

exemplary types of life also confirms the importance of individual factors in the earliest Stoa, as does the very large list of different actions which the sage is allowed to do, if not enjoined to do, under a range of different circumstances. The very theory of actions appropriate in special circumstances points in the same direction. There was never a monolithic ideal of life for the Stoics (in this they no doubt differed from some of the more enthusiastic Cynics); accordingly, the particularities of each agent's character had to have been given considerable weight in selection of the morally correct action. Panaetius' theory of *personae* (reflected later in Epictetus too)⁸⁵ was a formalization of earlier modes of moral reasoning, not a new departure.

In its formal and abstract evaluative mode Stoic ethics gives us a language which makes it all too easy to evaluate agents but which provides us with virtually no guidance in moral reasoning. Stoic ethics does, however, contain rich resources for this purpose. First, the basic theory of value sets out a typology of the kinds of objects of practical moral concern—the indifferent—which finds a middle ground between rigid essentialist abstraction and complete situational opportunism. Secondly, the relationship between appropriate actions and morally right actions provides a framework in which reasonable justification (*eulogos apologia*) in a concrete context becomes the proper immediate focus for every moral agent, and this allows the pursuit of abstractly defined moral virtue to fade into the background when one must reason about the selection of what to do; one can focus on the immediate and manageable question of appropriateness because it is a necessary condition for moral rightness and because the very act of rational selection exercises the practical reason, cultivation of which leads towards virtue. Thirdly, Stoic theory justified the common-sense institution of

beginnings of the school. Most important is the debate about precepts already considered. Ariston stands out as the voice of protest, and Cleanthes as the defender of the mainstream view. So we must conclude that the use of precepts of the sort outlined in *Ep.* 94 goes back to the earliest days of the school. And those precepts are clearly relevant to and indeed relativized to different social roles. See Gill, 'Personhood and Personality', 175.

⁸⁵ 2.10, 4.12.

giving generalized precepts relativized to one's role in life and individual character; such precepts had a clear place in the structure of ethical theory, a place which gave them enough room to function as flexible guidelines for moral reasoning. Fourthly, the use of general rules of thumb as a reference point in moral reasoning enables the moral reasoner to find the balance between abstract theory and the demands of a particular context.

The first two of these tools involve some sort of formal moral theory, an understanding of which had to be presupposed in the agent. But the rest are validations of perfectly ordinary ethical practice, the embodiment of the common sense of the morally serious but imperfect agent of any philosophical persuasion. It would clearly be wrong to claim that anything in Stoic ethics could be separated from the theoretical framework provided by the rest of the system, and the importance of the first two tools should make it clear how essential their general theory is. But the general theory is not, as critics often say, impossibly abstract, nor is the whole business cut off from common sense. When Cicero says that his way of approaching moral reasoning would also work for non-Stoics, he is more or less right. The kind of flexibility we see in his work, and in Panaetius, Seneca, and Epictetus, is not a sign that the Stoics fell away from the pure rigour of some hopelessly abstract moral theory. It is, I think, a central feature of Stoic theory which was present from the very beginning of the school's history.