

The Environmental Battle Hymn of the Stoic God

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Abstract: In Stoic theology, the universe constitutes a living organism. Humankind has often had a detrimental impact on planetary health. We propose that the Stoic call to live according to Nature, where God and Nature are one and the same, provides a philosophical basis for re-addressing environmental degradation. We discuss the value of the logocentric framework and aligning oneself with Divine will and natural law (as stated by reason) in order that living beings can thrive.

Keywords: environmental ethics, God, Stoic theology, Stoicism.

1. Introduction

Stoicism, with its call to ‘live according to Nature,’ invites its practitioners to view their wellbeing in light of humankind and Earth as a whole. Marcus Aurelius captures this idea succinctly when he writes “that which is not in the interests of the hive cannot be in the interests of the bee.” (*Meditations* 6.54)¹ The tool to work with in Stoicism is not faith but reason, and reason must prevail. If one is to argue for the existence of God (or anything else for that matter), then one must have a clear philosophical basis for doing so. This basis must be defensible via rational argument and not mere opinion or cultural precedent. Given the fundamental importance of recognizing virtue (the only good) and distinguishing it from vice (the only bad) – something that Cicero states can only be done by understanding the reality in which we live – faith-based statements are not an acceptable premise (*De Finibus* 3.7; see also Hahn 1978, particularly chap. 5).

With this in mind, we make the case that believing in God, as understood from the uniquely Stoic pantheistic position, is a rational decision that enables a person to develop a virtuous character. We build this case upon various Stoic concepts including Hierocles’ circles of concern and the Stoic theory of ‘appropriation’ (*oikeiosis*). We argue that if Stoicism maintains its theological elements, it could be considered an ‘environmental’ philosophy, due to its logocentric framing. The latter acknowledges that all beings, living and non-living, share in the *logos* (Divine Reason). It is in this context that we reflect on the benefits that a rational understanding of God brings to Stoic practitioners and the universal community (*cosmopolis*). We evaluate how the ancient Stoics arrived at

¹ As translated by Haines (1916).

their belief in God and their logocentric (reason-centered) understanding of the cosmos. We explore the notion of reason and delve more deeply into how a logocentric framing of the world, as opposed to a strictly anthropocentric (human-centered) or biocentric (Earth-centered) framing, can help moderns tackle environmental challenges.

At no point do we advocate for a ‘religious’ interpretation of ancient Stoic texts, whereupon the words become sacred and binding. Such a position is profoundly dogmatic, given that the only ‘rule’ in Stoicism is that ‘virtue is the only good’ and, even then, each person will perform their virtuous actions according to their personal proclivities and circumstances (Annas 2016). That said, while Stoicism was never a religion, the philosophy has spiritual aspects that ought to drive ethical conduct for the benefit of the individual and the wider world (Long 2018).

2. Stoic Theology

The ancient Stoics believed that the human *telos* (goal) was ‘to live according to Nature’² because it was only by living in harmony with oneself, others, and the natural world that one could hope to experience a state of flourishing (*eudaimonia*). For the Stoics, striving ‘to live according to Nature’ meant living excellently (*arete*) because that was thought to be the purpose for which humankind was designed. Doing what one was designed to do was also thought to be the most appropriate way to conduct one’s roles and to undertake appropriate/prescribed actions (*kathekonta*) towards oneself, one’s smaller community (neighborhood), and one’s wider community (*cosmopolis*). All such actions involved being consistently just, courageous, temperate, and wise (see Stephens 2011, 36–39).

The Stoic understanding of the exact nature and number of roles that a person has stems from the writings of Panaetius. His ideas were captured and developed by Cicero in *On Duties* (particularly 1:107-115) and, to a certain extent, Epictetus in the *Enchiridion*. For Epictetus, roles are divinely assigned and, therefore, living according to Nature (playing one’s part well) is following the will of God:

Remember that you are an actor in a drama, which is as the playwright wishes; if the playwright wishes it short, it will be short; if long, then long; if the playwright wishes you to play a beggar, it is assigned to you in order that you good-naturedly play even that role; and similarly if you are assigned to play a disabled person, a public official, or a lay person. For this is what is yours: to

² This is both the natural world and one’s own nature. For the Stoics, human beings have a self-preservation instinct and a social/communal instinct. Destroying the environment in which we live is an irrational and anti-social thing to do. A useful analogy is health: though we might never meet anyone who is perfectly healthy, it is a person’s natural state. Doing anything to purposely deteriorate our bodily health for money, social status or for the mere sake of it is foolish. Likewise, living harmoniously is to be morally healthy; that is, wise, just, brave, and temperate.

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finely play the role that is given; but to select itself is the role of the divine playwright. (*Enchiridion* 17)³

Epictetus' view of God, along with that of Cleanthes, is the one that moderns would, perhaps, most readily associate with the personal Abrahamic God (see Long 2002). Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus* (see *Enchiridion* 53), for example, can easily be interpreted by a person who is unfamiliar with Stoic doctrine to fit a scenario where the writer is calling out to a transcendent personal deity (Asmis 2007). In this respect, Cleanthes' hymn can be viewed in the same vein as the psalms of the Jewish King David:

O Zeus, giver of all, shrouded in dark clouds and holding the vivid bright lightning, rescue men from painful ignorance. Scatter that ignorance far from their hearts and deign to rule all things in justice. (Cleanthes, *Hymn of Zeus*⁴, quoted in Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 1.25.3)

On deeper reflection, those familiar with Stoic cosmology will recognize Cleanthes' hymn as an oratorical celebration of an imminent, rather than transcendent God, whose natural law, rather than personal instructions, compel humankind to 'live in accordance with Nature' (Asmis 2007). Evidence for Cleanthes' belief in an immanent divinity can be seen by the fact that he agreed with Zeno (and Chrysippus) that the cosmos was a living animal, born in the manner of other living animals. For Cleanthes, it followed that, like animals, God's body is finite, insofar as the cosmos is finite (Arius Didymus, quoted in Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.* XV 15, 817b⁵= *SVF* 2.528) and that, like the rest of creation, God is a composite of a physical soul (*pneuma*, or active matter) and body (extensional matter).

Cleanthes did not simply 'believe in' his metaphysical assumptions. He came to them by developing proofs (Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 2.32). In line with his conception of the cosmos as an animal, Cleanthes held that the sun was the mind/soul of God, that the universe was God's body and that both the mind and body were sentient and in complete harmony with each other. It was this harmony that Cleanthes believed resulted in the benevolent care which "preserves, nourishes, increases, sustains, and gives sensation" (Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 2.40 = *SVF* 1.504) to all components of the universe: the sea, air, rocks, plants and animals, including humans (Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 2.75-6; Long and Sedley 1987, 54]). For the ancient Stoics, the life-giving care provided by God was a sign that the universe was worthy of reverence and respect, something that could be shown through dedicated study and application of natural philosophy (a discipline that combines natural sciences and philosophy). This understanding of the universe led Posidonius to argue that:

³ Translation by author based on Hard and Gill (2014) and Johnson (2013).

⁴ As translated by Ellery (1976).

⁵ As translated by Gifford (1906).

[The objective of life is] to live engaged in contemplating the truth and order of the universe, and forming himself as he best can, in nothing influenced by the irrational part of his soul. (Posidonius, as cited by Clement of Alexandria in *Stromata* 2.21)⁶

Posidonius was admired across the Graeco-Roman world for his prolific contributions to anthropology, astronomy, botany, geography, history, hydrology, mathematics, meteorology, seismology, and zoology. Those who recognized his endeavors included the Greek astronomer and mathematician Ptolemy, the Roman physician Galen, the Greek geographer and historian Strabo, along with the Roman statesmen Seneca the Younger, Cicero, and Pompey. Thus, Posidonius was hardly a candidate for what some moderns might refer to as an unscientific, ignorant, or naïve person. For him, the Stoic theological position drove scientific enquiry rather than hindered it. That is not to say that the Stoics viewed all religious practices as scientific. Seneca in *On Superstition* (a book that has since been lost) is vehemently critical of ‘god-appeasing’ practices that invoke mutilation and other forms of physical punishment. As Augustine states:

Seneca was quite outspoken about the cruel obscenity of some of the ceremonies: “One man cuts off his male organs: another gashes his arms. If this is the way they earn the favor of the gods, what happens when they fear their anger? The gods do not deserve any kind of worship, if this is the worship they desire.” (*City of God* 6.10)⁷

Augustine then quotes Seneca’s position on how the sage would recognize superstition for what it is and understand that cultish customs have little connection with the truth. He concludes that:

Doubtless philosophy had taught him (Seneca) an important lesson, that he should not be superstitious in his conception of the physical universe; but, because of the laws of the country and the accepted customs, he also learnt that without playing an actor’s part in theatrical fictions, he should imitate such a performance in the temple. (*City of God* 6.10)⁸

While there were certainly religious aspects to ancient Stoicism, it was not a religion, at least not in the conventional sense. The need for Stoics to be flexible when it comes to assimilating certain religious beliefs and cultural matters is stated by Epictetus in chapter 31 of the *Enchiridion*. The Stoics *qua* Stoics did not argue that any book or building was sacred, nor that any theological belief should be set in stone (Clement, *Stromata* 5.12:76 = *SVF* 1.264; Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 7.33-34). Even the divinations offered by the Oracle of Delphi, the advice of which led Zeno of Citium to establish Stoicism, were to be considered in a measured manner. Furthermore, the Oracle would only speak to those seeking wisdom if it was clear that they understood, and would abide by,

⁶ As translated by Wilson (1985).

⁷ Modified by authors, based on translation by Bettenson and Evans (2003).

⁸ Modified by authors, based on translation by Bettenson and Evans (2003).

three maxims. These were ‘know yourself,’ ‘nothing to excess’ and ‘surety brings ruin’ (as stated by Plato in *Charmides* 165). Divination was by no means a science, but it was an introspective and spiritual practice which demanded a reasoned approach and not a blind commitment to faith in the gods (cf. Cicero, *On Divination* 1.3, 1.19). No one was forced to seek the Oracle (in the same way that no one should be forced to see a counsellor) and equally there is no evidence to suggest that any particular Stoic was seen as an apostate and ex-communicated for involving (or not involving) themselves in cultural rituals and traditions (Sadler 2018). The Stoics Chrysippus and Cornutus, for example, re-interpreted some pre-existing and traditional Graeco-Roman religious ideas in order to incorporate them into Stoicism. Panaetius doubted divination and the conflagration (the belief that the cosmos will end cataclysmically, becoming fire), while still professing a belief in God (*Testimonia* 130–140). Any Stoic who was committed to and *properly understood the fundamental principles* was free to question or reject earlier Stoic ideas on the basis of reasoned argument, as Seneca makes clear in his letter to Lucilius (33.11).

2.1 Stoic Pantheism

The Stoic god and Stoicism’s metaphysical stance do not fit neatly into a theist, pantheist or panentheist box because they are a complex amalgam of these positions (see Long 2002, 147). That said, Cicero states that Cleanthes and the Stoics after him were “pantheists in so far as they acknowledge that God and the world are identical.” (Cicero in Zeno, Cleanthes Fragment 4, 22)⁹ Certainly, Stoic theology is in line with Owen’s (1971) definition of ‘pantheism’ as the belief that “god is everything and everything is god or that the world is either identical with god or, in some way, a self-expression of his nature” (Owen 1971, 8). A contemporary interpretation of what very much constitutes the Stoic worldview of a pantheistic benevolent and omnipresent divinity is expressed by the primatologist De Waal:

The way our bodies are influenced by surrounding bodies is one of the mysteries of human existence, but one that provides the glue that holds entire societies together. We occupy nodes within a tight network that connects all of us in both body and mind. (2010, 63)

Pantheistic beliefs, particularly those operating from a biocentric perspective, tend to be inclined towards, and associated with, human thoughts and actions that tread lightly on Earth (Taylor 2011). The resulting ethical frameworks extend moral obligations beyond humanity to encompass non-human beings and non-living things, such as rocks (Levine 1994). Biocentric ideals, such as Naess’ (1973) Deep Ecology or Leopold’s Land Ethic (see Lenart 2010), model a non-hierarchical reality where humans and non-humans are

⁹ As translated by Pearson (1891).

considered equal in *every* respect. Such a position raises ethical questions regarding the legitimacy of the assumption that humans are superior to other animals and should thus enjoy superior rights or be favored in any way over them, or indeed the Earth itself (Gadotti 2008a; 2008b; Gadotti and Torres 2009; Taylor 2011). Such ideas clearly contradict the Stoic belief that the capacity for rational thought and action possessed by humankind bestows upon them a special place in the natural order:

First of all, a human being, that is to say, one who has no faculty more authoritative than choice, but subordinates everything else to that, keeping choice itself free from enslavement and subjection. Consider, then, what you're distinguished from through the possession of reason: you're distinguished from wild beasts; you're distinguished from sheep. What is more, you're a citizen of the world and a part of it, and moreover no subordinate part, but one of the leading parts in so far as you're capable of understanding the divine governing order of the world, and of reflecting about all that follows from it. (Epictetus, *Discourses*, 2.10.1-3)¹⁰

It is important to note that Stoicism does not promote purely anthropocentric values, especially as these often come into conflict with the Stoic obligation to care for the universal community, which is by no means restricted to human society (Whiting and Konstantakos 2019; Stephens 1994). Instead, Stoicism relies on a logocentric/anthropocentric hybrid, which acknowledges the superiority of human actions relative to non-human beings *only* when human individuals behave rationally according to their role, as assigned to them by Divine Reason (i.e. *logos*). Those subject to Divine Reason are not asked to satisfy capricious whims of a jealous God. There is no favoritism nor 'chosen people' tasked with interpreting or communicating God's commands. In Stoicism, following God's will is instead the act of harmonizing one's own nature and idiosyncrasies with the rational active principle that pervades the whole universe and is responsible for life, as Epictetus points out:

How else, after all, could things take place with such regularity, as if God were issuing orders. When he tells plants to bloom, they bloom, when he tells them to bear fruits, they bear fruit, when he tells them to ripen, they ripen. (*Discourses*, 1.14.3)¹¹

There are various examples of shared beliefs between Stoicism and biocentrism. A key one is provided by Naess (1995, 14), when he asserts that we are all in, of and from Nature from the very beginning. Another one is stated by Vaughan, who emphasizes that pantheism "recognizes both our biological and psychological dependence on the environment [and the fact that] we are actually interdependent and interconnected with the whole fabric of reality" (Devall 1995,

¹⁰ As translated by Hard and Gill (2014).

¹¹ As translated by Dobbin (2008).

103). There is thus a degree of understanding within both philosophies that the planet constitutes a living organism to which we are all bound.

One well known biocentric hypothesis used to describe the homeostatic relationship between a living Earth and its inhabitants is the Gaia hypothesis, proposed by Lovelock and Margulis (1974). Gaia is conceived as a holobiont that self-regulates its physicochemical cycles, which, when operating as it should, works to maintain the conditions that are conducive to plant and animal life. If the cycles are disrupted or deteriorate, then the optimal conditions for life on Earth are affected. In this respect, Gaia can be used to explain how the environment drives evolutionary processes via various intertwined feedback loops. While some proponents of Gaia have ascribed a literal 'mind' or 'agency' to Earth, Lovelock does not. Instead, he views Gaia through a thermodynamic lens whereby Earth, like any system moving towards a steady state, responds automatically to certain inputs (Radford 2019). For Lovelock, such reactions are not with any sense of foresight or *telos* (Lovelock 1990).

Neither Lovelock's position on Gaia nor those of some of his more zealous followers coincide with the Stoic position, which is that the universe is benevolent and perfectly rational. For Stoics, God is not a mindless feedback system (as Lovelock or, for that matter, Spinoza conceived). Nor is 'He' vengeful or angry with humans because of their failure to care for the planet they inhabit. In Stoicism, there is no heaven or hell. In any case, if there were a hell, all but the sage (the completely rational virtuous Stoic) would be in it (Arius Didymus, *Epitome of Stoic Ethics*, 5B12-13; *SVF* 3.654; 3.604; 3.660; 3.663; 3.103). With the caveat that some people are more likely to progress towards sagehood than others (Cicero, *De finibus* 4.20), those who do not wish to live according to Nature (knowingly or unknowingly) do not enter hell, but instead punish themselves on Earth. This punishment occurs because they are unable to reflect on what it means to live the 'good life':

There are some punishments appointed, as by a law, for such as disobey the Divine administration. Whoever shall esteem anything good, except what depends on the Will, let him envy, let him covet, let him flatter, let him be full of perturbation. Whoever esteems anything else to be evil, let him grieve, let him mourn, let him lament, let him be wretched. (Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.11.1-3)¹²

Another Stoic incompatibility with Gaia and other biocentric positions is that no individual species or specimen has intrinsic value. Earth itself has no intrinsic value either and, although deservedly worthy of moral consideration, is by no means 'special' or 'sacred.' In Stoicism, it is the ability to reason, which is seen as the defining characteristic that sets humans (including Neanderthals, see Whiting, Konstantakos, Sadler et al. 2018) apart from the rest of the animal and plant kingdom. It is therefore *logos* (reason) that Stoics value beyond all else. Another key contradiction between the Stoic logocentric and a biocentric position

¹² As translated by Carter (1807).

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is the philosophical lens through which one looks. Those sympathetic to biocentric ideology argue that our ethical values should stem from our shared planetary kinship that enables us to see through the ‘planet’s eyes.’ This is taken to mean that humanity ought to obtain its norms and values from Earth’s, or at least an animal’s or plant’s, perspective. As discussed in Whiting and Konstantakos (2019), there is nothing in Stoic thought that suggests that we should, or even could, view the universe through such a lens. In fact, it would be a false impression to believe that we know what or how a particular animal or plant feels or thinks. At the most, we could be more sympathetic to an animal’s or plant’s own call to live according to Nature and choose to behave in such a way that enables co-existence (see Whiting et al. 2020).

3. Stoic Environmental Ethics

Environmental interpretations, visions, and applications of contemporary Stoic practice are becoming increasingly common within Stoic literature. Issues raised include those linked to animal conservation (e.g. Konstantakos 2014), climate breakdown (Johncock 2020), environmental education (Whiting, Konstantakos, Misiaszek et al. 2018), and sustainable food production (e.g. Whiting et al. 2020). The impact of human encroachment upon the environment (including natural aesthetics) is also discussed in ancient Stoic texts. The longest excerpt was written by Seneca:

Now I turn to address you people whose self-indulgence extends as widely as those other people’s greed. I ask you: how long will this go on? Every lake is overhung with your roofs! Every river is bordered by your buildings! Wherever one finds gushing streams of hot water, new pleasure houses will be started. Wherever a shore curves into a bay, you will instantly lay down foundations. Not satisfied with any ground that you have not altered, you will bring the sea into it! Your houses gleam everywhere, sometimes situated on mountains to give a great view of land and sea, sometimes built on flat land to the height of mountains. Yet when you have done so much enormous building, you still have only one body apiece, and that a puny one. What good are numerous bedrooms? You can only lie in one of them. Any place you do occupy is not really yours. (*Letters to Lucilius*, 89.21)¹³

In addition to Seneca’s comments, Musonius Rufus gave various lectures that contained content that we would now readily associate with environmental matters. Musonius was chiefly concerned with agricultural practices and food consumption and how they could both be a source of virtue or vice:

The earth repays most beautifully and justly those who care for her, giving back many times what she receives... To me, this is the main benefit of all agricultural

¹³ As translated by Graver and Long (2015).

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tasks: they provide abundant leisure for the soul to do some deep thinking and to reflect on the nature of education. (Discourses Lecture 11, 1-3)¹⁴

It is likely that both Seneca and Musonius would be highly critical of the way in which human society has developed with little regard for the natural world. In Stoicism, virtue is not a theoretical concept in the sense that it cannot be obtained merely by thinking about it. Instead, virtue is necessarily made manifest in our actions and reactions towards the world around us, which includes non-human species and the natural environment. The excellent character (*arete*) of a flourishing agent (*eudaimon*) is built on that understanding. In which case, and as Long (1996b) points out, Stoic theology is integral to the Stoic conception of virtue, precisely because it provides the justification as to why virtue is sufficient and necessary for the life well lived.

Given that God is believed to permeate through and constitute all that exists, it follows that, for Stoics, Nature is both the source and ultimate reference for both facts and values. By extension, it is also the yardstick that ought to be used to measure one's thoughts and actions because it states not only what *is* the case but what *ought* to be the case (Long 1996). As explained in Whiting and Konstantakos (2019):

Nature is the *sine qua non* for the evaluation of reason and no reasonable proposition can exist or be understood outside of it. Nature is also the cause of knowledge and truth. It is the basis for everyone's (and everything's) being and reality. Even moral truths, which are not founded on scientific fact, but rely on coherence or intuition, are grounded in the subjective experience of our own nature and the objectivity of the natural world generally. This reality helps us understand that we are all part of Nature, as an interconnected and interdependent web of connections that we cannot separate ourselves from. Instead, what sets humans apart is a rationality that enables us to glean divine wisdom, and absolute truth, in the form of natural laws.

The objective truth that can be found in natural law provides the rationale as to why Stoics are called to 'live in accordance with Nature.' As a fundamental principle of Stoic virtue ethics, it does not only apply to moral duties or obligations (which would be a deontological position). Nor is it the mere performance of appropriate actions (*kathekonta*). After all, there are many people or corporations who want to be *seen* doing the right thing without having to truly engage in *doing* the right thing for the right reason. If one simply engages in 'environmentally friendly' practices to appease shareholders then they are no more virtuous than the person who is actively destroying the environment or ignorant of environmental problems in the first place. This is because although the consequences will certainly be different, they will be no wiser, no more just, no more self-controlled or courageous. Progressing towards *eudaimonia* requires Stoics to grapple with reality and, as the environment is intrinsic to that (whether one accepts the Stoic theological position or not), no one can reasonably expect to

¹⁴ As translated by King (2010).

achieve *eudaimonia* without considering the state of the environment and the impact humans have had on it. This is fundamentally what the Stoic biologist Steve Karafit asserts when he states that one cannot claim to be progressing towards the goal of Stoic virtues at the cost of environmental sustainability (Karafit 2018).

In some respects, environmental concerns have been integrated into the contemporary Stoic worldview through the addition of the ‘environment’ to the Stoic ‘circles of concern’ by Whiting, Konstantakos, Carrasco et al. (2018). The ‘circles of concern’ is a theoretical model conceived by the Stoic Hierocles to depict an individual’s social relationships, moral obligations and responsibilities to the self, family, friends and the wider cosmopolis (Stobaeus, *Anthology* 4.84.23 = 3:134,1–136,2¹⁵; cf. *Anth.* 4.27.23 = 4:671,3–673,18¹⁶). The expansion of the circles of concern is a way of acknowledging that all the preceding circles (from the ‘self’ to the ‘whole of humanity’) rely upon the sustenance and support offered by Earth. The most all-encompassing circle explicitly captures the moral duty humans have, as Aldo Leopold states, to ‘preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community.’ (Leopold 1949, 224-225) Preservation is not undertaken because any particular species or specimen is special or has the ‘right to life’ but rather because, in a given set of circumstances, such an action is, morally speaking, obligatory.

The contemporary scholars Martha Nussbaum and Richard Sorabji (see Sorabji 1993; Nussbaum 2006) have criticized the ancient Stoic position on obligations towards animals, focusing on the following claims by Chrysippus and Epictetus:

Life had been given to the pig as a form of salt to keep it from going rotten and to preserve it for human use. (Chrysippus, as recorded by Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 2.154–62)

God created some beasts to be eaten, some to be used in farming, some to supply us with cheese, and so on. (Epictetus, *Discourses*, 1.6-18)¹⁷

It is our view that such claims should be evaluated alongside other Stoic statements that appear to contradict, or, at the very least, place caveats on what is being said by either Epictetus or Chrysippus. For one thing, Musonius Rufus, who was Epictetus’ mentor, would have vehemently contested any opinion that suggested that God made animals to be eaten. On the contrary, he stated that:

One should choose food suitable for a human being over food that isn’t. And what is suitable for us is food from things which the earth produces: the various grains and other plants can nourish a human being quite well. Also nourishing is food from domestic animals which we don’t slaughter. The most suitable of these foods, though, are the ones we can eat without cooking: fruits in season, certain vegetables, milk, cheese, and honeycombs... a meat-based diet [is] too crude for

¹⁵ Meineke edition.

¹⁶ Wachsmuth and Hense edition.

¹⁷ As translated by Dobbin (2008).

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humans and more suitable for wild beasts... The fumes which come from it are too smoky and darken the soul. For this reason, those who eat lots of meat seem slow-witted. (*Lectures* 18A.2 and 18A.3; see also 18B)¹⁸

While Musonius' claims are certainly unscientific from a *modern* standpoint, given that diet and exercise was considered to be a way in which virtue would manifest (see Tieleman 2003, 94:163), Musonius' obviously considered it his moral duty, as a Stoic teacher, to highlight which foods and food preparations would constitute an (in)appropriate action. In this respect, he clearly had grounds to believe that cooking and eating meat damaged one's moral character. He did not concur that the Divine purpose of animals was to 'be eaten.' Instead, he appealed to virtue as a reason for *not* eating them. Likewise, while Chrysippus believed that pigs existed for human consumption and that other animals were created so that humans could make use of them for their own purposes, he also stated that this should be done justly (Cicero, *On Ends* 3.67, Long and Sedley 1987, 57 F(5)). It is, thus, not a definitively Stoic position to argue that humans can automatically claim dominion over animals and treat them how they would like.

Any Stoics who are cruel, or careless about others being cruel towards animals could hardly claim that they were being just or self-controlled. No philosophical acrobatics or unusual interpretations of Stoic doctrine are required to argue that commercially intensive farming practices that do not allow a calf to receive milk from her mother is against Stoicism. Firstly, it is a rejection, or a dismissal, of a cow's needs to respond to God's call for her to live according to her own nature. Secondly, it is a rejection of the ancient Stoic recognition that humans, as animals, share certain characteristics, motives, and instincts with other members of the animal kingdom. The main shared instincts are the preservation and the caring for oneself, procreation and the looking after one's young and other members that belong to one's kind. These instincts then form the foundation of communal bonds (Dinucci 2016). It is this behavior which led to the development of the distinctly Stoic theory of 'appropriation' (*oikeiosis*) by Hierocles (Ramelli 2009; Long and Sedley 1987, 57, esp. A, F(1)). Through this ethical framing, which is itself a product of our sharing in the *logos*, Stoics acknowledged that animals were capable of partaking in mutually beneficial activities both within their own species and across such divides (Cicero, *On Ends* 3.63, Long and Sedley 1987, 57 F(2)). Cleanthes' observation of this reality, upon studying an ant colony, led him to acknowledge that Stoic arguments (including his own) that stated that reason was restricted to God and humankind were incorrect. He concluded that ants showed a collective 'mind' and that they were therefore 'not destitute of reason power.' (Aelian, *Nat. An* 11) This train of logocentric thought is also present in Musonius Rufus' lectures:

But you will agree that human nature is very much like that of bees. A bee is not able to live alone: it perishes when isolated. Indeed, it is intent on performing the

¹⁸ As translated by King (2010).

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common task of members of its species – to work and act together with other bees. (*Discourses* 14.3)

Under a Stoic framework it is important to remember that collaboration among species is patterned on the collaborative and benevolent nature of God, which is shared throughout the cosmos via the *logos*. One of the more nuanced features of Stoic theology is the fact that the cosmos, and consequently God, is *not* ‘perfect,’ at least not in the same way the Abrahamic tradition suggests. This is because while God is morally perfect in the sense that ‘His’ mind and actions are always appropriate and benevolent, humankind plays a role in bringing about absolute perfection when Nature itself cannot, as Musonius Rufus states:

For nature plainly keeps a more careful guard against deficiency than against excess, in both plants and animals, since the removal of excess is much easier and simpler than the addition of what is lacking. In both cases human common sense ought to assist nature, so as to make up the deficiencies as much as possible and fill them out, and to lessen and eliminate the superfluous. (*Discourses* 21.2-3)¹⁹

Musonius’ words highlight the fact that when humans work together with Nature they flourish as individuals and facilitate flourishing for all those who surround them, including the environment. The more that individuals cooperate with Nature, the more Nature is able to respond in kind. This means that while God might possess ‘imperfections,’ humankind is still provided with what it needs to achieve *eudaimonia* (cf. Aulus Gellius, 7.1.7).

4. Discussion

The purpose of this discussion is to highlight the fact that Stoicism can provide a framework for solving the environmental challenges that persist in the 21st century. We have put forward the case that Stoic theology presents a method of reasoning that helps individuals to understand their roles and, consequently, the obligations they have towards themselves and others to maintain Earth’s conditions in such a way that all entities can live according to Nature:

He then who has observed with intelligence the administration of the world, and has learned that the greatest and supreme and the most comprehensive community is that which is composed of men and God, and that from God have descended the seeds not only to my father and grandfather, but to all beings which are generated on the earth and are produced, and particularly to rational beings – for these only are by their nature formed to have communion with God, being by means of reason conjoined with him – why should not such a man call himself a citizen of the world, why not a son of God? (Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.10.1)²⁰

We have argued that if humans reject Divine Reason, the universe will degenerate and we will all fall into a vicious cycle. Gill and Galluzzo (2019) made

¹⁹ As translated by Lutz (1947).

²⁰ As translated by Long (1877).

a similar argument when supporting the extension of the circles of concern by Whiting, Konstantakos, Carrasco, et al. (2018). They stated that the inclusion of the 'environment' explicitly highlighted the moral obligation that humans have to act upon their capacity for reason on behalf of plants, animals and the planet. They argued that this was even more necessary given that humankind has, through intensive fossil fuel extraction and mass deforestation, among other things, negated or sufficiently reduced Nature's ability to offer providential care.

It is certainly possible that the collective failure to recognize that Nature, as the body of God, is worthy of reverence and respect, has contributed to the planetary imbalance that we are experiencing today. As Whiting and Konstantakos (2019) and Whiting et al. (2021) point out, a lot of socioenvironmental injustice has occurred precisely because some human values lie in contrary to what cultivates a morally good character. It is also clear that social conventions have not always acknowledged the role of Nature in providing providential care but have, in fact, diminished such care to the detriment of human wellbeing and planetary health. From a Stoic perspective one ought to ask: How just, self-controlled, or wise is it to encroach upon and squeeze indigenous human communities and non-human populations (animals or plants) out of existence? How virtuous is it to value money over clean air and water?

Modern society's faith in neoclassical economics has propagated beliefs (e.g. economic growth is infinite on a finite planet) which, while not theological, are religious propositions. They are 'religious' in the sense that it is difficult to challenge the orthodoxy, even in the environmental discourse, which promotes the 'need' and 'sustainability' of infinite growth as a means to ensure wellbeing (Raworth 2017; Whiting, Konstantakos, Carrasco et al. 2018). Fewer positions could be further from what Zeno, Stoicism's founder, proposed in his *Republic*, which stated that the ideal city would have no monetary exchanges because its population would value virtue over accumulated wealth (Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 7.33-34). Arguably, the belief in the 'truth' or the 'science' behind economic rules such as supply and demand (prices) is even more widespread and universally shared than a belief in God (Harari 2016). Furthermore, while religious and anti-religious groups will almost certainly disagree about the existence and characteristics of God, any debate among them regarding the 'benefits' and 'ills' of neoclassical economics would be much more limited in scope, with any fervent opposition to the current economic model seen as a fringe, or even an irrational, position (Foster 2000).

If the argument against the Stoic God is that one cannot scientifically prove the existence of God, one must also acknowledge that a Stoic cannot scientifically prove that virtue is the only 'good' and vice the only 'bad' either. Furthermore, holding that 'virtue is the only good' neither immediately nor necessarily leads to the idea that humanity is behaving appropriately when taking care of the universal community, which includes the environment. That is not to say that all the Stoic 'proofs' for God are correct either. The following, for example, is a fallacy:

If the gods do not exist, nothing in the universe can be superior to humans, the only beings endowed with reason. But for any human being to believe that nothing is superior to his or herself is a sign of insane arrogance. There is then something superior to humankind. Therefore, the gods exist. (Chrysippus 112-20)²¹

While Stoicism has elements of religiosity or spirituality, it is not a faith. It does not call its practitioners to have a faith in science either. Instead, it calls Stoics to think and act virtuously, as their roles and the facts at hand dictate. To obtain facts, one must consistently observe reality and collect empirical evidence to aid such observations. The obtaining and interpretation of facts is not an end in and of itself but instead paramount to harmoniously striving for the 'good life.' Those who see the value in Stoic theology must, in order to operate coherently, appreciate that a science-based understanding of reality helps humanity to understand what is at stake should the climate break down, toxins enter rivers, and animal populations approach extinction. Taking the time to evaluate facts will help Stoics to distinguish true impressions from false ones. The facts themselves will not tell Stoics what they ought to do. A two-degree centigrade average rise of the global temperature, due to fossil fuel burning, is neither good nor bad per se. If the average global temperature were twenty degrees centigrade lower, then it is likely that many of us would be advocating for further fossil fuel extraction and use. In Stoicism, a practitioner is always called to ask whether an action would lead to justice or not; whether it would be wise or not. The facts alone will not provide the answer either way, it is reason that will.

Marcus Aurelius advocated the use of taking the 'view from above' in order to properly understand one's position and role in the world relative to the whole. In some respects, it is only by looking through a God (logocentric) shaped lens that one can fully appreciate what Marcus meant. Reflecting deeply on the universe's interdependent and interconnected web frees humankind to pursue truth based on respect for Nature. It also enables each of us to act in ways that acknowledge that we are all part of a limb that belongs to a much bigger animal – one that flourishes when we work together and withers when we do not. Is it possible that we could care for such an animal if we remove God from Stoicism? Perhaps. Maybe we could lean on our secularized norms and values? It is certainly possible, but why have faith in those?

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²¹ As translated by Dragona-Monachou (1976).

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