

Stoicism, Feminism and Autonomy

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Abstract: The ancient Stoics had an uneven track record with regard to women's standing. On the one hand, they recognized women as fully capable of rationality and virtue. On the other hand, they continued to hold that women's roles were in the home. These views are consistent, given Stoic value theory, but are unacceptable on liberal feminist grounds. Stoic value theory, given different emphasis on the ethical role of choice, is shown to be capable of satisfying the liberal feminist requirement that autonomy must be respected. In turn, a model for Stoic feminism is proposed.

Keywords: stoicism, feminism, autonomy, liberalism, Epictetus, Seneca

I

That the Stoics had proto- or incomplete feminist commitments is a relative commonplace in the critical literature on Stoicism.¹ On the one hand, the Stoics thought that women were equals with men in their standing as rational beings.² On the other hand, the Stoics, despite their progressive views in principle, were socially conservative in practice. Women may have had equal capacities for virtue as men, but they nevertheless had different natural and social roles to play. So the Stoics held that women were to be offered different opportunities.³

¹ Additionally, there is wide agreement that the lacuna of explicit Stoic work on the tension is troubling. See: Arnold 1911, Manning 1973, Pomeroy 1976, Asmis 1996, Hill 2001, Nussbaum 2002, Engel 2003, and Bates 2014.

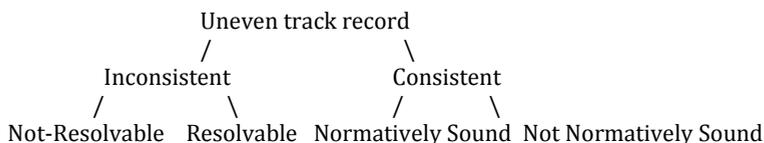
² Zeno's Republic has men and women sharing equal standing (DL VI.12). Cleanthes holds that men and women are equal in virtue (DL VII.175). Musonius Rufus holds that women should be taught philosophy (Stobaeus. 2.31.126). Seneca holds that women have the same capacities as men for virtue (*Cons. Marc.* 16.1). Epictetus argues that women are equal by nature (D.3.22.68). The stoics traced their philosophical lineage through the Cynics to Socrates, who all held similarly progressive views on women's equal capacities. See Socrates's proposal in Plato's *Republic* is that women can serve equally as guardians and philosopher kings in the good city (*Rep* V.451d). Diogenes and Antisthenes hold that women can philosophize (DL VII.12), and the Cynic Crates also had an equally philosophically adept wife, Hipparchia (DL VI.96-8).

³ Like Socrates' views on women guardians, Zeno's early views on liberty were more for minimizing social strife than for the sake of women's liberation. Similarly, Musonius holds that women should learn philosophy, because such training would make them better (wiser and more dutiful) housewives (Stobaeus 2.31.127). Seneca, despite holding that women have the same native capacity for virtue, nevertheless also holds that there are special impediments to virtue that come with being a woman: lack of self-control (*Ad Helv.* 14.2), credulity (*De Cons.*

Let us call this phenomenon of these two conflicting trends *Stoicism's uneven track record*.

In light of the uneven track record, a constellation of interpretive and evaluative questions arise. These questions come in two orders. The first-order questions are strictly interpretive: What is the relationship between the currents of Stoic progressivism and Stoic misogyny? Are they consistent? The second-order questions regard the first-order answers, and they are mostly evaluative. If the currents of Stoic thought are inconsistent, which is the better (both for Stoic consistency and for normative soundness) view to jettison? If the two trends are consistent, given broader Stoic value theory, are the results normatively sound?

As a consequence of the orders of questions, we have a relatively simple taxonomy for interpretive takes on Stoicism's uneven track record.



Our argument will proceed in two stages. First, we will argue that the Stoics' progressive view about women's capacities is consistent with their conservative views about women's roles, but this consistency is a morally unsound consistency. We will hang our case for consistency on Epictetus' *Enchiridion* 40, which simultaneously manifests both trends of the uneven track record and highlights the unacceptable elements of the Stoic program with women.

The second stage of our argument is that though the Stoics' uneven track record is internally consistent but morally wrong, it did not *have to* be that way. Stoicism's value theory provides sufficient material for not only the in-principle argument that women are equal partners with men in the *cosmopolis* (or as citizens of the world), but that unequal opportunity is unjust, misogyny is a failure to recognize the dignity of a fellow rational creature, and individual choice is a deep source of moral value. That the Stoics had an uneven track record by feminist lights is not evidence that Stoicism *must have* such a problem. As a consequence, a consistent and morally sound Stoic feminism is possible.

Sap. 19.2), and simple-mindedness (*Ad Marc.* 16.3). And Epictetus standardly references women as the kind of humans who can't keep their emotions in check (D 3.24.53) or as the kind of pretty trophy one would want when living the life of externals (D 4.94). This is not to mention all the standard usages of casually misogynistic phraseology. "Philosophize like a man, don't simper like a woman" (Seneca: *De Const.* 1.1.2).

II

We will begin with a focused reading of Epictetus' *Enchiridion* 40. Our objective is to show the overlap of the two trends of progressivism and misogyny. We'll then turn to asking whether this is a necessary connection for the Stoics.

Epictetus' E40 is addressed to young men, Stoic progressors. It functions on two levels. First, it is an exercise in culture criticism: Epictetus observes and condemns the sexualizing of young women and the way they internalize this way of viewing themselves. Second, it is a call for action – the men in these women's lives must not only not participate in this activity, but call young women's attention to it and offer them an alternative of modesty and uprightness.

Women from fourteen years old are flattered with the title of 'mistresses' by men. Therefore, perceiving that they are regarded only as qualified to give the men pleasure, they begin to adorn themselves, and in that to place all their hopes. We should, therefore, fix our attention on making them see that they are valued solely for displaying decent, modest and discreet behavior. (E40)

Here is how E40 manifests the two trends. On the one hand, the cultural critical element not only is a focus on the norms of objectifying women but it also acknowledges that women have the capacity to recognize this cultural pressure and can refuse to participate in it. This is the progressive element: many cultural norms fail to recognize the dignity of women as rational creatures, and women who participate in these norms begin to lose sight of that dignity, too. On the other hand, there is the alternative posed, that of modesty and uprightness. The problem is that the alternative posed is not altogether much better than the thought criticized. Why is being demure the *only* way one is honored?

In the same way that Epictetus' teacher, Musonius Rufus, held that philosophy for women yields wiser and more dutiful housewives, Epictetus seems to think that philosophy for daughters is for yielding modest young women. The trouble is that these trends, that of criticizing repressive cultural norms for the sake of encouraging other exclusions, seem inconsistent. This, again, is the unevenness of the Stoics' track record. Epictetus criticizes a cultural norm that offers young women only one role for them to play – that of a sexual object. He then offers an alternative – that of demure modesty. But this alternative, again, is only but one role, and it is not one that respects the variety of forms of human dignity. It is, again, merely a role to play. Epictetus may be right that sex-object is not a role that expresses a woman's dignity (and certainly hanging all one's hopes on it doesn't), but the better criticism should be not with *that option*, but with its *exclusivity* – that it is the *only option* for self-worth. Again, Epictetus, then, poses an exclusive option. On the face of it, Epictetus' views are inconsistent.

In the face of contradiction, one must make distinctions. The Panaetian distinction between the four personae and realms of duty allows us to mitigate the tension in E40. In *On Duties (De Officiis)* Cicero reports Panaetius' view as having duties in light of (i) our being rational creatures (universal duties), (ii)

our having special individual endowments, (iii) our having circumstances of chance provide social responsibilities, and (iv) our choices and volitions (*De Offic.* I.30.107-115). Epictetus inherits and endorses this four-personae view in his heuristic for discovering duties in D.2.10. First, one is a rational being. Next, one is a rational being with unique capacities. Further, one is a rational being with unique capacities with unique familial relations and specific citizenship. Finally one is a rational being with unique capacities, relations, and with a history of having made specific choices. Once one has completed this heuristic, one can see one's duties more clearly, since: "Each of these designators, when duly considered, always suggests the acts appropriate to it" (D 2.10.12). Epictetus, then, runs the reasoning for a man as recognizing that he is rational, has certain capacities for speaking, is a brother, son and a Roman, and so has responsibilities as having taken on the role as councilman, husband, father, and friend. Once he considers these roles, he sees his duties.

The same, it stands to reason, Epictetus would say goes for a woman. And so, for some woman, we might say she sees herself as a rational being, with a family, a city, chosen friends, and household responsibilities. So a woman's duties are determined by her relationships, as Epictetus makes clear in E30. For the woman, her relationships are, given her social role and her opportunities, overwhelmingly familial.

E40, then, stands as a corrective for young women who are confused about what their true roles are. In the same way that many a young man may be distracted from his duties by interest in the esteem of others, or wealth or pleasure, so, too, may a young woman be distracted by sexual interest. The apparent contradiction, then, can be resolved with the Stoic notion of indexing duties to given social roles, and as a consequence, one may square the program of consciousness-raising and progressive educational opportunities for women with the conservative views about women's duties and social opportunities. Educational reform and consciousness raising is about making sure that women can live up to their responsibilities as rational creatures, but that has no bearing on what social opportunities they are to be offered. Given the Four-Personae view, these are separate spheres of the person. In fact, Stoic value theory consistently maintains the distinction between social standing and opportunities and the goods of the soul. The goods of the soul are what matter, and the rest are incidental to true virtue and happiness. Once one has the virtuous soul, one plays the part into which one is cast – no matter if it is a Caesar or a slave, a merchant or a beggar, a philosopher or a housewife. The question, now, is whether this consistency is bought at the price of moral soundness.

III

There are at least four aspects of Stoic theory which can be made foci for concern for feminists. We will discuss these four aspects in order of ascending importance. The first thing to note is that the Stoics in general, and Epictetus in

particular, are addressing only men – we call this the *limited audience* problem. In E40, Epictetus advises men to "fix [their] attention" to make women understand that they are valued for their modesty (E40). Musonius Rufus addresses fathers and husbands regarding the education of daughters and wives, but never talks to the daughters and wives themselves (Nussbaum 2002, 303). The claim, by those who wish to defend the Stoics as feminists, is that the Stoics allow both men and women to philosophize. Women share in the same virtue as men and the study of philosophy allows them to realize this virtue (Hill 2001, 19).⁴ It remains a mystery, however, why the principal Stoic works are addressed exclusively to men if women are equally able to participate in philosophy.⁵

One could argue that the male audience is explained by precedent alone, although we're not convinced – especially considering some of the Stoic's blatantly sexist sentiments. Cicero and Seneca, for example, use feminine adjectives (like *muliebris*) to denote moral failings and masculine adjectives (like *virilis*) to denote praiseworthy actions (Manning 1973, 171). Seneca goes so far as to say that among those who do philosophy, Stoics are the only ones who consistently argue and think *like men* (*Ad Serenum* II.1). Musonius Rufus argues that men are superior to women and natural rulers, while women are naturally ruled (as noted by Engel 2003, 281; Nussbaum 2002, 303). Musonius also argues that a woman should "learn to love her children more than her life," and Epictetus dismisses Epicureanism as not befitting even women (*Stob. Anthol.* III 6,57). In short, the fact that Stoics claim that women share the same virtue as men is not enough to convince us of their egalitarianism. Women are never addressed – all advice about women is addressed to men – and when women are cited at all it is often not in a flattering way. Our argument here, however, is largely one about what to infer about the Stoics, *de facto*, from silences in their writing. More work is needed to make our argument stick.

If we return to Epictetus in E40, we may be tempted to credit him for pointing out the impact of oppression on the oppressed. He tells us that women internalize their sexual objectification and construct their self-image, and self-

⁴ Note here that Hill does not acknowledge the point we accept, that equal access to virtue in one sphere of life does not make one equal in other spheres. Equal access to philosophical education (even if we grant that this is something endorsed by the Stoics) does not ensure, most importantly, social equality.

⁵ The notable exception is Seneca. Two of his letters are addressed to women: *Ad Marciam* is a letter of consolation to Empress Livia's friend and daughter of the Republican historian, Cremetius Cordus. *Ad Helviam* is a letter Seneca addressed to his own mother while he lived in exile. In these, Seneca is clear that he regards women as natural equals, but also those with unique occasions for vice – he even opens his letter to Marcia acknowledging that she is an exception to the wide majority of women who suffer from the "feminine weakness of mind (*infirmirate muliebris animi*)" (*Ad Marc.* VI.1) That Seneca must acknowledge the fact that he is addressing a woman in philosophical manner is evidence that it is the exception that proves the rule.

worth, accordingly. We might see this passage as consistent with a larger Stoic argument regarding the common humanity of men and women alike. But note that in this passage Epictetus is also criticizing the women who construct their self-image based on their own objectification. We might call this a sort of *blaming the victim* problem. It is the women, after all, who upon realizing their only hope is to persuade men to "go to bed" with them, begin to "make themselves up and place all their hopes on that" (E40). They are participants in their own oppression. It is also important to note, in relation to our first worry, that Epictetus is urging men to inform women of their true worth so that women will no longer be willing participants in their own objectification. In this sense, women's salvation is still dependent on men.

This brings us to our third worry – the worry about *continued subordination*. In Epictetus and many other Stoics (including Cicero, Musonius, and Seneca) women are viewed as ultimately dependent on men for success. Although Epictetus does raise women above the status of sex-object to one of modesty (an improvement to be sure) he still defines women's goodness in terms of how they appear to men. Note that he doesn't argue that women are valued for their modesty, but for "*displaying (phainesthai)* decent, modest and discreet behavior" (E40). Lest we think this is a merely linguistic quibble – consider Musonius Rufus, who argues that educating women will turn out to be good for the husband (Stob. *Anthol.* 4.28.20, and see Nussbaum 2002, 303); or Hierocles, who argues that women should know how to labor efficiently so that they might "fulfill the orders of the master of the house" (Stob. *Anthol.* 4.28.21, and see Engel 2003, 284). Educating women is thus a good thing primarily for men. Displaying modest behavior is a trait that men value in women. But it's important to point out here, that even if the argument were made that modesty is good for women themselves, the Stoics would simply be providing another role to force upon females.

So far we have considered three worries – the limited audience problem, the blaming the victim problem, and the continued subordination problem – which lead us to question the Stoics' commitment to feminism. All three of these worries are united by our fourth, and most significant, concern – the *social status* problem. Our argument for the consistency of the two aspects of Stoic doctrine (the program of consciousness-raising and progressive educational opportunities, and the conservative views about women's social roles) relied on the notion of separate spheres. Stoic value theory maintains the distinction between social standing and the goods of the soul; so although women share the same virtue as men, and thus share this good of the soul, they must also exercise this virtue in a completely different social arena than men. While men are permitted to do politics, for example, women must stay in the home.

What the Stoics fail to completely acknowledge, however, is the way that goods of the soul rely on and are not completely separable from, social standing. Nussbaum argues of the Stoics, for example, that they fail to "understand the

extent to which human dignity and self-respect require support from the social world" (Nussbaum 2002, 302). The aspiration of Stoic ethics is self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*), but the Stoics consistently acknowledged that this aspiration is regularly just that – aspirational. Seneca notes that having enough rest helps with controlling anger (*De Tranq.* XVII.5; *De Ira* III.ix.5), that children should not be subjected to degrading treatment or made to be excessively servile or submissive (*De Ira* II.xxi.4). Seneca even goes so far as to counsel that it is wise to avoid people and conditions that will provoke irritation (*De Ira* III.vi.3 & III.viii.3). And finally, Seneca holds that station is preferable for and conducive of virtue, since the good soul has free play to express itself as a judge rather than as the judged, the benefactor instead of the beggar (*De Clem.* I.v.3). The reality is that though the Stoic goal is self-sufficiency, we are not independent creatures, and the contingencies of our lives have immense consequences for our opportunities for virtue. It is, then, no coincidence that Marcus' opening book of the *Meditations* is a long list of people who had been good teachers and exemplars. The implication is that without them, he would not have had such virtue.

The lived reality of women's lives, for the Stoics, is that they are good and efficient homemakers. An education in virtue simply allows them to fulfill this purpose better. And while many contemporary women might embrace homemaking as a worthwhile lifestyle, they enjoy something completely lacking from the Stoic story – *choice*. The very same separation of spheres that allows the Stoics to be consistent thus condemns them on the feminist question. Consistently hearing that one is not capable of choosing well or having any opportunity to do so destroys whatever capacity one has to exercise one's capacities. The Stoics regularly recognized that exercises were necessary for the perfection of judgment, desire, and action – but if one is never offered those opportunities to ever exercise them, one cannot fully develop one's capacities for rationality and virtue. That should be troubling.

Why is it, then, that so many contemporary scholars continue to consider the Stoics feminists or quasi-feminists? For a possible solution, we suggest looking at the definition of feminism at play. Lisa Hill, for example, defines feminism as "A view of women as a distinct sociological group for which there are established patterns of behavior, special legal and legislative restrictions, and customarily defined roles..." (Hill 2001, 14). This definition says nothing about choice or social status, and so Hill can conclude that Stoicism is consistent with feminism. We argue, on the contrary, that any acceptable definition of feminism must include an aspect of choice for women, and must say something about reforming the isolation of women to the private sphere. When this definition of feminism is used, it is clear to see that the Stoics are not, in fact, feminists. And on the assumption that the liberalism requirement is right, then any Stoic view that runs afoul of the choice principle is normatively unsound.

IV

By analogy, consider the question of Plato's *Republic* as a politically feminist document. The Principle of Specialization running the beautiful city is that peoples' jobs are indexed to abilities, and women with the same abilities as men should play the same social roles as men (456a). Both men and women can use reason to see the Forms, so both should have the opportunity to pursue that educational opportunity. As a consequence, women can be full guardians (*phulakes pantiles*). Glaucon, horrified at the prospect of women leading (and the sight of old women naked in the Palestra), objects, but Socrates reminds him that it is a matter of justice that jobs and political opportunity be available to those with ability, regardless of sex. So the beautiful city, as a matter of justice, has equal opportunities for women. This is not only a utopia, but, it seems, a *feminist* utopia (See, for example, Vlastos 1997).

Despite these initial progressive sentiments, Plato, like the Stoics, has an uneven track record with women, too. First and foremost is the fact that, despite claiming that men and women are equal in some capacities, they are not so equal in others. Socrates and his interlocutors agree men have greater mental and physical prowess (455b), and so men perform most jobs better than women (455d), even those widely considered to be womens' work. Plato, additionally, is no stranger to the offhand misogynist crack. So vices, like that of being exceptionally emotional, are expected in women (387e), and even if women are able to do philosophy, we don't expect them to be consistently good at it (455b).

Independent of Plato's rhetoric is the final point that, as Julia Annas notes, there is "no reference to women's desires or needs" (1976, 311). Women (and men, alike) are given social roles that are determined by their natures, and then expected to perform them without question. Women's roles are made equal, not for their benefit, but for the state's. The case against Platonic feminism is to be made along the lines of the question: *what kind of role does an individual's choice make in determining that person's life?*

If the answer is that individual choice plays none for women (or men, for that matter), then our view is that this makes the view non-feminist. We will defend this view, what we call *the liberal core of feminism*, later. But for now, notice that the assessment of Plato as feminist depends on the status of *individual rights* as a prerequisite for feminism. If one takes, one might say, equality of treatment and opportunity regardless of sex as the only requirement for feminism, then Plato counts. If one requires the further liberal rider of individual choices being respected, then Plato fails.

It is an irony of intellectual history that Epictetus, too, sees the matter with Platonic feminism clearly. Stobaeus reports that Epictetus criticized the women of Rome for carrying around copies of Plato's *Republic*, thinking that the Platonic political vision would be something that would liberate them and create a "community for women" (*koinas... tas gounaikas*). Instead of proposing that they be liberated from their encumbering marriages to particular men, Epictetus

holds that Plato “first abolishes that kind of marriage, and introduces another kind, to the state, in its place” (Stob. *Anthol.*6.58 – Epictetus Fragment 15).

Plato is the ancient touchstone for our reconstruction. Plato is a proto-feminist, but one who failed to think through the demands of feminism as a justice movement in the right way. The Stoics, as we’ve argued, fail in similar fashion. Ancient ethical and political thought has a long line of failure in thinking about individual rights, and the figures around whom we reconstruct Stoic ethics and politics recapitulate the oversight. But Stoicism as a broader frame of thought, we might say as a philosophical *Zeitgeist*, has the capacity to construct an approximation of liberal feminist commitments. What follows is a brief overview of what tools are available within the Stoic tradition to frame the thought, and then we will close with a defense of the liberal requirement we’ve deployed for genuine political feminism.

V

The Stoic tradition was not merely a set of academic philosophical doctrines. It was, particularly by the time of the Imperial Stoa, a cognitive paradigm, and one that was the default for intellectuals (Cf. Shaw 1985). Testament to this fact is the phenomenon of contrast by all those who were non-Stoic philosophers in the period. The most important job for a neo-Platonist, Epicurean, or Pyrrhonist is to make it clear where the view on offer critically differs from or overlaps with the prevailing rough set of Stoic views.⁶ The reality is that Stoicism had its *dogmata*; however, they were a rough but familiar list. Cicero’s digest in *Paradoxa Stoicorum* is representative, but it seems clear that Marcus, for example, diverges widely on the singularity of vices (M 2.10), and the reality is that by the time of Seneca’s *De Clementia*, Stoic politics had come a long way from the Cynicizing idealistic fervor of Zeno of Citium’s *Republic*. Stoicism was, it seems, more a rough and ready range of intellectual options all bearing family resemblances, but nevertheless allowing for wide disagreement.

It is within this range of intellectual diversity for the Stoic tradition that we pose *Stoic feminism*. The place to start is with the Stoic notion of natural law. Plutarch describes Zeno’s *Republic* as based on a notion of a “law common to all (*ho nomos ho koinos*)” (Plutarch *De Alexandri Magni Fortuna aut Virtute*: 392 a-b). This notion of natural law was expressed in Stoic philosophy in projects ranging from logic and the theory of inference being universal⁷ to the political aspirations of cosmopolitanism.⁸ The universe and we, within our minds and as

⁶ See Sextus’ keenness on making it clear how his criticisms of dogmatism first and foremost bear on the Stoics (e.g., PH III.181). See Simplicius’ commentary on the *Enchiridion* for the neoPlatonist urgency of appropriating Stoic doctrines (3,5).

⁷ See, for example, the story related by Sextus Empiricus of Chrysippus attributing the use of disjunctive syllogism to his dog (PH I.69).

⁸ As we see most clearly expressed in Marcus Aurelius, who claims that he is a citizen both of Rome and the world.

bodies, are governed by *the logos*. The objective of Stoic life, then, is to come to understand and live in accord with this *logos*. We thereby, come to make ourselves *at home* in this world. Diogenes Laertius calls this *oikeiosis*, the process of coming to live in accord with our nature (literally, home-making) (DL VII.85).

This core concept, that of living in accord with nature, has a significant ambiguity. On the one hand, *accordance with nature* can simply mean being in accord with *what is*. One, as Epictetus says, wills in accord with how one finds the world (E8). Call this *thin naturalism*. On the other hand, nature has a teleological, normative element to it. Injustice, for example, is unnatural (Marcus *Meditations* 2.16 & 9.1). Call this *teleological naturalism*.⁹

It is in this duality of *accordance with nature* that we see, first, the tools for diagnosing why so many Stoics failed the critical program for feminism, and second, that there are tools for developing the progressive feminist program. In short, if *oikeiosis* requires living in accord with what is, the thin naturalism, then programs of drastic cultural change or criticism are objectionable. However, if we see natural teleology in the divine reason in each human, then there is reason for cultural criticism. Cultural norms that contravene or degrade the natural dignity of rational human choice (*prohairesis*) deserve criticism and should be changed.

The Stoics' uneven track record with women is recapitulated by their treatment of slavery. On the one hand, the Stoics widely decried the treatment of slaves and even the very institution of subjecting another human to domination. Epictetus seems to even propose that there are some activities (e.g., holding a chamber pot) that are beneath human dignity and should be refused even at the price of a lethal beating (D I.2). On the other hand, the Stoics never moved beyond this mere theoretical criticism. For sure, Marcus Aurelius made manumission easier, but he took no steps toward restricting slavery. And Epictetus, as reported by Simplicius, despite having been a slave himself, takes a slave to nurse the child of a neighbor who was about to expose it (116,50 – Brennan 2002, 95).

But the uneven track record on slavery for the Stoics needn't undercut their progressive line of thought. The conservative thinly naturalistic viewpoint is relevant only for framing feasible policy change, but not the direction in which policy should be changed.

The same, we hold, is the case for feminism. The stoic natural-teleological view is that women have rational natures and a capacity for reasoned choice. The consequence is that from the perspective of the goods relevant to moral goodness, women are men's equals and deserve the same respect and dignity that men are afforded. And this is precisely why Musonius Rufus holds that women deserve to be taught philosophy, why Seneca holds that women have the same capacities for virtue as men, and why Epictetus criticizes the sexualization

⁹ See Susan Ford Wiltshire (1992) for a discussion of how this duality of the notion of naturalness yielded a robust notion of natural law and the notion of natural rights.

of young women. What is valuable in women, their capacity for rational choice, is not being respected. Culture criticism is necessary in those cases, and the Stoics consistently came to criticize their own cultures for these failings. The problem was always what they proposed in its place.

But what of Stoic endurance, what of the requirements that the Stoic distinguish between internals and externals and be resigned to what is? Epictetus proposes that we should not look to have events happen as we want them to, but to want them to happen as they do (E8). Stoic ethics, as David Engel notes, has a core commitment to resignation, and so, as Engel takes it, to conservatism:

[T]he Stoics' emphasis on the moral indifference of one's external conditions makes it unlikely that they ever advocated a more prominent role for women in political life. *It probably also makes feminism and Stoicism not just contingently, but essentially incompatible* (2003, 288, emphasis added)

But this, we hold, is a non-sequitur. Engel's view has the Stoic feminist be indifferent to externals in the sense that they are not reasons for action. However, the Stoic, again, identifies *duties* and then acts in ways pursuant of them. Insofar as our duties to each other as fellow rational creatures requires respecting each other's choices (that which is the expression of our moral purposes – our *prohairesis*), then we do have responsibilities to each other. Just because externals are indifferent to us does not mean that we have no moral reason to nevertheless act in ways pursuant of external justice.

A further line of argument is necessary to properly rebut Engel's point. Stoic value theory runs that social standing cannot affect one's virtue, and since virtue is sufficient for the good life, unequal treatment is not really harm. Again, we've argued that *there is a difference between recognizing that one is not harmed in being treated unjustly and being complicit with unequal treatment or participating in it*. Surely it is a harm to be knowingly unjust, but harm to the virtue of the person complicit with or participating in the injustice. And so, Stoic value theory requires an active life of advocating for justice, equal opportunity and respecting the choices made by others. Our strategy, then, is to say that the doctrine of the moral indifference of externals is orthogonal to the requirements of Stoic feminism.

This said, the doctrine of moral indifference to externals can still be useful to, instead of contrary to the purpose of, the Stoic feminist. Consider: the Stoic can have a critique of the institution of slavery or any other unjust treatment of people, but then also have strategies for life that makes it so that when injustices happen to us, we can endure them. Epictetus prepares to go to the baths by readying himself for the rude and raucous behavior of others (E4). When he goes and is splashed or has someone act inappropriately around him, he must understand that he signed up for the whole experience. And so he is ready to endure what must be endured. But this is not an *endorsement* of the rude or raucous behavior. No Stoic would endorse such actions, but would criticize them.

The same should go for the Stoic feminist – we identify the correct conditions for justice, but we prepare ourselves for when injustice arrives. There is, then, living in accord with what is (thin naturalism's acceptance of what is), and living in accord with what natural reason requires (recognizing the ways one's culture can fail to manifest divine reason).

VI

So far we have argued that the Stoics' uneven track record can be resolved, and that the two trends within Stoicism (the progressive view about women's capacities and the conservative view about women's roles) are consistent. We have also argued that Stoicism's two trends *can be* aligned in a way which is morally sound. Our argument here focused on what we call *the liberal core of feminism*. In this final section, we offer a brief defense of this idea.

We argue that respect for individual choice is a *sine qua non* for any feminist theory, and it is this respect which constitutes feminism's liberal core. The respect for individual choice is entailed by the moral equality of persons, that is, liberalism's stipulation that people are free and equal, and capable of the rational choice of ends and conceptions of the good. In other words, each person should be viewed as a "self-authenticating source of valid claims" (Rawls 2005, 32). Because this respect for individual choice is entailed by the commitment to moral equality, any theory grounded on the moral equality of persons must respect individual choice. Feminism, which is grounded on the moral equality of *women*, must therefore similarly respect women's choices. Not respecting women's choices denies their status as free and equal, and given that this result is unacceptable for any feminist account, we argue that feminism should readily accept the liberal rider to respect individual choices.

To put the point another way, liberalism is committed to the idea that all people should enjoy both personal and political autonomy; that is, each person should be able to choose the kind of life she wants to lead, and she should similarly be able to (at least partially) determine the circumstances under which she leads this life. Feminists, too, are committed to promoting autonomy, more specifically, the autonomy of women. Historically, feminists have been concerned to free women from the forces of misogyny and patriarchy – forces which denied women the power of choice over their own lives. It seems, then, that feminism already has (at least minimally) a liberal core.

But our argument here rests on the stronger claim that feminist theories must necessarily have this liberal core. In order for a theory to be considered feminist, it *must* respect individual choices. Why? Because to do otherwise is to fail to recognize that women have rational natures and the capacity for reasoned choice. To establish a set of norms for women which dictates what sorts of roles or actions are appropriate for them *as women*, is to deny their equal moral status and their status as rational choosers. This result should be unacceptable to any feminist. Insofar, then, as feminism is committed to women's freedom from the

dominating forces of patriarchy, insofar as it is committed to the idea that women share men's capacity to choose for themselves, it must be committed to the respect of individual choice.

Under this conception of feminism, the Stoicism of the individual Stoics on offer fails. Recall that, although Epictetus criticizes the cultural norm that views women as sex-objects, he proposes another norm in its place. This norm – of appearing modest – is appropriate for women based on their nature *as women*; individual choice plays no role in determining their lives. But Stoicism as a philosophical *Zeitgeist* does, in fact, have the capacity to be a feminist theory. This capacity, as we've shown, stems from Stoicism's respect for rational human choice (*prohairesis*) – the same respect that constitutes the liberal core of feminism.

VII

Our conclusion is, then, threefold. First, that feminism requires respecting individual choice. We have called this *the liberal core of feminism*. Second, that *the Stoics*, despite their feminist inclinations (or we might say, *protofeminism*), failed to respect the autonomy of individual women. This, we've argued, is not inconsistent with their Stoicism, but is morally unacceptable. This is what we've called *Stoicism's Uneven Track Record*. Third, and finally, we have argued that despite the fact that the individual Stoics themselves failed the liberal requirement, Stoicism as a philosophical program is not inherently anti-liberal (and thereby anti-feminist). We've provided a sketch of what this liberal Stoicism looks like. A Stoicism 2.0, if you like. The liberal Stoicism we've proposed respects autonomy, but it recognizes the fact that the world is not ideal, and so there must be the familiar Stoic virtues of endurance. And these virtues of endurance needn't be inherently socially conservative or misogynist.

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