The post-existentialist neo-stoicism of Jacon Xenakis and the stoic theory of suicide

Dragona-Monachou Myrto

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by

Myrto Dragona-Monachou, Ph. D.

To determine the rational and the irrational\(^1\) and to learn to apply these «protoconcepts»\(^2\) to specific instances, two things are needed, said Epictetus,\(^3\) the teacher par excellence of Jason Xenakis: education and «the criterion of that which is in keeping with one's own characters».\(^4\) For, to most men, it is reasonable to endure all sorts of humiliation, to swallow the worst insults, to undergo any mutilation, provided that they remain alive, that they would go on living, regardless of whether this existence is of any value, or whether existence has become a morally indifferent matter, in the Stoic sense of the word.\(^5\) «For different men sell themselves their value at different prices» Epictetus continues. Most men forget their «proper character» and are content to be a mere thread of the garment.\(^6\) Whereas others, the few, value themselves more highly and prefer to keep their character at all costs. For the latter any compromise in moral questions is irrational. It is contrary to reason and thus contrary to Nature.\(^7\) And all familiar with Stoicism know how central a notion was reason (logos) to the pre-Hegelian Stoic panlogism (not only in logic, but also in physics and ethics). Reason (and

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\(^1\) I would like to thank Mr. G. Giannaris for having kindly placed at my disposal Xenakis' early writings and given me information about him as a man and teacher. Though familiar with his works on Stoicism, I cannot claim to have been personally acquainted with him, having met him only once. What follows is entirely based on assumptions drawn from his writings and written immediately after his death five years ago.

\(^2\) By «rational» or «reasonable» I translate the Greek word εύλογον as it occurs in Epictetus and the early Stoics in some particular cases such as αίρεσις εύλογος and εύλογος εξαγωγή. The term may sometimes be translated as «probable» in other cases (probabile in Latin) and is very important to Epictetus who speaks of a «preconception» of it.

\(^3\) Discourses 1, 2, 6.

\(^4\) Disc. 1, 2, 7: Εἰς δὲ τὴν τοῦ εὐλόγου καὶ ἀλόγου κρίσιν οὐ μόνον ταῖς τῶν ἠτόκους Δίας αὐτωποίησις ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν κατὰ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτὸν δικαίως. The whole Discourse is concerned with «how may a man preserve his proper character upon every occasion».

\(^5\) From the moral point of view things are divided by the Stoics into good, bad and indifferent. See SVF III 70-71.

\(^6\) Disc. 1, 2, 11-18.

\(^7\) This is implicit in the Stoic teleē-formula «living in accordance with nature» which amounts to «living according to reason». Xenakis lays more emphasis on reason than on nature: «Epictetus' precept to live agreeably with nature is reducible to the advice to live realistically... or of course reasonably, insofar as the Stoic appeal to nature is regarded as a misguided appeal to human reason» (Epictetus 55).
especially upright reason) was identical with Nature and Logosophy. Among those few who, though holding an eudaemonistic view of life in a non-naturalistic sense and being of an optimistic disposition, did not hesitate to depart from it of their own free will, as soon as life ceased to be worth living, Epicurus mentions an Olympian athlete who was in danger of dying unless he submitted to an operation. He refused the treatment and died, death being preferable to amputation; for although his athletic ability would not have been lost, he would have felt shame among his fellows, and loss of self-esteem. This would also have been inconsistent with the teaching of the philosophical school of which he was a member. Yet Epicurus, in praising him for his decision, remarked that he did not act either as an athlete or a philosopher but as a man.

This comment has been variously interpreted. Bonhoff12 considers this case of suicide as justified by the sense of honor which would have been injured if the athlete had preferred to go on living mutilated, and not by any moral principle. J.M. Rist13 treats this «curious» passage, as he puts it, as «a perversion of the older and commonplace Stoic view that a man may die for his principles», relating it to questions of character for Stoics, regarding the act as an expression of courage, assumes that in praising the athlete's act Epicurus may be condoning euthanasia.14 However we interpret this passage, the property of man is not here to be separated from that of the philosopher, and especially of the Stoic philosopher. By «man» Epicurus means, says Xenakis, a rational human being, and he adds: «By classifying oneself as a human being, one is committed to be a Stoic, that is, to regard reason as sovereign». «Man» thus can stand for a rational being, and moreover for a free being, used to exercising his freedom not in trifling matters but in questions of life and death; i.e. for a proud personality fully aware of his own «proper character». It is here a case of dignity and adherence to strict principles. Epicetus himself said that he would rather die than shave his beard off,16 if someone forced him to do so, because he considered it «part of his own mask as a philosopher», i.e. as a symbol of his philosophical profession, which he deemed to be a service imposed by God. Both are cases of the Stoic unbending pride and dignity, the only virtues of Stoic ethics Christianity could not tolerate. But is no way can pride as a justification of suicide be excluded from the moral sphere, in which the question of suicide was more or less placed by the Stoics.18 It is the combined virtues of the athlete and philosopher—whose happy coexistence was revived in Xenakis'—that must have constructed Epicetus' notion of «man». And this was in harmony with the conception of man in classical Greek thought, as embodying the ideal of the unity of the «good» and the «beautiful».

In this short paper, dedicated to J. Xenakis' memory, I do not attempt to explain the secret of the motivation of his fatal act with Epicetean maxims. My reference to Epicetus is not arbitrary, however, since Xenakis' work on the philosopher constitutes the main contribution of English-speaking literature to the bibliography on Epicetus, the prominent defender of human freedom. Nor do I justify his decision to desert the international society of philosophy. The athlete who chose death over amputation and thus gained the approval of Epicetus is mentioned here only to explain Xenakis' «drastic liberation» in the light of Stoicism, the philosophical movement he revived for himself by both living and dying its precepts19—to speak in Heracleitan terms—and whose study he contributed greatly during the last years of his life. I attempt to show his last act as the «last item» of Epicetus' negative ethics which, as viewed by Xenakis, include «analysis, delay, realism, strength, detachment, separation, mediation and suicides».20 Among these «remedial devices» suicide is the most drastic method of escaping pain and is used when all else has failed,21 an alternative method to self control, a rational choice when all other preventive and remedial techniques have proved ineffective, and all resistance methods and other «tonics»22 impotent to save one's


17. See Rist, op. cit., 252. 18. E. Benz (Das Todesproblem in der stoischen Philosophie, Stuttgart 1968, 29) cited by Rist (op. cit. 233) regards the problem of suicide related to that of free will in Stoicism from the beginning, with which Rist does not agree. 19. As it can be gathered from his curriculum vitae, he was a Greek philosopher for years. And this was not his only interest in sports. 20. In the preface of his book on Epicetus Xenakis speaks of the paucity of Epicetus' studies. The bibliography by W.A. Oldfather (Contribution towards a Bibliography of Epicurus, Urbana 1927-1952), however, amounts to about 1185 titles with translations and commentaries. Yet it seems true that «this (i.e. Xenakis book) is the first book-length commentary published in English devoted only to him» (op. cit. IX). 21. See Hercul. B 60 DK: ζωής τὸν οίκεσιν τῆς θανατού, τὸν δὲ οἴκεσιν βιών τετραχώς. 22. Epicetus 83. He explains there that the names of these items are his own but that they somehow get support from the text. 23. Ibid., 23, 84. 24. See ch. 31: «Other safeguards» and 34: «It's fated and other tonics».

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identity, integrity and self-image.25 Xenakis did not depart from life out of weakness of will, lack of courage, or mental imbalance. No other way was left for him «when the smoke filled the house».26 Far from being an irrational outlet in a moment of despair, his decision appears to me a «rational» choice, in accordance with the Stoic teaching and particularly the ethics of Epictetus, with which he was familiar and which he practiced. Without trying to justify his act by any practical standard, considering suicide meaningless in matters of life,27 I wish to express my conviction: «only exclusions on his writings and especially on those concerned with Stoicism and endorsing the «Stoic suicide therapy», and on a paper read at the World Congress of Philosophy four years before his death, that Xenakis' 'splitting' of his own free will must be seen as the most telling confirmation of the Stoic (and his own) sense of freedom as an 'excluder', as liberation28—not as utopianism. Xenakis attained the Stoic ideal of the free man. He died «rationally» and in accordance with his «idiosyncratic» reading of the Stoicism of Epictetus.

His philosophical interest centered upon Stoicism relatively late.29 As it can be gathered from references in his writings,30 he must have begun his philosophical researches with Plato, to whom he repeatedly returned.31 He gained philosophical maturity within the realm of the logical discipline of analytical philosophy, to which he made a considerable contribution with several short articles (of a destructively critical character) dealing with current moral, aesthetic and epistemological theories.32 He considered himself a follower of the «ordinary and modern philosophy» with an emphasis on aesthetics, logic and linguistic philosophy.33 At the same time he deeply admired Cynicism. This was «the most durable philosophical movement» for him.34 He greatly extolled the Cynical way of life as exemplified and revived by contemporary hippies. So much did the Cynic ideal appeal to him that he upheld that «the best ethicist of our time» is among henchies (and relatives) rather than in philosophy departments.35 Ancient Scepticism with its noncommittal attitudes also attracted him,36 because of his anti-dogmatism and his avoidance of anything that could turn his self-dependence into ego-dependence.37 Cyrenaic pessimism about the attainability of happiness and the Hegesian prompt resort to suicide also attracted him at times.38

Plato's Ethics (HTTR 50, 1957, 67-70) one may assume that his Ph. D. Dissertation at Harvard University was on Plato. He mentions there as his «teachers» W. Jaeger, R. Demos, Cavarnos, Stampolis, J.L. Cook, D. Ross and other distinguished scholars.


4. Apart from relevant articles, there is an explicit statement of his in his article «Deity-Values», Hilbert II 26 (1958) 255-61. This is assumed from his Curriculum Vitae. He has taught at Deree College (full professor); University of Alberta (Canada); Louisiana State University; McNeese State College; University of North Carolina; University of Maryland (Athens Campus).

32. He considered himself a «Platonist» and «Philosopher-Practitioner» in 1949/50. He also wrote two articles with the same title on Aristotle: «Aristotle on Truth Values» in 1957/8. He did not write anything on the subject but Hegesias is referred to in his Epicus 19 and his articles on Hellenistic movements. In SSTH he has put Hegesias' alleged saying «Suicide is liberation» as motto.

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These interests were steps for Xenakis in his existential quest. Stoicism, particularly the Stoicism of Epictetus, almost totally absorbed his last philosophical investigations. Apart from some epistemological articles most of his publications since 1968 were directly or indirectly imbued by Stoicism. It is highly probable that Xenakis resorted to Epictetus' «clinic» and surrendered himself to his drastic therapy after a personal experience which probably shocked him deeply.

Plato required that the attendants of philosophy attain a certain age. Physical and mental maturity is needed to grasp the meaning of the Stoic teaching. «Epictetus, since he seldom uses the word in the political sense» Plato's stand is more ambivalent and remedial devices amounted to not only from Xenakis' «impressionistic» survey in his book on the philosopher, but also from his essay on «Stoic Suicide Therapy». In this paper he mainly epitomizes the «credo» of his teacher concerning life and death (particularly self-inflicted death) as the ultimate expression of the most utopian freedom.

The views found in it are so close to his own (as revealed in the paper read at Varna in 1973) that there is not doubt either that Xenakis fully incorporated the Stoic teaching as he understood it, or that he devoted himself to Stoicism because he ideosyncratically shared the same views. Among his own ideas of life and freedom and «life in freedom» Xenakis echoes Epictetus' teaching on the self and its detachment from externals. Not all these presumably Epictetean ideas entirely coincide with those found in accounts of other scholars. This does not mean that Xenakis biased the evidence, but that he read it in a personal way, which renders «his Epictetus» somewhat different from the «credo» of his teacher concerning life and death.

Epictetus' views on suicide are in conformity with the general Stoic tradition, though the issue is connected by him with the question of freedom. Epictetus' treatment of the subject appeared to Xenakis more important than the traditional Stoic discussions, because the lame freedman confronts it existentially and associates it with outlooks on life which have greatly impressed Xenakis, and which made suicide in-irrevocable. Yet Xenakis lays stress on the Stoic features—though with some Cynic shades—of Epictetus' theory and does not consider him to be at variance with orthodox Stoic teaching on this point.

In his haste to depart from life, he went beyond Epictetus and the other Stoics. In his striving after freedom he chose the most drastic of Epictetus' remedial devices, without heeding his master's advice to «delay when misfortune strikes». Whereas Cleanthes and Epictetus' pupil Demonax are said to have died of their own free will after having lived almost a century, and Zeno and Antipater in old age —Seneca's suicide being imposed on him—Xenakis left in his early 50's, at about the age of Cato, the Stoic «martyr». Despite the features our epoch shares with the Hellenistic era, it is more difficult to be a committed Stoic nowadays than in the distant past. The pitfalls in the way of freedom may be too numerous to overcome. Xenakis' obsession with Stoic suicide as therapy and ultimate expression of freedom, and his sharing Epictetus' general outlook on life suggests that his action be understood in terms of the Stoic «rational exit».

Although other Greek philosophers have not openly condemned suicide, and the Cyrenaic Hegesians ex-tolled it, the Stoics were the only ones to defend it on philosophical grounds as a rational deliverance and ultimate affirmation of freedom. The early Stoics moreover, Chrysippus in particular, claimed that it is the wise man and not the foolish who is entitled to extract himself from life rationally. Although this appears paradoxical at first sight, only the wise man's decision is ipso facto rational. Only he can judge whether his decision to depart, even if he is happy and

41. Epictetus 8, Cf. p. 74 and Disc. II 19, 29 and III 23, 30-32: «Men, the lecture-room of the philosopher is a hospital; you ought not to walk out of it in pleasure, but in pain. For you are not well when you come», Cf. SSTh 81.
42. See Epictetus 83.
43. Most scholars lay more emphasis on Epictetus' religious thought and spirituality. They also relate his passion for freedom to his having been born a slave, emancipated later by his master, which Xenakis does not see so important for his passion for freedom, since «he seldom uses the word in the political sense». The meaning of E's freedom is for him rather psychological (op. cit., 16). His bibliography is greatly selective and consistent with the spirit of his own interpretation of Epictetus. This is also at variance with my appreciation of Epictetus' theological ideas found in a long chapter devoted to him in my book. The Stoic Arguments for the Existence and the Providence of the Gods, Athens 1976, 209-230, but I do not disagree with his basic assumptions, since he has looked at Epictetus from another angle.
44. For bibliography related to my point of view see my book, op. cit., p. 300.
46. On Zeno's death see SYP I 6, on Cleanthes I 474-476, and on Antipater's III Ant. 7. Cato died at about his fifties.
47. For Xenakis' survey on the attitudes of Greek and some modern philosophers on suicide (somewhat incomplete) see SSTh. The following may be briefly added: The Pythagoreans condemned suicide on religious grounds and Aristotle on religious and social. So did the Epicureans, but because they considered life worth living, since death meant absolute dissolution to them. Against suicide were also the Academicians, Peripatetics and perhaps the Cyrenaics except Hegesius. Plato's stand is more ambivalent than as presented by Xenakis. Because he permitted it under extreme necessity. All other Greek philosophers and particularly the Stoics, Cynics and perhaps the Sceptics were favourable to it. The laws of ancient cities except Koss were repugnant to it. Suicide was practiced widely under the Roman Empire, mainly due to Stoic influence. Most modern thinkers, particularly John Donne, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Hume and many contemporaries, were not opposed to the exercise of the right of suicide. Among those who rejected it Schopenhauer is curiously the most prominent. The question is revived nowadays because of the discussions held on euthanasia.
virtuous, is correct. The late Stoics extended this right to all men and Xenakis does not discriminate between the wise and the foolish, associating voluntary death with the question of freedom, on which the early Stoics did not lay particular emphasis.

He finds that most Greek philosophers (including Democritus and Socrates) have a positive attitude to suicide, considering the «negative» stand of Plato and Aristotle «atypical». Like the late Stoics, he does not permit the determination of the cases in which suicide is permitted and justified. In this he seems to have adopted the common late Stoic trend without the technicalities concerning the wise and the foolish, since later this distinction became weaker. The early Stoics must have related this distinction to the question of suicide under the influence especially of the Cyrenaeics (better the adherents of Hegesias), particularly in connection with the Cynics in this respect. As we know from Diogenes Laertius (II 95) the Hegesians held that it was more expedient for the fool to go on living than to die, whereas for the wise, life was a matter of indifference. The Cynics, on the other hand, considered suicide the best alternative to an irrational course of life. This was consistent with their doctrine that death is totally indifferent to man, virtue being his end and freedom his ultimate good. As J.M. Rist it puts it, by their precept «either reason or the rope» the Cynics «are prepared to commit suicide, as a remedy for any kind of failure to live a rational life». And though permitting suicide even for trivial reasons and according to the moral character of the agent, the Cynics did not consider that it was the prerogative of the wise man to decide upon the rationality of the action, nor did they attach great importance to the matter. Xenakis did not lay emphasis on this differentiation between the Cynic and Stoic views, and, while finding acceptance of suicide consistent even with Scepticism, he regards the Stoics as pupils of the Cynics, even in his view of suicide as a fulfillment of the Cynico-Stoic sense of freedom as liberation from hindrance and constraint.

The justification of suicide—though not its extollation in Hegesias' way—constitutes at first sight one of the great paradoxes of Stoicism, apparently its most irreconcilable antithesis. Its acceptance seems inconsistent with some of the basic tenets of Stoic ethics such as the following: The primary inclination of a human being is its self-preservation. The end of life is happiness, and living happily amounts to living in virtue and in accordance with nature and logos. But this is not the proper place to present or even summarize the basic Stoic ethical doctrine with its technicalities and its complicated theoretical basis. It suffices to say that suicide is not required by such doctrines which believe that virtue consists of the exercise of reason, and it is unalienable by anything under the most adverse circumstances. Strictly speaking, natural evil, including pain, is either nonexistent or necessary for the exercise of virtue. This is basic tenet of Stoic theodicy (or cacodicy, as Xenakis preferred to call it). Only vice is really bad, and only virtue morally good. And vice does not depend on externals, since no adversity can change the good disposition of the moral agent. Nothing can harm the wise man, because nothing can abate the strength of his soul (his tonos). Freedom is mainly internal, and this consists of assenting to events happening within the deterministic nexus of Stoic physics, and of not being compelled to follow them. On the higher level of Stoic ethics, people are either wise or foolish. But in actual fact the Stoic sage was never found. The extreme application of the basic Stoic aphorism «bear and forbear» renders all external adversities meaningless, and the fundamentally Stoic dispositions of unperturbedness (ataraxia) and unfalzteness (apatheia) make the Stoic invulnerable to disturbance and pressure. On the other hand, his continuous training to eradicate or at least to alleviate passion makes the Stoic master of his emotions and thus independent of all circumstances. Suicide, therefore, should have found no place within the realm of appropriate and inappropriate acts. It seems superfluous in Stoic ethics, which is not so much an ethic of «resignation» but of joyful subjection to the universal Law of Nature, which is a better arbitrator than individual laws and wills.

It is not strange, therefore, that most of our evidence about the early Stoic theory of suicide has come down to us from opponents of Stoicism such as Plutarch («l'adversaire privilégié» of the Stoics) and the Aristotelian commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias. Plutarch criticizes the Stoic views destructively in his treatises De stoicorum repugnaniis and De communibus motitis on the ground that they

48. See SVF III 758-759.
49. «STThs 79. It is true that Socrates' death was early considered a heroic suicide and Cato died reading Plato's Phaedo.
50. The main circumstances under which suicide was permitted by the early Stoics were the following: For the sake of one's country and friends and under hard pain, amputation and incurable disease (SVF III 757). Cf. SVF III 768, where the five ways of «rational deliverance» are presented in a metaphorical language: Life is like a banquet and there are so many ways of reasonable voluntary death as there are reasons for interrupting the banquet: namely, great necessity (joyful sometimes), sudden presence of obscene talkers, unwholesome food, lack of food, and drunkenness with all their metaphysical and actual consequences.
52. For an excellent modern survey of Stoic ethics see A.A. Long, op. cit., 179-209. For a good placement of the question of suicide in the realm of the Stoic discussions of duties see Bonhöffer, op. cit., 188-193.
53. Epictetus 46ff. He says: «I coined the expressions cacodicy (justification of evil) and algodicy (justification of suffering and pain) because theodicy, the usual word employed in connection with the problem of evil is absurd if «god» is at the same time defined as perfect or even as good». Anyways Xenakis does not find the Stoic, even Epictetus, «cacodicy» entirely satisfactory.
54. These are Xenakis' renderings for the Greek terms. His interpretation of these Stoic virtues is very much in accordance with the Stoic spirit. See Epictetus 81ff.
55. But as a matter of fact the whole question is placed in this realm. See SVF III 763 and Bonhöffer op. cit., 188.
56. Plutarch has been so characterized by D. Babut, Plutarque et les Stoïciens, Paris 1971.
discuss the appropriateness to stay in life or depart from it not in terms of what is morally good or bad, but in relation to the class of 'intermediate' things in reference to nature.\textsuperscript{57} He finds two strictures within Chrysippus' insistence on the wise man's duty to depart from life (for all his happiness and security) and the fool's to remain alive, even if there is no hope if the latter to acquire wisdom, as well as his view that moral virtue and moral vice have nothing to do with life itself.\textsuperscript{58} Alexander of Aphrodisias sees a contradiction in the sage's decision to die of his own free will and the Stoic doctrine of the self-sufficiency of virtue and its unalienability by any lack of natural disadvantages.

Cicero, as a Platonist, may be included among them since the Platonic attitude to suicide is different. According to it man as a possession of God does not have the right to escape except by a divine signal, or under extreme necessity, a stand, however, which the opponents of Stoicism could not always make.\textsuperscript{59} Yet Cicero is impartial and in his sole piece of evidence on the matter he gives us the best Stoic explanation why it is appropriate for the sage to depart from life even when his virtue is not threatened and he is still happy and serene.\textsuperscript{60} He relates the subject with the whole question of 'duties' and the subclass of the second-level goods, i.e., those which are said to be 'in accordance with human nature' the most strict moral sphere, though the wise man's act to leave life is ipso facto a moral choice, provided that his act is 'timely' behavior.\textsuperscript{61} Because 'many of the things which accord with human nature are not unconditionally appropriate', and thus suicide is an extreme example of conduct inimical to a man's own interests in most circumstacies which might be rationally defended in certain situations.\textsuperscript{62}

In less technical terms, the Stoic theory of suicide may be explained (though not completely justified) on the grounds of the evaluation of life and death in themselves within the general Stoic theory of value, which the opponents of Stoicism could not always grasp. Both taken in themselves were considered by the Stoics as morally indifferent. As Xenakis remarks, 'it is the use made of life, not life as such that matters.'\textsuperscript{63} What is important in questions of life and death is the moral disposition, intention and character of the agent (his προηγμένος), his moral purpose of inner self, to speak in the language of Epictetus. The inner motive is quite different in the wise and in the ordinary man (or the fool in the early Stoic sense) and this explains the justification of the decision and the act of the former but not of the latter. With as long as external circumstances do not threaten the human moral purpose and as long as life is consistent with human nature, it is still preferable to death. It has value, is naturally advantageous and is to be selected and preferred to its opposite. Thus it is appropriate for man to enjoy it. But when life ceases to be 'natural' and even before it becomes 'unnatural', it turns out to be an ἀδιάνοητον, deprived of any intrinsic value; and to depart from it is not merely appropriate, a καθήκον, but a 'perfectly appropriate act' a real κατάφορον. When man is brought to the point to groan within himself, death is no longer a matter of indifference; it is to be actively preferred to life. As soon as vice threatens one's moral purpose, one may escape, 'not so much forced by external circumstances, but by moral virtue itself.' Because of the 'indifference' of life and death in themselves, freedom, dignity, pride and character, which are indisputable values, are placed on a higher level than simple life and longevity.

The right to judge the appropriateness of the last action is further extended by the late Stoics to ordinary men, and is no longer the prerogative of the wise man, 'who was rarer than the mythical phoenix.'\textsuperscript{64} Some criterion is still necessary, however, in order to determine whether circumstances impose voluntary departure and at the same time to justify the rationality of the action. Wisdom constituted such a criterion for the early Stoics but it is generally considered insufficient. Its formality and vagueness is regarded as the weakest point of the Stoic theory of suicide, because it may be offered as an excuse for unjustifiable deaths. In discussing intolerable pain as an excuse for suicide, Rist soundly asks: 'Does not the degree of adversity that would impel one to suicide be concerned, made Bonhöffer condemned the Stoic suicide theory as failing to unequivocally determine the point to which external necessity is unbearable, even if it was stated that it is only under the most difficult circumstances that the right to depart willingly might be granted. For all these deficiencies and objections pointed out even by ancient critics and philosophical rivals of

\textsuperscript{57} See SVF III 759-760. It is the case of the μία κατά ωσιν, which are neither morally good nor wrong, which is equivalent to the 'intermediate' goods.

\textsuperscript{58} De comm. not. op. cit. 1 p. 1063d (SVF III 759). Cf. SVF III 761-762.

\textsuperscript{59} SVF III 764: 766-767.

\textsuperscript{60} Zeno's suicide was explained as obedience to a sign given by god. See Rist, op. cit., 234-236 and 242 on Zeno's death.

\textsuperscript{61} See Rist, op. cit., 252; Bonhöffer, op. cit., 30. But Xenakis, Epictetus 19, considers Zeus' permission a 'mere formality.' Cf. Dist. 1 9 16; III 13, 14.

\textsuperscript{62} De finibus III 18, 60 (SVF III 763).

\textsuperscript{63} Et saepe officium est sapientis desciscere a vita, cum sit beatissimae, si id opportune facere possit. Sic enim censent, opportunitatis esse beate vivere, quod est conventiener naturae vivere (SVF III 763).

\textsuperscript{64} A.A. Long, op. cit., 206.

\textsuperscript{65} Epictetus 19. Actually this is the view of Epictetus, Dis. II 6, 15.

\textsuperscript{66} The wise man was an ideal rather than an actual man. See SVF III 662, 668. From the Middle Stoa onwards it was spoken of men 'progressing towards virtue' and not so much of the polar distinction between the wise and the fools.
Stoicism, the early Stoics elaborated a positive theory of suicide, consistent with the greater part of their ethical teaching, and most of them put the theory into practice themselves. This positive attitude the late Stoics defended more fervently, due to the greater instability and anxiety of the Roman age. And even if we are not in the position to speak of a general theory of suicide held unalterably by all Stoics, i.e. by Zeno down to Marcus Aurelius, nevertheless we can trace some common trends during the five centuries of Stoicism. Without placing suicide at the center of early Stoic ethics, there are some common features that testify to the unity of Stoic philosophical thought and its helenic character; for the Jews condemned suicide on religious grounds. The matter is closely associated with freedom in late Stoicism as the expression and fulfillment of its most utopian form. But there is still differentiation among its representatives. Seneca extolls suicide as the unalienable right of self-disposal. He sings «pacem» to it and a certain libido mortendi is not alien to him. For him suicide is open to everyone, and, as Rist puts it, «suicide itself makes a man free». He considers it «the ultimate means of salvation» and proclaims that «the highway to liberty is any vein in one's body». He was, moreover, the single late Stoic who committed suicide (though forced by Nero, with the choice only of its means). M. Aurelius is also well disposed to suicide, but his attitude is ambivalent. He views the problem existentially. His «crisis of identity», the strong sense of the Heraclean flux dominating everything and making it unimportant betray a more emotional attitude on his part than with the other Stoics'.

In spite of the shades of opinion held by the individual Stoics, because of their common positive attitude towards suicide, we may speak of life in the Stoic sense as a «being towards death» in an anti-Heideggerian spirit, i.e. not as a matter of ultimate concern, but as a matter of indifference always present in the Stoic's mind as a safety valve to liberation.

Xenakis, unlike Rist and Bonhoffner, has read an unequivocal affirmation of suicide into Epictetus. He does not consider rational and moral only the cases in which a divine signal is implied. Such cases he finds unimportant and mere reminders of the Platonic inheritance because he believes God to be only a value ideal and a «systematically elusive concept» in him. Though discussing Epictetus' views of divine providence and the signs of design in the world, he finds his arguments inconclusive and regards Zeus as inoperative in Epictetus' world-view, being thus at variance with the current orthodox interpretation. Xenakis belittles the importance of passages in which Epictetus appears to attempt to dissuade people from suicide, paying particular attention to passages in which suicide is appreciated in terms of freedom, dignity and pride. As it is clear in his article on «Stoic Suicide Therapy» he sees Epictetus as the main representative of the positive Stoic stand on suicide, a role that Seneca was more entitled to play. For his scholarly objectivity and his reliable, though somewhat «impressionistic», interpretation of Epictetus, he sometimes projects his own ideas into him. Not only has he presented Epictetus as an «apostle» of freedom, in his own sense of it as liberation, but also a most fervent defender of suicide.

Epictetus' enthusiasm for freedom, attested by the extensive use of the word in Arrian's report of the Discourses, as well as his anti-existentialist notion of it, may have been the main reason why he had so strong an appeal to Xenakis as to have him attribute ideas to the philosopher more radical than he in fact had. As far as we know only Xenakis denied the theonomic character of Epictetus' ethics, arguing that his ethics can stand without the belief in God and placing little weight on his theological conception of the universe. But apart from their common obsession with freedom Xenakis had further reasons for singling out Epictetus and becoming a devoted student of his. Epictetus much more than the other late Stoics, who were mostly ethically minded, still had interest in logical theory. And Xenakis was perfectly equipped to tackle the technical Stoic logic. Epictetus was also the only professional teacher among his nearly contemporary Stoics, following the example of his teacher Musonius. Xenakis found in him a teacher, like himself, occupied with philosophy as a therapy, considering the philosophers to suicide on which an objective account could be based are the following: Dis. I 2, 3–4; I 1; 9, 16; 9, 20; 24, 20; 25, 18; II 1, 20; 15; 4; 23; 16; 11; 13; 14; 22; 34; 24; 105; IV 1, 20; 171; 10; 27.

74. Epictetus 19, 56. Cf. STS74-76.
75. Dis. I 9 16; II 15, 4-8.
77. I know no man upon whose lips the idea (of freedom) more frequently occurs. The word «free» (adjective and verb) and «freedom» appear some 130 times in Epictetus, that is, with a relative frequency about six times that of their occurrence in the New Testament and twice that of their occurrence in Marcus Aurelius (W. A. Oldfather, Epictetus, The Discourses, Oxford 1961, XV). Cf. Xenakis, Epictetus 16.
78. Epictetus 16, 46, 56, 58.
The post-existentialist neo-stoicism of Jason Xenakis and the stoic theory of suicide

By

Iosif E. Karpov

Theosophical school as a clinic and himself as a philosopher-therapist with a drastic course of healing. Yet it is worthwhile. Life is a mission. You can retain a realistic mood, even if it is comfortable or boring. Life is a campaign, a game, greater than the pancratium and wrestling and the greatest. It is a "play" for "boys" with not enough winners. As soon as the rules are broken, the game is over and the playmates can "depart." Life is a guesthouse, a motel, in which you lodge for one night, without caring whether you would be no fun. Life is a prison, no eudaemonistic outlook or optimistic mood can be retained.

His personal views of life, revealed in his last but one public paper, fully coincide with Epictetus' attitude towards it. They use the same metaphors to express its playful, nonserious and nonsacred character. Epictetus' refrain that life is a game becomes a leitmotif of his. Not only is life a game but the greatest game, greater than the pancratium and wrestling and all other Olympic games, for its trophy (happiness) is the greatest. It is a "play" for "boys" not enough winners. As soon as the rules are broken, the game is open and the playmates can "depart." Life is fun, a great joke, as the Cynics also maintained. And in fun there is always escape; for otherwise there would be no fun. Life is a guesthouse, a motel, in which you lodge for one night, without caring whether you would be no fun. Life is a guesthouse, a motel, in which you lodge for one night, without caring whether you would be no fun.

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philosophically (not only historically) and more timely in reference to modern needs.

He concentrated upon ethics because he considered it to be Epictetus' «dominant interest» and because he had not found «his diagnosis of problems in living and techniques for coping with them sufficiently appreciated».93 He regarded Epictetus' ethics as «primarily pain oriented» and consisting of «existential reminders, such as that things are ephemeral and people vulnerable, plus ways of avoiding and easing distress, including training and thought analysis».94 He saw Epictetus more interested in individual than socio-political ethics and the former more «pain» than «happiness-oriented». He divided them into «preventive» (teaching for anticipating ills) and «remedial» (techniques for alleviating and rectifying ills). Suicide is included among the latter as the most drastic remedy when all else failed.95

The degree to which he assimilated Epictetus' teaching is obvious if one compares the epilogue of his essay «Stoic Suicide Therapy», summarizing the presumed Epictetean views, with the last lines of his paper read at the Congress. The epilogue of the essay can be seen as Epictetus' last command to Xenakis. It runs as follows: «Thus if you get into a crippling car smash and no longer enjoy tennis and other things, use the extra time and energy on your writing and so get into «an ultimate» (teaching for anticipating ills) and «remedial» (techniques for alleviating and rectifying ills). Suicide is included among the latter as the most drastic remedy when all else failed.95

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Xenakis seems to have followed the first part of his teacher's command for many years, making a considerable contribution to philosophy with his monograph on Epictetus—the only «book-length study on him» in English-speaking literature, as he remarks—, and many important articles published in the best philosophical periodicals throughout the world. In these he tried to «establish a philosophical terminology derived from Greek roots»97 which is worthwhile to be studied and perhaps used. And there came a time when he judged it timely and rational to comply with the last part of his teacher's precept: to see the door wide open and make the decisive leap as if ready from long ago.

The degree to which he prepared to depart is manifest in his own commandment to himself in the epilogue of his paper on «Freedom and the Tourist Philosopher». Summing up in it the «tourist outlook on life» he gives «a sketch of a possibility, not a categorical imperative» which runs as follows: «Live and let live. Do your thing. Travel light, live light, for sooner or later everything flies (save that). Have only weekend relations. Don't accumulate, improvise instead, so you can flee at a moment's notice. Be a life visitor, not a junk collector, a capitalist—unless maybe you are another Seneca, the Stoic self-made millionaire who had things but was not had by them. The idea being anyway that what counts in the end is not how many things you have, but how much of your heart you put into them. How you feel when they are gone. Be easy going. Love them and leave them.»98

This is the «credo» of a «passerby» of life «like crows and ravens». People, according to him, won't be «possessive or possessed by possessions». They should «rotate, not be rooted in the soil like plants». This was his preparedness: to leave «at a moment's notice», still laughing and before sighing. Plato said in the Phaedrus (68c): «παρθένοις μὲν πολλοί, βάκχοι δέ παuvoi». I say: «There are many historians of Stoicism but very few genuine Stoics».99 Among the latter, the first and perhaps one of the last was J. Xenakis. Not only was he a scholar on Stoicism but a real adherent of the Stoic teaching. The Stoic way of life, no less than Stoic philosophy, appealed to him greatly. His Stoic death put its stamp on a life imbued with the most intimate Stoic beliefs. The fact that he became involved with Stoicism comparatively late and after a distinguished career as an analytical philosopher helped him to grasp the real core of Stoicism and bring it to life. His knowledge of Existentialism, on the other hand, enabled him to treat Stoicism with an emotional sensitivity and to understand and better appreciate the Stoic concept of freedom from comparison with the Sartrian view of it. He said: «In his nonfatalist moods Epictetus allows for more freedom than even existentialism does. Absurdity, anguish, nausea, abandonment, despair, he would say, are not necessary.»100 The fact that he must have discovered Stoicism after a painful personal experience made him see in it a harbor and a clinic and appreciate its teaching in a thoroughly different way than scholars who, while conscientious, were essentially unaffected by it. Having taught and written on ethical theories, he was able to grasp and show these features of Stoic ethics which are philosophically important far beyond the age for which they were first formulated, features which can render Stoicism a living philosophy today.

His Neo-Stoicism is closer to the attitudes of life presented in Kazantzakis' Zorba the Greek and in Camus' The Stranger—in both of whom he sees the influence of Epictetus101—than to the religious and humanistic Neo-Stoicism of Justus Lipsius, Descartes,
Spinoza, Pascal, Kant, the French philosophers of the 17th century and the English of the 18th, although Xenakis saw the role of Epictetus particularly prominent in these movements. His Neo-Stoicism, on the other hand, is not orthodox Stoicism, but a peculiar eclecticism of Socraticism and most Socratic and Hellenistic currents such as Cynicism, Scepticism, Epicureanism and Cyrenaicism. He regarded Stoicism as an amalgam of heterogeneous elements. Thus his Neo-Stoicism is a modern world-and-life-view elaborated with the tools of analytical philosophy, seen under the needs of psychology and psychiatric researches, and experienced in an existential mood.

Stoicism, a philosophical system with serious interests in analysis and logic, gave Xenakis not only a model of life and death, but also a key to the solution of the main philosophical problem of our age. Stoicism, and particularly the Stoicism of Epictetus taught him that «the split in current philosophy between analysts and nonanalysts is unnecessary». He says: «Certainly it is not clear why a concern with language and concepts cannot combine with a concern with problems of life and death. Vested interests apart, only a narrow definition of philosophy or a superficial acquaintance with the powers of conceptual clarification prevents the analyst from appreciating what the existentialist or Marxist or anarchist is trying to do, or vice versa. Indeed, despite both camps, the results of concept analysis is not just description and information, but change in one's outlook on life and language... Analytic and nonanalytic philosophy complement rather than compete with each other, the former by providing the latter with at least a tool, the latter by supplying the former with direction. Which shows too that they can coexist in the same thinker and moment of thought.»

It is a pity that his belief in the vitality of Stoic ethics did not make him invulnerable to the irrationality prevailing in our age and world. For he promised to offer much to philosophy by demythologizing it and bringing it again close to life. He believed that Stoic ethics is «the most binding moral framework the individual need live by».

And he claimed: «Epictetus' nonchemicophysical therapeutic techniques will be outmoded when (or if) anxiety, dejection, and the rest will all be erasable by means of an operation or shock treatment or electrical conditioning or a pill, etc... But meanwhile, at any rate, apparently his techniques still have some use, not to mention the fact that rational education, another characteristic feature of his thought, will stay with man as long as man is rational; for indeed the denial of this is self-contradictory.»

103. Ibid., 4, 88. 102.
104. Ibid., 130.
105. Ibidid., 126.
106. Ibid., 42: «For Epictetus mental ethics appears to be more important than physical medicine». Cf. SSTh. 86: «Even if chemicophysical tricks will one day totally eclipse, Cynic-Stoic therapy, its underlying philosophy of life and childrearing won't in the process be swept away; for only a cosmic upheaval can do that». 