιστατικὰ καθήκοντα (or καθήκοντα κατὰ περίστασιν) are stabbing oneself and throwing away one’s property – both of which make more sense as “duties in a dire situation/emergency” (or “prescribed actions in a dire situation”) rather than simply “circumstantial duties” (or “circumstantially prescribed actions”). Further corroboration that the term means something like καθήκοντα “in an emergency” can be found in the discussion of καθήκοντα that are said not to be περιστατικά. If περιστατικά καθήκοντα were in fact “circumstantial καθήκοντα,” then the contrasted group of καθήκοντα ἀνεύ περιστάσεως would have to be “καθήκοντα independent of situation/circumstance.” And while they are often translated as such, this cannot be right because the examples of such καθήκοντα (taking care of one’s health and of one’s sense organs), just like all other examples of καθήκοντα encountered so far, admit of exceptions in certain situations.

Sedley, an advocate of the rules interpretation who translates περιστατικά as “circumstantial,” explains that to care for one’s health is:

[a καθήκον] ‘independently of circumstances’ (ἀνεύ περιστάσεως) – meaning, presumably, not that you should never in any circumstances neglect your health, but that,

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52 The etymology of “περίστασις” is very similar to that of “circumstance.” Both words, in their original meaning, refer to what is “standing around.”
53 In the following discussion I will leave καθήκον untranslated because my argument is, I believe, valid whether one takes καθήκον to mean “duty” or “prescribed action” or “appropriate action.”
54 Except for the aforementioned, virtue-referencing, perfect καθήκοντα (e.g. “to live on the basis of virtue”), which do not offer substantive action-guidance and which will be revisited later in the chapter.
such circumstances being rare, you should care for your health as a matter of general policy, not as a response to this or that particular circumstance.\textsuperscript{55}

In other words, when the Stoics speak of something being a καθήκον “independently of circumstances,” they are using the phrase in a loose sense (they do not actually mean that it is absolutely independent of circumstances). Such a reading is uncharitable in that it imputes not just a lack of precision to the Stoics (who were notorious for their terminological exactitude) but a self-contradiction: something that is “καθήκον independently of circumstances” does, as it turns out, occasionally depend on circumstances. Sedley’s reading is also at odds with the general Stoic usage of the term περίστασις, as discussed above. Translating “καθήκοντα ἀνευ περιστάσεως” instead as “καθήκοντα in the absence of a dire circumstance” avoids introducing any imprecision or self-contradiction into the text and still results in the same meaning that Sedley wants, viz. καθήκοντα that one should follow “as a matter of general policy,” absent any emergency.

Another debated issue in the translation of this passage in D.L. is how to understand the preposition in the phrase “κατὰ περίστασιν.” As mentioned above, the same passage refers to περιστατικὰ καθήκοντα also as καθήκοντα κατὰ περίστασιν, and so understanding the latter construction may help us decide on the meaning of the more ambiguous adjective. Some scholars take the κατὰ to mean “in,” while others take it to mean “dependent on” (both readings are grammatically sound). This dilemma is, in a sense, inseparable from the previous one about the meaning of περίστασις. If περίστασις means “circumstance,” then clearly “dependent on circumstance”/“not dependent on circumstance” makes much more sense than “in a circumstance”/“not in a circumstance” (since you can never not be in a circumstance). Similarly,

\textsuperscript{55} Sedley 1999, 132.
if περίστασις means “emergency,” then “in an emergency”/“not in an emergency” makes far more sense than “dependent on an emergency”/“not dependent on an emergency.”

Thus, my argument that περίστασις means “emergency” or “dire situation” is also a consideration in favor of translating κατά as “in.” Nevertheless, let us consider the main objections to such a reading offered recently by Vogt. While Vogt does not consider the possibility of περίστασις meaning “emergency” or “dire situation,” she does discuss what is, in effect, a similar interpretation of several scholars who take the term to mean “exceptional circumstance.”

Vogt emphatically states that, based on the Greek text:

The Stoics do not distinguish between what is appropriate in standard circumstances as compared to what is appropriate under exceptional circumstances. Rather, they distinguish between appropriate actions that depend on the circumstances and those that do not.

She does not offer further philological justification for this claim, but her reading clearly involves taking the preposition in “κατά περίστασιν” to mean “dependent on.” This is grammatically legitimate. However, her reading also requires taking the phrase “ἄνευ περιστάσεως” to mean “not dependent on περίστασις,” which is grammatically problematic. This phrase simply means “without a περίστασις” or “absent a περίστασις.” It is not equivalent to the negation of the phrase “dependent on περίστασις.” However, it is equivalent in meaning to the negation of the phrase “in a περίστασις.” Thus, independent of any consideration of the meaning of περίστασις, there is a separate philological argument for translating κατά as “in” and not as “dependent on.”

Vogt also makes a philosophical case against the kind of reading I have been arguing for (namely that there are some καθήκοντα that hold in most cases and others that hold only in

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emergencies or dire circumstances). If it is the case that in dire situations a generally valid καθήκον may become invalid and/or a generally prohibited action may become morally prescribed, then we need a way to explain how this change of duties works. Vogt claims that the only two available explanations for how this shift could occur are both problematic. In order to understand her claim, we should remember that we are dealing here with καθήκοντα that do not make intrinsic reference to virtue but only to indifferents (things which are neither good nor bad but which may have value or disvalue).\(^{58}\) To do one’s καθήκον is to properly select indifferents that have value (e.g. health, wealth, friendship) and reject indifferents that have disvalue (e.g. poverty and mutilation). Thus, we have to explain how it is that in a dire circumstance it might be a καθήκον to reject something of value which it would normally be a καθήκον to select. Vogt thinks that the following are the only two explanations available.

(1) If the good is at stake, indifferents ‘switch’ from being valuable or disvaluable to being strictly indifferent. The good trumps the valuable by annihilating the fact that the valuable is preferred. (2) In exceptional circumstances, what is usually valuable switches to being disvaluable. On this reading, what is in accordance with nature, and therefore has value, is determined by the circumstances.\(^{59}\)

I agree with her that explanation (2) is incorrect. In other words, it cannot be that circumstances change the value of something since, for the Stoics, “whether something is of value or disvalue is a fact of nature.”\(^{60}\) However, I do not agree that (1) is problematic; and I think that there is at least one other explanation available besides the two offered above.

I will offer my suggested alternative explanation shortly. First let us consider Vogt's main argument against explanation (1). She claims that:

\(^{58}\) As opposed to the separate class of virtue-referencing καθήκοντα which always hold (ἀεὶ καθήκει) but do not offer substantive action-guidance. These “perfect” καθήκοντα will be discussed in the next section.

\(^{59}\) Vogt 2008, 209-10 (emphasis in original).

wisdom consists in choosing among indifferents, *not* in weighing the good against the indifferent. The Stoics do not discuss cases where, for example, health would switch from being preferred to being strictly indifferent (in the sense of irrelevant to action) because, in a given situation, virtue is at stake.\(^{61}\)

However, the Stoics *do* discuss cases where the good (virtue) is in conflict with the merely preferred. At the end of his *Diatribe* 16, mentioned earlier, Musonius writes that a son is allowed to disobey a father who forbids him to do philosophy because “being good and being a philosopher are the same thing.”\(^{62}\) This is an example where consideration of the good does enter one's deliberation and outweighs the value of any and all indifferents. There is a similar passage in Epictetus where, once again, consideration of the good overrides one's duty to parental authority.\(^{63}\) Moreover, the entire third book of Cicero’s *De Officiis* deals with dilemmas between the good and what appears expedient (sc. has value). Thus, there are plenty of scenarios discussed by the Stoics which show that (1) does happen. One need not say, however, that the indifferents “switch from being preferred to being strictly indifferent” (which would imply a *change* of value), just that they cease to be relevant to the deliberation.

It should be noted that in her book Vogt limits her discussion of moral deliberation to the perspective of the sage. Insofar as the perfectly wise deliberator is concerned, she is right in what she says about wisdom in the last quoted passage. In other words, it is true that perfect sages would never find themselves in a dilemma between the good and the merely valuable (since such dilemmas only arise in one who mistakenly takes something of mere value to be good). Moreover, I agree with her that all *καθήκοντα* that sages perform consist in the correct selection

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\(^{62}\) *Diss.* 16.89.

\(^{63}\) Epictetus, *Diss.* 3.3.5-10.
of indifferents (not in choosing virtue over value). However, for ordinary people dilemmas between what seems good and what seems expedient arise all the time. The extant Stoic authors discuss such dilemmas and offer advice on how to ensure that one chooses the virtuous option over the apparently expedient. It may be that our limited evidence of early Stoicism (the period Vogt focuses on) does not include much treatment of such cases. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, the later Stoics are very much concerned with such dilemmas and they offer deliberative tools (called κανόνες or regulae) for solving them.

Thus, I do not think explanation (1) above is problematic for the reason Vogt gives. In fact, I think one advantage that Stoicism has over most other ancient schools is that it offers a system for cutting through any dilemma that may arise between what is right and what seems expedient. For example, if someone offers you a billion dollars to kill someone, according to the Stoics there is no real dilemma. A billion dollars has a lot of value, but killing someone is obviously wrong, so you politely decline the offer. While the even more austere Cynics and Megarians (e.g. Stilbo) could also claim that their systems cut through such dilemmas, they did not have the kind of sophisticated theory of value that the Stoics offered for making decisions in most everyday situations.

In any case, let us return to the original purpose of our discussion of (1) and (2), which was to attempt to explain how a normally inadvisable action can become one’s καθήκον in dire circumstances. Vogt claims that both (1) and (2) are problematic explanations. I have argued that (1) is actually consistent with the Stoic theory as far as non-sages are concerned. Moreover, (1) does seem to explain some cases of περιστατικὰ καθήκοντα. For example, suppose a young

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64 viz. sages do not act virtuously because they choose the good over the merely valuable. Rather, it is their constant virtuous disposition and the perfect knowledge with which they make their selection of indifferents that makes their performance of each καθήκον an act of virtue or right action (κατόρθωμα).
65 Several such examples will be discussed in the next chapter.
66 This system of moral deliberation is explored in the next chapter.
aspiring philosopher, who happens to be very rich, comes to the conclusion (like Wittgenstein did) that he cannot pursue a virtuous life of philosophy unless he gives away all of his inherited fortune. The goodness of the virtuous life trumps the value of his inheritance, and so he gives away his fortune. This is an example of a paradigmatic καθήκον κατὰ περίστασιν that is determined by a consideration of the good.

Nevertheless, this explanatory model (where consideration of the good enters our deliberation and trumps the value of indifferents) does not explain all cases of περιστατικά καθήκοντα. For example, it does not tell us why it may be καθήκον in dire circumstances to eat human flesh. Moreover, since (1) applies only to non-sages, it does not explain how a sage might come to have περιστατικά καθήκοντα (such as “to eat human flesh”). I suggest that there is a third explanation available which, taken together with (1), does explain all cases of περιστατικά καθήκοντα. This alternative explanation is that circumstances can change one’s καθήκον by introducing a new object of value into the equation (or by removing something of value), thus changing the moral calculus. This alternative explanation avoids the problematic assumption of (2) that the value indifferents changes depending on circumstance.

By way of example, consider the famous story of the Uruguayan rugby team that was left stranded in the snowy Andes mountains after their plane crashed, and who survived by eating the corpses of those among them who had died. According to the Stoics, they did their καθήκον. However, it is not the case that dire circumstances made the corpses of their companions suddenly switch to having high value. Chrysippus is clear that corpses simply have no value (just like the pieces of our hair and of our nails that we regularly cut off have no

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67 Throwing away one’s fortune is one of the two examples of καθήκοντα κατὰ περίστασιν given at D.L. 7.109.8.
69 Diogenes Laertius reports that the Stoics claimed that the good man will eat human flesh κατὰ περίστασιν (D.L. 7.121.10). Cf. SVF 3.747-52.
The relevant fact here is that life has more value than death (which actually has negative value or disvalue). In most normal situations, we do not have to weigh things of value against our own life or death. The rugby players’ περίστασις here introduces two new indifferents into their deliberation – one of great value (life), and the other of great disvalue (death). The stranded rugby players are doing their καθῆκον in selecting life over certain death. It just so happens that using dead human flesh (which has no value) is involved in their selection.

Cicero also discusses cases where duty changes under dire circumstances. In the examples he gives, it is clear that things do not change value, but new situations introduce new indifferents (including new people) that must be taken into account in our deliberations. We do not select indifferents based on their absolute value, but based on their relative value compared to other available options. Stobaeus' epitome makes this explicitly clear with the word παραμετρεῖσθαι, which means to measure things in relation to one another. Cicero echoes this language when he says that we must weigh our competing obligations to different people against one another and become good calculators of duty.

My interpretation of περιστατικὰ καθῆκοντα is thus fully consistent with the position maintained by Vogt that the value and disvalue of indifferents in and of themselves are not affected by circumstance. In the end, the main differences between our interpretations stem from a philological disagreement on the meaning of κατὰ περίστασιν. In substance, however, my view is in line with her final conclusion. Vogt ends her discussion on this topic by saying,

the things that appropriate action deals with (health, wealth, etc.) have value or disvalue independently of the circumstances, and...we can only explain why it is sometimes

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70 Sextus Empiricus Adv. math. XI 194 (= SVF 3.752).
71 Off. 1.31 ff. and 3.19.
72 Stobaeus 2.7.8a.8.
73 Off. 1.59. The Latin is ratiocinatores officiorum.
appropriate to put one's health or property at risk if we consider a specific case, with specific circumstances.\(^7\)

My interpretation is fully consistent with this statement. Furthermore, I agree with Vogt that “exceptional circumstances” is a poor translation because it suggests that there are rules and then exceptions to those rules, which creates a misleading picture of Stoic moral deliberation. The same kind of reasoning that prescribes what we should do in normal situations also prescribes περιστατικά καθήκοντα in dire situations. There are no fixed rules for action in Stoicism that hold under all circumstances. And this bears repeating because scholars have often assumed that the καθήκοντα ἀνεύ περιστάσεως are equivalent to the duties mentioned in the same passage in D.L. which are said to always hold (ἀεὶ καθήκει). Distinguishing between these two types is crucial for the reconstruction of the classification of καθήκοντα (to be discussed in the next section).

To sum up, there are καθήκοντα (ἀνεύ περιστάσεως) that usually hold, except in emergencies (e.g. to honor one's parents, siblings, and country), and there are καθήκοντα (κατὰ περίστασιν) that only hold in emergencies (e.g. to stab oneself or eat human flesh). Both could be called circumstantial, in that they are situation-dependent and admit of exceptions. In fact, as previously argued, there is no evidence for any practical duty espoused by the Stoics that is not circumstantial in that sense. Furthermore, one should not fall into the trap of thinking of the ἀνεύ περιστάσεως category as comprising rules and the περιστατικά καθήκοντα as being the exceptions to those rules. As I shall explain in the next chapter, the Stoics offered a sophisticated formula for deliberation which rational agents can use in any situation to determine their precise duty. The various examples of practical καθήκοντα found throughout the Stoic sources never fully describe anyone's specific duty in a particular situation. The ἀνεύ περιστάσεως examples

\(^7\) Vogt 2008, 213 (emphasis in original).
merely serve as good approximations for what most people's duty will be in various types of ordinary situations. The περιστατικὰ καθήκοντα are examples of unusual prescriptions that the very same formula for deliberation may yield to certain types of people on rare occasions.

Variations of the No-Rules Interpretation

So far, I have been arguing against the rules interpretation and in favor of the no-rules interpretation, claiming Vander Waerdt, Inwood, and Vogt as my allies. However, there are subtle yet important differences between the interpretations of these various scholars in terms of how they explain the process by which a rational deliberator determines his or her καθήκον. First of all, Vander Waerdt’s interpretation (which Vogt calls the “prescriptive reason interpretation”) focuses on the disposition of the agent. According to him, the “common law” (κοινὸς νόμος), which the Stoics say applies to all humans, is identified with the right reason (ὀρθὸς λόγος) of the sage. 75 Whatever the sage’s right reason prescribes has the status of law and is a perfect duty (κατόρθωμα). 76 The common law (or the sage’s right reason) “prescribes not a determinate class of actions but a certain rational disposition with which one is to act, namely, the perfectly rational and consistent disposition which enables the sage to apprehend and act in accordance with the provident order of nature.” 77

It is beyond the scope of the present study to explore Vander Waerdt’s interpretation in detail. The salient point for the purpose of this discussion is that Vander Waerdt does not offer a substantive method whereby a rational deliberator may ascertain his or her perfect καθήκον. I agree with Vogt that this model basically boils down to: “whatever the sage decides to do is

75 Vander Waerdt 1994, 273.
76 Vander Waerdt 1994, 274-75, 287.
77 Vander Waerdt 1994, 276.
appropriate and lawful in a given situation.”\textsuperscript{78} This statement is obviously true, but it is not very helpful to a non-sage who wants to learn how to morally deliberate properly. Thus, Vander Waerdt’s account “cannot explain the fact that the Stoics have substantive views about a life in agreement with nature.”\textsuperscript{79} Vogt goes on to argue in great detail that the Stoic theory of καθήκον and the common law provides a “substantive” guide to life because it “incorporates substantive claims about value and the nature of human beings.”\textsuperscript{80} By “substantive” (which she does not define) I take it that she means, at least in part, something like “concrete” – in other words that there are objective criteria by which we can evaluate and select indifferents and thus perform our καθήκον.

Vogt’s version of the no-rules interpretation is a significant improvement on Vander Waerdt’s because she shows that there is a substantive body of knowledge about the nature of things that the sage must acquire and make use of in order to live in accordance with nature (and thus live virtuously, performing all of one’s καθήκοντα). However, her interpretation has two limitations. First, her model of Stoic moral deliberation is limited to the perspective of the sage. She does not try to uncover any substantive guide for action that the Stoics might have offered for non-sages. Second, as she herself points out, it is still unclear, based on the available evidence, how exactly the sage is supposed to know the precise value of all the indifferents relevant to every instance of deliberation and to accurately weigh them against each other.\textsuperscript{81} In the next chapter, I attempt to address both of these issues by reconstructing the method of deliberation that the Stoics offered, which even non-sages can implement and which includes guidelines for properly selecting objects of value.

\textsuperscript{78} Vogt 2008, 190.
\textsuperscript{79} Vogt 2008, 163.
\textsuperscript{80} Vogt 2008, 163.
\textsuperscript{81} Vogt 2008, 202.
Finally, Inwood's interpretation differs from those of Vander Waerdt and Vogt in that he suggests that the Stoics may have made use of rules of thumb. In other words, while he argues that there are no fixed rules of conduct in the Stoic system, he explores the possibility that the Stoics may have found generally-valid rules useful (for example in rule-case deductions). While it is clear that the Stoics did see pedagogical value in rules of thumb (e.g. that one should obey one’s parents), I do not believe that such rules formed the backbone of the Stoic method of moral deliberation. In the next chapter I attempt to reconstruct their method of deliberation by collating what Cicero and the Roman Stoics have to say about deliberation. I believe it will become clear that the Stoics proposed more of an “algorithmic” method for ascertaining one’s duty than a rule-based or intuitionist approach.

There is one final point to make about rules. Earlier in the chapter I said, following Inwood, that virtue-referencing καθήκοντα (e.g. “to act justly”) may indeed be exceptionless but they do not offer substantive action-guidance. However, that is not to say that such injunctions are not useful in moral deliberation. The point of the earlier discussion was merely to show that the Stoics do not offer any fixed rules of conduct that could be codified into a list of commandments. However, virtue-referencing injunctions do offer valuable action-guidance of a different kind. To borrow an argument from Julia Annas, being told what action is right (or, in our case, καθήκον) to do in a particular scenario is often not as helpful as being told which virtue is called for. In her words:

As is familiar, terms like right are thin terms, poor in content and so without further resources to indicate what the right thing to do actually is. Virtue terms are thick terms: to be told that an action is brave, or generous, is...to be pointed in a highly specific way

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83 This term, which I find very apt, is borrowed from Brennan 2003, 282.
towards the kind of action that it is. We would not expect to be able to define thick terms by appeal to the informatively poor thin ones.\textsuperscript{84}

While her discussion is mainly about Aristotle, we can extend her argument to the case of Stoicism. If someone who is morally deliberating is told to “do what is καθῆκον” (or “do what is morally prescribed”), such advice, in and of itself, may not be very helpful. By contrast, to be told which virtue is relevant to a given situation (e.g. “be brave” or “be patient”) may be more useful to the deliberator.

Instead of classifying rules as either “substantive” or “vacuous” in terms of action guidance, it may be more helpful to speak of “evaluative” and “non-evaluative” injunctions. The non-evaluative ones are convenient in that you can simply obey them without the need for further deliberation. However, injunctions that are couched in explicitly evaluative terms can be relatively substantive. In other words, καθῆκοντα that make reference to virtue can be useful. The concept of καθῆκον is defined by appeal to virtue (and to following nature, which amounts to the same thing), not the other way around. Only by understanding virtue can we hope to be able to know what our καθῆκοντα are. That is why Cicero, in the first book of \textit{De Officiis}, goes through all the virtues and offers examples of duties derived from each one. It would be useful to know which virtue is called for in a given situation (whether bravery or prudence, for example), even for an agent who does not have the perfect knowledge of virtue that a sage has. Moreover, as we shall see in the next chapter, thinking about virtue is often useful for the purpose of \textit{ruling out} potential actions one is considering. It is often apparent even to a non-sage when a considered action is not in accordance with virtue. Thinking about virtue in order to rule out such actions is an important part of the Stoic method of moral deliberation.

\textsuperscript{84} Annas 2014, 16-17.
Reconstructing the Classification of Καθήκοντα

If the classification of non-virtue-referencing καθήκοντα into περιστατικά and ἀνευ περιστάσεως is exhaustive, as it appears to be in D.L., then there is no room left for the fixed, universal commandments that the rules interpretation requires. Still, as discussed before, D.L. does mention a class of καθήκοντα that always hold. Where do these duties fit into the classification? As argued previously, these must be the same general exhortations to act virtuously (e.g. “to live in accordance with virtue” or “to act justly”) referred to by Stobaeus and Cicero as “perfect duties” (τέλεια καθήκοντα/officia perfecta). These καθήκοντα differ from the two types discussed above in that they make intrinsic reference to virtue and are not substantively action-guiding. They always hold, but they do not tell you what to do and are thus essentially different from the substantive, non-evaluative kind. Therefore, they must constitute a category of καθήκοντα that is separate from the genus of non-evaluative καθήκοντα that exhaustively includes περιστατικά and ἀνευ περιστάσεως καθήκοντα as its species. If this is correct, then we should expect there to be a name for this genus of non-evaluative duties. In fact, both Arius Didymus (in Stobaeus) and Cicero contrast perfect duties with “middle duties” (μέσα καθήκοντα/media officia). These middle καθήκοντα, then, must comprise the genus which includes both περιστατικά and ἀνευ περιστάσεως καθήκοντα as its species.

This category of middle duties has proved difficult to investigate because it is mentioned only briefly in each of the three main sources (Cicero, D.L., and Stobaeus). D.L. and Stobaeus give only a few banal examples of such duties, and it might thus seem that they are a minor or

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86 Stobaeus 2.7.8.8, Fin. 3.59.7, and Off. 1.8.2.
87 See D.L. 7.109-10, Stobaeus 2.7.8.12, and Off. 1.8.6. D.L.’s terminology is slightly different than that of the other two. I have already explained that what he refers to as καθήκοντα that always hold (ἀεὶ καθήκει) are the perfect καθήκοντα mentioned in the other two sources. As I shall explain more fully after offering my translations of these passages, what D.L. refers to as καθήκοντα ἐν τοῖς μέσοις must correspond to the middle καθήκοντα mentioned in Stobaeus and Cicero.
unimportant category. However, under the classification that is now emerging, they constitute perhaps the most important category of καθήκοντα – the practical ones we use the most in everyday situations. They are presumably called “middle” καθήκοντα because they occupy an intermediate position on the moral spectrum between perfect duties (sc. virtuous actions) and moral mistakes (ἁµαρτήµατα). They are measured by indifferents and not by the good and bad. By contrast, perfect duties are defined in terms of the good and bad (sc. virtue and vice). That is why they make intrinsic reference to virtue. That is also why they do not spell out specific actions, since no course of action is virtuous per se and there is no way to tell someone with words alone how to act virtuously. Middle καθήκοντα, on the other hand, spell out specific actions and only refer to things that are indifferent (most things in life) and never to virtue.

How can a consideration of indifferents tell us what our duty is? Indifferents may have no goodness or badness, but they have value and are extremely important for action. Most deliberation involves the consideration of the value and disvalue of indifferents. Middle duties figure in all aspects of our lives and they are morally important. The examples offered in D.L. and Stobaeus are banal, but they may be deliberately so for the sake of clarity – to emphasize that these duties are strictly non-evaluative and do not involve consideration of virtue per se.

If all this is correct, then by collating the information offered by D.L., Stobaeus, and Cicero on the different types of καθήκοντα, we get the following schema (reproduced in English below).

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88 Cf. Sedley 1999, 133 n.15. The Stoics and Peripatetics seem to have shared similar terminology in speaking of an intermediate position between right actions (κατορθώµατα) and moral errors (ἁµαρτήµατα). See the epitome of Peripatetic ethics at Stobaeus 2.7.24.35.

89 As Arius Didymus writes: παραµετρεύσθαι δὲ τὸ µέσον καθήκον ἀδιαφόρους τις (Stobaeus 2.7.8a.8).
Diagram 1:

Diagram 2:

activities done on the basis of impulse

- duties
  - always morally prescribed (= perfect duties = moral achievements = activities done on the basis of virtue)
  - duties in normal situations
- neither duties nor contrary to duty (= moral errors)
- contrary to duty
  - not always morally prescribed (= middle duties)
  - duties in dire circumstances
We are now in a better position to understand why it is that any non-evaluative statement of a καθήκον (one that tells you \textit{what} to do without reference to virtue, e.g. “take care of your health”) must have exceptions. All such statements only make reference to things of value (sc. indifferents). But no amount of value is enough to make something \textit{good}. Value is only grounds for action when it is weighed against something of less value. For example, since taking care of one’s sensory organs has higher value than neglecting or harming them, it is one’s καθήκον to take care of one’s eyes if the alternative is simply not to take care of one’s eyes. But there is always something of greater value or disvalue than any given thing. Therefore, there is always a conceivable scenario in which something of very high value is to be rejected (in favor of something of even higher value). So, for example, if in order to stay alive one must (for whatever reason) destroy one’s eyes, then the καθήκον ἄνευ περιστάσεως “to care for one’s eyes” ceases to be καθήκον. Likewise, there is always a conceivable scenario in which something of great disvalue is to be selected (when the only alternative is something of even greater disvalue). It seems clear that these kinds of scenarios (where we select or reject what we would normally \textit{not} select or reject) are περιστάσεις or dire situations which, as explained earlier, change the calculation by introducing new objects of value or disvalue into the equation.

It follows that any action described without intrinsic reference to virtue, no matter how repulsive (like eating human flesh), can conceivably be a καθήκον in some type of dire circumstance. Conversely, any seemingly moral commandment that does not make intrinsic reference to virtue (e.g. any one of the Ten Commandments) can conceivably be contrary to καθήκον in some type of dire circumstance. It seems likely that the disturbing theses came from Stoic arguments that were originally intended to illustrate these points. The Stoics were trying to show that every action described without reference to virtue can be καθήκον at one time and
contrary to καθήκον (sc. a moral error or ἀμάρτημα) at another. One cannot rely on rules because everything which it is normally καθήκον to do (viz. καθήκοντα ἄνευ περιστάσεως) can become contrary to καθήκον in a conceivable περίστασις. And every action that is normally contrary to καθήκον (sc. a moral error) can become καθήκον in a conceivable περίστασις.

This may be easier to visualize with the help of the following diagram (reproduced in English on the following page), which is an expanded version of the previous schema.

**Diagram 3:**
Diagram 4:

The arrows indicate that the categories on both sides of the two horizontal lines are comprised of the same actions (described non-evaluatively, viz. without reference to virtue). That is, every (non-evaluatively described) action which is normally a duty (e.g. obeying one’s father) can be contrary to duty (sc. a moral error) in a dire circumstance (e.g. if one’s father is aiming at tyranny). And every action that is a moral error in ordinary situations (e.g. eating human flesh) can be a duty in dire circumstances (e.g. in the case of the stranded Uruguayan rugby team discussed earlier). The converse of each of these two statements is also true. The phrases in diagram 2.3 “ἁμαρτήματα κατὰ περίστασιν” and “ἁμαρτήματα ἄνευ περιστάσεως” do not occur in the sources, but I am not just making them up out of thin air. After outlining the various types of καθήκοντα, both D.L. and Stobaeus say that an analogous classification applies to actions
contrary to καθῆκον.\textsuperscript{90} The Stoics clearly had a systematic and symmetrical classification scheme worked out, the full structure of which does not seem to have been explained in the scholarship. Synthesizing this information into a comprehensive diagram is visually helpful for making sense of both the disturbing theses and the duties κατὰ περίστασιν.

Perfect duties, which are invariably couched in explicitly evaluative terms, are not always helpful to a moral reasoner because they do not tell you what to do, only how to act. Nethertheless, thinking about virtue is a crucial part of the deliberative process. As we shall see in the next chapter, the Stoic begins deliberation by considering virtue first and employing various criteria (κανόνες/\textit{regulae}) in order to rule out all considered actions that go against virtue. This initial filtering may still leave a plurality of available options that all seem in accordance with virtue. At this second stage of deliberation, consideration of value becomes necessary as a way to further narrow down our choices until we arrive at our actual duty. But even in cases where our deliberations involve only indifferents (when virtue is not at stake in the choice that lies before us), the duties that follow from such deliberations are no less important. As Stobaeus reports, if we do not uninterruptedly and without distraction concern ourselves with selecting preferred indifferents and rejecting dispreferred indifferents, we shall not attain the good life.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{90} D.L. 7.110.1: Ὅ δὲ αὐτὸς λόγος καὶ επὶ τῶν παρὰ τὸ καθῆκον. Stobaeus 2.7.8a.4: Ὄμοιος δὲ καὶ τῶν παρὰ τὸ καθῆκον τῆν αὐτὴν γίνεσθαι τεχνολογίαν.

\textsuperscript{91} Stobaeus 2.7.8a.12. See text and precise translation below.
New Translations of the Passages on Καθήκον from the Greek Epitomes

Taking the various conclusions from the previous discussion into account, I offer new translations of the relevant passages in the epitomes, beginning with the one found in Diogenes Laertius:

Also, they call “prescribed action” that which, when done, admits of a defense that stands to reason,¹ such as what [naturally] follows in life, which applies also to plants and animals. For, one can observe prescribed² activities even in them. The term “prescribed action” was first coined by Zeno in this way: it is derived from the phrase, “to have arrived in front of someone.” And it is an activity in conformity with nature’s arrangements. For, of actions done on the basis of impulse, some are prescribed, others are contrary to what is prescribed, <and others are neither prescribed nor contrary to what is prescribed>.²

Prescribed actions are all those which reason demands that one do, such as honoring one’s parents, brothers, and country, and associating with friends. Contrary to what is prescribed are all those acts which reason demands that one not do,³ such as neglecting one’s parents, not caring about one’s siblings, not associating with friends, despising one’s country, and so on. Neither prescribed nor contrary to what is prescribed are all acts which reason neither demands that one do nor forbids, such as picking up a twig, holding a pen or scraper and the like.

¹ καθήκον φασιν εἶναι ὃ πραχθὲν εὐλογόν [τε] ἵσχει ἀπολογισμόν, οἷον τὸ ἀκόλουθον ἐν ἡμῖν, ὅπερ καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ φυτά καὶ ζώα διατείνει, ὅρασθαι γὰρ κατὰ τοῦτον καθήκοντα. κατανοομάσθαι δ’ οὕτως ὡς πρὸς τό Ζήνωνος τὸ καθήκον, ἀπὸ τοῦ κατὰ τινας ἥκειν τῆς προσονομασίας εἰληµµένης. ἑνέργηµα δ’ αὐτὸ εἶναι τὰς κατὰ φύσιν κατασκευασίς οἰκείοιν. τὸν γὰρ καθ’ ὁρµὴν ἑνεργοµένων τὰ μὲν καθήκοντα εἶναι, τὰ δὲ παρὰ τὸ καθήκον, <τὰ δ’ οὕτε καθήκοντα οὔτε παρὰ τὸ καθήκον>.

Καθήκοντα μὲν οὖν εἶναι ὡς λόγος αἱρεί ποιεῖν, ὡς ἔχει γονεῖς τιµάν, ἀδελφοὺς, πατρίδα, συµπεριφέρεσθαι φίλοις: παρὰ τὸ καθήκον δὲ, ὡς καὶ αἱρεί λόγος, ὡς ἔχει τὰ τοιαῦτα, γονέων ἀµελεῖν, ἀδελφὸν ἀφροντιστεῖν, φίλοις µὴ συνδιάτισθαι, πατρίδα ύπερορᾶν καὶ τὰ παραπλήσια: οὕτε δὲ καθήκοντα οὔτε παρὰ τὸ καθήκον ὡς οὐθ’ αἱρεῖ λόγος πράττειν οὔτε ἀπαγορεύει, οἶον κάρφος ἀνελέσθαι, γραφεῖν κρατεῖν ἡ στλεγγίδα καὶ τὰ ὅµοια τούτοις.

² Εἰτὶ δὲ καθήκον φασιν εἶναι ὃ πραχθὲν εὐλογόν [τε] ἵσχει ἀπολογισμόν, οἷον τὸ ἀκόλουθον ἐν ζωῆ, ὅπερ καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ φυτά καὶ ζώα διατείνει, ὅρασθαι γὰρ κατὰ τοῦτον καθήκοντα. κατανοοµάσθαι δ’ οὕτως ὡς πρὸς τό Ζήνωνος τὸ καθήκον, ἀπὸ τοῦ κατὰ τινας ἥκειν τῆς προσονοµασίας εἰληµµένης. ἑνέργηµα δ’ αὐτὸ εἶναι τὰς κατὰ φύσιν κατασκευασίς οἰκείοιν. τὸν γὰρ καθ’ ὁρµὴν ἑνεργοµένων τὰ μὲν καθήκοντα εἶναι, τὰ δὲ παρὰ τὸ καθήκον, <τὰ δ’ οὕτε καθήκοντα οὔτε παρὰ τὸ καθήκον>.

3 Prescribed actions are all those which reason demands that one do, such as honoring one’s parents, brothers, and country, and associating with friends. Contrary to what is prescribed are all those acts which reason demands that one not do, such as neglecting one’s parents, not caring about one’s siblings, not associating with friends, despising one’s country, and so on. Neither prescribed nor contrary to what is prescribed are all acts which reason neither demands that one do nor forbids, such as picking up a twig, holding a pen or scraper and the like.
Καὶ τὰ μὲν εἶναι καθήκοντα ἀνευ̉ περιστάσεως, τὰ δὲ περιστατικά, καὶ ἀνευ̉ περιστάσεως τάδε, ύγιείας ἐπιμελεῖσθαι καὶ αἰσθητηρίων καὶ τὰ ὁμοια· κατὰ περίστασιν δὲ τὸ πηροῦν ἔαυτόν καὶ τὴν κτήσιν διαρριπτεῖν. ἀνὰ λόγον δὲ καὶ τῶν παρὰ τὸ καθήκον.

'Ετι τῶν καθηκόντων τὰ μὲν ἀεὶ καθήκει, τὰ δὲ οὐκ ἀεὶ. καὶ ἀεὶ μὲν καθήκει τὸ κατ' ἄρετὴν ἔβην, οὐκ ἀεὶ δὲ τὸ ἔρωταν καὶ ἀποκρίνεσθαι καὶ περιπατεῖν καὶ τὰ ὁμοια. ὁ δ’ αὐτός λόγος καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν παρὰ τὸ καθήκον. ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἐν τοῖς μέσοις τι καθήκον, ὡς τὸ πείθεσθαι τοὺς παῖδας τοὺς παιδαγωγοῖς. (D.L. 7.108-10)

Furthermore, prescribed actions are divided into “prescribed actions in the absence of an emergency” and “prescribed actions in dire circumstances.” Prescribed actions in the absence of an emergency are the following: taking care of one’s health and one’s sense organs and the like. Prescribed actions in dire circumstances are, e.g., stabbing oneself and throwing away one’s property. An analogous division holds for actions contrary to what is prescribed.

Furthermore, some prescribed actions are always prescribed, while others are not always prescribed. Living on the basis of virtue is always prescribed. Actions that are not always prescribed are: to ask questions, to answer, to walk etc. The same can be said of actions contrary to duty. There is also in intermediate things a type of prescribed action, such as for children to obey their chaperones.

Notes:

1. I translate εὔλογον as “that stands to reason” and not “well-reasoned,” as Brennan and Vogt (following Brennan) do for three reasons. First, there does not seem to be sufficient philological evidence that εɵλογον can actually mean “well-reasoned.” Second, Cicero renders the term “probabilis” (De Officiis 1.8.7 and De Finibus 3.58.7), which is closer to “reasonable” than to “well-reasoned.” “Reasonable,” in English, is admittedly too weak since many things could be called “reasonable,” which do not hold up to the high standard of reason which the Stoics undoubtedly demand. Thus, “that stands to reason” seems preferable. Even if Brennan’s philosophical argument is correct that “the standard of reasonableness in the καθήκον is the
rationality of the Sage,” I do not think that justifies taking εὖλογον as “well-reasoned,” if such a usage is not well-attested. We can simply take “that stands to reason” to mean “as determined by a sage.”

2. This portion of the text is a conjecture supplied based on the sentence, several lines down, which speaks of actions that are neither in accordance with nor contrary to duty. This conjecture is not necessary in order to make the passage logically consistent. We may simply take the division offered here to be non-exhaustive.

3. Some scholars translate “ὅσα μὴ αἱρεῖ λόγος” as “which reason does not dictate” or something similar. I agree with Inwood's argument that this must be translated as “which reason dictates not to.” The negative imperative force is picked up a few lines down by the word “ἀπαγορεύει.”

Below is the analogous passage in Stobaeus (73,1.1-23):

Prescribed action is defined as that which [naturally] follows in life, which when done has a reasonable defense; “contrary to what is prescribed” is defined in the opposite way. And this [criterion of what naturally follows] applies also to the irrational animals. For they also engage in activit[ies] following their own nature. But in the case of rational animals the definition is thus given: that which [logically] follows in a rational life.

92 Brennan 1996, 328.
They say that, of prescribed actions, some are perfect duties; these are also called [morally] right actions. Right actions are activities done on the basis of virtue, such as being wise or acting justly. But duties that are not [done on the basis of virtue] are not right actions; nor do they call them perfect duties but middle duties, e.g. marrying, going on an embassy, holding conversation, and so forth.

Of right actions, some are required, others are not. Required right actions are those defined as (lit. bear the predicate) “advantages,” e.g. being wise, being temperate. Right actions that are not required are the ones that are not [similarly predicated]. Similarly in the case of actions contrary to duty, the same system of classification applies.

Furthermore, every action contrary to duty that happens in a rational being is a [moral] error. But a duty, when accomplished, becomes a right act. Now, middle duties are determined by the comparative measurement of indifferent things, which are classified as [either] “contrary to nature” [or] “according to nature.” These indifferents offer us such a well-flowing life that if we do not persevere and without distraction keep selecting and rejecting them [according to nature], we shall not attain true happiness.
Notes:

1. There is no consensus on how to translate ἀκόλουθον. Brian Johnson has a helpful discussion of the term in which he shows that it is important in the context of Stoic discussions about following nature. It is also a logical term, signifying what necessarily follows in an argument. While plants and animals do what naturally follows in life spontaneously, for a human to do what naturally follows, reason is required. Moreover, to follow reason is to follow nature. That is why I write “[naturally] follows” in the case of animals and “[logically] follows” for humans.

2. I switch to translating καθήκοντα as duties at this point in the text because only human καθήκοντα are discussed in the remainder of the passage. In the first section, one needs to translate the term as “prescribed activity” in order for the mention of animals to make sense. However, in what follows, it would be awkward and confusing to speak of “perfect prescribed actions” and “middle prescribed actions.”

3. I translate κατορθώματα as “right actions” following Cicero’s recte facta.

4. Of the numerous textual problems in this passage, the word which I print εὐροίαν is the most intractable. The manuscripts have εὐφυίαν and ἐφυίαν (which must be misspellings of the same word). Numerous conjectures have been proposed, including χρείαν (Lynden), εὐθηνίαν (Wachsmuth), εὐποιίαν (Meineke), εὐεξίαν (Heine), and εὐροίαν (Hense). I believe Hense’s emendation is the most plausible because it makes good sense of the passage and, unlike all other suggestions, it is a Stoic terminus technicus.

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96 Fin. 3.24.10.
Commentary on the Two Epitomes

The degree of overlap and consistency between these two passages is remarkable. Could this mean that both D.L. and Arius Didymus drew from the same source(s)? There are several reasons to think that they did not. First of all, they use different terminology to refer to the same things. For example, the “perfect duties” of Stobaeus are the same ones which D.L. says “always hold,” and the “middle duties” of Stobaeus are referred to by D.L. as duties “in the middle.” There are also minor differences in phrasing. For instance, D.L.'s “εὔλογον ἱσχει ἀπολογισμόν” means essentially the same thing as Stobaeus' “εὔλογον ἁπολογίαν ἔχει,” but the different forms suggest they come from different authors. That both epitomes list many of the same quasi-definitions of καθήκον (also found in Cicero) suggests that they had become standard doctrines commonly held by all Stoics.

Also, the order that these quasi-definitions are presented in the two epitomes is different in non-trivial ways. For instance, both epitomes include the partial definitions “that which, once done, admits of a defense that stands to reason” and “that which [naturally] follows in life” in the same sentence, but in different order. D.L.'s presentation implies that the latter is an example of the former, while Stobaeus implies that the former is an example of the latter. Stobaeus' is the correct presentation since “that which [naturally] follows in life” can refer to καθήκοντα of all living things, while “that which, once done, admits of a defense that stands to reason” refers only to duties performed by rational animals. There are other indications that the epitome of D.L. was compiled less adeptly than the one included by Stobaeus. For example, the way the classification of καθήκοντα is presented at the end of the passage in D.L. (especially with the phrase “ἔστι δὲ καί”) would seem to imply that the middle duties are a separate category from the duties that do not always hold (οὐκ ἄει). They are in fact the same category. The epitomist clearly does not
understand how the various types of καθήκοντα relate to one another. As a result, he seems to have merely listed the various labels he found, thus creating the impression that there are five different types of καθήκοντα. Stobaeus, meanwhile, is very clear that there are only two main types. If it is true that Arius Didymus is the author of the epitome in Stobaeus, and that this is the same Arius who instructed Augustus in philosophy, then that would explain this epitome's superior clarity and organization.

Now that it is clear that there are two main genera of duties – perfect and middle – the question arises, to which of the two do the various quasi-definitions apply? If someone performs an action “that admits of a defense that stands to reason,” is that a perfect duty or a middle duty? What if we do “that which reason demands that we do”? What kind of duty have we performed then? Luckily, Cicero answers these questions for us. He reports both of these quasi-definitions and says that they refer to middle duties. This does not mean that perfect duties do not have a reasonable defense or are not commanded by reason. It simply means that these are not sufficient conditions for an action to qualify as a perfect duty, while they are each a sufficient condition for something to qualify as a middle duty. This suggests that the “reason” (λόγος) and “reasonableness” (εὔλογον) spoken of in these quasi-definitions need not be the perfect reason/reasonableness of the sage (who only performs perfect duties), but that of normal people. Thus, fulfilling one's everyday duties is something that even a normal, not-perfectly-wise person can aspire to.

**Conclusion**

More than 250 years ago, Adam Smith faulted the Stoics (and other ancient schools) for not “lay[ing] down many precise rules that are to hold good unexceptionably in all particular

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97 Both are mentioned at De Finibus 3.58.7-15 and one mentioned again at Off. 1.8.7.
cases.  Given the paucity of extant Stoic material and the various aspects of their ethics (enumerated at the beginning of the chapter) that might seem to suggest a rule-based system, Smith’s criticism was not unreasonable. Only in recent decades have scholars finally begun to realize that what Smith saw as a failure on the Stoics’ part was actually a deliberate move. The Stoics did not fail to offer rules for action. They rejected rules of conduct, deeming them to be insufficient guides to acting rightly. Instead of fixed rules, they offered a flexible framework for evaluating individual actions on a case-by-case basis and determining whether they are morally prescribed (καθὴκον) or contrary to duty (παρὰ τὸ καθὴκον). Stoic duties are thus situation-dependent and, as will be shown in the next chapter, agent-specific.

Vague injunctions to act and live virtuously are indeed universal and exceptionless, but practical commandments that offer substantive action-guidance are not. Duties that do not always hold are called “middle duties” by the Stoics and they are determined on a case-by-case basis by a comparative evaluation of the various indifferents involved in a given scenario. If one's situation suddenly changes and new objects of value or disvalue enter (or are forced into) the equation, one's duty changes accordingly. Since there is no limit to value or disvalue, even something of high value will have to be rejected if something of higher value appears, and even something of extreme disvalue will be selected if the alternative has even greater disvalue. As a result, even normally abhorrent acts may be our duty in extreme situations. In short, no course of action (described non-evaluatively) is a universal duty, and any course of action can conceivably be a duty under some dire circumstance. While the performance of duty does not constitute virtue per se, it is still morally required. Moreover, performing duties as consistently as possible is the only path to the good life.

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98 Adam Smith *Theory of Moral Sentiments* VII. iv. 3.
Chapter Three

A Formula for Action

In the previous chapter, I made the case that καθήκοντα are not universal or generalizable rules of conduct but are, rather, specific prescriptions for action, uniquely tailored to the nature of individual rational actors and the situation in which they are in. Unlike Kant, the Stoics held that two rational actors who find themselves in exactly the same situation may have different duties on account of their different individual natures and personal histories.\(^1\) Also unlike Kant, the Stoics believed that for any formulation of a rule of conduct (made without reference to virtue), there are conceivable exceptions, i.e. there are circumstances under which following that rule violates the demands of duty. A corollary of this latter point is that, in the Stoic system, no finite list of commandments can suffice as a comprehensive guide to human action.\(^2\) If, then, what is καθήκον varies from case to case and person to person, and there are no fixed rules to rely on, how are people supposed to determine what is καθήκον for them? Does the Stoic system ultimately break down into a kind of extreme situationalism veiled by the ostensibly unifying

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\(^1\) Cf. Cicero’s claim (Off. 1.112) that difference of one’s individual nature carries such significance (differentia naturarum tantam habet vim) that it may be right for one person to commit suicide (e.g. Cato) but wrong for another even in the same situation. Cf. Seneca’s account (Ep. 94.14-15) of the stupendous number of praecepta (the closest thing to “rules” in Stoic terminology) that would be needed to accommodate the full range of human roles and circumstances.

\(^2\) According to Seneca some of the early Stoics seem to have explicitly said that the number of praecepta is infinite (Ep. 94.35). Coming in defense of the utility of precepts, Seneca responds that so far as the most important things in life are concerned, there are a finite number of useful and generally-applicable precepts (praecepta generalia). However, he does not dispute the claim that a comprehensive list of rules of conduct for all situations and personalities would indeed be infinite.
claim that “καθῆκον is whatever the Sage would do”? Or did the Stoics have a robust method to generate the specific καθῆκον of any given person under any given circumstance? In other words, how could the Stoics claim to offer substantive action-guidance when they had done away with all universal, substantive action-guiding commandments?

This is, I think, a crucial question and one that has not yet been fully answered. This is partly due to the dearth and difficulty of the evidence, but also to the fact that the question only arises under the no-rules interpretation of Stoic ethics, which, historically, has been marginal at best. If you believe the Stoic system operated with fixed rules, then there is obviously no need to look for such a method. Now that the no-rules interpretation has suddenly gained support in recent decades, some scholars have begun the work of unpacking how the Stoics could claim to offer substantive action guidance without rules. Vogt, for example, at the end of her book explores “the deliberative route that takes the sage to her decision” by considering “what kinds of consideration count, from the point of view of the sage, as relevant to action” as well as “the cognitive development” through which one becomes a sage able to accurately consider “everything that pertains to a given situation.” Like other scholars who have explored the issue of Stoic deliberation, she focuses her discussion on the ideal case of the sage. As a result, she does not seek to uncover how the Stoics would advise a morally progressing person (not yet a sage) to determine his or her καθῆκον. By the end of her discussion, the reader is not offered a reproducible method of deliberation. We are left wondering how one is supposed to know which facts of nature are relevant to a given situation and how exactly one should go about weighing them against each other. If one needs to be a sage in order to know how it all works, then that is

4 Vogt 2008, 179, emphasis in original.
6 Nevertheless, her model is a significant improvement on that offered by Vander Waerdt, which, as she points out, largely boils down to “καθῆκον is whatever the sage would do.” See Vogt 2008, 162-63.
not very helpful. All the more, since there is no hard evidence that most Stoics believed perfect sages existed at all. The sage was a useful ideal, and for some Stoics it was only an ideal.\(^7\)

It may be objected here that what I am saying does not apply to the early Stoics and that they simply did not offer a method of moral deliberation for non-sages, viz. they were only concerned with defining morally correct action through the ideal figure of the sage. This has been a prevalent view since at least the end of the nineteenth century when Schmekel made such a case in his important work *Die Philosophie der mittleren Stoa: in ihrem geschichtlichen Zusammenhange dargestellt*.\(^8\) He argued, based on the early fragmentary evidence, that sagehood was held by the pre-Panaitian Stoa to be a realizable ideal,\(^9\) and that it was Panaetius who first rejected this view.\(^10\) Under Schmekel’s interpretation, the Stoics end up offering a kind of “two-track” ethics, with one set of criteria for sages and another set of teachings (mostly developed later) for the rest of us.

Recent scholarship has found this view implausible.\(^11\) The criteria for good action are the same for sages and fools. Schmekel might be right that Panaetius broke with the earlier Stoa on the issue of the realizability of sagehood. However, as Schmekel concedes, no Stoic is known to have claimed that there had ever been more than a couple of sages in all of human history.\(^12\) The Stoics were not writing for an audience of sages or aspirants to sagehood, but for ordinary people hoping to make some progress (προκόπτειν/proficere). There must have been some subset of their teachings (even those where sagehood was discussed) that offered some practical advice to these προκόπτοντες/proficientes for moral deliberation. How much these teachings overlap with

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\(^7\) See Brouwer 2014, 97-134, who argues convincingly that none of the Stoics claimed to be sages.
\(^8\) Schmekel 1892, 358-366.
\(^9\) Schmekel 1892, 278: *Das Ideal des Weisen ist daher kein blosses Ideal, sondern in Wirklichkeit realisierbar.*
\(^10\) Schmekel 1892, 366.
\(^12\) Schmekel 1892, 278 n.3 and 361 n.1.
or differ from the practical instruction found in the later, extant authors is difficult to say. The scope of our investigations is limited by the available evidence. I will thus be focusing primarily on later authors in my search for a Stoic method of moral deliberation.

As Seneca says in letter 94, once you have accomplished the difficult task of removing false opinions from your mind, you do not suddenly know what your duty is in all cases.\footnote{Ep. 94.36} You still need to do some mental work on the spot to figure out what you are obligated to do. So what is this mental process of deliberation that leads to the determination of one’s duty? That has not been fully explained in the scholarship. Recent progress has been made exploring how we can deliberate based on our roles in life, particularly Brian Johnson’s recent book \textit{The Role Ethics of Epictetus}. This is helpful, because it highlights an aspect of deliberation that is practicable for non-sages and does not depend on rules (though it is compatible with both the rules and the no-rules interpretation). However, Johnson and others see this type of deliberation as a late innovation within Stoicism. What we need to try to uncover is a method of deliberation without rules that is 1) reproducible by non-sages and 2) likely to have been widespread in the Early or Middle Stoa.

In the following sections of this chapter, I first attempt to reconstruct what I call the “standard method” of Stoic moral deliberation whereby rational deliberators may ascertain their καθῆκον in any given situation. I do this by collating the main sources that discuss moral deliberation. Then I turn to the supposedly late Stoic method of deliberation that makes use of roles. According to Johnson, Epictetus was the first to fully develop and employ such a “role method” of deliberation. I argue that, in fact, a sophisticated role method is already at work in Cicero’s \textit{De Officiis} and may even date back to the early Stoa. Cicero’s role method (seen in the discussion of the “four personae”), has not been recognized before as pertaining to deliberation...
because scholars have hitherto misinterpreted it as being merely a theory of *decorum*. I argue that it is not a theory but, rather, a necessary component of the method of deliberation outlined in the rest of *De Officiis*. By the end of the chapter, I hope to show how sophisticated and yet practicable and flexible the Stoic method of deliberation was, and to add some nuance to the prevalent notion that virtue for the Stoics was an “all-or-nothing affair.”

Furthermore, the discussion of the Panaetian/Ciceronian method will help set up the comparison between Stoic and Kantian deontology, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

**In Search of a Stoic Method of Deliberation**

If the no-rules interpretation is correct in that the Stoics rejected all fixed rules of conduct, and if, therefore, an alternative method was needed for the determination of one’s duty, then we would expect the Stoics to have discussed such a method of deliberation-without-rules in their works. Indeed, it is hard to find any Stoic text that does not proffer some advice or *exempla* related to moral deliberation. However, nowhere in the extant material is this advice collected and presented as a step-by-step method for finding one’s duty. How should we then look for evidence that such a method existed?

A good place to start such a search would be to look for explicit mentions of a “method” or “procedure” for determining one’s duty. However, I have found no solid evidence that the Stoics used a word meaning something like “method” in reference to deliberation. The most promising candidate for such a word is the Latin *formula*, which appears in both Cicero and Seneca and can be translated as both “rule” and “procedure”/“formula” (usually in legal contexts). Most existing translations of the relevant passages render the term as “rule.” However, there are two cases in particular where it is worth examining if this is right – one in Seneca’s

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14 Schneewind 1996, 293.
*Letters* and one in Cicero’s *De Officiis*. It bears mentioning that *formula* never means “rule” as in “rule of conduct” or “commandment” (like e.g. “Thou shalt not kill.”) Where it is translated as “rule” the term usually means a maxim, philosophical principle, or important tenet. For example, in one letter Seneca offers the following *formula*: “the wise man’s soul ought to be such as would be proper for a god.”15 This is not a substantive action-guiding commandment, but a maxim expressing an ideal to strive for. Elsewhere in the *Letters* Seneca offers Lucilius a *formula* by which Lucilius can know when he has achieved significant progress: “You will come to your own when you shall understand that those whom the world calls fortunate are really the most unfortunate of all.”16 This is also not a rule of conduct but a kind of puzzle that is meant to be pondered at great length.

In letter 6 to Lucilius, Seneca says that Cleanthes could not have learned as much from Zeno by listening to his lectures as he did by interacting with him and observing him to see whether or not he lived according to his *formula* (*an ex formula sua viveret*).17 While the term *formula* in Seneca’s letters usually refers to a single maxim or doctrine, the use of the term here is intriguing because the context suggests something more than just a rule. That is perhaps why one translator (Gummere in the Loeb edition) takes the liberty of translating it with the plural “rules.” If Seneca is referring to a single maxim or tenet of Zeno’s, it is hard to know which of his signature doctrines that would be. Is it that only virtue is good and only vice is bad? Is it that all humans are members of one cosmic community? Or is it, as Epictetus summarizes Zeno’s ethical doctrine, that “to follow the gods is man’s end, and the essence of good is the proper use of external impressions”? *(Diss. 1.20.15)* And how is Lucilius supposed to know which it is?

15 *Ep. 92.3-4* (tr. Gummere): *Denique ut breviter tibi formulam scribam, talis animus esse sapientis viri debet, qualis deum deceat.*
17 *Ep. 6.6.3.*
Seneca’s early letters to Lucilius are written as if to a (promising) novice in philosophy and presuppose little doctrinal knowledge on the part of the reader. Thus, the most likely interpretation of this passage is that Seneca is using the word *formula* to mean a general method or formula (in the English sense of the word). The implication is that within Zeno’s philosophy there was a set of core teachings that could be taken as an actionable formula for how one ought to live. We will likely never know whether Zeno explicitly presented a method of deliberation in his works or what subset of Zeno’s teaching Seneca had in mind when he spoke of his *formula*. However, this passage suggests that there was enough material about moral deliberation in Zeno’s teachings that one could extract at least the outline of a method from them and use it not only for one’s own deliberations but also as a way to evaluate the moral rectitude of other people’s actions.

The other instance of the word *formula* that warrants examination because it seems to mean more than just a rule is in *De Officiis* 3, where Cicero writes,

> Itaque, ut sine errore diiudicare possimus, si quando cum illo, quod honestum intellegimus, pugnare id videbitur, quod appellamus utile, *formula* quaedam constituenda est; quam si sequemur in comparatione rerum, ab officio numquam recedemus. (3.19.11)

Therefore in order that we may pronounce judgement without error, if ever that which we call beneficial seems to conflict with that which we understand to be honourable, a **rule of procedure** must be established. If we follow this when comparing courses, we shall never fall away from duty. (tr. Atkins and Griffin)

Atkins and Griffin take *formula* here to be a technical term borrowed from Roman law, where it means a document that “set[s] out the question of fact for the judge to establish and the legal decision that would follow depending on the facts.” Dyck also understands *formula* here in the

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18 Griffin 2007, 90-92.
technical legal sense, noting that Cicero qualifies his use of this metaphor “with *quaedam* apologizing for the metaphorical application of the legal term.” Under this reading, the *formula* called for will be like a legal *formula* to the extent that it will help one judge in favor of the *honestum* and against the apparent *utile*, which “are conceived as rival litigants.” This interpretation seems more promising than other translations which take *formula* to be a rule, since Cicero does not follow up by offering a simple rule. However, the problem with interpreting this passage is that it is not exactly clear what part of the following text is meant to be the *formula*. Is it contained in the discussion that immediately follows? Or is the rest of book 3 – replete with principles, precepts, and exempla – collectively to be taken as the *formula* (or as the material from which the reader is expected to infer a *formula*)? After all, the rest of book 3 continues to treat of the same theme: apparent conflict between the good and the expedient.

Most scholars have taken the content of the *formula* to be an idea that is found shortly following this quotation. As Atkins and Griffin put it, Cicero “adopt[s] as the *formula* for resolving apparent conflicts between the honourable and the beneficial the notion...that it is contrary to nature to secure a benefit for oneself at someone else’s expense.” Aside from the fact that this is not a “rule of procedure” but simply a rule, it cannot be the *formula* because Cicero offers exceptions to it. It is permissible to secure a benefit for oneself at someone else’s expense, provided that it is a real benefit (it is co-extensive with the honorable and is in the interest of humanity) and not just a selfish, apparent benefit. Killing a tyrant is Cicero’s example *par excellence*. Dyck attributes this apparent inconsistency on Cicero’s part to sloppiness:

Cicero’s way of presenting the argument is, however, disjointed and misleading. For he begins by offering a blanket formula as if this would cover every case which could

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20 Dyck 1996, 521.
22 Atkins and Griffin 1991, xxv.
23 *Off.* 3.29-32.
arise...when, in fact, the point of the discussion of καθήκοντα κατὰ περίστασιν is to show that in certain circumstances an ordinarily valid general rule may not apply. Inwood, however, finds Cicero here to be “most instructive” and thinks that a rule which has exceptions but is generally defensible is all that is needed in this context. Inwood appeals to the standard partial definition of καθῆκον/officium being that which once done has a reasonable justification. According to Inwood,

following [the formula] would prevent us from straying from appropriateness in our actions. I take it that this means that a reasonable justification of our action once done would be based on the claim that we followed such a formula. But for this procedure to provide a reasonable justification for specific actions...it will itself have to be a generally defensible rule. And Cicero goes on to provide just that.

In other words, being able to say that one followed a generally defensible rule can be the basis of a reasonable justification for one’s action, which then makes the action satisfy the criterion of καθῆκον/officium. Inwood here is trying “to show the moral function of rules which do not apply universally and exceptionlessly.” Such rules seem to be useful for making “reasonable justifications” because they can be used in rule-case deductions and because, as Cicero points out, “our capacity for self-deception makes a general rule useful.” These points seem valid, generally speaking. However, here Cicero explicitly says that the formula should be something that allows us to judge infallibly (sine ullo errore) where our duty lies. He seems to be calling for something more than a mere rule of thumb. Moreover, in a later passage where, according to Inwood, Cicero applies the formula to two hypothetical scenarios that had been discussed by the Stoics Antipater and Diogenes of Babylon, Inwood admits that there is not “any sign of rule-case

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24 Dyck 1996, 520.
25 I have argued in the previous chapter that εὔλογον means not just “reasonable” but “that stands to reason.” In any case, I concede the point here for the sake of argument.
26 Inwood 2005, 124.
27 Inwood 2005, 121 n.68.
28 Inwood 2005, 109-111, 124-6
29 Inwood 2005, 125 n.78.
Inwood’s claim that Cicero pronounces final judgment in favor of Antipater (at Off. 3.57) “by using the rule of procedure outlined in 3.20-2” is not backed up by any argument. In fact there is no strong indication in the text that what Inwood (and Atkins, Griffin, and Dyck) see as the formula is what Cicero relies on to rule in favor of Antipater’s position.

The difficulties of interpretation regarding the formula passage, which Dyck acknowledges and Inwood tries to work around, stem from the fact that what they (and most scholars) take to be Cicero’s formula admits of exceptions. But what if they have the formula wrong? Cicero, after all, does not clearly demarcate the formula in the text, nor does he explicitly refer back to a formula later. Most scholars, including the four mentioned, seem to assume that Cicero’s formula must be what is expressed in the lines immediately following the phrase “sed redeo ad formulam” right before 3.21. Suppose this is the right starting point. Where, then, does the formula end? Atkins and Griffin take the endpoint to be a few lines down, at 3.21.5. Inwood’s reading of the formula includes several more lines, until 3.23.1. I see no reason to draw the line at either point. If we read a bit further on, we do find a few crucial Stoic doctrines that (by definition) always hold and are more than generally defensible rules. As an alternative to the standard interpretation, I suggest that the crux of Cicero’s formula is expressed in the idea expressed repeatedly over the next few pages that all of humanity forms a common body and that the interest of the whole is the same as the interest of each individual member. There are several arguments for this.

The reason, says Cicero, why a formula is needed is that people often have doubts about whether an action is good or bad. This, in turn, is due to the following.

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30 Inwood 2005, 128.
31 Inwood 2005, 128.
32 The common body of humanity is hinted at throughout the passage and mentioned explicitly at III. 32
Saepe enim tempore fit ut quod turpe plerumque haberi soleat, inveniatur non esse turpe. (Off. 3.19.1)

For often the occasion arises when something that is generally and customarily considered to be dishonourable is found not to be so. (tr. Atkins and Griffin)

Cicero seems to be discussing the Stoic notion of περίστασις, though he does not explicitly mention the Greek word or create a Latin term for it, but instead uses the vague ablative tempore.\(^{33}\) We can be quite confident of this thanks to a letter Cicero wrote to Atticus discussing materials to use for the final, non-Panaetian section of his book. Cicero mentions that he has requested a summary of a work of Posidonius containing a section “περὶ τοῦ κατὰ περίστασιν καθήκοντος.”\(^{34}\) As discussed in the previous chapter, the Stoics maintain that there are περιστάσεις or dire circumstances that can make a normally abhorrent action καθῆκον and/or an action that would usually be καθήκον morally wrong. It is for this reason, says Cicero, that we need a formula whereby we may determine without fail where our duty lies under any circumstance. The discussion of duty under varying circumstances comes to a clearly marked end at 3.32.12, about four pages after the need for a formula is brought up. This is the first clear change of subject after the formula is mentioned. I see no reason why the search for the formula must be limited to only the very beginning of this passage and not extended to its entirety (viz. 3.19.11 – 3.32.12).

Whatever the formula therein is, it must be something that is not subject to change under dire circumstances, since its raison d’être is to provide guidance in such situations. The standard interpretation of the formula as being a prohibition against securing “a benefit for oneself at someone else’s expense” fails this test. The idea that all humans are part of one greater body

\(^{33}\) Cf. 1.31 where he also discusses such tempora which affect one’s duty. Like the Greek περίστασις, tempus can mean both “circumstance” in a neutral sense as well as “dire circumstance.”

does not. The formula may also include a few other important doctrines mentioned in the passage which seem to be logically interconnected: Nature made humans as social beings with common interests\(^\text{35}\). We are all part of one body\(^\text{36}\) => “the benefit of each individual and the benefit of all together should be the same.”\(^\text{37}\) These are stable, unchanging philosophical commitments that can help one make the right choice in tumultuous circumstances, as for example when a friend is aiming at tyranny. It is because the would-be tyrant is aiming to harm the common body that it may be justifiable to permanently cut him off from said body. It is not, as Dyck says, that “the general formula does not apply to him.”\(^\text{38}\) Rather, the formula, properly understood, is what provides the justification for tyrannicide.

Seneca provides further corroboration that Cicero’s formula consists of a set of important doctrines concerning the universal body of humanity providentially ordered by nature. In his famous letter 95 he offers what he also calls a formula, one that is very similar to Cicero’s:

possim breviter hanc illi formulam humani officii tradere: omne hoc, quod vides, quo divina atque humana conclusa sunt, unum est; membra sumus corporis magni. Natura nos cognatos edidit, cum ex isdem et in eadem gigneret. Haec nobis amorem indidit mutuum et sociabiles fecit. Illa aequum iustumque composuit; ex illius constitutione miserius est nocere quam laedi. Ex illius imperio paratae sint iuvandis manus. (Ep. 95.52)

I can lay down for mankind a rule, in short compass, for our duties in human relationships: all that you behold, that which comprises both god and man, is one—we are the parts of one great body. Nature produced us related to one another, since she created us from the same source and to the same end. She engendered in us mutual affection, and

\(^\text{35}\) Off. 3.27 and 3.28.12.
\(^\text{36}\) The idea that humanity forms a one body is first hinted at near the beginning of the formula passage (3.22) where the human body is presented as an analogy to the fellowship of humankind (humani generis societatem). Cicero then mentions a “union of citizens” (civium coniunctionem, 3.23.6), then a universal fellowship of humankind again (communem humani generis societatem, 3.28.9). Humanity is not explicitly referred to as a body until the end of the passage (humanitatis corpore, 3.32.11). There is, admittedly, a textual issue in the manuscripts here, and at least one textual critic (Unger) strikes out corporis (the reading in the MSS) altogether. Even if his emendation is correct (which seems unlikely) the overall message is not destroyed. A few lines earlier, the analogy with the body is brought up again, implying that we should think of humanity as a body.
\(^\text{37}\) Off. 3.26.12 (tr. Atkins and Griffin)
\(^\text{38}\) Dyck 1997, 521.
made us prone to friendships. She established fairness and justice; according to her ruling, it is more wretched to commit than to suffer injury. Through her orders, let our hands be ready for all that needs to be helped. (tr. Gummere)

The degree of overlap between this passage and Cicero’s discussion is striking and has been noted by numerous scholars. Some have conjectured that Cicero and Seneca are drawing from a common source.\textsuperscript{39} It is also possible that Seneca is drawing from Cicero. However, Seneca’s use of the same term, \textit{formula}, should not in itself be taken as an indication that he is drawing from Cicero. Unlike Cicero, Seneca uses the term \textit{formula} frequently in his letters and offers numerous examples of \textit{formulae}. Moreover, the doctrines involved also appear in Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius (though not collected together as here), and seem fundamental to the Stoic system.\textsuperscript{40} Nevertheless, if we take, as I have proposed, Cicero’s \textit{formula} to consist of the main doctrines mentioned throughout \textit{Off.} 3.21-32 and we take Seneca’s \textit{formula} to be the full passage quoted above, then there is an almost perfect match between the two. Surprisingly, no one seems to have suggested that Cicero and Seneca may have the very same \textit{formula} in mind, even though virtually every point that Seneca includes in this \textit{formula} also appears in the passage in Cicero (though not in the same order).

The explanation for why the two \textit{formulae} have not been recognized as near equivalents is, I believe, that scholars have been looking for a simple rule in each case. For example, Dyck seems to take the \textit{formula} offered by Seneca in the above passage to be only what is contained in the phrase “according to [nature’s] ruling, it is more wretched to commit than to suffer injury.” Everything else, he thinks, is a “process of reasoning” leading up to that rule.\textsuperscript{41} He similarly sees the several pages following (what is commonly taken as) Cicero’s \textit{formula} as a series of

\textsuperscript{39} Posidonius is generally agreed to be the most likely source. See Dyck 1997, 524.
\textsuperscript{40} The conception of the cosmos as one living being and the idea that every human is a part of it can be traced back to Zeno. See Vogt 2008, 133.
\textsuperscript{41} Dyck 1997, 524.
arguments in favor of it. If, as Dyck and others do, we take each formula to be the first identifiable rule in the respective passage, then the two formulae do not match. That, in itself, is not an argument against such an interpretation. But other problems arise, internal to each passage, under the rule interpretation. For example, since at least the time of Pohlenz, scholars have found Cicero’s formula (as they define it) weak and un-Panaetian in that it merely tells us to avoid injustice.\(^{42}\) Considering that in book 1 Cicero (following Panaetius) makes clear that simply avoiding injustice is not enough to guide virtuous behavior,\(^{43}\) it would be strange for him to then claim that the universal formula for making right moral judgments is nothing more than an injunction against injustice. Besides being inconsistent with Cicero’s earlier claims, it is, as Dyck acknowledges, “redundant per se” since “it is merely an application of Stoic doctrine to particular choices.”\(^{44}\) I believe it is the doctrine(s) from which the rule against wrongful gain is derived that really matters and that actually constitutes the formula Cicero speaks of.

Dyck takes what he sees as Seneca’s formula to be wider in scope than Cicero’s. He writes:

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\text{in Seneca the negative precept corresponding to our [sc. Cicero's] passage is complemented by a positive one (ex illius [sc. naturae] constitutione miserius est nocere quam laedi: Ep. 95.53), which Cicero doubtless judged irrelevant to his concern here.}\(^{45}\)
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It is hard to know what Dyck means here, since he does not clarify what the positive precept is that Seneca includes and Cicero does not. I see two ways to make sense of Dyck’s claim. On the one hand, Dyck seems to be saying that Seneca’s additional, positive precept is embedded in the maxim, “according to [nature’s] ruling, it is more wretched to commit than to suffer injury.” Perhaps Dyck sees this as a stronger claim than Cicero’s in that it not only prohibits wrongful

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\(^{42}\) Dyck 1997, 525.

\(^{43}\) Off. 1.28-29

\(^{44}\) Dyck 1997, 525.

\(^{45}\) Dyck 1996, 524.
gain, but also enjoins that one prefer to suffer than to commit injury. On the other hand, the placement of the parentheses may be in error, and by “positive precept” Dyck may be referring to the very next sentence in Seneca: “Through [nature’s] orders, let our hands be ready for all that needs to be helped.” Either way, both of these additional precepts are offered by Cicero in the passage immediately following what is taken to be his formula. In line with the former, Cicero explicitly says, “it is more repugnant to Nature for man to rob a fellow-man for his own gain than to endure all possible loss, whether to his property or to his person or even to his very soul.” He later adds, “each one must bear his own burden of distress rather than rob a neighbour of his rights.” In line with the Seneca’s follow-up claim about offering a helping hand, Cicero says that it is in accord with nature to “undergo the greatest toil and trouble for the sake of protecting or aiding all peoples, if possible.” It seems bizarre to take, as Dyck does, Cicero’s formula to be only the first sentence in an extended discussion and then claim that it lacks precepts which are mentioned just a couple of pages down, especially when Dyck claims that “formula” is used here in its legal sense, where it does not mean a mere rule.

It is possible that Seneca, in this passage, is reading Cicero and distilling what he takes to be the formula implied in Cicero’s discussion. It is also possible, as mentioned, that the two authors draw from a common source. Either way, it is interesting that in Seneca the formula comes right after a discussion of the duties owed to the gods, whereas in Cicero the discussion is prompted by the need for a stable moral compass in a tumultuous world. Despite these different set-ups, the underlying motivation for providing a formula may be the same in each case. Unlike

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46 Off. 3.28.16, tr. Miller.
47 Off. 3.30.8, tr. Miller.
48 Off. 3.25.3, tr. mine.
our duties to the gods, our duties to other humans are subject to change. They are dependent on circumstance and therefore cannot be codified into commandments. Thus, when Seneca begins his discussion of duties to other humans, he may be motivated to include the formula for the same reason that Cicero is, namely to find a reliable way to derive duties under any circumstance.

There are passages in the works of the other two Roman Stoics – Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius – that are quite similar to the two formulae in Cicero and Seneca and which are also brought up in relation to περίστάσεις. However, they, writing in Greek, do not have a term or label similar to the Latin formula. What they offer are simply δόγματα (called by Cicero and Seneca decreta) – important theses about the world that act as guiding principles in our deliberations. For example, Epictetus’ Discourse 2.5, which largely deals with moral deliberation, contains a discussion of man belonging to a universal body that is reminiscent of the formulae of Cicero and Seneca. It is rather long, but worth quoting at length.

τῷ γὰρ ποδὶ κατὰ φύσιν εἶναι ἑρῶ τὸ καθαρὸν εἶναι, ἄλλ', ἂν αὐτὸν ὡς πόδα λάβῃς καὶ ὡς μὴ ἀπόλουτον, καθῆξει αὐτὸ<ν> καὶ εἰς πλόν ἐμβαίνειν καὶ ἀκάνθας πατῆσαι καὶ ἔστων ὅτε ἀποκοπήναι ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὅλου· εἰ δὲ μὴ, οὐκέτι ἔσται ποὺς. τοιούτοιν τι καὶ ἐδὲ ἡμῶν ὑπολαβέων δει. τί εἰ; ἄνθρωπος. εἰ μὲν ὡς ἀπόλουτον σκοπεῖς, κατὰ φύσιν ἔστι ζήσαι μέχρι γήρως, πλούτειν, ὑγιαίνειν. εἰ δ' ὡς ἄνθρωπον σκοπεῖς καὶ μέρος ὅλου τινός, δι' ἐκείνο τὸ ὅλον νῦν μὲν σοι νοσῆσαι καθήκει, νῦν δὲ πλεύσαι καὶ κινδυνεύειν, νῦν δ' ἀπορηθῆναι, πρὸ ὥρας δ' ἔστιν δι' ἀποθανεῖν. τί οὖν ἀγανακτεῖς; οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι ὡς ἐκείνος οὐκέτι ἔσται ποὺς, οὕτως οὐδὲ σὺ ἄνθρωπος; τί γὰρ ἔστιν ἄνθρωπος; μέρος πόλεως, πρώτης μὲν τῆς ἑκ θεῶν καὶ ἄνθρωπον, μετὰ ταῦτα δὲ τῆς ὡς ἐγγίστα λεγομένης, ἢ τί ἔστι μικρὸν τῆς ὀλίγης μίμημα. 'νῦν οὖν ἐμὲ κρίνεσθαι; νῦν οὖν ἄλλον πυρέσσειν, ἄλλον πλεῖν, ἄλλον ἀποθνῄσκειν, ἄλλον κατακεκρίσθαι; ἀδύνατον γὰρ

49 As mentioned previously (see chapter 2, n.28), duties to god(s) belong (along with virtue-referencing καθήκοντα and injunctions to live in accordance with nature) to the category of καθήκοντα that always hold (ἀεὶ καθῆκε), but do not offer substantive action guidance. Duties to god(s) include believing in them, acknowledging their majesty and goodness, and being a good man (Ep. 95.50). These duties remain unchanged during a περίστασις (in fact often providing the justification for a καθήκον κατὰ περίστασιν).

50 See Inwood 2005, 121-122 for an informative discussion on δόγματα/decreta.
ἐντοιούτῳ σώματι, ἐν τούτῳ τῷ περιέχοντι, τούτοις τοῖς συζῶσιν μή συμπίπτειν ἄλλοις ἄλλα τοιαῦτα. σὸν οὖν ἔργον ἐλθόντα ἐπιπίπτειν ἄν δεῖ, διαθέσθαι ταῦτα ὡς ἐπιβάλλει. (Diss. 2.5.24-29)

For I will assert of the foot as such that it is natural for it to be clean, but if you take it as a foot, and not as a thing detached, it will be required (καθῆκον) of it to step into mud and trample on thorns and sometimes to be cut off for the sake of the whole body; otherwise it will no longer be a foot. We ought to hold some such view also about ourselves. What are you? A man. Now if you regard yourself as a thing detached, it is natural for you to live to old age, to be rich, to enjoy health. But if you regard yourself as a man and as a part of some whole, on account of that whole it is ordained (καθῆκον) for you now to be sick, and now to make a voyage and run risks, and now to be in want, and on occasion to die before your time. Why, then, are you vexed? Do you not know that as the foot, if detached, will no longer be a foot, so you too, if detached, will no longer be a man? For what is a man? A part of a state; first of that state which is made up of gods and men, and then of that which is said to be very close to the other, the state that is a small copy of the universal state. “Must I, then, be put on trial now?” Well, would you have someone else be sick of a fever now, someone else go on a voyage, someone else die, someone else be condemned? For it is impossible in such a body as ours, in this universe that envelops us, among these fellow-creatures of ours, that such things should not happen, some to one man and some to another. It is your task, therefore, to step forward and say what is required, to arrange these matters as is prescribed. (tr. Oldfather, modified)

For Epictetus, just like for Cicero and Seneca, keeping in mind that we are part of a larger, providentially-ordered body is crucial in order for us to realize that it may be our καθῆκον, when circumstances arise, to do or suffer things that most people would not consider good or natural.

Epictetus’ use of the foot analogy seems to be borrowed from Chrysippus, who had claimed, “if I really knew that it was ordained for me to be ill at this present moment, I would even seek illness; for the foot also, if it had a mind, would seek to be covered with mud”51 (viz. because it would know this was necessary for the sake of the body as a whole). Thus, both the

51 Quoted by Epictetus at 2.6.10, tr. Oldfather.
idea that humans are organic parts of a whole as well as the use of this idea to explain περιστατικά καθήκοντα seem to go back to the early Stoa. There is, however, a marked difference in terms of the types of περιστατικά καθήκοντα that are considered by Cicero, as compared with Chrysippus and Epictetus. While Cicero applies the formula to the daring and enterprising example of tyrannicide, Chrysippus and Epictetus emphasize the hardships that can and must be endured in life. For them, one of the main functions of these δόγματα is to promote a healthy acceptance of whatever fortune and necessity brings.

Marcus Aurelius, like Epictetus, seems to take these δόγματα as most useful for accepting the inevitable and maintaining a virtuous disposition amidst the vicissitudes of fate. For example, the beginning of his second book of Meditations, which is also largely concerned with deliberation, includes several mentions of the larger body of which all humans are a part, most notably in the following passage.

Τὰ τῶν θεῶν προνοίας μεστά. τὰ τῆς τύχης οὐκ ἄνευ φύσεως ἢ συγκλώσεως καὶ ἑπιπλοκῆς τῶν προνοίας διοικουμένων. Πάντα ἐκεῖθεν ἡγητέοι θεῖοι πρόσεστι δὲ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον καὶ τὸ τῶν ὅλων κόσμων συμφέρον, οὐ μέρος εἰ. παντὶ δὲ φύσεως μέρει ἄγαθον, ὁ φέρει ἡ τοῦ ὅλου φύσεως καὶ ὁ ἐκεῖνης ἐστὶ σωστικόν. σφῶσει δὲ κόσμων, ὄσσερ αἱ τῶν στοιχείων, οὕτως καὶ αἱ τῶν συγκριμάτων μεταβολαί. ταῦτα σοι ἄρκειτο· ἐξὶ δόγματα ἔστω. τὴν δὲ τῶν βιβλίων δίψαν ῥῆσω, ἢν μὴ γογγύζων ἀποθάνης, ἅλα ἔλεος ἀληθῶς καὶ ἀπὸ καρδίας εὐχάριστος τοῖς θεοῖς. (M.A. 2.3)

All that is from the gods is full of Providence. That which is from fortune is not separated from nature or without an interweaving and involution with the things which are ordered by Providence. From thence all things flow; and there is besides necessity, and that which is for the advantage of the whole universe, of which thou art a part. But that is good for every part of nature which the nature of the whole brings, and what serves to maintain this nature. Now the universe is preserved, as by the changes of the elements so by the changes of things compounded of the elements. Let these principles be enough for thee, let them always be fixed opinions. But cast away the thirst after
books, that thou mayest not die murmuring, but cheerfully, truly, and from thy heart thankful to the gods. (tr. G. Long)

Here too, the point is that a firm belief in the providential ordering of nature will enable us to maintain our moral purpose no matter what happens to us. Like Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius suggests that περιστάσεις are inevitable and part of the natural functioning of the cosmos. Though these δόγματα are not collectively labeled as a formula or the equivalent, Marcus does imply that they function like a formula, i.e. a shorthand for deriving what we should do. When he says, “let these principles be enough for you…. Cast away the thirst after books,” he implies that these few δόγματα concerning the ordering and world and our place in it form a kind of formula, as it were. They are so important and have such wide scope that holding them in mind is more important than reading volumes of philosophy in search of guidance (at least for someone with an adequate amount of prior philosophical training, like Marcus himself). A bit further down, Marcus reiterates that one must always have these principles in mind:

Τούτων ἀεί δεῖ μεμνῄσκεσθαι, τίς ἡ τῶν ὅλων φύσις, καὶ τίς ἡ ἐμῆ, καὶ πῶς αὕτη πρὸς ἐκείνην ἔχουσα, καὶ ὁποῖον τι μέρος ὑποίου τοῦ ὅλου οὐδαμῶς καὶ ὁποῖον ὁ κωλύων τὰ ἀκόλουθα τῇ φύσει, ἢς μέρος εἶ, πράσσειν τε ἄει καὶ λέγειν. (Μ.Α. 2.9)

These you must always bear in mind, what is the nature of the whole, and what is my nature, and how this is related to that, and what kind of a part it is of what kind of a whole; and that there is no one who hinders you from always doing and saying the things which are according to the nature of which you art a part. (tr. G. Long, modified)

Despite their apparent differences, all four passages from the four authors have several important points in common. They present the same basic Stoic theses (δόγματα/decreta) about man’s place in a providentially ordered world. These doctrines are presented as such important guiding principles in moral deliberation that the reader is encouraged to always hold fast to them, either by internalizing them as a formula, or by frequently repeating the various principles to oneself.
Furthermore, these doctrines are especially useful as a source of guidance in difficult times. However, these four authors have different kinds of difficult times in mind. Cicero’s example *par excellence* is a bold, enterprising action whereby someone takes it upon himself to forcefully affect the fate of an entire state. By contrast Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius have more to say about accepting one’s place in the cosmos while buffeted by forces beyond one’s control. Their point seems to be that, no matter how dire things get, no one can hinder you from doing your καθήκον. The καθήκοντα κατὰ περίστασιν that Epictetus has in mind may seem defeatist in comparison to Cicero’s. For example, one’s καθήκον in a shipwreck is “to drown without fear, neither shrieking nor crying out against God, but recognizing that what is born must also perish. For I am not eternal, but a man; a part of the whole.”\(^52\) However, these types of περιστατικά καθήκοντα are more similar to the examples given by D.L. and thus may be more typically Stoic than Cicero’s example.

I am not sure that actual members of the Stoa ever dared to list tyrannicide as a possible καθήκον κατὰ περίστασιν (especially considering how many heads of the school courted favor with Hellenistic monarchs). In fact, Epictetus denies that philosophers teach people to hate kings.\(^53\) Cicero’s emphasis on tyrannicide has been noted by scholars, with Dyck even speculating that it is the underlying motivation for the discussion of the *formula*.\(^54\) That seems unlikely, given that the doctrines comprising it are so important to all the surviving authors. However, Cicero is likely taking a *topos* within Stoicism and using it to also score a political point.\(^55\) In any case, though Cicero’s main example of a καθήκον κατὰ περίστασιν in this context is tyrannicide, he also considers the more typical types elsewhere, such as the suicide of Cato,

\(^{52}\) Diss. 2.5.12-13, tr. Oldfather.
\(^{53}\) Diss. 1.29.9.
\(^{54}\) Dyck 1997, 520.
\(^{55}\) Cicero’s concern with issues of *officium* in relation to the civil war and Caesar’s death can be seen in his correspondence with Matius (*Ad familiares* 11.27 and 11.28).
discussed earlier.\textsuperscript{56} The δόγματα/decreta comprising the formula are brought up in a number of different contexts by the various authors. This wide range of contexts shows how useful and flexible they are within the Stoic system.

To sum up, Cicero discusses the need for a formula but does not clearly specify what the formula he has in mind is. Virtually all scholars take the formula to be the first thing that looks like a rule after the topic is brought up. This “standard” interpretation, however, creates various difficulties. For one, the rule against taking from another has exceptions (which Cicero discusses), it is quite trivial, and it does not provide what Cicero says is needed (a universal guiding principle not subject to change). Furthermore, it is not a “rule of procedure,” as these same scholars take the term formula to mean. If we stop looking for a specific rule, but instead consider the possibility that the formula consists of key doctrines (δόγματα/decreta) which are the sources of rules, then all of these difficulties vanish. Moreover, the doctrines which Cicero puts forth in the discussion of the formula match up perfectly with those offered by Seneca also under the label of formula (viz. holism, rational teleology, a part–whole understanding of the cosmos\textsuperscript{57}). If Seneca is culling his formula from Cicero, then he corroborates my reading and lends it the authority of someone well-schooled in Stoic thought and vastly more well-read in Stoicism than anybody today can be. If Seneca’s formula is independently derived, then he is providing yet another piece of evidence that there was a cluster of decreta concerning humanity and the natural order that was taken by the Stoics to provide a stable source of guidance under the vagaries of fortune.

We now seem to have a firmer grasp of what the formula is that Cicero and Seneca say we should keep in mind when deliberating. It is somewhat reminiscent of Kant’s second

\textsuperscript{56} Off. 1.112.
\textsuperscript{57} As summarized by Inwood 2005, 122.
formulation of the categorical imperative (“Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means”).\textsuperscript{58} However, while for Kant the categorical imperative (in its various formulations) is a sufficient criterion for rational agents to use to determine their duties, no Stoic holds such a formula as Cicero and Seneca express to be likewise sufficient for moral deliberation. The above formula is not the Stoic method of deliberation that we are looking for. It is a small, but nevertheless crucial, part of a much more extensive method of deliberation that the Stoics offer, as we shall see.

To return to the origins of the present discussion, it would seem that there is no single term in the extant Stoic material for a process or method of moral deliberation. The one word the Stoics do use in discussions of deliberation which can, at times, mean a method/process is the Latin formula. However, except (perhaps) for Seneca’s ambiguous mention of “Zeno’s formula” in letter 6, formula is not used in this sense in Stoic discussions of deliberation. It is, of course, possible that earlier Stoic authors had spoken explicitly of a “method” of deliberation. It is perhaps more likely that the Stoics did not feel the need to use such a term. When Cicero presents Panaetius’ “four personae” – which \textit{is} a kind of method – he does not label it as such. He just lays out the method without saying that it is a method. The Stoics certainly claimed to have a way of rationally finding one’s duty. However, they may have never called it a “method,” and they may have preferred to teach its various parts under different headings, both in writing and in the classroom.

\textsuperscript{58} G 4:429, tr. Ellington.
Reconstructing the Stoic Method of Deliberation

If there was a standard Stoic method of moral deliberation, then the various statements and pieces of advice on doing/finding one’s duty that are scattered across the various sources must all pertain to some part or other of the standard method. Thus, one way to try to reconstruct the Stoic method of deliberation would be to collect all the bits of evidence on deliberation and see if they fall into place in a kind of system. In fact, when gathered together, the various quasi-definitions, pieces of advice, statements, and injunctions about καθήκον/οfficium found across the sources do seem to form a sequence of steps that must be followed in a certain order. Some precepts are clearly to be followed at the outset of deliberation while others are obviously relevant to later stages of the process. For example, one of the partial definitions of καθήκον that seems to go back to the early Stoa states that καθήκον is that which reason compels you to do (ὁ λόγος αἱρεῖ ποιεῖν).\(^59\) This has two implications for deliberation. On the one hand, one must only act on the basis of reason, i.e. one should not be rash or reckless. On the other hand, once our reason has issued a command, we must not fail to act on it.\(^60\) The first precept pertains to the very beginning of deliberation, before one has even examined all the options available. The second pertains to the very end, after one has rationally considered all the relevant facts and determined the right course of action. The remaining Stoic precepts and injunctions on deliberation must pertain to stages in between these two.

If we proceed in similar fashion, examining the various precepts on deliberation and considering which stages must come before or after which other stages, we can proceed to recreate the full sequence. For example, statements about how we ought to select among indifferents pertain to a stage that comes after the stage where one considers whether a course of

\(^{59}\) D.L. 7.108.6.

\(^{60}\) Rashness and negligence as the two ways of failing to act on the basis of reason are mentioned at Off. 1.102, Diss. 2.5.3, and M.A. 2.5.6.
action is honorable or not. It is only when we have determined (at least in broad terms) what the honorable thing to do is (or when virtue is not at stake, as e.g. in trivial decisions) that we can dispassionately select among the indifferents involved. Admittedly, some scholars may not agree with this. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Vogt does not believe that the Stoic deliberator can be in a dilemma between the good and value. She believes that καθῆκον entails the calculating and selecting of value alone, and that the good (virtue) lies in the way one performs the calculating and selecting.\(^1\) As far as sages are concerned, she is certainly right, since they would never weigh goodness against mere value, and the way they (wisely and dispassionately) select indifferents makes their every act good (virtuous). However, for everyone else, false opinion or lapse of judgment often lead to dilemmas between false goods (that are merely valuable) and the virtuous course of action. Epictetus’s discourses are replete with such examples. Furthermore, there are many circumstances, as we have seen in the notion of περίστασις, that lead to confusion about what is honorable and what is base. Thus, while I agree with Vogt that the Stoic deliberator does not weigh the good directly against value, there is a stage of deliberation involving the examination of things in order to determine if they are good, merely valuable, or downright wrong. This stage precedes the stage where mere value is calculated and selected.

So far we have identified two important stages of deliberation sandwiched between the injunction against rashness and the injunction against negligence. In the first of these two, the deliberator considers what course of action is honorable and/or whether the goal of a contemplated action is the good or some false good. In the second stage the deliberator calculates and selects value, i.e. what is expedient, in a way that does not conflict with the good (virtue). This ordering matches with the view that Cicero attributes to Panaetius at the beginning of *De
Officiis, namely that deliberation has three parts: the first two corresponding to those just mentioned and the third being the resolution of any apparent conflict between the good and the expedient. Thus, if we consider the overall plan of Cicero’s Panaetian model in writing De Officiis, it seems to follow at least the first two stages in order. It first treats of virtue and the good and then proceeds to discuss selecting what is expedient (sc. selecting among indifferents). I think that Panaetius’ plan was meant to track the general procedure that moral deliberation follows according to the Stoics. Of course, I am not saying that Cicero’s two Panaetian books are just meant to lay out a procedure of deliberation. They provide much more than that. I merely suggest that the organizing principle of the treatise’ structure does seem to mirror the two main steps in the actual deliberation process.

Book 3, for which there is no Panaetian original, is a more complicated matter. Cicero seems to have good evidence that Panaetius initially intended to write a final book treating the apparent conflict between the good and the expedient but did not complete it for some reason. However, Cicero also reports that some people thought that Panaetius decided in the end not to treat of this topic. They may have thought this because, as Cicero reports, some people held that it was wrong to “introduce this counterbalancing of right and expediency.” Apparently some philosophers (whether Stoic or not is unclear) thought that the mere suggestion that the right and expedient might conflict would destroy the doctrine that only the morally right is good. In any case, Cicero did find some Stoic sources on this topic to work from, as mentioned earlier. Moreover, the apparent conflict between the good and the expedient is discussed by all three of the subsequent Roman Stoics. It was also deemed by Posidonius the most important topic in

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62 Off. 1.9.  
63 Panaetius, of course, treated of this two-fold division in three books. The first book may have been mainly theoretical in nature. For discussion of the likely structure of Panaetius’ work, see Dyck 1984.  
64 Off. 3.9.  
65 Off. 3.13.6.
philosophy,\textsuperscript{66} and there is no good reason to think it was not an important topic in earlier discussions as well. Book 3 thus seems fully in line with mainstream Stoicism. The question for us is, how does it fit in with the method of deliberation?

As Cicero explains in book 3, this final “capstone” \textit{(fastigium)}\textsuperscript{67} which he is placing on the Panaetian material aims to provide tools/criteria to employ in cases when what is truly good is in doubt.\textsuperscript{68} Thus, book 3 does not add a new stage of deliberation, but deals with difficulties that arise during the stages of deliberation already discussed in the first two books. These difficulties which lead to dilemmas involving a false semblance of expediency are of two types. One is dire circumstance (\textit{περίστασις}) and the other involves either wrong opinion or incorrect judgment of impressions (\textit{φαντασίαι}) involving the good and the bad. As already discussed, the \textit{formula} (or the set of doctrines therein) is meant to guide us when facing the first difficulty. To address the second difficulty, we need a way to make sure that what appears or is generally believed to be good or evil truly is good or evil. For this purpose, the Stoics offer various criteria or “rules” (in the sense of a measuring stick – \textit{κανών} or \textit{στάθη} in Greek, \textit{regula} in Latin).\textsuperscript{69} For example, one of Epictetus’ most famous such “rules” is to ask whether an apparent good is under the power of our will (\textit{προαιρεσίς}) or not. If it is not, it cannot possibly be the good. Cicero offers the \textit{regula} that “that which seems expedient must not be morally wrong, or, if it is morally wrong, it must not seem expedient.”

It is important to note that most of these \textit{regulae} are used to test the goal of an action under consideration, not the action itself. According to the Stoics we should be able to “refer”

\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Off.} 3.8.
\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Off.} 3.33.8.
\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Off.} 3.18-19.
\textsuperscript{69} It is generally accepted in the scholarship that \textit{regula} is the customary translation for the Greek \textit{κανών}. Cf. Inwood 2005, 120; Cooper and Procopé 1995, 283; Dyck p.279; Opel 1937, 88-90.
(ἀναφέρειν/referre) our every action to some goal, i.e. to explain its ultimate end. In order to act well, the ultimate end of our actions must be virtue (or, in other words, living in conformity with nature) or some aspect thereof. If, instead, we are unable to reasonably claim that an action is done for the sake of virtue, but can only refer to utility or pleasure as its end, then that action cannot be καθήκον. As Seneca says, one must declare allegiance to virtue and make that the sole motivating factor in our actions. This is a necessary condition for right action. However, applying it in every case is not a simple matter. As Epictetus makes clear again and again, we are attracted to false goods all the time, whether because we uncritically follow popular opinion or assent to false impressions. The regulae provide a handy set of tools to quickly test the end to which we refer an action under consideration. They cannot confirm that a contemplated action is right, but they can often tell you, quickly and easily, that an action under consideration is wrong or has a likelihood of being wrong.

The way that these regulae are meant to be used in deliberation seems to be that one applies them straightaway upon being moved with inclination (-Origin) or aversion (έκκλητικῶς). For example, Epictetus had his students practice using one of these regulae (his term is κανών, of course) by telling them to walk around town and submit everything they see to it. Seeing a beautiful person or a consul may initially rouse desire or admiration until one applies the κανών, “Is this under the power of the will (προαιρεσις)?” Bodily beauty and prestige obviously fail the test, and can thus be immediately discarded as the end to which we should refer any of our actions. Likewise, seeing a parent grieving for a dead child may initially rouse aversion to an apparent evil (death), but submitting the impression to the rule immediately shows

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70 Cf. De Finibus 3.21 and Epict. Diss. 3.23.3-6, 4.4.4, and 4.4.43.
71 Ep. 95.44.
72 Cf. Off. 3.40
73 Diss. 3.3.2.
74 Diss. 3.3.14.
that death is not a real evil. Though it is our duty to avoid evil (τὰ κακὰ ἐκκλίνειν καθήκει),
death is not truly an evil. Thus, avoiding death is not, by itself, a proper justification for the
correctness of any action we may at some point consider. As is suggested in this passage and
elsewhere, these rules require constant practice and are always needed for testing our
impressions (φαντασίαι). In another discussion of such rules, Epictetus says having κανόνες with
which to judge impressions is crucial because the use of impressions is “the first and only cause
of acting rightly (κατορθοῦν) or erring (ἁμαρτάνειν).”76 These rules are not just crutches for
fledgling philosophers, but are presented as useful even to the best of humans. For, “the task of
philosophy is this – to examine and to establish the standards (κανόνες); but to go ahead and use
them after they have become known is the task of the good and excellent man.”77

Cicero and Seneca also offer regulae for deliberation which, although not identical to
Epictetus’ κανόνες, also serve the purpose of testing the end to which we refer our actions.
However, while some of their regulae are like Epictetus’ in that they are standards against which
to measure impressions or opinions regarding the good and the bad, some other regulae that
Cicero and Seneca offer are presented as standards for measuring actions as such78 or even one’s
way of life.79 The regula which Cicero offers in Off. 3, (“that which seems expedient must not be
morally wrong, or, if it is morally wrong, it must not seem expedient”)80 seems to be of the
Epictetian type insofar as it deals with impressions and opinions. If something appears both
expedient and morally wrong, then the regula tells you that one of these impressions must be
wrong. It cannot slice through the false impression in one stroke like Epictetus’ κανόνες. But it

75 Diss. 1.27.7.
76 Diss. 1.28.30.
77 Diss. 2.11.24-25, tr. Oldfather.
78 Ben. 7.2.2.
79 Ep. 20.3.
80 Off. 3.81.
can tell you that you must reason further before deciding how to act. Seneca offers a similar
*regula* to Cicero’s but seems to present it as a standard for measuring actions:

> Sciat nec malum esse ullum nisi turpe nec bonum nisi honestum. Hac regula vitae opera
distribuat; (Ben. 7.2.2)

Let him know that there is no evil except what is base, and no good except what is
honourable. Let him apply this rule to all the deeds of life; (tr. Basore)

It is not exactly clear if the *regula* is to be used to measure impressions/opinions or to evaluate
actions. Either way, its function is to make sure that agents can refer all of their actions to the
proper end – the *honestum*. In letter 95, Seneca again mentions the importance of having a *regula*
to measure actions.\(^{81}\) What this *regula* is is not revealed until a couple of pages later. It turns out
to be that one must “set before our eyes the goal of the Supreme Good, towards which we may
strive, and to which all our acts and words may have reference” (*Proponamus oportet finem
summi boni, ad quem nitamur, ad quem omne factum nostrum dictumque respiciat*).\(^{82}\) Even
though this is presented as a standard for measuring actions, it does so by considering the thing
for which an action is done. Like with Epictetus’ *κανόνες*, the point is to make sure we have the
correct ultimate end in view when we act.

There are, however, a couple of *regulae* in Cicero and Seneca that certainly do seem to
measure actions as such. In *Off.* 1 Cicero says that, in addition to following the universal laws of
human nature, we should also follow our own individual nature and “regulate our own pursuits
by the standard of our own nature” (*nos studia nostra nostrae naturae regula metiamur*).\(^{83}\) Seneca says you “should lay hold, once for all, upon a single norm to live by, and should
regulate your whole life according to this norm” (*Unam semel ad quam vivas regulam prende et*}

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\(^{81}\) *Ep.* 95.39.
\(^{82}\) *Ep.* 95.45.
\(^{83}\) *Off.* 1.110.
The focus of both of these regulae is on consistency throughout life, which is a major part of the proper Stoic end of living κατ᾽ ὀμολογίαν. Thus, they do serve to help us always maintain the same, proper end for our actions. However, unlike the previous regulae, these seem to be a way of evaluating actions and thus operates in a slightly different way. If we are considering a certain action, we can ask, “Is this consistent with my prior choices?” If it is not, then the regula raises a red flag. We must make sure we have an adequate justification for acting out of character, otherwise we run the risk of failing to live consistently. Though not always helpful, it is a handy tool to add to the other quick and easy checks we can apply to the actions that we are inclined to do in order to make sure they are done for the sake of the good.

There are a few other similar tests one can use to evaluate actions as such, which look like regulae but are not so labeled. For example, Cicero says in Off. 3 that an action cannot be good if it needs to be concealed. He does not call this criterion a regula, but it functions in much the same way. Although used to measure actions, it works somewhat like Epictetus’ κανόνες in that if a potential action fails the test, it is immediately disqualified. If an action needs to be concealed, it absolutely cannot be good. No Stoic would disagree with that. There may be many more regulae not labeled as such and scattered among the Stoic material. My aim is not to create a comprehensive list, but to understand the stage of deliberation in which these types of criteria are employed. We now seem to have a general sense of what these regulae/κανόνες are. It seems clear that they are useful for the early stage of deliberation, when we already feel inclination or aversion but have not yet thought through our options carefully. Furthermore, they are criteria for testing moral goodness, not expediency. Thus, they can be securely placed in the

84 Ep. 20.3.
85 Off. 3.37.
first of the two major stages of deliberation mentioned earlier, in which one considers questions of right and wrong. The next question we have to answer is where the *formula* fits into the deliberation process.

What seems clear is that the *formula* must pertain to a stage of deliberation after the *regulae* are considered, since the *regulae* act like initial filters of our impressions, opinions, and inclinations. The question then is, does the *formula* come later in stage 1, or in stage 2, which deals with mere value? There are several indications that it pertains to the latter. For one, none of the *δόγµατα/decreta* comprising the *formula* explicitly say anything about virtue or the good, while they do speak of aligning the interest of the individual with that of humanity or the cosmos. I will argue that the *formula* is meant to be a guide for properly selecting things of value (viz. indifferents). This does not mean that the *formula* does not help us act virtuously. Virtue consists largely in the proper use of indifferents. As Epictetus says, externals are indifferent, but the use of them is not indifferent. ⁸⁶

My claim that the *formula* is to be used for the selection of value is not a controversial one, but is in line with the scholarship. Most scholars, since they analyze moral deliberation from the point of view of the sage, do not discuss a stage of deliberation corresponding to what I have called stage 1, viz. where questions of virtue and vice are considered. I have included this stage in my discussion because all the extant authors give advice on deliberation addressed to normal, non-omniscient people, and these authors also recognize the need in every deliberation to examine the end to which an action has reference and to test if that is the good or not. However, once that stage is complete, false impressions and opinions are cleared away, and the proper end is in mind, the remaining process of deliberation involves, as explained in recent scholarship, the

⁸⁶ *Diss.* 2.5.1-7. It is quite clear from within this passage that the *ὕλαι* (materials) spoken of are the same as externals/indifferents. For further confirmation of this meaning of *ὕλαι* cf. *Diss.* 1.29.2.
calculation and selection of indifferents. As Vogt writes, “The sage chooses among indifferents in each and all of her choices…. It is of key importance that the sage is not weighing indifferents versus the good. She chooses consistently well with respect to indifferents, and only with respect to these.”87

Thus, what I call stage 2 of the deliberation process is what has generally been seen in recent scholarly work to be the whole of the deliberation process. The question is, how does the formula fit into it? Before attempting to answer that question, let us review the stages of deliberation that we have established so far. First of all, there is the injunction against rashness. This is sometimes stated explicitly, but is also implied by the partial definitions of καθῆκον that make reference to reason as the (only) guide to action. Next comes the first major stage of deliberation, whose goal is to ensure that the action we end up choosing to do is done for the sake of the good. This largely involves using regulae to filter out wrong impressions and raise red flags about morally questionable actions. Next comes the second major stage of deliberation, whose goal is the proper selection of value. This proper selection of value is what makes the final act virtuous or not. The formula is somehow meant to help us select value properly, especially in dire circumstances (how this works will be worked out below). Finally, there is the injunction against negligence. If we have made it through the main stages of deliberation, and our reason has decided what is καθῆκον to do, we must go through with the action decided upon.

The following is an outline of the stages of Stoic moral deliberation that we have established so far.

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Diagram 5:

❖ Preparation: Do not rush to act. Remember that you must do only what reason commands (
\(\lambda \omicron \gamma \omicron \varsigma \ \alpha \iota \rho \epsilon \iota \ \pi \omicron \omega \iota \nu\)) or what can be rationally justified (\(\epsilon \upsilon \lambda \omicron \gamma \omicron \nu \omega \omicron \alpha \iota \gamma \nu \epsilon \iota\)).

❖ Stage 1: Make sure your action will be done for the sake of the right end (viz. virtue = the good = conformity with nature).

➢ When you feel inclination (or aversion) towards an object, apply \textit{regulae} to test it.

Examples:
- If not \(\pi \rho \omicron \alpha \iota \rho \epsilon \tau \iota \kappa \omicron \omicron\), it is not truly good (nor truly evil).
- If not something stable (\(\beta \epsilon \beta \alpha \iota \omicron \nu\)), it is not the good.

➢ If a course of action appears expedient, apply \textit{regulae} to test it. Examples:
- If morally wrong, cannot be expedient \(\Rightarrow\) red flag
- Expectation that you must conceal your actions \(\Rightarrow\) morally wrong
- If inconsistent with your normal behavior \(\Rightarrow\) red flag

❖ Stage 2: Now that you have the proper end to which to refer your action, calculate the value of the relevant indifferents and select accordingly.

➢ When circumstances are dire, consider the \textit{formula} to help in your selection.

❖ Final Reminder: Do not fail to act once you have rationally determined the right thing to do.

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88 I take these two standard criteria, which are found across the sources, to largely overlap each other. As Vogt says, “the sage’s reasoning, which leads her to decide for a particular course of action, makes use of the same considerations as the well-reasoned justification that can, in retrospect, be given for her action” (Vogt 2008, 175).

89 Diss. 3.3.14

90 Diss. 2.11.20

91 Off. 3.81

92 Off. 3.37

This is clearly not yet a complete outline. Nor should one think that every step listed above is necessary in every instance of deliberation. I am merely trying to include all the major steps that may be necessary. Let me first say a few things about why this is a promising outline so far, and then I will turn to what is still missing. One indication that this is a legitimately Stoic method and not my own concoction is that, with the exception of some of the *regulae*, all of the steps listed here are brought up in all of the main sources. I have not assembled the outline by combining individual parts that only appear in one source or another. Although different authors give different *regulae*, they all serve the same function of testing the end to which a contemplated action is referred and weeding out actions that would be done for the wrong purpose. Furthermore, the ordering of this schema is not drawn from any particular author, but is, as I have argued, the logical sequence that these steps would have to follow. We can see that, apart from the injunctions against rashness (at the beginning) and negligence (at the end), the process of deliberation has two main components that require the most mental effort: 1) considering what is honorable and 2) calculating and selecting among indifferents. The division of first two books of *De Officiis* suggests that this is the correct order within the deliberation process.

Now let us consider what is missing. A modern reader who looks at the above procedure will likely think that it is insufficient for the purpose of determining the right thing to do. For example, if you see yourself surrounded by many instances of injustice and suffering (at the personal, societal, and even global level) and you feel a sense of duty to make a positive impact on the world, how will the above procedure help you? There are so many different avenues you can potentially pursue, so many different factors to consider, so many different problems to try and solve. It does not seem that the above procedure will be of much assistance in narrowing down your options enough that you can then begin to consider what is honorable and what is
expedient. There is clearly some component or guidance mechanism that is still needed. What is missing? I believe the answer must lie in the consideration of one’s roles. Moreover, as I shall argue, it is in this part of deliberation that is concerned with roles that the formula becomes useful and often crucial.

As Julia Annas has argued,⁹⁴ the Stoic calculus for finding the morally right thing to do is profoundly different from the route that deliberation is supposed to take in most modern ethical systems. If you are a utilitarian, for example, your goal is to maximize utility (however you define what that is). There is some external thing that you aim to maximize (e.g. the elimination of suffering in the world) and you try to see how much of your life and resources you can devote or divert to that end while still maintaining a standard of living that you are content with. For the Stoic, on the other hand, there is no external good that has to be maximized at the expense of your time, energy, or resources. The *summum bonum* to be maximized is internal, i.e virtue. As Annas puts it:

Seeking the good...does not imply running away from your commitments in order to seek something grander; you should look for your moral aim not outside the commitments you already have, but in trying to live a good life within them.⁹⁵

Annas suggests that virtue consists in performing our roles well. The Stoic already has roles to perform in life – roles that are given by nature, society, chance, and choice. The ideal is to perfect the virtuous performance of the roles that we already have in life. It is our roles that narrow down our options to the point where there are only a few worthy of consideration and we can apply the above method. Roles provide the crucial guiding mechanism without which the method outlined above would not work.

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⁹⁴ Annas 2002, *passim* but especially pp.115, 120, and 123.
The function of roles in Stoic ethics is a topic that has been getting more and more attention in recent scholarship. Brian Johnson’s recent book *The Role Ethics of Epictetus* argues that Epictetus makes “roles provide the bedrock justification for ethical action.” However, he sees the importance of roles as an innovation of Epictetus and not as part of standard Stoic doctrine. Annas had previously suggested, in the article quoted above, that roles have a more central place in Stoic thought. Vogt brings up roles at the end of her book as a potential solution to an unanswered question about deliberation: how the Stoic calculates, compares, and then selects value. In other words, how does the Stoic know what things to include in their calculation of value and how do they choose one thing over another? This question, which I flagged earlier, seems to be the most important unanswered question in the attempt to understand Stoic deliberation. No adequate account has yet been given of this process. Vogt convincingly argues against the proposal that this is done via a hierarchy of values (i.e. there is no standard “ranking system” of values to use). Instead, she argues that care for others and the fulfillment of our societal and familial roles may be a major factor in the calculation. However, she is mainly concerned with early Stoicism and she acknowledges the dearth of relevant evidence concerning roles in the early texts:

The way we are to concern ourselves with all human beings involves taking care of those we are connected to by the various roles we have in our lives. These remarks must remain tentative. We have too little testimony on early Stoic thought about these issues.

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96 Johnson 2014, xi.
Taking Guidance from Roles

In the remainder of this chapter I will largely be in dialogue with Johnson’s book on roles in Epictetus since it is by far the most extensive work on roles in Stoicism. Johnson has already done much of the hard work of unpacking how roles factor into Epictetus’ ethics. In this discussion I want to push back against some of the claims he makes, particularly claims of Epictetus’ pioneering originality. My goal is to show that roles must have been a key component in moral deliberation in earlier Stoicism. I do this first by arguing that many of the mechanisms Johnson attributes to Epictetus are already at play in Cicero (and Panaetius). Then I offer an account of how roles help the Stoic deliberator properly select among indifferents. Finally, I look for evidence that the Panaetian account of roles has antecedents in even earlier Stoics.

Johnson is certainly right that roles are discussed more by Epictetus than any other extant Stoic writer. However, this in itself does not imply that roles are more important to Epictetus’ system than to those of earlier authors. The consideration of a wide variety of roles in Epictetus may be due to the nature and genre of the writings that have come down to us, via Arrian, and which preserve Epictetus’ teachings. These diatribes are meant to convey a classroom-style approach to teaching, where many students of diverse social roles are seeking advice and guidance. By contrast, Seneca’s Letters and Marcus Aurelius’ Meditations are each ostensibly addressed to a single individual. Both authors still talk about roles, but they focus on the roles that pertain to them and, in the case of Seneca, to their intended audience. One would not expect treatment of a wide variety of possible roles in such contexts. Cicero’s De Officiis is the only extant work on Stoic deliberation that, like Epictetus’ Discourses, sets out to offer instruction

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98 Seneca, for example, brings up the life-as-theater-play analogy at Ep. 77.20.6. Marcus Aurelius discusses his own roles at Meditations 2.5 and at 3.5. He discusses choosing one’s role at 6.42-43.
99 Seneca mentions the myriad of possible roles humans can have at Ep. 94.8-16, but unlike Cicero he is not concerned with organizing these roles into a classification and/or explaining how one should deliberate based on the roles one has.
that is applicable to a diverse readership. Roles do play a prominent and important part in that
work, *pace* Johnson. In fact, it is not clear to me that roles are less important for Cicero than they
are for Epictetus.

Roles are brought up in the first book of *De Officiis* in the famous discussion of the “four
*personae*” that every human is said to have. *Persona* is a term borrowed from drama and can
mean “role” (as in a play) or “mask” in Latin. The first of the four *personae* is defined as the
universal human nature: that of a rational and social animal. All humans have the first *persona* in
common. The second *persona* is each person’s individual nature (both physical and
temperamental). The third consists of those things bestowed by chance (wealth, reputation, status
etc). The fourth is the one we choose for ourselves, particularly our vocation in life. Each of
these *personae* imposes certain restraints on our behavior. In deliberating what we should do, we
are to strive to make our actions conformable to our four roles in life. So, for example, if one is
naturally strong (2nd *persona*) and affluent (3rd *persona*) and has chosen the life of an athlete
(4th *persona*), then going regularly to the gym is in keeping with their character, while gorging
on cake and wine is not. Often times, consideration of one or a few of our *personae* is enough to
figure out what we should do. Panaetius’ four *personae* framework provide a remarkably flexible
and intuitive method for considering what actions are in line with our roles in life.

Writing on the four *personae* in 1977, De Lacey remarked that this “formulation of Stoic
ethical doctrine...has not received the attention it deserves.”\(^{100}\) Sadly, this remains true to this
day. Much has been written on this “four *personae* theory,” as it is sometimes referred to, both
before and since De Lacey, but hardly any of it analyzes this “theory” for what it really is: a
formula (in the English sense) or rubric for moral deliberation. Most scholarship on the four
*personae* explores issues other than *καθήκον*/*officium*, such as *decorum*, the notion of

\(^{100}\) De Lacy 1977, 163.
persona,\textsuperscript{101} or personality and individualism.\textsuperscript{102} The only recent attempt to analyze Panaetius’ formulation for the purpose of further understanding Stoic moral deliberation is Johnson’s. While Johnson sees roles as being crucial to Epictetus’ ethics later, he does not see them as being crucial for Cicero insofar as duty is concerned. He echoes earlier scholars in deeming that “Cicero’s theory is merely a theory of decorum (the virtue that concerns what is socially pleasing), whereas Epictetus’ role theory is a theory of ethics in general.”\textsuperscript{103}

This notion that the four personae formulation (henceforth “FPF”) comprises a theory of decorum seems to be the main reason why this part of De Officiis has not been studied much in the context of moral deliberation. However, as said above, the FPF does not offer a theory of decorum. In fact, it is not a theory at all. It does not purport to explain anything. And while it makes use of the concept of decorum, there are many indications that it is ultimately about duty. First of all, after giving an account of what decorum is,\textsuperscript{104} Cicero returns to the topic of duty and only then brings up the four personae. During this interlude on duty (1.100-103), Cicero iterates some of the standard criteria of officium, such as obedience to reason, following nature, and having a justification for one’s actions that stands to reason (causam probabilem reddere). Moreover, he repeats twice the injunctions against rashness and negligence, which, as we saw earlier, form the two end points of the moral deliberation process. After a short digression on types of jest, Cicero gives a precept which “is essential to every inquiry about duty” (pertinet ad omnem officii quaestionem; 1.105), namely that we must always keep in mind the superiority of humans over beasts. Then the first two personae are introduced, the first of which – the universal human role – is said to be the source “of the rational method of ascertaining our duty” (ex qua

\textsuperscript{101} Frede 2007.
\textsuperscript{102} Gill 1988 and Sorabji 2007.
\textsuperscript{103} Johnson 2014, 137
\textsuperscript{104} Off. 1.93-99. This part of the text may indeed be called a “theory of decorum,” but not what follows.
ratio inveniendi officii exquiritur; 1.107). It should be clear from all of this that the four personae formulation (FPF) has much to do with duty.

Cicero thus provides many signals in the text that the FPF is not a parenthetical theory of decorum (or of the specific duties derived therefrom), but is intimately connected with the purpose of the entire work – the determination of one’s officia. How, then, is the notion of decorum helpful for finding one’s duty? The answer is given in the introduction to the discussion of decorum. The very first thing Cicero says about decorum, which he equates with the Greek πρέπον, is the following.

Huius vis ea est, ut ab honesto non queat separari; nam et, quod decet, honestum est et, quod honestum est, decet; qualis autem differentia sit honesti et decori, facilius intelligi quam explanari potest. (Off. 1.94)

Such is its essential nature, that it is inseparable from moral goodness; for what is proper is morally right, and what is morally right is proper. The nature of the difference between morality and propriety can be more easily felt than expressed. (tr. Miller)

In modern philosophical language, one could say that quod decet and quod honestum est have the same extension but not the same intension. The important implication for moral deliberation is that, if we can determine what action is truly proper (decret), then we have also determined what action is morally good. In other words, the concept of decorum offers an alternative route that moral deliberation can take.

One of the very few surviving fragments of Panaetius likens the many virtues to a group of archers all aiming at the same target. All virtues have the same goal, but each reaches it in a different way (ἄλλην κατ’ ἀλλὸν τυγχάνειν). Thus, each virtue can potentially show us the way to the right goal, which is “living in accordance with nature” (ζῆν όμολογομένως τῇ φύσει). The deliberative route Cicero offers via decorum can be especially helpful if there are cases where it

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105 Stobaeus 2.7.63-64 (= SVF 3.280).
is easier to determine what is proper (decet) than what is, say, just or wise. Cicero implies that there are such cases. When he claims that there is a notion of propriety that means harmony with nature (naturae consentaneum), he explains this with a theater metaphor. When a well known character (such as Minos, Aeacus, or Atreus) appears on stage, the audience can sense if what he says is in keeping with his character or not. Cicero is implying that everyone has a sense for decorum, even those unschooled in philosophy. Thus anyone can use their sense of decorum as an intuitive way to aim for the right target. Whether this argument is valid or merely rhetorical is not relevant to the present discussion. The point is that Cicero wants to claim that everyone has an intuitive sense of decorum. Moreover, he claims that decorum is apparent in every virtuous act:

Quare pertinet quidem ad omnem honestatem hoc, quod dico, decorum, et ita pertinet, ut non recondita quadam ratione cernatur, sed sit in promptu. (Off. 1.95.2)

This propriety, therefore, of which I am speaking belongs to each division of moral rectitude; and its relation to every virtue is so close, that it is perfectly self-evident and does not require any abstruse process of reasoning to see it. (tr. Miller, modified)

According to Cicero, thinking about decorum can be very useful in moral deliberation because it is often easy to discern what is proper for a character (whether on stage or in life) without complex reasoning.

According to Johnson, “Cicero’s role theory limits itself to decorum” and the “personae operate as criteria for discovering what is proper.” However, this conventional view has the picture backwards. Decorum is not the goal. It is the aiming mechanism. By thinking about decorum especially as pertains to our roles in life, we may discover our moral duty – our officium. Johnson writes, “If Cicero had wanted his personae theory to have wide implications for appropriate action [sc. officium], he could have connected roles with the fact that all virtues

106 Johnson 2014, 137.
are unified.”¹⁰⁷ This is a baffling claim, considering Cicero does make the connection, explicitly saying that *decorum* belongs to every virtue, as we have seen above. Johnson continues, “He therefore could have argued that, when Socrates fulfills his ironic *persona*, he exhibits not only the virtue of propriety but the virtues of justice, courage, and wisdom.”¹⁰⁸ However, Socrates’ ironic temperament is an aspect of only one of his *personae* (the second one). Cicero nowhere claims that acting in a way that is proper to just one of your *personae* is a sufficient condition for virtuous action. All *personae* must be considered in order to find one’s duty. But if that is done correctly, then that action will not only be proper but also morally good because, as Cicero tells us, *quod decet* and *quod honestum est* have the same extension.

I would like to respond to two more arguments that Johnson makes to the effect that Cicero’s FPF is underdeveloped or deficient in comparison to Epictetus’ role theory. First, Johnson claims that the goal of the FPF is to act with propriety so as to win approval from others.¹⁰⁹ While winning approval is certainly held out as one of the potential rewards of acting with propriety, that does not mean that it should be taken to be the main motivating factor. If the FPF were solely about winning acclaim, then it is odd that Cicero uses the FPF to justify Cato’s suicide,¹¹⁰ a clear example of a *κατὰ περίστασιν καθῆκον*. While Cato did win acclaim for his final act, winning acclaim is not presented as his motivation. This is one of very few instances in the entire work where a duty in dire circumstances is given an ethical justification (the *formula* as justification for tyrannicide is another notable one). Thus, the FPF seems to be an important tool for the determination of one’s duty, even in times of extreme adversity.

¹⁰⁷ Johnson 2014, 163. I have added the brackets to clarify that “appropriate action” is Johnson’s way of translating *καθῆκον/officium*.
¹⁰⁸ Johnson 2014, 163.
¹⁰⁹ Johnson 2014, 164.
¹¹⁰ *Off.* 1.112.
Second, Johnson claims that Cicero says very little about the first *persona*, “nor does he explain his silence.”\(^{111}\) This has led to confusion among interpreters. Johnson suggest that “because of the hastiness of its construction, the *De Officiis* intends the preceding discussion of *sôphrosunê*...at 1.100-106 to be the domain of the first *persona*” since “without such a reading, Cicero’s notion of the universal role remains a largely uninformative placeholder.”\(^{112}\) I agree that the preceding passage is important for understanding the first *persona*. However, it is neither clear to me that said passage is chiefly concerned with moderation (*sôphrosunê*) nor that there needs to be a special virtue which is the domain of the first *persona*. As I mentioned before, the passage in question contains several standard Stoic claims about moral deliberation, including injunctions against rashness and negligence as well as various defining criteria of *officia*. These claims do not pertain solely to moderation but to deliberation in general. When Cicero then brings up the first *persona*, he says, “Everything honourable and seemly is derived from this, and from it we discover a method of finding out our duty” (*a qua omne honestum decorumque trahitur, et ex qua ratio inveniendi officii exquiritur*).\(^{113}\) This seems to me to be yet another signal on Cicero’s part that we are to take the FPF as an integral part of the deliberation process concerning duty, and not as a theory of *decorum*.

When considering what is befitting (*dece*t) to our universal human nature, Cicero implies that we are to make use of the entire rational, deliberative apparatus that the Stoics provide via *regulae, praecepta, decreta* etc. Moreover, the other thing Cicero says about this *persona*, that “we are all participants in reason” (*omnes participes sumus rationis*)\(^{114}\) is a very loaded claim, which for the Stoics implies that we are all fellow citizens bound by the common law of the

\(^{111}\) Johnson 2014, 139.

\(^{112}\) Johnson 2014, 139. For a list of other similar attempts to explain this “difficulty” see Johnson 2014, 166 n.3.

\(^{113}\) *Off.* 1.107, tr. Atkins and Griffin

\(^{114}\) *Off.* 1.107.
cosmic city. Thus, the first *persona* is not an “uninformative placeholder.” It is rich in content and it is what connects the FPF with the rest of the tools of deliberation offered throughout the *De Officiis*. As we saw earlier, these tools and procedures for deliberation (which I included in the outline), are not always sufficient for determining one’s duty. There was something missing. As mentioned, Vogt had speculated that roles may be part of what is missing. The FPF provides a way to incorporate roles into the rest of the deliberation process. The first *persona* stands for the standard methods, tools, criteria, doctrines etc. that pertain to deliberation, and *personae* 2-4 stand for our various roles in life – roles we have obtained through nature, chance, and choice.

It is important to realize that Cicero clearly indicates in this passage that every decision about what constitutes our *officium* is made via the first *persona*. There is thus an asymmetry between the first *persona* and the remaining three (which do not entail any capacity for decision making). Of course, we are supposed to consider the demands of all our *personae* when deliberating, but the ultimate decision is made qua rational being and not, for example, qua daughter or qua orator. Nevertheless, the consideration of our roles provides a crucial way for us to narrow down our options to the point where the “standard” method of deliberation outlined earlier becomes sufficient for the determination of our duty.

In order to see how the consideration of roles can factor into the deliberation process, let us take, as an example, the story with which the first chapter of this thesis opens. Suppose Plato is deliberating whether to defend his friend Chabrias in court and thus risk being killed. Without due consideration of his roles, the number of available options to consider are limitless. Plato could think, “Defending Chabrias seems virtuous, but so does staying at home and finishing the *Laws*, and so does trying to establish a good republic in Syracuse.” He could apply all the Stoic κανόνες, but they would not disqualify any of these three options. He could also apply the

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formula, but that would not help either. “Chabrias may be beyond saving, but think of all the
good that could come from establishing a just polity in Sicily!” he could say to himself.
However, if he considers, as Panaetius suggests, his natural, accidental, and chosen roles, then
his options become severely restricted. Plato might then reason in the following way. “It has
always been my nature (2nd persona) to be loyal to friends, I was born an Athenian citizen and
not a Syracusan (3rd persona), and I have made it my profession (4th persona) to defend the
truth. Thus, it would be against my individual personae to fail to defend my friend and
wrongfully-accused fellow citizen Chabrias in court.” After considering his roles, Plato knows
that he really only has two options: perform his roles well and risk death, or abandon his roles in
order to live. Now he can reapply the standard deliberative tools to these two final options. Any
one of several κανόνες immediately reveals that merely staying alive is an inadequate end to
refer any action to, whereas performing one’s roles (and thus being consistent in life) is an
adequate end. There is finally no room left for doubt that he must defend his friend from
injustice, even if doing so is dangerous. He has found his καθῆκον.

This example is a case where the deliberation process can end with the use of
κανόνες/regulae to test the ends of the available options. Now let us consider examples where
the deliberation ends with the selection of value. Cicero offers the example of a judge presiding
over a case involving one of his friends. The judge may be tempted to pass a lenient sentence on
his friend. However, Cicero says that the upright man (vir bonus) “lays aside the role of friend
when he assumes that of judge” (ponit enim personam amici, cum induit iudicis). But how is
this conclusion reached? There may be several ways, of course. I believe that, given the position
of this passage in the text, the formula is implied as one way to do it.

116 Off. 3.43, tr. Miller
Suppose the judge is presiding over a lawsuit involving a friend where the friend’s property is at stake. The friend may expect the judge to rule in his favor, even if such a ruling is unfair. However, a well-informed and thoughtful judge may reason in the following way. “My interest is the same as the state’s interest. My friend’s interest is also the same as the state’s interest.” He would then realize that the interest of the state makes the value of the friend’s property irrelevant to the moral deliberation, even if his friend thinks otherwise. After all, the value of private property presupposes a well-functioning state. Going against the interest of the state not only goes against the true interest of the friend, it also subverts the value of the friend’s property, which the friend (mistakenly) thinks is the important value in question. To pass an unfair sentence in favor of his friend would thus be self-defeating, even from the point of view of the friend’s perceived interest. Therefore, the judge concludes that he will follow the letter of the law. This example is helpful because it shows that selecting value need not make use of a hierarchy of values (as mentioned earlier, Vogt points out that there is little evidence for a fixed ranking of values being used in deliberation). The judge does not way the value of the health of the state against the value of his friend’s private property. Rather, the formula reveals that the value of the state’s health is relevant to the deliberation, while it completely removes the value of the friend’s property from the equation.

I believe a similar justification is implied in the example of tyrannicide in Off. 3. Suppose you are Brutus and you have already done all in your power to dissuade Caesar for making himself tyrant but to no avail. Your role as Caesar’s friend (3rd persona) implies that you should care for Caesar, while your role as senator (4th persona) implies you should care for the safety of the republic. The only way to save the republic is to kill Caesar. What do you do? There is no obvious virtue either in killing someone or in caring for a tyrant. So, you proceed to stage 2 of
deliberation and consider value in conjunction with the *formula*. Similarly to the previous example, you may reason in the following way. “My interest is the same as the interest of the state. Caesar’s interest is the same as the interest of the state. It is in both our interests to preserve the health of the state. If Caesar lives, our common interest will be destroyed. Thus, I will kill Caesar.” Again, you do not have to weigh the value of the state’s health *against* the value of your friend’s life. Rather, the *formula* reveals the health of the state as a relevant value, whereas the value of Caesar’s life is an irrelevant value because his interest is actually the health of the state (even though, paradoxically, he must die in order for that value to be preserved).

Thus, the *formula* seems to be particularly useful in the context of thinking through one’s *personae* in order to work out where one’s duty lies. That the *formula* is indeed meant to be used in conjunction with the FPF is suggested by Cicero in a number of ways. First, both the *formula* and the FPF invite us to consider ourselves as part of a cosmic community.\(^{117}\) Second, both are used to justify examples of περιστατικὰ καθήκοντα. Finally, as seen in the two examples from *De Officiis* 3 just discussed, the *formula* seems to be one way to resolve conflicts which may arise between the demands of an individual’s several *personae*. If we revisit the *formula*-like passage in Epictetus discussed earlier in this chapter,\(^{118}\) there too we find the doctrines included in Cicero’s *formula* discussed in relation to περιστατικὰ καθήκοντα and to roles of a sort. Just as the foot has a role to play as part of the body, so too must we, as parts of a greater whole, sometimes willingly “go into the mud,” as it were, for the sake of the whole.

It should not be lost on us here that “part” and “role” are related notions in Greek and Latin, just as they are in English. To “play one’s part” and to “play one’s role” can mean the

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\(^{117}\) This is implied in the first *persona*, as discussed earlier.

\(^{118}\) *Diss.* 2.5.24-29
same thing, and there are examples where Stoic authors use μέρος/pars in such a way. One can only have a role to play if one is a part of a system. In fact, the Stoics make the claim that it is because we are a part of a whole that we have a role to play. As John Cooper has argued, the claim that humans are organic parts of the cosmos is crucial for the Stoic conception of what it means to follow nature, and how following one’s own individual nature is an important component of following the cosmic, divinely ordered nature. Thus, the formula and the FPF are connected on a profound level. While the FPF helps us maintain consistency in performing our roles, the doctrines comprising the formula explain why we have roles to begin with and how to align our personal roles to our cosmic role. To be a part, is to have a part to play. Our part is largely assigned to us by nature. We cannot escape it, nor should we be dissatisfied with it.

One may here raise the objection that, since the formula is presented by Cicero in his final, non-Panaetian book, my claim that it is meant to be used with the Panaetian FPF is suspect. However, as mentioned earlier, Cicero says that the first persona – the universal nature of humans as rational beings – contains the rational faculty of ascertaining our duties. To think through one’s first persona is to employ the entire set of cognitive apparatus and key doctrines, which include those Cicero placed under the label of “formula.”

We are now in a position to clarify how the formula and the consideration of roles work together in the second stage of the deliberation process, where value/externals are selected. First of all, thinking through our roles reveals which things of value are relevant to our deliberative calculus and which are not. This often narrows down our options to a single acceptable action, which must then be our duty. This can be seen in the example with Plato above, where it is not justifiable for him to evade defending Chabrias, even if he does so by going off and doing some

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119 Cf. Off. 1.98.4 and Meditations 6.42.1.9.
121 Off. 1.107.5.
other noble action which is not tied to his roles. Meanwhile, a firm belief in the doctrines comprising the *formula* ensures that we stick to the roles we already have and do not seek to assume new ones at whim. Sometimes, however, thinking through your *personae* does not narrow down your options enough, and you are still left with a dilemma (especially where different *personae* seem to call for different actions). In such situations the *formula* has another important function to play, namely to resolve such dilemmas. As we saw in the two examples from Cicero above, the *formula* further narrows down our options by, again, revealing which things of value are relevant to our calculation. As mentioned earlier, the question of how Stoic deliberators decide which things of value enter their calculation and which do not is one of the big unanswered questions. I believe that roles together with the *formula* go a long way in answering that.

Let us finally consider the Stoic process of deliberation in its entirety, now that we have fully elaborated the two main stages of deliberation. The first involves making sure – with the aid of κανόνες/ *regulae* if necessary – that one’s action is done for the sake of the right end. The second involves the dispassionate selection of value, and can be assisted by thinking through one’s roles and keeping in mind the doctrines of the *formula*. Now, one might ask, does the *formula* really only pertain to stage two? In a sense, it is operational throughout the process (and indeed our lives), since it is comprised of key doctrines. However, the Stoics suggest that it is especially helpful for the dispassionate selection of value (i.e. stage two) in times of crisis. One may also ask, does every instance of deliberation include all of the steps listed above in diagram 5? From the three examples just discussed, it should be clear that all steps are not necessary in every case. If one is a sage, or close enough to sagehood that one consistently does actions with the right end in mind, then part one is unnecessary. One may jump straight to part two. Thus,
Vogt, following Barney, was right to maintain that “The sage chooses among indifferents in each and all of her choices.” However, for non-sages who do not consistently refer their actions to the right end, an extra step is needed before they may proceed to the dispassionate selection of indifferents. And in some cases, the non-sage may complete the deliberation process after part one, without recourse to part two at all. If, for instance, there are only two courses of action available, and the deliberator determines via one or more *regulae* that one of the options cannot possibly be referred to the right end, whereas the other passes all the tests, then the decision is made. For the sage, deliberation would presumably not even be necessary in such a case. In conclusion, the process I have outlined does not need to be followed in full in every instance of deliberation. It has been my aim to include and explain all the steps which *may* be necessary in order for any deliberator (not just a sage) to determine his or her καθῆκον.

**Did the Early Stoics Think About Roles?**

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to make a full comparison of Cicero’s FPF with Epictetus’ role theory. My aim has been to show that the FPF is not a digression about *decorum*, but that roles form a crucial part of the deliberation method that Cicero puts forth in *De Officiis*. Without the FPF, the remaining tools for deliberation are insufficient for guiding us toward ascertaining our duty in every case. I would like to end with a suggestion that roles may have been important throughout the early Stoa as well. However, in looking for early evidence of the consideration of roles, we should not expect to find the same terminology that later Stoics use. It is important to realize that the Stoics never developed a consistent or standardized vocabulary for discussing what we call roles (not even in the time of Epictetus). What Johnson translates as “roles” in Epictetus are what Epictetus sometimes calls πρόσωπον, sometimes ὄνοματα, and sometimes

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122 Vogt 2008, 199.
merely implies through lists of relationships (brother, father, etc.) or professions. Thus, even Epictetus himself does not have a unified terminology. Furthermore, virtually all scholars (Frede, Gill, Dyck, Johnson) have assumed that Epictetus’ term πρόσωπον corresponds to Cicero’s persona, and that both terms can mean “mask.” However, this is not exactly true. Persona can, of course, mean both “mask” and [theatrical] “role,” (though it cannot mean “face” – the primary meaning of πρόσωπον). However, while πρόσωπον can theoretically mean “mask,” when Epictetus speaks of actual masks, he uses a different form: προσωπεῖον.123

Epictetus’ use of a different form to mean “mask” seems to have gone unnoticed in the scholarship. I think this has important consequences for the way we are to interpret these terms. For Cicero, the fact that persona can mean “mask” is important, because it implies that one person can balance several different “masks.” We can even take one off and put another on depending on the situation we are in, as in the example above involving the judge. However, I see no evidence that Epictetus thinks the same person can have different πρόσωπα. In fact, there are two passages where he says one should always have the same πρόσωπον.124 It would make no sense in the context of De Officiis for Cicero to say that one should always have the same persona. Thus the two terms do not seem to match up. I think Frede is probably right that Epictetus’ use of πρόσωπον is closer to the modern notion of a “person” than Cicero’s persona is.125 Thus, while roles certainly figure prominently and are important in Epictetus, I am unconvinced that his use of the term πρόσωπον is referring to the same kind of thing as when he speaks of ὄνόματα or speaks of relationships/professions. The later can be reasonably called roles, the former perhaps not.

123 Diss. 1.29.43, 2.1.15, and 2.8.24
124 Diss. 1.25.31 and 3.5.16
125 Frede 2007.
The upshot of all this is that the Stoics never established a consistent terminology for discussing roles. Thus, if we want to look for evidence of roles in earlier Stoicism, we should not look for mention of πρόσωπα or ὀνόματα. A better strategy would be to take a cue from Panaetius and realize that all roles can be put into three categories: those we obtain by nature, by chance, and by choice. We can then look for earlier evidence that peculiar attributes of individuals (natural, fortuitous, and chosen) have bearing on moral deliberation. Prima facie, it is difficult to imagine that such considerations would not have bearing on individuals’ deliberations. As Inwood writes, “it would be a strange agent-centred ethical theory which did not in its theory of moral reasoning provide for the relevance of the particularities of each agent.”

The idea of following one’s own particular nature can be traced back at least to the time of Chrysippus, who wrote that the ultimate end (τέλος) is to live in accordance with your own nature and the universal nature (κατὰ τὴν αὑτοῦ καὶ κατὰ τὴν τῶν ὅλων). Cicero says almost exactly the same thing in the discussion of the FPF and he (or his Panaetian model) may be quoting from Chrysippus. Differences of natural temperament in relation to deliberation are also discussed by Seneca in letters 94 and 95, and there is no compelling reason to take this interest in individual temperaments as only a late Stoic concern. It is also hard to imagine that the early Stoics would not accept that we have roles acquired by chance, since the notion of fortuitous roles seems to track the notion of indifference. Finally, the idea that one should choose a single profession in life and do it well seems to be a tenet shared by all the major Greek philosophical schools. It is already an important feature in Plato’s and Aristotle’s ethics. As Inwood writes, “Several considerations ought to incline us to the view that (at least informally)

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126 Inwood 2005, 129.
127 D.L. 7.88.3.
128 Off. 1.110.3.
the individual character and situation of the agent were held to be relevant from the beginnings of the school.”

Conclusion

The Stoics rejected the possibility that commandments or rules of conduct are sufficient guides to live by on the grounds that every such rule will have exceptions. Nevertheless, they believed that people are never free from moral obligation. At every moment, they have a duty to perform. Their duty can be determined through a rational deliberation process that is most clearly and fully expounded in Cicero’s *De Officiis*. In the first stage rational agents consider the end for the sake of which they are about to act. There are various criteria (κανόνες/regulae) they can use to make sure that they are acting for the sake of the actual good (virtue) and not for the sake of some false good. In the second stage they consider the value of the indifferents involved and use a set of doctrines called by Cicero and Seneca the “formula” to determine what things of value are relevant to the case at hand. Meanwhile, throughout the process of deliberation, rational agents consider their roles in life. These roles usually narrow down their options to the point where there are only very few actions under consideration. This narrowing down of potential actions is what ensures that by using the criteria (κανόνες/regulae) and/or the formula they will be able to arrive at the determination of their duty.

While Panaetius may have been the first to formulate a role method in these terms, it is unlikely that he came up with it all on his own. The specific formulation found in Cicero may be uniquely Panaetian, but the consideration of roles and the various deliberative tools seem fundamental to the Stoic system. I have argued against Johnson’s view that the four *personae* constitute an underdeveloped theory, and that Epictetus is the first one who worked out a full

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129 Inwood 2005, 129 n.84.
system of role-based ethical thought. The role method is already extensively developed in Panaetius, and it is likely that at least the seeds of the method were planted in the early Stoa. The consideration of roles seems to be a *sine qua non* of the deliberative system.
Chapter Four

Groundwork for the Comparison of Καθῆκον and Kantian Duty

The surge of interest in Stoicism in recent decades, both within and outside of academia, has been accompanied by numerous attempts to compare Stoicism with modern ethical systems, particularly that of Kant. With its emphasis on a universal law and its rejection of either pleasure or utility as the *summum bonum*, Kant’s ethical system bears a closer resemblance to Stoicism than do other modern philosophies.\(^1\) However, despite the growing number of comparative studies, the project of understanding Kant’s relationship to the Stoics has, as it were, hardly begun. The majority of scholars working on Kant seem unaware of the deep connections his ideas have with Stoicism. By way of example, consider Kant’s claim in the *Groundwork* that the moral law “must hold not merely for humans but for all rational beings generally.”\(^2\) Much discussion has arisen in the literature\(^3\) (and in the media\(^4\)) connecting this claim to Kant’s speculations regarding extraterrestrial life. However, hardly any attempts have been made to connect Kant’s claim with the one philosophical school that spoke of “rational beings” more than any other in history: the Stoics.

In this chapter I hope to contribute to the burgeoning project of understanding Kant’s relationship to Stoicism. I must, however, limit my discussion to a narrow consideration of

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\(^1\) MacIntyre 1984, 236 makes the rather bold statement that Kant “saw himself as the preeminent modern heir of the Stoics.” However, he does not explain the basis for such a claim. For Kant’s admiration for the Stoics see Schneewind 1996, 292. Wood has shown that Kant’s attitudes towards the ancient schools is more nuanced than has been appreciated. In his lecture, Kant does not refrain from criticizing the Stoics on a number of points, and he often takes a surprisingly charitable stance towards Epicurus. Cf. Wood 2015, 129-30.

\(^2\) “alle vernünftige[n] Wesen überhaupt” G 4:408, tr. James W. Ellington (modified). Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the *Groundwork* are Ellington’s.

\(^3\) Cf. Schneewind 2009, 153. See also Louden 2000, 12-13, and 188 n.30.

\(^4\) See Bragg et al., 2017. See also Alwan et al., 2009.
practical moral deliberation in the two schools of thought. A broad, sweeping comparison of the two ethical systems has never been attempted, probably for good reason. Kant’s unique epistemology, metaphysics, and vocabulary, combined with the multitude of avenues through which he could have been exposed to Stoic-looking ideas, makes any wide-ranging comparison difficult and risky. I will, therefore, follow the example set by recent scholarship of focusing on a specific aspect within the two ethical theories – in this case that of practical moral deliberation. I will not explore in detail related topics such as Kant’s grounding of the principle of morality in theoretical and metaphysical reasoning. My focus will be on the practical aspects of deliberation and duty. What does it mean according to the two systems to do one’s duty? What tools and criteria are available to ascertain one’s duty? How does Kant’s “formula of humanity” in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* compare with the Stoic formula of the common body of humanity? Where significant differences emerge, I will attempt to offer explanations for why the two systems diverge.

In the first part of this chapter, I offer a brief overview of some relevant, comparative studies on Kant and the Stoics. I then explore the various avenues through which Kant could have accessed Stoic ideas as well as the implications of this *Quellenforschung* for the present study. Next, I explain how Kant may have been influenced by the Stoics in his conception of the will and I argue that his anti-eudaimonism paradoxically brought him closer to genuine Stoicism than he realized. After comparing Kant’s definition of duty with the Stoic conception, I turn to the categorical imperative. In the last section, I compare Kant’s “formula of humanity” with the Stoic formula of the common body of humanity. I try to answer the question, how would the ideal Kantian agent’s actions differ from those of the Stoic sage?
On the Various Approaches to Studying Kant’s Stoic Influences

The scholarship written in the past century that compares Kant with ancient philosophers seems to fall on a spectrum between two general approaches. On the one hand, some scholars seek to uncover similarities, thus “countering the common depiction of Kant's moral philosophy as radically opposed to ancient ethics.”\(^5\) On the other hand, there are those who emphasize the distinctive features of each system and caution against too easily equating aspects of them that seem similar *prima facie*. The former approach presupposes that both Kant and the ancients are dealing with similar problems and employing similar kinds of tools and concepts to work out solutions to those problems. As Annas succinctly puts it, “ancient [ethical] theories are theories of what modern moral theories are theories of.”\(^6\) The latter, more historicist, angle sees a potential danger in this approach since, as Schneewind writes, it “might lead us to try to minimize differences between ancient and modern ethics.”\(^7\) Due to his vastly different historical circumstances, Kant was handling “issues that Aristotle and Chrysippus and Cicero could not even have formulated.”\(^8\)

Clearly, both approaches are vital for improving our understanding of the relationship between Kant and Stoicism. The “assimilatory” and the historicist approach are not, strictly speaking, opposed to each other, but can work together in a dialectically fruitful way. Every time an important similarity is uncovered between Kant and the Stoics, our understanding of where the differences lie is sharpened. And every time an asymmetry is detected, we are prompted to scrutinize the points of similarity under new light. Thus, most scholars attempt to do a combination of both. However, the comparative study of Kant and Stoicism is still in its early

\(^{5}\) Engstrom 2015, 116.  
\(^{6}\) Annas 1993, 14; cf. 12, 47, 120ff.  
\(^{7}\) Schneewind 1996, 298.  
\(^{8}\) Schneewind 1996, 299.
stages. Due to the difficulty and often fragmentary nature of the Stoic evidence, it is scholars of ancient philosophy who are uniquely positioned to be able to uncover similarities. Thus, like the majority of ancient philosophy scholars who have approached the topic, I will be taking a more assimilatory approach. But I hope that in suggesting similarities I will be contributing to the ongoing dialectic, and that other scholars will respond by further clarifying the boundaries between Stoicism and Kantian ethics.

Comparing Kant with the Stoics is a complicated endeavor for a number of reasons. For one, whenever Kant discusses or appropriates ideas from Stoicism, he significantly transforms them to suit his own epistemology, metaphysics, and moral psychology.\(^9\) As a result, these Stoic influences are not always easy to discern. Second, there are many avenues through which Kant may have encountered Stoic ideas. He seems to have read Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius\(^10\) (mainly in German translations) but he also engaged (indirectly but perhaps more actively) with Stoic ideas through the writings of Leibniz, Wolff, Baumgarten, and Hume, all of whom were greatly influenced by Stoicism.\(^11\) Stoicism was evidently quite popular during the eighteenth century. Hume reports that “The fame of Cicero flourishes at present; but that of Aristotle is utterly decayed.”\(^12\) Thomas Jefferson was reading Epictetus\(^13\) in America at the same time Kant probably had the *Encheiridion* on his bookshelf in Prussia. If it is possible to determine precisely which Stoic ideas reached Kant through which of the many possible

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\(^10\) Rothe 2014, 133.
\(^11\) For Kant’s engagement with Stoic ideas via Leibniz, see Schneewind 1996, 293-96. For Wolff and Baumgarten see Reich 1939b, 447, 463. For a brief discussion of the influence of *De Officiis* on Hume, see DesJardins 1967, 237-38.
\(^12\) On the second page (in virtually any edition) of his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. While Cicero is, admittedly, not a Stoic, it is his Stoic-based *De Officiis* (which had been translated into English by Thomas Cockman in 1699 as “Tully’s Three Books of Offices”) that was his most widely-read work at the time. Cf. Moore 2002, 367.
\(^13\) Jefferson mentions Epictetus in several letters, including his letter to Joseph Priestley dated April 9, 1803. Kant at that time was 78 years old.
avenues, it is certainly beyond my competency. Nevertheless, since Kant did have direct exposure to the writings of Cicero and the Roman Stoics I think it is fair and worthwhile to compare what he says with what they have written.

A third caveat is that even if Kant had read the Roman authors carefully, his interpretation of them must have been quite different from ours. One need only look at the last century of scholarship to see how drastically our understanding of Stoicism has changed. I would even go so far as to say that no one in Kant’s time had sufficient resources to form a solid understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of Stoic ethics. As we saw in the previous chapter, for example, Adam Smith’s criticism of the Stoics for not laying down enough precise moral rules betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the Stoic system, which has only begun to be clarified in the past few decades. In Kant’s time there was no collection of the early Stoic fragments, such as the one Hans von Arnim painstakingly compiled later. This was before scholars such as Schofield and Vogt showed how misleadingly the “disturbing theses” of the Stoics were presented by Diogenes Laertius, Plutarch, Sextus Empiricus, and the Church Fathers. Finally, there is little indication that Kant could have imagined the profound influence that Stoicism had on early Christianity, which he treats as an entirely separate system of ethics. For these reasons, we should not assume that, when Kant discusses some aspect of Stoicism, his understanding is the same as ours. Furthermore, even allowing for Kant’s exceptional genius, we should consider the possibility that some of the flaws he saw in Stoicism may have been based on an incomplete picture of Stoicism. In my comparison, I shall not be comparing Kant with “orthodox Stoicism” but with ideas that he could have directly encountered in Cicero and the

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15 *Theory of Moral Sentiments* VII. iv. 3.
17 For a collection of recent work on Stoicism’s influence on early Christianity see Rasimus, Engberg-Pedersen, and Dunderberg, eds., 2010.
Roman Stoics. Where Kant sees those ideas as problematic or deficient, I will also examine whether the Stoics had offered further explanations in works that were beyond his reach.

One final difficulty in comparing Kant with the Stoics is that many of the terms Kant uses, which seem to have analogs in Stoic terminology, actually mean different things than their Stoic counterparts. To give a few examples, Kant’s ideal of Glückseligkeit (bliss/happiness) does not correspond exactly with the Greek concept of εὐδαιμονία.\(^{18}\) His concept of Wert (worth/value) has little semantic overlap with Stoic ἄξια.\(^{19}\) Furthermore, Kant’s division of duties into perfect and imperfect ones may call to mind the Stoic distinction between perfect duties\(^{20}\) and middle duties.\(^{21}\) However, the criteria for the Kantian division are different than those of the Stoic classification, as will be explained later. Thus, words in Kant that appear similar to Stoic terms are not, in and of themselves, a reliable guide to uncovering similarities between the two schools of thought. Stoic influences on Kant should not be sought in his terminology but in his broader claims and ideas.

“Kant was not a knowledgeable historian of philosophy,”\(^{22}\) writes Allen Wood in an article on Kant’s interest in the history of ethics. His “knowledge of classical Greek philosophy was mostly at second hand,” and his philosophical investigations were not motivated by historical considerations, but came by way of reflections on natural science, ethics, aesthetics, and religion.\(^{23}\) However, as Wood goes on to argue, Kant was more interested in and influenced by the history of ethics than has been appreciated. A similar claim was made eighty years earlier

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\(^{18}\) Schneewind 1996, 299.
\(^{19}\) Cf. Wood 1999, 27 (on moral worth) and 142 (on objective value).
\(^{20}\) In Greek: κατορθώματα or τέλεια καθήκοντα. In Latin: recte facta or perfecta officia.
\(^{21}\) μέσα καθήκοντα or media officia. The distinction between perfect and middle duties is discussed in chapter 2.
\(^{22}\) Wood 2015, 120.
\(^{23}\) Ibid.
by Klaus Reich in “Kant and Greek Ethics”, a work which arguably kickstarted the scholarly study of Kant’s relationship with ancient ethics. Reich was responding to the prevalent scholarly view at the time (at least in Germany) that Kant and other eighteenth century German philosophers had little contact with or concern for ancient Greek philosophy. Reich’s two-part essay made the case that Kant was deeply influenced both by Plato (via Moses Mendelssohn’s *Phädon oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele*) and by Stoicism (via Cicero’s *De Officiis*).

Since the publication of Reich’s essay, numerous scholars have examined other connections between Kant’s work and ancient philosophy. In the next section I will give a brief sketch of how this work has changed our understanding of Kant’s use of ancient materials.

**How much ancient philosophy did Kant know?**

In Manfred Kuehn’s authoritative biography of Kant, we learn that the young Immanuel received training in not just Latin, but also Greek and Hebrew at the secondary school he attended in Königsberg, the Collegium Fridericanum. Latin learning was the backbone of education at this Pietist institution, with students expected to be able to write and even speak in Latin in the final two of the six years of Latin instruction offered. Kant apparently did very well in Latin, and people who knew him while he was at the Collegium guessed that he would become a classical scholar. The classical Roman prose authors Kant read in school were Cornelius Nepos, Curtius, Caesar, Pliny, and Cicero (including selections from *De Officiis* in the

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24. “Kant und die Ethik der Griechen,” originally published in 1935 in Germany, was translated into English and published as two articles in *Mind* in 1939.
25. Reich 1939a, 339.
26. Kant was baptized “Emanuel” and later changed his name to “Immanuel,” deeming the later to be a more faithful rendition of the original Hebrew name. For the sake of consistency, I shall be referring to him as “Immanuel,” even when discussing his early years. Cf. Kuehn 2001, 26.
The fluency that Kant acquired in the language can be seen in the three dissertations he would write in Latin over a decade later as he tried to climb the ranks at the University of Königsberg towards a full professorship.\textsuperscript{31}

The Collegium seems to have offered five years of instruction in ancient Greek, though mainly for the purpose of teaching students to read scripture. Only after reading the entire New Testament in Greek did students, in their final year or two, encounter texts from pagan authors. They read from an anthology (J. M. Gesner’s \textit{Chrestomathia}) that included short excerpts from Aristotle (only \textit{Rhetoric} II. 12-17), Sextus Empiricus, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Theophrastus, Plutarch, Lucian, and Herodian.\textsuperscript{32} Curiously, there was no Plato. Kant may, of course, have been exposed to Platonic ideas in his philosophy classes. He would also have encountered Aristotelian philosophy at the Collegium if he attended the classes of one Johann Adam Gregorovius, though there is no way to know for sure if he did. Gregorovius was a staunch Aristotelian who fought against what he saw as the prevalent disdain for Aristotle and argued that new ethical systems had not surpassed that of the ancient master.\textsuperscript{33} The one philosopher Kant could not have avoided studying at length at the Collegium was Christian Wolff,\textsuperscript{34} who himself had been profoundly influenced by the Stoics.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{30} Kuehn 2001, 48. Kuehn does not say whether the “Pliny” referred to is the Elder or the Younger. Given the school’s Christian emphasis, it may well have been Pliny the Younger, who provides one of the earliest mentions of Christians. Upon his death, Kant’s library included a Latin edition of the younger Pliny’s letters and \textit{Panegyricus} and no volume of the elder Pliny’s works. See Warda, 1922, 22.

\textsuperscript{31} Kant wrote and defended his \textit{Magisterarbeit} or M.A. thesis, entitled \textit{Meditationum quarundam de igne succincte delineatio}, in 1755. He earned his doctorate just four months later with a thesis entitled \textit{Principium primorum cognitionis metaphysicae nova dilucidatio}. Half a year later, in April 1756, he defended his \textit{Habilitationsschrift} entitled \textit{Metaphysicae cum geometria iunctae usus in philosophia naturali, cuius specimen I [primum] continet monodologiam physicam}. Cf. Schönfeld 2000, 74.

\textsuperscript{32} Kuehn 2001, 47-48.

\textsuperscript{33} Kuehn 2001, 73-74.

\textsuperscript{34} Kuehn 2001, 38.

\textsuperscript{35} Reich 1939b, 447.
Despite his strong classical foundations, there is little hard evidence that Kant continued
to explore ancient Greek and Roman literature in the original languages after his school years. As
far as we can tell, Kant’s personal library contained only a few ancient books: a volume of
Seneca’s philosophical works, some of Cicero’s orations, Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*, Pliny’s
letters and *Panegyricus*, one volume of Aristotle’s works in Greek and Latin, and Aesop’s
fables.\(^{36}\) It is possible that he never read Plato in the original Greek, and that his knowledge of
Plato came largely through Jakob Brucker’s encyclopedic *Historia Critica Philosophiae*,
published 1742-44.\(^{37}\) However, he did continue to engage with ancient philosophical texts over
the years through influential translations and commentaries that were made during his time, such
as Moses Mendelssohn’s *Phädon* and Christian Garve’s translation of and commentaries on *De
Officiis*.

Mendelssohn’s 1767 work *Phädon oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele* (*Phaedo or
On the Immortality of the Soul*) was, as he writes in his preface, “something intermediate
between a translation and my own elaboration.”\(^ {38}\) It contained a literal translation (from a Latin
version) of one third of Plato’s eponymous dialogue, and interpreted much of the rest with
occasional recourse to Plotinus and to contemporary philosophy.\(^ {39}\) It was tremendously
influential, not just in Germany, but in much of Europe of the eighteenth century.\(^ {40}\) Kant and
Mendelssohn were on friendly terms, and from their correspondence it is clear that Kant
considered that *Phädon* was written in part as a response to one of his own earlier essays.\(^ {41}\) Reich

\(^{36}\) Based on A. Warda’s 1992 study *Kants Bücher*, which was largely based on a catalogue from an auction of
Kant’s books after his death.

\(^{37}\) Fistioc 2002, 16.

\(^{38}\) *Mitteilung zwischen einer Uebersetzung und eigenen Ausarbeitung*; two pages from the end of his preface (which
lacks page numbers in the early editions).

\(^{39}\) Reich 1939a, 345-46.

\(^{40}\) Elon 2002, 40.

\(^{41}\) Reich 1939a, 345.
suggests that *Phädon*, in turn, profoundly influenced Kant and caused him to overcome his earlier ethical skepticism.\(^{42}\) While not as well known as Kant’s Hume-induced awakening from “dogmatic slumber,”\(^{43}\) the effect on him of Mendelssohn’s Platonism was likely a significant part of “the violent change which [Kant’s] views certainly underwent between the beginning of 1767 and 1770.”\(^{44}\) Platonic philosophy thus helped spur Kant towards the conviction that an understanding of morality cannot be based on the senses but must be grounded on reason alone.\(^{45}\)

Another contemporary work through which Kant entered again into dialogue with ancient philosophy was Christian Garve’s 1783 translation of and commentaries on *De Officiis*, published under the title *Philosophische Anmerkungen und Abhandlungen zu Ciceros Büchern von den Pflichten*. In fact, the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* grew out of a piece that Kant originally started writing as a response to that work. Garve had previously written a harsh review of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, and, according to one of Kant’s friends (J. G. Hamann), Kant set out to get a sort of revenge by writing a scathing critique of Garve’s Cicero.\(^{46}\) To Hamann’s disappointment, however, the intellectual feud he was hoping to see did not materialize, and Kant’s work morphed and grew into the *Groundwork* instead. Although initially more interested in Garve than in Cicero, I believe that Kant’s rediscovery of Cicero through Garve may have provided part of the impetus for Kant to write the *Groundwork*.\(^{47}\) Given that the *Groundwork* grew out of a response to Garve’s Cicero, it is surprising how little, relatively speaking, has been written on Kant and Cicero.

\(^{42}\) Reich 1939a, 346.
\(^{43}\) Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, 4, 260; 10.
\(^{44}\) Reich 1939a, 347.
\(^{45}\) Ibid.
\(^{46}\) Kuehn 2001, 278.
\(^{47}\) Besides Reich 1939b, other works that make this case are Horn 2008, 1099-1100.
Besides Garve’s Cicero, there were many other avenues through which Kant likely continued to encounter Stoic philosophy in his later years. As mentioned, he had a Latin edition of Seneca’s philosophical works on his bookshelf. Various comments he made throughout his published works and recorded lectures about Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius suggest a level of familiarity with their works as well (likely from German translations). There are even indications that he knew Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives of the Philosophers* as well as Stobaeus’ *Florilegium*. He would have also found discussions of Stoic ideas in the works of Adam Smith, Hutcheson, and Rousseau. Furthermore, Schneewind has compellingly argued that Kant indirectly engaged with Stoic ideas about providence and determinism through the philosophy of Leibniz.

As these many links between Kant and ancient philosophy have come to light over the past decades, more and more scholars have tried to assimilate aspects of Kant’s thought with those of ancient philosophers, within and beyond the Stoa. For example, the Kantian philosopher Christine Korsgaard has argued that the apparent contrast between Aristotle’s claim that the virtuous agent takes pleasure in moral action and Kant’s claim that only an action done *not* for the sake of pleasure can have moral worth stems from a psychological disagreement, not an ethical one, between the two philosophers. In an interview, Korsgaard went so far as to say (about Kant and Aristotle) that she holds “a somewhat unusual view that the views of these two philosophers are completely compatible.” Meanwhile, in a dissertation from ten years ago, another scholar has argued that important elements of Kant’s epistemology seem to derive from

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48 Rothe 2014, 133.
49 Ibid. n.7.
50 Rothe 2014, 134.
51 Schneewind 1996, 293-95.
52 Korsgaard 1996, 204.
53 Korsgaard 2014, 00:51.
ancient Academic Skepticism, perhaps directly from Cicero’s *Academica* or perhaps more likely via Hume.\(^{54}\) Christian Wildberg has told me that this was already noticed by Reich, who gave several lectures on Kant and Academic Skepticism in the late nineteen seventies in Marburg, but unfortunately never published any of that material.

To sum up, the view prevalent in the early twentieth century that Kant and his contemporaries were not much concerned with ancient philosophy has been shown by the collective work of numerous scholars to be incorrect. Through the many direct and indirect avenues highlighted above, Kant engaged with ancient philosophy repeatedly throughout his life. When we turn to the specific topic of moral duty, we should not expect to find Kant any less in dialogue with the ancients, especially since it was Garve’s Cicero that spurred him to write what eventually became the *Groundwork*. In terms of Stoic ethics, it is fair to assume that Kant read Cicero and Seneca in Latin as a youth, revisited Cicero later through Garve, and knew the works of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius through the German translations that were available during his time. In the next section we will explore how the demands of Kant’s notion of duty compare with the demands of Stoic καθῆκον/officium.

**Kant and the Stoics on Practical Reason and Happiness**

If the Stoics could travel in time and encounter Kant’s philosophy, what would they think of it? They would surely find much of Kant’s terminology confusing, and they might find much in his writings to be amazed and baffled by, but they would probably still see Kant as belonging to their corner of the meta-ethical landscape. If we are to trust Cicero, the philosophers of his day thought that there were only three possible meta-ethical positions (to use a convenient

\(^{54}\) Gonzalez 2008.
anachronism\textsuperscript{55}), based on the three candidates for the \textit{sumnum bonum}: pleasure, freedom from pain, and virtue. While Kant (thinks that he) disagrees with all ancient positions on the \textit{sumnum bonum}, the Stoics would have recognized him as their intellectual kin insofar as he rejected pleasure and utility as the highest good and he, like they, believed that there was a moral law common to all humans, which all are obligated to follow.

As a \textit{Gedankenexperiment}, let us imagine that a late antique philosopher traveled forward in time and tried to determine where Kant’s ethics diverges from Stoicism. I say late antique so that it is someone who knew all the Stoic sources that Kant was aware of. The latest ancient writer on Stoic ethics whose work Kant could have plausibly read was the sixth century Neoplatonist Simplicius, whose commentary on Epictetus’ \textit{Encheiridion} was available in German translation at least as far back as 1778 (seven years before Kant published the \textit{Groundwork}).\textsuperscript{56} This translation comprised the first of a set of two volumes, the second of which was the first German translation of Epictetus’ \textit{Discourses}.\textsuperscript{57} There is reason to think that Kant read the latter volume,\textsuperscript{58} and so it is not unlikely that he also knew of the former. Let us then imagine Simplicius himself as our time-traveler and assume, for the sake of the \textit{Gedankenexperiment}, that he is well versed not just in Epictetus but in the entire Stoic tradition. Supposing he were to compare Kant’s writings on duty with Stoic ethics, what would he find familiar and what unfamiliar?

\textsuperscript{55} Cf. Annas 1993, 135, who explains that ancient ethical debates included what we would call “meta-ethical” considerations.

\textsuperscript{56} Simplicius Epiktet. \textit{Aus dem Griechischen Übersetzt von J. G. Schultheiß}. Published by Orell, Geßner, Füeßlin und Comp., Zurich, 1778. Also published in the same year by the same company as \textit{Bibliothek der griechischen Philosophen. Erster Band}. as part of a two-volume set.

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Bibliothek der griechischen Philosophen. Zweyter Band}. Orell, Geßner, Füeßlin und Comp., Zurich, 1778. The book is available on Google Books, but is labeled as \textit{Bibliothek der griechischen Philosophen, Volume 2}. For the claim that this was the first German translation of the \textit{Discourses}, see Schranka 1885, 35.

\textsuperscript{58} Rothe 2014, 133.
He might start by considering the opening statement of the first section of the *Groundwork*: “There is no possibility of thinking of anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be regarded as good without qualification, except a *good will*.” Simplicius would probably recognize this as a form of the claim that Epictetus makes dozens of times and in many different ways throughout his writings, that only a good προαίρεσις is truly good (and only a bad προαίρεσις is truly bad). There is, of course, scholarly disagreement about how close in meaning προαίρεσις is to the notion of a will. However, as far as Kant knew, προαίρεσις probably was the will, because that is how it had been translated into German. If we look, for example, at Schulthess’ translation of the *Discourses*, mentioned above, we find προαίρεσις translated often as “*Wille*” and equally often as “*freyer Wille*” (though the Greek text says nothing about freedom). Thus Kant’s opening statement in the *Groundwork* is really very similar to the claim he would have found repeated and rephrased throughout the German edition of the *Discourses*, namely that only a good will is truly and absolutely good.

In fact, in his lectures Kant credited the ancients with the “insight that ‘moral perfection’ lies in ‘the constitution and perfection of the free *power of choice*.’” The term here is not *Wille* but *Willkür*, which Kant identifies with *arbitrium* – the famous Augustinian term. However, a *free* power of choice (*freie Willkür* or *arbitrium liberum*) for Kant is a will (*Wille*). Thus, Kant is, in effect, speaking of the will in his statement about the ancients. One may here object that Kant discovered this “ancient insight” because of an accident of translation or that such translations may have been “contaminated” by Christian theology. Schulthess, after all, was a

59 G 4:393 (emphasis retained), tr. Ellington.
60 See especially *Diss.* 1.8.16.3; 1.25.1.3; 1.29.1.1; 1.30.4.2; 2.1.6.1; 2.10.25.1; and 2.16.1.1.
61 This similarity is noted in Rothe 2014, 135.
63 KrV A534/B562.
theologian. Thus, the influence on Kant may not really be from the Stoics, but from Christian theology imposed on interpretations of the Stoics. However, as Wildberg has argued, the use of “προαίρεσις” to mean something approaching the medieval/modern notion of a will is already at play in Simplicius’ commentary on Epictetus. As far as using the word “Wille” goes, Schulthess was not imposing any modern concept that was not already in Simplicius’ commentary on Epictetus.

Kant’s own view of the will is that it is nothing other than practical reason, which is simply our faculty of reason in its practical application. As for Epictetus himself, while some scholars interpret his term προαίρεσις to mean something like the will, in the sense of a faculty, Wildberg has raised doubts about this interpretation. He has convincingly showed that in most cases in the Encheiridion (where Simplicius sees something like a will at play) the term actually denotes a “moral choice one can make in the form of a rational commitment.” In other words, Epictetus maintains to some extent the pre-Stoic, Aristotelian usage of the term to mean a kind of “policy decision” that is made “before action,” as Sorabji helpfully puts it. I agree with Wildberg and Sorabji that προαίρεσις in most cases means a kind of moral choice/decision and not the faculty of making such choices/decisions. However, there is at least one case in the Discourses where Epictetus does unambiguously use the term as meaning the faculty. In a discourse where Epictetus repeats the claim several times that all of our faculties (δυνάμεις) are subordinate to our “prohairetic faculty” (προαιρετικὴ δύναμις), which makes use of them all, he...

65 Wildberg 2014, 345-349.
69 Wildberg 2014, 344.
70 See Sorabji 2007, 151-53, where he also explains several important differences between Epictetian and Aristotelian usage of the term.
suddenly switches to the term προαιρεσίς where we would expect him to say again προαιρετικὴ
dύναμις.

Τί ἐστι τὸ χρώμενον; προαιρεσίς. τί ἐπιμελεῖται πάντων; προαιρεσίς. τί ὅλον ἀναιρεῖ τὸν
ἀνθρωπὸν ποτὲ μὲν λιμῷ, ποτὲ δ᾽ ἁγχόνῃ, ποτὲ δὲ κατὰ κρημνοῦ; προαιρεσίς. ἐίτα τούτῳ
τί ἱσχυρότερον ἐν ἀνθρώπωις ἐστίν; (Diss. 2.23.17-18)

What is that which uses [the rest]? προαιρεσίς. What is that which attends to everything?
προαιρεσίς. What is it that destroys one’s whole person, sometimes with hunger,
sometimes with a noose, sometimes by hurling him over a cliff? προαιρεσίς. What, then,
is stronger than this among humans? (tr. mine)

The claim here that one’s προαιρεσίς is that which uses everything suggests an active
faculty, rather than a kind of choice. That προαιρεσίς here must stand for προαιρετικὴ δύναμις is
corroborated further on in the discourse where Epictetus repeats the participle of the verb “to
use” (χρώμενον) but with προαιρετικὴ δύναμις as the subject this time and the other faculties
again as objects. 71 The nature of this faculty is explained earlier in the same discourse, where it is
equated with the faculty of making use of impressions (χρηστικὴ τῶν φαντασιῶν), 72 which we
know from elsewhere is precisely Epictetus’ definition of the rational faculty (λογικὴ δύναμις). 73
In another discourse, that in us which “makes use of everything else” (τὸ πᾶσιν τοῖς ἄλλοις
χρώμενον) is equated with the ἡγεμονικὸν, i.e. our “command center.” 74 Thus, for Epictetus the
rational faculty, the command center, and the prohairetic faculty are interchangeable terms.
While προαιρεσίς by itself usually means a moral choice or decision, Epictetus does, at least
occasionally, also use the term to denote the faculty which makes such choices, which is none
other than our faculty of reason, or our command center.

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71 Diss. 2.23.28.
72 Diss. 2.23.8.1.
73 Diss. 1.1.5.3.
74 As Sorabji translates it. See Sorabji 2007, 151.
This exceptional usage of προαιρεσις in Epictetus is important for the present discussion because it shows that Simplicius and the later translators of Epictetus did not invent a completely new meaning of προαιρεσις. They merely promoted a rare usage of it and ignored, or did not see, its primary meaning. If Kant read Schulthess’ Epictetus, Kant would have found not just the claim that only a good will is good. He would have also found the claim that the will is nothing other than the faculty of reason. Both of these claims are crucial for Kant. While these readings owe much to the later reception of the text, they would have served to guide Kant to a few important and genuinely Epictetian claims about the nature of the rational/prohairetic faculty. Epictetus insists that reason is itself practical (it can make decisions and set its purpose without the aid of desire or inclination) and that freedom consists in following right reason. Both of these claims are also central for Kant.

To return to our Gedankenexperiment, Simplicius would probably see several of Kant’s important claims about the will as being very much in line with his own interpretation of Epictetus’ προαιρεσις. Moreover, he would be able to find antecedents to some of Kant’s claims about the will even in earlier Stoics who had no technical term that could be interpreted (or misinterpreted) as meaning something like the “will.” Take, for example, the following famous claim from the Groundwork.

A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes...but only because of its volition, that is, it is good in itself and, regarded for itself, is to be valued incomparably higher than all that could merely be brought about by it…. (G 4:394)

This is reminiscent of Cicero’s analogy of the archer whose purpose is to aim as well as he can and not to be concerned with whether he hits the mark or not. Hitting the mark (which is a
analogous to selecting a preferred indifferent) is incomparably less important than aiming rightly (which is analogous to setting the right end for one’s action).⁷⁵

All this is not to say that Kant is merely recycling Stoic material. Our Simplicius would likely be impressed with how Kant took up certain Stoic tenets – such as the claim that the consequences of one’s action have no bearing on the rectitude of said action – and developed them in new ways as part of his own ethical system. Furthermore, regarding the concept of the will, Simplicius would see that Kant developed a theory of practical reason and its limitations that went far beyond any Stoic account. In any case, our time-traveler’s goal is to find out where the demands of Kantian ethics on our behavior diverge from Stoicism. With this end in mind, he might then proceed to inquire why Kant rejects the Ciceronian account of the honestum as the target that all humans should aim at in all their actions.

Kant’s rejection of virtue as the guiding principle of our actions probably owes more to Garve’s interpretation of Cicero than to any careful study of the original Stoic material. For Garve, the honestum was something inextricably tied to our external, public image. As Kuehn explains, “honorableness” (Ehrbarkeit) was perhaps the most important virtue in eighteenth century Prussia, and Garve seems to have taken Cicero’s honestum to be a similar concept.⁷⁶ To be fair to Garve, there is even today a tendency (as we saw in the previous chapter) to read Cicero as claiming that virtues should be cultivated because they bring social benefits like honor or renown.⁷⁷ However, our Simplicius would immediately see that this is a faulty reading of Stoicism. The ideal of virtue (ἀρετή) that the Stoics hold up has little to do with our external image. In fact, Epictetus says that one should be ready to be mocked and despised for doing the

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⁷⁵ *De Finibus* 3.22.
⁷⁷ Kuehn too reads Cicero in this way (ibid.).
right thing – an idea already expressed by Plato’s Socrates. It certainly is true that Cicero spoke of virtue using a Latin word (honestum) with much heavier social connotations than the Greek ἀρετή and, in catering to a Roman audience, he may have overemphasized the social benefits of virtue. However, even for Cicero, those benefits cannot be the chief motivating factor of our actions. The entire point of virtue being the final end is that it is not instrumental. Thus, in rebelling against the instrumental conception of honestum/Ehrbarkeit, Kant was not distancing himself from Stoicism, but was rather moving closer to it in its true form.

Having concluded that Kant’s rejection of the honestum as a final end was not actually a rejection of any genuine Stoic doctrine, our Simplicius might next explore the related question of why Kant rejected eudaimonism. Here, again, he probably would not see Kant as fundamentally opposed to Stoicism. As Engstrom has shown, the importance of happiness (Glückseligkeit) in Kant’s system has been underestimated as much as his supposed opposition to eudaimonism has been exaggerated in the scholarship. There are, of course, important differences between Kant’s view of Glückseligkeit and the Greek concept of eudaimonia. Unlike the Stoics, Kant believed that it is possible, by some accident of fortune, to be happy even if you are not morally good. Also unlike the Stoics, Kant thought that it is possible to be morally good and still not achieve happiness.

It is easy to see why Kant diverges from the Stoics on these points if we consider his conception of Glückseligkeit. He had a (very un-Stoic) idea that happiness is an empirical satisfaction of desires and inclinations. This includes rational desires. Nevertheless, Kant thus “commits himself to a hedonist account of happiness.” Or, as Christoph Horn puts it, he sees the

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79 Engstrom 2015, 103-6.
concept of happiness “with a hedonistic accent.” However, this is completely unlike the Stoic conception of *eudaimonia*, which has nothing to do with the satisfaction of desire, but is just another way of saying “living in accordance with nature” or “living virtuously.” Thus, as Horn points out, Kant’s famous jab that “All eudaimonists are therefore practical egoists” is not justified as far as the Stoics are concerned. It might apply to Epicureans, who have a similar conception of happiness as Kant does and who, unlike Kant, posit it as the highest end. However, it does not apply to the Stoics, for whom happiness is synonymous with virtue.

As Horn has helpfully illustrated, Kant offers three further objections against positing happiness as the highest end: 1) All assessments of happiness depend on experience and are thus subjective and not universal (even if widely agreed upon). 2) Notions of happiness are unstable and transitory and are thus unsuitable as a motivational basis for morality. 3) Attaining happiness is not in our power since the goods that supposedly produce happiness (*Glücksgüter*) do not remain firmly or reliably at our disposal and they are ambivalent (they may or may not end up producing happiness). These objections clearly do not apply to the conception of *eudaimonia* of the Stoics, who went out of their way to construct a theory in which *eudaimonia* is an objective and stable concept (since it is rooted in the rationality of nature) and, by their definition, always in our power to attain.

Kant is not ignorant of these Stoic claims. In his (very brief) discussion in the Critique of Practical Reason of the Epicurean and Stoic views of the *sumnum bonum*, Kant shows that he is perfectly aware that the Stoics had a non-hedonistic conception of happiness, since they equated happiness with virtue. He sees the Stoic view as asserting that “to be conscious of one’s virtue is

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81 Horn 2008, 1086.
82 VA 7:130.
83 Horn 2008, 1087.
happiness."\textsuperscript{84} He simply rejects such a conception of happiness outright. In a rare display of humor, he makes a joke ridiculing the Stoic claim that the wise man would be happy even under extreme duress. He says that when the sage who is in severe pain cries out, “Pain, however much you may torment me, I will still never admit that you are something evil (κακόν, malum),”\textsuperscript{85} the loud cry itself belies the sage’s words. He thus thought that any attempt to equate virtue with happiness was simply unconvincing. Furthermore, his own view of happiness is more in line with the Christian view of humans as frail and unable to secure happiness for themselves all on their own.\textsuperscript{86} That is why he taught in his lectures that we can only hope by our upright conduct to be \textit{worthy} of happiness.\textsuperscript{87}

Nevertheless, it is not clear if these differences in the conception of happiness by Kant and the Stoics affect how moral deliberation is to proceed in the two systems. The kind of eudaimonism that Kant is strongly opposed to is the kind where maximizing happiness is the primary motivating factor in our deliberations.\textsuperscript{88} However, Stoic deliberation does not proceed along such lines. While the Stoics were eudaimonists in the sense that, just like all the major ancient schools, they upheld the claim that the good life (εὐδαιμονία) is the final end (τέλος), they also expressed this final end in other ways, which they claimed amounted to the same thing: “living virtuously” and “living in agreement with nature”\textsuperscript{89} and following the “common law, which is the right reason that permeates everything, which is the same as Zeus.”\textsuperscript{90} As we have seen in the previous chapter, when a Stoic goes through the process of moral deliberation, the

\textsuperscript{84} KP 5:111; tr. Pluhar.
\textsuperscript{85} KP 5:60; tr. Pluhar.
\textsuperscript{86} Horn 2008, 1088.
\textsuperscript{87} C 27:247.
\textsuperscript{88} Cf. Engstrom 1996, 103.
question of happiness need not even enter the equation. Living virtuously – that is in accordance with nature – is the primary aim. “Logically speaking, the identification of this with living happily is a subsequent move,” as Cooper puts it.\textsuperscript{91}

For the Stoics, there is only one final end, which can be expressed in several different ways. For Kant, however, there are two distinct final ends: (1) the “good” (\textit{Gut}) and (2) happiness or “well-being” (\textit{Wohl}).\textsuperscript{92} The former is the “moral” good and is valued unconditionally, while the latter is the “physical” good and, though also a final end in that it is not instrumental, it is valued conditionally, viz. its goodness is dependent on the goodness of morality.\textsuperscript{93} The Stoics would agree with Kant that in moral deliberation we should set our sights on the moral good (or on the end as defined morally). They would merely disagree with Kant that it is possible to achieve this end without also, by definition, achieving \textit{eudaimonia}. For Kant, we can only hope to become worthy of happiness. For the Stoics, there is only one end, which can be either defined morally or in terms of happiness. In deliberating, we are to aim for the morally-defined good, trusting that we are thus also aiming at happiness (and that this is the only way to happiness).

In examining Kant’s rejection of eudaimonism by positing two final ends, our Simplicius would not find anything in this distinction that directly changes the way a person is to morally deliberate. Now, I am not saying that the difference between the two systems is trivial. Kant’s double-final-end system has profound implications on the way we are to think about God as well as the ways we should structure our political communities.\textsuperscript{94} There is also much to explore in

\textsuperscript{91} Cooper 1996, 275.
\textsuperscript{92} Kp\textit{V} 5:59-60.
\textsuperscript{93} I am here following Wood 1999, 311-12.
\textsuperscript{94} Wood 1999, 313.
Kant’s claim that eudaimonism inevitably results in the heteronomy of practical reason. Nevertheless, in terms of the immediate demands these two systems make on our deliberations, it is hard to find any glaring divergence. Simplicius might then consider one more way in which Kant’s ethics seems to be opposed to ancient ethics, which is that Kant claims to offer an objective way to determine the moral worth of individual actions, whereas the ancient schools supposedly looked at virtue from an agent-centered perspective and over one’s life as a whole.

The difference between ancient and modern ethics is often expressed in the idea that the ancient schools asked, “How can I attain the good life?” while modern ethics asks, “what should/must I do?” Numerous scholars have shown that this is a gross oversimplification. Nevertheless, establishing objective criteria by which to evaluate the morality of individual actions is undeniably of much greater concern to modern ethics than it was for ancient philosophers. Based on the sources available to him, Kant could have legitimately concluded that the ancient schools only gave internal, agent-centered accounts of virtuous conduct. However, our time-traveler would know that this is incorrect – as has become clear in recent decades, thanks in part to Stoic material that was unavailable to Kant. As Cooper has argued, the Stoics, unlike other ancient philosophical schools, do try to give the correctness of virtuous action “some confirmation similarly from the outside,” via their theory of what it means to follow nature, which, as we saw in chapter 2, is the same thing as following the common law.

Once again, in moving away from a perceived flaw in ancient ethics (and in trying to establish objective criteria for moral action), Kant was unwittingly moving closer to, not farther from, original Stoic doctrine. A similar thing can be said about another supposed correction he

95 KpV 5:64, discussed in Irwin 1996, 65-67, who argues that Kant’s claim relies on a hedonistic conception of what happiness is.
97 Annas 1993, 7.
made to Stoicism. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* he argues that “it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God” and he faults all of the Greek philosophical schools (including the Stoics, whom he discusses briefly in this context) for not realizing that. Their failure to realize that is why they never came up with a satisfactory account of the *sumnum bonum*. Considering his main exposure to Stoicism seems to have been Cicero via Garve, it is understandable that he would think the Stoics did not share his view, since Cicero downplays any religious element in Stoicism. However, belief in a rational, providential, and all-permeating god was crucial to the Stoic conception of the common law. It might also be that because some Stoics (in particular Seneca, whom Kant also read) mention a plurality of gods, Kant would have seen their religious views as even more distant than his claim about God. However, if Kant had had access to all the Stoic material that we have access to today, he would see that, as far as Stoic ethics is concerned, there is only one god that matters, and belief in this providential deity is a cornerstone of the concept of καθήκον/ officium.

Even if Kant (thought that he) profoundly disagreed with the Stoics on the question of the *sumnum bonum* and the importance of believing in God, the question remains how much his notion of *Pflicht* was nevertheless influenced by the Stoic concept of officium. Horn thinks that these two points of departure from the Stoics indicate that Kant did not derive his notion from the Stoics. However, his argument depends, in part, on the idea that officium “denotes only an appropriate, rationally-founded mode of behavior” and has no sense obligation. Even if that were true (which it is not), Kant would not have known that. The translations of his day rendered officium as *Pflicht*. It was only a century later that scholars mistakenly (as explained in my first chapter) began taking καθήκον/ officium to mean “appropriate action.” In reading Cicero’s

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99 KpV 5:125; tr. Pluhar.
100 Horn 2008, 1103.
examples in *De Officiis* (whether in Latin or in Garve’s translation) of the *officia* performed by Cato and Regulus, it is hard to see how Kant could have avoided the impression that these *Pflichten* of the Stoics were obligations.

Perhaps the best way to explore how much Kant’s notion of *Pflicht* may be indebted to Stoic *officium* is to look at the demands these concepts place on our behavior in each system. In the previous chapter, I have attempted to reconstruct from the extant sources the system of criteria for right action which the Stoics derived from their idea of following nature. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that my account is correct. Let us then proceed to compare Kant’s criteria for right action to those offered by the Stoics.

**The First Formulation of the Categorical Imperative**

In order to compare Kant’s categorical imperative with the Stoic criteria for right action, our late-antique philosopher would first have to understand what Kant means by acting “from duty.” In reading the *Groundwork*, he would find that Kant, just as the Stoics, did not claim to be inventing a new concept in “duty” but, rather, appealed to what he saw as a “common notion.” He would also find that Kant distinguished between actions “from duty” (*aus Pflicht*) and actions “in conformity with duty” (*pflichtmäßig*), where only the former have true moral worth. While reminiscent in certain respects of the Stoic distinction between perfect duties (τέλεια καθήκοντα or κατορθώματα or recte facta) and middle duties (μέσα καθήκοντα or media officia), this is an original distinction on Kant’s part which ties in with his own moral psychology. The similarities are that only acts *from* duty for Kant have true moral worth, just as only perfect duties are acts of virtue for the Stoics. Also, while acts done merely *in conformity with* duty lack true moral worth

101 G 4:389. While the Stoics did coin the term καθήκον, they never claimed to be introducing a new concept, often using the more common word δέον as synonymous. Cf. D.L. 7.171.7 as well as Epictetus *Diss.* 1.22.7, who speaks of the “universal concept” or “preconception” (πρόληψις) of obligation/necessity (δέον).
(just as middle duties for the Stoics do not qualify as virtuous), it is still preferable that people act in conformity with duty rather than against duty, just as it is preferable in the Stoic system that people perform middle duties rather than neglect or go against their duties.

A fundamental difference in Kant’s classification can be seen in the following passage from the *Groundwork*.

From love of humankind I am willing to admit that even most of our actions are in conformity with duty; but if we look more closely at the intentions and aspirations in them we everywhere come upon the dear self, which is always turning up; and it is on this that their purpose is based, not on the strict command of duty, which would often require self-denial. (G 4:407, tr. Gregor)

On the one hand, Kant here echoes the Stoic view that people perform middle duties all the time though they fall short of truly virtuous action. On the other hand, we see that for Kant acting from duty often involves acting against our inclinations. As Wood explains, if we feel any desire or inclination besides the incentive of duty that simultaneously moves us to do the right thing, then our action is not done from duty. Only if the incentive of duty must either overcome opposing incentives or “move us to act without any cooperating ones,” are we acting from duty, strictly speaking.102

Kant is certainly not saying that you can only be a good person if you are constantly battling against your desires and inclinations. He does not think that acts in conformity with duty (but not from duty) are morally worthless.103 What he is saying is that he thinks we feel a special degree of esteem (*Hochschätzung*; sc. more than mere approval) for a moral action someone does if we see that that person did it for no other reason than out of duty.104 Interestingly, under Kant’s view, all of the Stoic sage’s actions would have true moral worth, since there are no non-rational

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103 Wood 1999, 33.
104 Wood 1999, 27.
incentives that could cooperate with reason in leading the sage to act in conformity with duty. Unlike Kant, the Stoics had a highly unified theory of human motivation according to which all humans are essentially rational beings who do not have any non-rational capacities that could conflict with reason or give rise to impulses to act. Emotions and desires for the Stoics are mistakes of reason, not separate inclinations or faculties. When non-sages fail to do their καθήκον, it is never because they are overpowered by irrational inclinations, but only because they reason incorrectly. The sage, meanwhile, always reasons correctly and always follows the moral law purely and solely on the basis of reason and, thus, on the Kantian model, always acts from duty.

Earlier I mentioned that the Kantian distinction between actions in conformity with duty and those from duty is reminiscent of, but different from, the Stoic distinction between middle καθήκοντα and the perfect καθήκοντα (or κατορθώματα) of the sage. We have just seen that perfect καθήκοντα, if looked at from a Kantian perspective, would qualify as actions from duty. Conversely, not all actions from duty would qualify as perfect καθήκοντα in the Stoic system. Some actions from duty (where the incentive of duty is the only motivating factor to act) could qualify as perfect καθήκοντα if performed by a sufficiently wise person. However, the actions from duty where there are competing inclinations simply do not fit into the Stoic account of human motivation at all.

What about middle καθήκοντα vs. actions in conformity with duty? Middle καθήκοντα resemble actions in conformity with duty in that an agent does something which duty prescribes, but not with the right mental state that would make that action have a special degree of moral worth. Presumably, some middle καθήκοντα (e.g. actions that accidentally align with what is morally prescribed) would fail to qualify as actions from duty, not because the agent acts on
incentives other than duty, but because the agent does not reason well and is thus not acting on the basis of any understanding of what the moral law requires. However, such actions would qualify, for Kant, as actions *in conformity with* duty. Interestingly, other middle καθήκοντα (e.g. where a morally progressing agent has a pretty good understanding of virtue that falls just short of the perfect wisdom of the sage) would actually qualify as actions *from* duty in the Kantian system. Kant does not think that one needs a high degree of wisdom in order to act *from* duty. The examples he provides in the *Groundwork* of actions done *from* duty\(^{105}\) involve ordinary people (like shopkeepers) who are definitely not sages.

Kant held that the Stoic figure of the sage is just an imaginary ideal, and not a very useful one at that.\(^{106}\) For real people, even good ones, Kant thinks that the demands of duty often require self-denial and inner conflict. It would be interesting to explore how Kant’s view of acting *from* duty – viz. sometimes against our inclinations – is related to his view of the human psyche as something more complex than the Stoics conceived of and furthermore as plagued by a radical propensity to evil. The concept of radical evil is, of course, completely un-Stoic and adds another dimension to Kant’s already complex moral psychology. He likely derived his concept of radical evil from the Christian/Augustinian tradition. In fact, when Kant published his article *On the Radical Evil in Human Nature*\(^{107}\) seven years after publishing the *Groundwork*, many of his admirers were shocked and dismayed that Kant seemed to be introducing a Christian element into his moral philosophy. Goethe famously wrote that Kant had “criminally smeared his philosopher’s cloak with the shameful stain of radical evil, after it had taken him a long human life to cleanse it from many a dirty prejudice, so that Christians too might yet be enticed to kiss

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\(^{105}\) G 4:397-99.  
\(^{107}\) Which was re-published a year later as the first part of his *Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason*.  

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its hem.\textsuperscript{108} Whether or not there is any truth to Goethe’s claim, the concept of radical evil adds yet another complexity to Kant’s moral psychology which would be interesting to explore further in terms of how it might distance his notion of duty from that of the Stoics.

Our main purpose in this study is to see specifically how the demands of duty on our actions according to Kant differs from the Stoic account. Let us then consider how Kant thinks we are to determine our duty. The answer, of course, lies in the categorical imperative, which is first formulated with reference to “maxims.” So, what is a maxim? Its precise meaning is debated, since Kant never elaborates in his published works beyond saying that it is a “subjective principle of volition” or “of acting.”\textsuperscript{109} However, in his lectures he apparently defined a maxim as the major premise of a practical syllogism.\textsuperscript{110} It is often said that Kant borrowed the notion of a maxim from Wolff, whose view of the reasoning structure of the practical syllogism was the following. 1) $X$ is good; 2) Doing $Y$ will achieve $X$; 3) Therefore, doing $Y$ is good.\textsuperscript{111} Here, the first statement (sc. the major premise) is the maxim.

Wolff’s view of a maxim is thus fully compatible with the standard Aristotelian view of the major premise of a practical syllogism, as proposed in book 7 of the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, except that Aristotle does not limit the predicate of the major premise to “good.” In this respect, Wolff’s conception is more reminiscent of what Epictetus says about “opinions” (δόγματα) which co-determine our actions. While Aristotle never went so far as to insist that we always act on the basis of practical syllogisms, Epictetus does categorically state that there is no other (external) cause of our acting or of our not acting than opinions (δόγματα).\textsuperscript{112} Moreover, he

\begin{footnotes}
\item[108] Fackenheim 1996, 21. Goethe wrote this in a letter to Herder on 7 June 1793.
\item[110] McCarty 2009, 5.
\item[111] McCarty 2009, 5.
\item[112] Diss. 1.11.33. “ὑπολήψεις καὶ δόγματα” is hendiadys, as is clear from what follows. While δόγμα can also have the technical meaning of “doctrine,” it can also just mean “opinion.”
\end{footnotes}
claims that every good action proceeds from a good δόγµα, and all bad actions proceed from bad δόγµατα.\footnote{Diss. 1.11.35-37; Cf. Diss. 1.29.3.} In a discourse specifically about “applying our opinions of good and bad,” Epictetus repeats the claim that all calamities result from bad δόγµατα and good deeds result from good ones, and it is clear from his examples that these δόγµατα function as major premises in practical syllogisms. Furthermore, they seem identical in form with Wolff’s maxims in that their predicate is “good” (or “bad”).

Kant seemingly echoes Epictetus when he maintains that actions are determined by maxims and that the moral worth of actions is also determined by the content of the maxims from which they proceed. In the \textit{Groundwork} he says that “an action from duty has its moral worth \textit{not in the purpose} to be attained by it but in the maxim in accordance with which it is decided upon.”\footnote{G 4:399, tr. Gregor (emphasis in original).} Kant here further echoes Epictetus (and the Stoics in general) in saying that the rightness of an action “does not depend upon the realization of the object of the action.”\footnote{G 4:399-400.} However, when we turn to the examples of maxims that Kant offers, we see that they do not resemble those of Wolff (or Epictetus’s δόγµατα). For example, one of the maxims Kant discusses for the purpose of showing that it fails the test of the categorical imperative is: “When I believe myself to be in need of money, I will borrow money and promise to repay it, although I know I will never do so.”\footnote{G 4:422, tr. Wood.}

This is evidently not the same kind of thing as Wolff’s maxims or Epictetus’s δόγµατα. Some scholars try to explain away the difference by arguing that Kantian maxims can be
expressed as composite Wolffian maxims or “practical sorites.” It seems to me there is a simpler solution, namely to see Kant as adopting Moses Mendelssohn’s conception of a maxim:

In every legitimate action that a human being undertakes, he silently makes the following rational inference: Whenever the property A is encountered, my duty requires me to do B. The present case has the property A; therefore, and so on. The major premise of this rational inference is a maxim, a general rule of life.

McCarty, whom I have been following here, quotes this passage but prefers to explain Kantian maxims as composite Wolffian ones. I do not understand why he does not see Kant as closer to Mendelssohn’s account. Perhaps Mendelssohn’s maxims can also be expressed as a set of Wolffian ones, though I do not see how that would work.

In fact, there seems to be one important reason why Kant may prefer Mendelssohn’s formulation to that of Wolff, which is that Mendelssohnian maxims work better with FUL and FLN. Wolffian maxims (and Epictetian δόγματα) are simple judgments about what is good or bad. If we interpret FUL with the Wolffian idea of a maxim, we get something like “Act only in accordance with that [judgment about what is good or bad] through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.” It is hard to see how such judgments could be thought of as (or willed to be) laws or formulated in a law-like way. It seems clear that Kant’s conception of maxims requires that they actually describe a course of action to be done, just like Mendelssohn’s do. Mendelssohnian maxims, unlike Wolffian ones, have a rule-like structure that allows them to be universalized, and thus to be formulated as laws. In any case, let us proceed to the way in which Kant claims we are to test the validity of our maxims.

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117 McCarty 2009, 7-8.
According to Kant, a principle of volition is a maxim if it is subjective and a law if it is objective. By following the categorical imperative, we ensure that we act on an objective principle of volition. The first formulation of the categorical imperative is stated in two ways. The first, often called the “formula of universal law” or FUL, states: “Act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.” A few lines down, Kant offers a similar formulation, usually referred to as the “formula of the law of nature” or FLN, which states: “Act as if the maxim of your action should through your will become a universal law of nature.” Scholars generally agree that FUL and FLN fall short of later formulations of the categorical imperative in that they provide no practical laws. What they do offer is a permissibility test for maxims.

As our late-antique philosopher studied FUL and FLN, he would recognize them as being similar to the Stoic κανόνες/regulae discussed in the previous chapter, in that they do not establish positive duties but can only rule out (or fail to rule and therefore permit) maxims. Just as the Stoic regulae do not test actions per se but only the end for which an action is performed (which can be expressed as a Epictetian/Wolffian maxim), so too the two permissibility tests contained in FUL/FLN “are tests of maxims, not of action-kinds,” as Wood explains. “Their results can show only that it is permissible or impermissible to act on a certain maxim, never that we have a positive duty either to follow a maxim or to perform an action of a certain kind.” The problem, however, with these permissibility tests is that they are inadequate, as even scholars charitable to Kant have pointed out. FUL/FLN can yield both “false positives” (actions

120 It is beyond the scope of the present study to explore the differences between the two formulations.
121 Cf. Wood 1999, 81.
122 Wood 1999, 81.
123 It would be a distraction from the present discussion to explain the two permissibility tests entailed in FUL/FLN. They are elaborated and discussed in Wood, 1999, 84-100.
124 Wood 1999, 100.
that seem to pass the permissibility tests and yet are immoral) and “false negatives” (actions that seem innocent but fail the test). Our late-antique philosopher would probably not be troubled by the false positives, since the whole point, for the Stoics, of having an assortment of *regulae* is that not every *regula* will be able to filter our every bad action we are considering, and so the more you have the better. However, the false negatives would certainly be worrying, since the only way that *regulae* can work in the Stoic method of deliberation is if they never disqualify an action being considered unless it truly is motivated by the wrong reason.

Interestingly, the types of maxims that come out as false negatives in the FUL/FLN test are ones that the Stoic system can easily accommodate because of its role ethics. For example, Onora O’Neill offers the following maxim that fails the universalizability test: “I will buy a clockwork train, but never sell one.” Clearly the maxim is self-defeating if universalized because if everyone decided to buy a clockwork train but never sell one, then no one would actually be able to buy one since no one is selling. Thus, what appears to be a perfectly innocent (certainly not immoral) maxim is ruled out by FUL/FLN. But such innocuous non-universalizable maxims are not ruled out by the Stoic permissibility tests (sc. the *regulae*), so long as one’s motive in adopting such a maxim is not base.

Moreover, the Stoic FPF (four *persona* formulation) could even *generate* such a maxim as spelling out one’s καθῆκον for someone whose individual social or professional roles warrant such action. For example, if a Stoic has decided to follow an austere, Cynic-style life and has vowed never to sell anything, and if (for whatever reason) an occasion arises when said Stoic could be of service to his community by buying a clockwork train, then, by thinking through the

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126 As discussed in chapter 3.
127 Quoted in Wood 1999, 105.
128 Which is completely compatible with Stoicism. Cf. Epictetus *Diss.* 3.22.
FPF, he might arrive at the conclusion that it is his καθῆκον to buy a clockwork train and never sell one. This example is admittedly fanciful, but it illustrates the flexibility of the Stoic system, which makes rigorous demands on our actions without requiring that they be universalizable – a requirement which creates problems for Kant’s FUL because it can yield false negatives and false positives. I am not here trying to denigrate Kant’s first formulation of the categorical imperative. I am merely following what seems widely acknowledged in the scholarship, which is that FUL and FLN are problematic in their derivation\textsuperscript{129} and insufficient for the purpose of grounding positive duties. Many scholars (and even Kant himself\textsuperscript{130}) see the second formulation of the categorical imperative – the “formula of humanity” or FH – as being more complete. So let us turn to that next.

**The Formula of Humanity**

Kant’s formula of humanity (or FH) states: “So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or that of another, always at the same time as an end, never as a means.”\textsuperscript{131} Kant derives this formula using certain concepts that would seem unfamiliar to any ancient philosopher, such as that of an “existent end in itself.” Nevertheless, the resulting FH is reminiscent of the Stoic formula consisting of the doctrines that all humans are part of the common body of humanity, that we are constituted by nature as social and cooperative, that the interest of any individual is the same as the interest of humanity as a whole, and that it is wrong to harm another for one’s own personal gain. In fact, scholars have already noted the many parallels between *De Officiis* 3,

\textsuperscript{129} Wood 1999, 97-105.
\textsuperscript{130} Wood 1999, 139.
\textsuperscript{131} G 4:429, tr. Wood.
where Cicero discusses the need for such a formula, and the *Groundwork*. Reinhold Glei, in the only relatively recent article that directly compares Cicero’s formula with Kant’s categorical imperative, claims that it is not far-fetched to take Cicero’s formula to be a categorical imperative, and that “Cicero's formula and Kant's imperative are different in formulation but identical in substance.”

Glei, here, is operating under the common but mistaken assumption that Cicero’s formula is just the imperative against harming others for personal gain, which Cicero offers right after mentioning the need for a formula to assist in moral deliberation. As argued in the previous chapter, the actual formula is not that (or any other) imperative but, rather, is the set of key doctrines that Cicero proceeds to offer about the providential order of the world and the common body of humanity of which every human is an organic part. This set of doctrines is meant to provide guidance during moral deliberation by helping us choose an action that is compatible with the demands of virtue and of our roles in life. Nevertheless, it is likely that Kant took Cicero’s formula to be what Glei and most other scholars have taken it to be. Furthermore, like most scholars today, Kant likely took the ensuing discussion of the key doctrines (what I take to be the true formula) as justifications for the imperative against harming others. If this is true, then Kant might have thought that he was improving on Cicero’s attempt at an imperative formula by offering a more sophisticated one grounded in an updated metaphysics and epistemology.

Glei’s motivation in writing his article is not to claim that Kant was influenced by Cicero (he leaves that question open), but to argue that we may better understand Cicero by looking at

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132 Besides Reich 1939b, see Glei 1999.
133 Glei 1999, 52; tr. mine.
Kant’s expanded arguments for a similar imperative against harming others.\textsuperscript{134} Nevertheless, his observations offer very helpful starting points for how we might proceed to uncover Ciceronian influences in Kant. For example, he suggests that three of the main considerations in the passage where Cicero discusses his \textit{formula} correspond to three approaches Kant takes to the categorical imperative in the \textit{Groundwork}. First, the idea that a \textit{formula} is required for moral deliberation corresponds to Kant’s first attempt to formulate the moral law (which yields FUL and FLN). Next, the idea in Cicero’s passage that all humans share a common rationality is also a crucial claim in Kant’s derivation of FH. Finally, the idea that every human belongs to a common body of humanity has echoes in Kant’s “formula of the realm of ends.”\textsuperscript{135}

Glei thinks that this “tripartite division of argumentation” in Cicero only reveals itself in light of Kant. His reluctance to conclude that Kant was influenced by Cicero seems due, in part, to his idea (again, shared by other scholars) that Cicero’s discussion is not an explication of standard Stoic doctrine but, rather, represents his own attempt to justify tyrannicide.\textsuperscript{136} However, as explained in the previous chapter, while Cicero may indeed have take the opportunity to score a political point, his discussion of the \textit{formula} has parallels in all three of the Roman Stoics, who also mention the same key doctrines that Cicero discusses and, like him, connect them with the notion of \textit{περίστασις} – a dire circumstance in which normally prohibited actions may become morally prescribed (like killing a friend who is aiming at tyranny). When we recognize that Cicero here is indeed offering standard Stoic doctrine, and that Kant may have encountered the very same doctrines in Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, it becomes much more plausible

\textsuperscript{134} Glei does this “fully aware of the anachronism” involved: Glei, 1999, 50.
\textsuperscript{135} Cf. Glei 1999, 53.
\textsuperscript{136} Glei 1999, 53-58.
to think that the Stoics may help us better understand Kant’s arguments, rather than the other way around.

So much for historical considerations. Let us return to our main objective, which is to consider how the demands of FH on our actions compare with the demands of καθῆκον. In terms of how we treat other people, FH does not seem to require of us anything that the Stoic formula does not also require. One might here object that the Stoics tolerated slavery while Kant maintained the equal worth of all rational beings. However, I would argue that the Stoics also maintained the equal worth of all rational beings. We may fault them for not being abolitionists. But let us consider for a moment the ideas of Kant and those of the Stoics in complete isolation from their social and historical context. Imagine if we presented both Kant’s FH and the Stoic formula to someone today who knew nothing at all about either Kant or the Stoics, and asked that person, which of these formulas is more conducive to freedom and the abolition of slavery? That person would probably have a hard time answering.

In a passage in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant enumerates sixteen ethical duties, of which eleven are directly derived from FH.\(^\text{137}\) All of them, except for the duty against suicide, are in full agreement with the demands of Stoic ethics. The case of suicide is interesting because it shows perhaps the key difference between FH and Stoic doctrine in terms of their demands on our actions. For the Stoics, life is merely a prefered indifferent. That does not mean they thought you could go around killing people. You are prohibited from doing so by the fundamental doctrine that “all rational animals exist for the sake of each other.” However, it does mean that a sage may commit suicide if continuing to live virtuously is no longer possible. Because of Kant’s

\(^{137}\) MS 6:423-462. Collected and listed in Wood 1999, 140.
original argument that humanity is an “existent end in itself,” he can rule out suicide completely. And yet he was at least tempted to allow that Cato’s suicide may have been justified.\(^{138}\)

I do not doubt that there are interesting differences between the demands of Kant’s FH and Stoic καθῆκον on our actions that play out on a macro or societal level. However, in terms of immediate demands, I cannot see any striking differences (besides the case of suicide). Of course, how Kant derives FH is another matter entirely, which sets Kant very much apart from the Stoics. His line of argumentation is both complex and problematic. In fact, Kant himself was unsatisfied with his derivation and tried to offer different arguments for it in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.\(^{139}\)

Kant’s attempts at deriving FH seem highly original. Nevertheless, there may even here be more points of contact with Stoicism than has been noticed. While scholars disagree on the precise form of Kant’s argument for FH, it seems to proceed (how exactly is debated) from the idea that all humans, under certain circumstances, “experience their wills being moved through the moral law” to the inference that all human beings are subject to the same moral law.\(^{140}\) Glei has already hinted at a connection between this approach in Kant and the Stoic claim found in Cicero (both in *De Officiis* and *De Legibus*) that the common rationality of all humans implies that we are all subject to the same moral law.\(^{141}\) I offer another comparandum from the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius.

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\(^{139}\) Kitcher 2017, 241.

\(^{140}\) Kitcher 2017, 218.

\(^{141}\) This case is made in the *formula* passage (*Off.* 3.27), and argued more explicitly at *Leg.* 1.33.11: “*quibus enim ratio natura data est, isdem etiam recta ratio data est, ergo et lex, quae est recta ratio in iubendo et vetando; si lex, ius quoque; et omnibus ratio; ius igitur datum est omnibus.*” (“For those creatures who have received the gift of reason from Nature have also received right reason, and therefore they have also received the gift of Law, which is right reason applied to command and prohibition. And if they have received Law, they have received Justice also. Now all men have received reason; therefore all men have received Justice.” tr. C. W. Keyes). Cf. Glei 1999, 55-56.
Εἰ τὸ νοερὸν ἡμῖν κοινόν, καὶ ὁ λόγος, καθ' ὅν λογικοί ἐσμεν, κοινός· εἰ τοῦτο, καὶ ὁ προστακτικὸς τῶν ποιητῶν ἢ μὴ λόγος κοινός· εἰ τοῦτο, καὶ ὁ νόμος κοινός· εἰ τοῦτο, πολίται ἐσμεν· εἰ τοῦτο, πολιτεύματος τινος μετέχομεν· εἰ τοῦτο, ὁ κόσμος ὡσανεὶ πόλεις ἐστὶ· τίνος γὰρ ἄλλου φήσει τις τὸ τῶν ἄνθρωπων πᾶν γένος κοινοῦ πολιτεύματος μετέχειν; (4.4.1)

If the intellectual capacity is common to us all, common too is the reason, which makes us rational creatures. If so, that reason also is common which tells us to do or not to do. If so, law also is common. If so, we are citizens. If so, we are fellow-members of an organised community. If so, the Universe is as it were a state—for of what other single polity can the whole race of mankind be said to be fellow-members? (tr. Haines)

What I find interesting here is that Marcus Aurelius and Kant both try to move from the individual’s conception of one’s rationality to the idea that this is a shared attribute of all humans and from there conclude that we are all bound by the same law. As mentioned earlier, Kant was familiar with Marcus Aurelius and may well have encountered this passage. He may also have encountered the similar argument in Cicero’s De Legibus mentioned above. Comparing Kant’s derivation of FH with Stoic attempts at grounding the concept of a common law in common human rationality seems like a potentially fruitful topic for further investigation.

I will not here discuss the two further formulations of the categorical imperative that Kant offers (the “formula of autonomy” and the “formula of the realm of ends”) because my purpose has been to compare the practical demands of Kantian duty with those of καθήκον, and most of the duties Kant enumerates are derived from FH. Moreover, the groundwork for comparing the formula of autonomy to Stoic ethics has already been laid by John Cooper, who has shown that the Stoics had a concept of autonomy (though they rarely used that word) which anticipated the

142 The argument here presented by Marcus Aurelius may well have been already articulated by the early Stoics. Cf. Cicero’s similar argument at Leg. 1.33.11 in the previous note. Cf. Vander Waerdt 1994 for a reconstruction of Zeno’s argument that there is a common law binding all humans.
Kantian concept in many respects. Exploring how the formula of the realm of ends might set Kantian ethics apart from Stoicism is a project that has yet to be undertaken.

**Conclusion**

To wrap up our *Gedankenexperiment*, our late-antique philosopher, though doubtless impressed with Kant’s critical and metaphysical projects, when turning his attention to the demands of the categorical imperative on our behavior would not find much that is not also demanded by the Stoic conception of καθήκον. Apart from the duty prohibiting suicide, all of the duties that Kant enumerates as following from the categorical imperative are also demanded by Stoic ethics. Furthermore, our time-traveler might even find Kant’s system unhelpful in everyday situations where the Stoic method of deliberation offers a systematic way to determine one’s καθήκον. While the demands of Kantian duty are, for the most part, included in the demands of καθήκον, the Stoic conception of duty is much broader. The Stoic system offers the moral agent a way to determine his or her duty in virtually any situation.

Because of the “vastly wider range” that καθήκον covers compared to Kantian duty, Cooper suggests that:

> if we should choose to call all the Stoic duties *moral* duties, we should frankly admit that we are employing so widened a conception of morality as to risk losing contact with what we nowadays understand by that term.144

While he certainly makes a valid point, another way to think of καθήκον is that the Stoics ask us to think morally about every situation we find ourselves in. Every action for them is morally important and contributes either to our progress or to our wretchedness. And they have one unified method of moral deliberation which can equally guide us through everyday situations.

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143 Cooper 2003.
144 Cooper 1996, 277.
that we do not think of as morally crucial (and where Kant offers no guidance) as well as moments of moral crisis. Furthermore, since the Stoic “algorithm” for determining one’s καθήκοντα takes into account differences of individual temperament, abilities, and social roles, it avoids the false negatives of FUL and can generate more specialized, custom-tailored duties for different people while still being rigorous and demanding and not allowing anyone to consider themselves exceptionally entitled to anything or to think that they can take exception to rules that apply to everyone else.
Conclusion

In these final remarks I would like to give an overview of the main claims I have made in this dissertation and indicate areas where further research might be especially fruitful. In the first chapter I made the case that, contrary to the common assumption, the term καθῆκον did not denote merely “appropriate action” but, rather, [morally] “required/prescribed action.” I did this by offering a philological survey of all pre-Stoic occurrences of the verb καθήκειν (from which καθῆκον is derived) in the extant literature. As I showed, the verb, which originally meant “to have come down,” eventually came to mean “to be prescribed/required/established” (usually by tradition, nature, decree, or some other source of authority). If the verb did also denote appropriateness, this was a less common usage. In any case, it was the strongly normative meaning of the term that the Stoics availed themselves of when they adopted it. For them, a καθῆκον is an action that is required and prescribed. It is therefore not unreasonable to translate καθήκειν into English as “duty,” though in some contexts where its literal meaning is felt, “prescribed action” is more suitable. Besides contributing to a better understanding of the Stoic term’s origins, I hope that my study may prove useful to future editors of ancient Greek lexica. The current definitions of καθήκειν in the major dictionaries of ancient Greek could be revised, for the benefit of scholars and translators alike.

What I did not consider in my philological survey were classical inscriptions. If there is lingering doubt about the original usages of καθήκειν, looking at inscriptions may prove useful for establishing its meaning more firmly. Also, more work could be done on the pre-Ciceronian history of the term officium in Rome. While it is commonly assumed that Cicero was the first to
translate καθήκον as officium, this inference rests solely on the fact that Atticus apparently disagreed with Cicero that officium is the optimal translation.¹ It is entirely possible, however, that the Roman playwrights of the second century BC had already associated officium with καθήκον. We know that the Stoic term had found its way into the plays of Menander,² which were then translated into Latin. Sadly, we cannot compare any of the instances in the Roman plays where officium appears to any Greek originals. Thus, it is hard to prove that the Latin word was being used to translate καθήκον. Nevertheless, there are some places in early Roman comedy where officium is used in ways that are reminiscent of the Stoic concept.³ A careful survey of the occurrences of officium across the plays may be able to offer clues as to whether or not the term was translating καθήκον. If it turns out that the playwrights had already associated the two concepts over a hundred years before Cicero, that would significantly change our understanding of the reception of Stoicism at Rome.

In the second chapter I argued that καθήκοντα are not fixed rules of conduct but are situation-specific prescriptions for action. I built on the arguments of Vander Waerdt, Inwood, and Vogt, who pioneered the “no-rules” interpretation over the past two decades. This new approach is quite exciting, not just because it makes the Stoic theory of duty unique, but because, if correct, it implies that we are just now uncovering a key aspect of the theory that was lost and lay hidden for thousands of years. Another related and recent breakthrough in Stoic scholarship has been in understanding and contextualizing the disturbing theses attributed to the Stoics. Under the no-rules interpretation, these ostensibly shocking claims cease to be shocking and begin to look like sophisticated arguments against the infallibility of fixed rules of conduct and

¹ Epistulae ad Atticum 16.11.4.13.
³ Especially this fragment of a play by Caecilius Statius: Homo homini deus est si officium suum sciat (quoted at Symmachus Ep. 9.114). For similar language used by the Stoics see Plutarch Stoic. absurd. 1058.B.11 as well as M.A. 4.16.1.2. Cf. Plautus Asinaria 495.
in favor of the Stoics’ own flexible account of prescribed action. I have argued that some of the disturbing theses can be best understood in the context of περιστατικά καθήκοντα, which should be translated as “duties in dire circumstances” and not as “καθήκοντα dependent on circumstance,” as the phrase is often rendered. My reconstruction of the Stoic classificatory structure of the different types of καθήκοντα offers a new way to visualize how these duties in dire circumstances relate to other types of duties and why it is that any action (described without reference to virtue) can be a duty in one situation but a moral error in another.

In the third chapter, I attempted to uncover the method of deliberation that the Stoics offered for finding one’s καθήκον. This is a difficult task because no such method is explicitly laid out in the extant sources. So far, scholars have mainly tried to understand Stoic moral deliberation from the perspective of the sage. As a result, the models they have come up with do not offer much practical guidance for non-sages. But the Stoics do seem to have been concerned with offering a comprehensive guide to life even for non-sages. By collecting and collating the practical advice found throughout the sources for finding one’s duty, I was able to reconstruct a method of moral deliberation that seems consistent with all the sources and is useful for ordinary people. This method is remarkably practical, flexible, and sophisticated, and provides a more nuanced picture of Stoic ethics compared to the traditional view of Stoic virtue being an “all or nothing” affair.

In the second half of the third chapter, I argued that “role ethics” was not an innovation of Epictetus but was a key component of the Stoic theory of καθήκον at least since the time of Panaetius. Further studies might be able to uncover evidence of role ethics even in the Early Stoa. One place to start would be to look for evidence that early Stoics allowed for significant differences in the temperaments of different individuals (as did all of the later extant authors).
Another place to look might be the fragments where the early Stoics discuss tragedy. One scholar has already suggested that some of the disturbing theses attributed to the Stoics may have been originally inspired by discussions of tragedy and of the horrific acts that often take place on the tragic stage. Their preoccupation with drama may indicate that they were indeed interested in roles from the beginning.

While the epitomes of Stoic ethics and the comments about Stoicism from non-Stoic authors paint a prohibitively austere picture of Stoicism, all of the of the complete extant texts we have are quite relatable and accessible (as can be seen by their newfound popularity among popular audiences today). The standard explanation for this discrepancy for centuries was that the original Stoics were moral fanatics (to borrow Kant’s term) who cared only about sages, and that it was only the later Stoics who made their school’s philosophy relevant and palatable to ordinary people. However, scholarship over the past decades has gradually been moving away from such a view and has come up with increasingly sympathetic interpretations of early Stoic ethics. While the method of deliberation that I presented was mainly based on the Roman Stoics, future scholarship may be able to trace parts of it back to the early Stoa. We should keep an open mind about the possibility that the early Stoics were already offering much useful moral advice. That may be part of the reason their school experienced such a meteoric rise to prominence.

In the fourth chapter, I turned to Kant. The reconstruction of the Stoic method of moral deliberation opens up new ways to compare the notion of καθῆκον to Kantian duty, especially as regards moral deliberation. Until recently, it would have been difficult to compare the demands of Kantian duty to the demands of καθῆκον. Now, we can finally compare not just what counts as a duty in each school of thought, but also the deliberative tools that each system offers for

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4 Hook 2005, 32 ff.
finding one’s duty in a given scenario. As the Stoic method of moral deliberation becomes better understood, it may become of interest to scholars of modern philosophy who are interested in deontology. While the extant Stoic authors do not offer as sophisticated a metaphysical grounding of their concept as Kant does (maybe if we had Chrysippus’ works we would think otherwise), they offered a more flexible and practical deliberative toolbox that does not run into the problems that plague Kant’s Formula of Universal Law.

Finally, while I claim that the Stoics invented a new concept and that this concept anticipated the modern notion of moral duty in important ways, I do not want to claim that they were the first people in history to invent a concept of moral duty. Nor do I want to claim that they offered the only ancient antecedent of our concept of duty. As Sorabji has pointed out, the concept of svadharma in the Bhagavad Gita is similar to the Stoic notion of καθῆκον in many ways, as was already recognized by Gandhi.5 Maybe the concept of moral duty is more widespread in human history than has been recognized. Similar notions may have arisen at other times and in other places beyond the reach of our historical knowledge. Neither Kant nor the Stoics claimed to be introducing a new moral principle. Both thought that they were discovering something new about an existing principle. They both grounded their notion of duty in the common rationality of all humans, which they took to imply a common moral law. If we follow this moral law, we will be acting in our own best interest and in the interest of humanity.

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