

Stoicism Revised

It is fallacious to write an academic paper on Stoicism. If Marco Aurelio in his Meditations pointed out how grateful he was to be spared from wasting his life doing literature reviews, Seneca makes this clearer in his writings. While, in accordance with other Stoics, Seneca tried to avoid the use of foreign notions attempting to use words in its original sense, it is in "The Shortness of Life" that he escalates against academic pedantry. He makes fun of the Greek academics wasting their lives attempting to establish the number of rowers who followed Ulysses in his journey and saw this tendency also appearing in the Roman culture where academics debated on who was the first emperor to ever unleash the lions in a Gladiator show etc.

It is at this point that Seneca presents to the reader Papirio Fabiano, a prolific Roman philosopher who doubted the assimilation of knowledge. Under this perspective we may find it necessary to justify the need to write a review on Stoicism. While Micheal Foucault pointed at it in his "Technology of the Self" as an alternative to the technology of power threatening our daily life, much intellectual debate is still focused on this technology of power. A non-dogmatic revision of stoic philosophy can be in this sense initiating the discussion on how stoicism can come to the rescue in the increasingly polarized intellectual debates of our time.

Here we will therefore point out how the much criticized emergence of sousveillant technologies such as life-logging wearable cameras and the quantified self can in fact be seen to some extent as a possibility for stoic thought and conduct to re-emerge and lead the way to a better and more sustainable society. Following are in a nutshell what stroke me as the main characteristics of Stoic thoughts and their relation to what technology of the self, which in Foucault's mind corresponds to care of one self, can be.

We already pointed out the resistance of the Stoics for any pedantry work. Seneca, advising Paolino, a friend in doubt of how to step down from his busy life, tells him that it is better to account of oneself that of the grain of the state. In this respect he writes that mules are made to carry such a weight and not horses made for racing. In this sentences Seneca is clear that one ought to step down from the burden of social duties which are like the yoke prohibiting the ox to look back at the past, only projecting it in the abyss of the future.

The above paragraph might sound in dissonance with Stoic principles at large which focuses on laboriousness, meaning operosity. Already from the start of the Stoic movement in fact, the participation to the forum and therefore to the matters of the republic was an important conditions. As times changed however and the forum

became a dangerous sea, Seneca points out the need to wait in a calm harbour. This is not a coward or an Epicurean choice.

In his long essay "On Anger" Seneca points out to the existence of two republics. There is the republic we are usually acquainted with, with its global scopes and affairs and there is a more intimate republic constituted by a person and his private domain. When public affairs get too entangled and corrupted, it is better for the wise person to put his operosity to the minor republic. It is here that his work lead by his practie of virtue can inspire others for eternity.

In other words Seneca says that rather than wasting one's own voice at a too corrupted and decadent forum it is better to prepare what he calls the lights to point a new virtuous future to others. Tranquility is what a wise man seeking to make through his conduct an immortal examples to others is therefore to be found. This tranquility is therefore a precondition to the practice and love of virtue and the preeparation for life and death.

Here Seneca is well aware of the critic that other people moved against him. Mainly this critic referred to his healthyness. While very much despising luxury, Seneca was well aware that being rich was a very good condition to be virtuous particularly with others. Richness is seing only as a providential vehicle to practice virtue however it is considered temporary and gain and losses have to be accepted. According to Seneca then, one ought to have richness and not richness have him and one ought not to increase his richness too high to avoid a deadly fall.

We have now discussed the right condition to practice virtue but we have not yet specify what this practice consist of. On "Of a Happy Life" Seneca tells us briefly about his practice of self-examination. Every evening he would look back at every instance of his day trying to spot what he did right or wrong. On "The Shortness of Life" he talks about looking back as the characteristic of a wise man. While busy men can only look in the future for a moment of rest and have no time for the present and fear the past, it is the wise who can invest his present time looking into the past.

In this respect, if we are to think of life-logging and quantified-self technologies and the hype connected to them, we come to realize that they are mostly deviced for future oriented consumers who have a busy life and therefore are quite in contrast to what a stoic should be. Seneca despised the busy men of Rome running from one meeting to another and caring about the last fashion. To me, it is clear, wearable gadgets are this fashion.

To enforce my convinction that contemporary self-tracking at large, as conceived by the

industry, is not a form of stoicism, ultimately we read in Seneca what he means with the practice of virtue. If virtue is therefore a result of laboriousness, Seneca hints that in order to invest our time without waste, we ought to be fatiguing. Self-examination in Seneca is therefore conceived as a form of fatigue and in contrast, the self-tracking devices offered by the industry promise no effort in capturing, retrieving and analysing.

What can we define then a stoic? What is his or her love and practice of virtue? It is a effortfull self-examination, an examination avoiding the use of the preficonfigured systems develop by the industry, an examination that must be self-crafted also with effort and through a process. This effortfull self-examination is at the base of virtue, a virtue that gives insights on life but also prepares for a death that the consumers buying wearable gadgets are afraid of.

Seneca describes a virtuous erson as the a balloon that is not too deflated nor too inflated. In this respect he advocades for a life that is neither too cut out nor too social. As the self-examining frameworks offered by the industry depends on sharing the data through the social media, this state of perfect inflation can only be found by the individual alone. Aurelio here comes to our help indicating that a principle directiveness in our life can be developped by following one's one nature.

From now on we will treat Seneca's second republic, Aurelio's principle directiveness as well as Foucalt's technology of the self under what we define as personal framework. To cultivate virtue then, we have understood that it is necessary to develop a framework of self-examination that is not provided but ought to be conceived following one's own nature. Aurelio as well as Benjamin Franklin and Mahtma Gandhi were all important political figures who have been develeping schemes to enforce their virtue prior taking care of the social at large.

It is here important to define in stoic terms what we imply as personal framework. Literally we define as framework a frame that an individual establishes to confine his work. we use the adjective personal to emphasize that the individual as to have control of this framework. Only then, according to another Stoic Epithetus, only through the possesion of a personal framework the individual is to classify as completely free.

A personal framework is therefore a frame designed by an individual to dedicate himself to a laborious self-examination of which he is in full control. In a digital age then, the individual who aims for virtue and freedom ought not to utilize frameworks provided by the industry which on one hand hinder his laboriousness and on the other don't provide him full control.

The personal framework ought to be conceived as a system to achieve what Aurelio

define as holliness. It is not a selfish device but rather, as we have seen it adopted by great politicians like him and Franklin as well as Gandhi, it is the precondition to be a potential good leader. As it is often the case however among stoics like Zenone, Rufio, Seneca and Epithetus, precarious circumstances might never allow a stoic to serve society.

This is particularly the case when stoicism is developed under a state of emparialism. Under this circumstances the stoic is force to exile in another country or in the after life by committing suicide. The last is a measure taken when the possibility for his freedom (e.g. the removal of his possibility to cultivate his personal framework) is removed.

It cannot be denied that also today, in giant states governed by technology, the lives of individuals are engulfed and a stoic effort begins by cutting one's own freedom certainly not through a bland independence but through the conception of a personal framework which requires a fair enough knowledge of technology in order to bricolage it.

Ideologically this process is even harder under populist ideas that any forms of control, even the personal, is patriarchal and fascistic. To the contrary, as we showed before adressing the persecution of the stoics unde the age of the Roman empire, personal control and the development of virtue, for as much as they can be scorned, are the lights leading an alternative way into the near future, they are, in Seneca's mind, the stars above the stormy mass of humans laying in the lowest part of the sky.

It is Seneca here to be very critical about democracy at large, saying in his essay "On Anger" how nothing good came of the mass especially when lead by anger. He sees the need of bright and firm and therefore stoic stars leading with virtue the way. If on one hand, in the same essay he points out the pther opposite, the cruelty of tyran, it is to a aristocratic republic he is thinking of as a good system for self-maintainace.

What is the remedy for a morally sick person? The remedy may lay in getting closer to nature and balance along with it his deviation. In the same manner we cannot deny that a cultural revolution bringing an entire population back to nature might have had its positive effects. We can see the technological progress as the element of disturbance within a person as well as around him. Regular immersions in nature can be redirective.

What is needed for each citizen is a natural domain not where to fall in complete leisure but where his care can be espressed. What I am referring to is literal, each citizen need to remeasure himself through a natural work. Common sense can only arise through this practice. In whatever circustance this natural domanin can be most certainly found within a person. It is the small door to a giant palace he did not know he owned.