HERCULES AT THE CROSSROADS IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES: NEO-STOICISM BETWEEN ARISTOCRATIC AND COMMERCIAL SOCIETY*

Few intellectual paths would have seemed as ill-considered, in the France of the late 1960s and 1970s, as an inquiry into the rhetorical foundation of early modern French culture. Not only was this a decidedly unfashionable project, it was a devilishly difficult one, too. Yet, Marc Fumaroli undertook it, persevered, largely on his own, and many years later was rewarded for his excellence with the only kind of immortality still on offer from the French Republic.

Three, four and even five hundred years ago, the form of this stylized moral biography would have been immediately recognizable as the story of Hercules at the Crossroads. It first appears in Xenophon, in the mouth of the sophist Prodicus, a contemporary of Socrates. The young Hercules had wandered out to a lonely crossroads where he was confronted by two women, each of whom tried to persuade him to adopt their way of living. One represented Excellence (*Arete*) and the other either Happiness (*Eudaimonia*), or Pleasure (*Kakia*). The former was clad in armor and pointed to the rough ascent up a steep hill whose summit was crowned by a temple and the promise of immortal glory. The other wore very little and offered an easily-gained and easily-lost happiness that lay immediately to hand.[1]

The legend itself was evoked by Cicero in *De Officiis* [I.32.118]. But without explicitly mentioning Hercules, it was Seneca who more consistently framed his

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1 Ancient adaptations of the « Choice » were not uncommon, placing Hercules alternately between Kingship and Tyranny (as in Dio of Prusa, 40-115 CE) or between Friendship and Hypocrisy (as in Themistius, 317-88 ce). The latter identification was inspired, since Prodicus had himself described virtue as « the best companion of Friendship. » Pizzolato, 198 and *passim*. In the vast literature on the subject I have found the following particularly helpful: Harms, Tobins, Orgel, Sparn, Kray and Oettermann. I thank Dr Jörn Garber for bringing this last to my attention.

moral philosophy in terms of the dynamic of choice[2]. « "But", you say, "the path by which we are called to go is steep and rugged". What of it? Can the heights be reached by a level path? » If virtue was « lofty, exalted and regal, unconquerable and unwearied, » pleasure was « lowly, servile, weak and perishable. » And if virtue was found in the temple, forum and senate, or « standing in front of the city walls, dusty and stained, and with calloused hands », pleasure lurked in the shadows, skirting scrutiny and clinging to places of indulgence and enervation[3].

The trained mind has an important place in Seneca's account. The constancy that provided the strength to bear with the twists of fortune reflected an acquired indifference to external goods[4]. If fortune was by definition ungovernable, then this strength of mind could at least liberate the individual from slavery to those things beyond his control[5]. Relentless self-disciplining and systematic, nightly « self-examination » « molded » the individual into « an image that is to be in the likeness of God. »[6]

If it is to Cicero's discussion of the Choice of Hercules that Petrarch explicitly referred in *De vita solitaria* (1346), Seneca's texts helped inform its use. For, like Seneca, Petrarch identified living well with choosing well.[7] Petrarch's « solitude » was a condition of controlled sociability for the purpose of self-perfection. This conception lay oblique to the classical tradition with its stern dichotomy between politics and *otium*, and equally clear valorization of the one and condemnation of the other. It is also true, of course, that solitude-as-isolation was not what the ancient thinkers had in mind, but rather solitude-as-separation-from public life. This Petrarch understood and his great radicalism on this issue was to shear away the ideologically-motivated condemnation of solitude in order to preserve some space for the individual's creative pursuits.

It was in just such an elective and therapeutic solitude, he wrote, that the young Hercules tarried awhile, *as* if at a crossroads (*velut in bivio*) – suggesting that life itself could be considered a crossroads write large – before repudiating *voluptas* and following the path of *virtus*[8]. Three themes dear to Petrarch are packed

[2] It is literally true that Seneca does not retell the story of the Choice, and to that extent Panofsky's effort in *Exkurs III* (*Die Tugend- und Lasterallegorie des Antonio Averlino Filarete*) to explain away Filarete's reference to Seneca's story of the two women trying to win over the heart of Hercules, as a misreading of Xenophon, is warranted (Panofksy, p. 195-96). On the other hand, someone familiar with the story from Xenophon and aware of Seneca's discussions of the modalities of choice – the *Motivkomplex*; or the metaphors without the narrative – could well have confused the two.

[3] Seneca, *De Constantia*, 1985, 1, 49; *De Vita Beata*, 1985, 2, 117.

[4] Seneca, *Epistulae* 1, 119, 201, 2, 127; *De Constantia*, 1985, 1, 77; *De Providentia*, 1985, 1, 9.

[5] Seneca, *De Constantia*, 1985, 1, 103.

[6] Seneca, *De Ira*, 1985, 1, 339-41, 1, 267; *Epistulae* 1, 229; 2, 449; 3, 449; *De Constantia*, 1985, 1, 105; *De Tranquillitate Animi*, 1985, 2, 215; *De Vita Beata*, 1985, 2, 149.

[7] See Mommsen's emendation of Panofsky. Enenkel treats this more narrowly as a debate about the active and contemplative lives.

[8] Petrarch, 1925, 304. It was Petrarch, wrote Mommsen (p. 188) who created the phrase *Hercules in*

into this vignette: that freedom is necessary for creativity, that its model was the mind's capacity to choose its way, and that it was best assured in the society of like-minded individuals dedicated to learning that he called « solitude ».

Hercules' struggle for freedom was an allegory of the routine challenge of self-government. « Let some, » Petrarch wrote, « govern the populous city and others rule the army. Our city is that of our mind, our army that of our thoughts: we are distraught with domestic and foreign wars. » Petrarch's solution was flight to the « haven » and « refuge » of solitude, rather than fight[9]. His representation of his own life as a work of art in the famous letter describing the ascent of Mt. Ventoux, in Provence, on 26 April 1336, is itself shaped by the choice between hard virtue – the mountain's ascent – and yielding to ease – meandering forever in the low valleys that offered, in the end, no way up[10].

According to Hans Baron, Matteo Palmieri's *Della Vita Civile* (1430s) was the « reply » to the *De Vita Solitaria* that the famous Florentine Chancellor Coluccio Salutati never wrote. In the book, Palmieri set out to describe the training that offered the best preparation for life as a citizen. Beginning with education of children, Palmieri noted how very difficult it was for young people to make the right choices because of their lack of self-knowledge. « In the choice of the way in which we ought to live arises the first requirement to decide ourselves who and what we want to be and what kind of life to follow.» « Such deliberations, » he wrote, « were difficult above all others (*Tale deliberationi sopra ogn'altra è difficile*). » Generally, he wrote, the choices made by young people reflected unexamined preferences. It was for this reason that he found so exemplary the legend of the youthful Hercules wandering out to the solitary crossroads to make his choice[11]. If even Hercules had to struggle before making the right choice, how much more difficult would be our struggle? Palmieri wanted to recapture this difficulty of choosing: to Hercules grace was sent because he was the son of Jove but « to us, certainly, no. » Palmieri added that without « thinking a lot » young people would follow what seemed to them most pleasurable – with consequences for the well-being of the city that could easily be imagined[12].

bivio by combining the Ciceronian and Pythagorean literary traditions.

9 Petrarch, 1925, 183-4. For the claim that *Jeder einzelne Mensch steht wie Herkules am Scheideweg* see Heitmann, p. 222.

10 Petrarch, 1948, p. 39-40.

11 *Nello eleggere in che modo doviamo vivere si ala prima diligenza fermare in noi medesimi chi et quali noi voliamo essere, & in che generatione di vita seguire. Tale deliberationi sopra ogn'altra è difficile* (Palmieri, p. 22).

12 *Questo primo errore non solo a i deboli ingegni è commune, ma Hercule anchora virtuoso sopra tutti i mortali, erro come dice Xenophonte, poi cresciuto nel tempo data dalla natura apto ad eleggere qual via nel vivere ciaschuno deve seguire, se ando in lugha solitudine, quivi sedendo seco medesimo lungho tempo dubito veggendo due vie, una di diletto & l'altra di virtu, per laquale entrare piu tosto dovesse, & poi si misse per la piu gloriosa. Cosi fermo giudicio dicono essere stato per grati conceduto ad Hercule che era figluolo di Giove, a noi certo no, che sanza troppo pensare in questa eta seguiamo quello ci si mostra piacere* (Palmieri, p. 22v).

Palmieri's invocation of the story of Hercules at the Crossroads eluded Erwin Panofsky's comprehensive treatment of *Hercules am Scheidewege* (1930), though Palmieri's insistence on the importance and difficulty of hard thinking is the central theme of an engraving (fig. 23) that he does discuss, by Adam Ghisi after a drawing by Giulio Romano, « Deliberation is the most difficult of all things » (*Deliberatio omnium difficillima*)[13]. This echoes Palmieri so closely as to suggest either extraordinary coincidence or direct citation. The story has been pared down to its essential elements, on one side Hercules lost in thought and on the other the two women pointing to the rewards they offered him.

This same focus on the act of choice characterizes Annibale Carracci's painting in Farnese Palace in Rome (1595; fig. 24) that Panofsky judged its « canonical form. »[14] By disposing of the moralizing allegory – or relegating it to a few, carefully chosen symbols – Carracci created a drama of judgment and a hero whose strength was expressed in his capacity to choose well, that is, in contemporary terms, to be guided by reason not passion[15]. The distinctiveness of his setting of the story is best seen by comparison: the Northern European engravers, Sadeler (fig. 25), Saenredam, and Wierx (fig. 26) come off as heavy-handed moralizers. The later works by Rubens and others that use Carracci's layout to celebrate the wisdom of rulers, such as Ferdinand of Austria and Alexander Farnese, nevertheless seem glib when contrasted with the seriousness and almost mystery of the earlier work (fig. 27)[16].

Panofsky's explanation for *why* Carracci's version became « canonical » concentrates on its « formal » perfection: as a « synthesis », or *summa*, of the earlier representations. Panofsky does not try to suggest a connection between the popularity of Carracci's version and the popularity of its interpretation of the story, nor between the proliferation of interpretations of the story and its wider popularity at the time. Of course, there is no reason why the popularity of an image *necessarily* should reflect that of its content. Sometimes ways of representing are generated and perpetuated for reasons « internal » to the worlds of patrons and artists. But sometimes, certain issues, like why a particular image became and

[13] Panofsky, p. 105-6.

[14] Panofsky, p. 124-26. There is now a new edition (Berlin, 1997) with a long article reviewing the book's fortuna by Dieter Wuttke and a comprehensive bibliography brought up to the present. Dempsey (p. 269-311) notes the stoic associations of the story. The scene had earlier formed the centerpiece in the garden at the Villa d'Este in Tivoli that had been planned in the 1570s by Pirro Ligorio and Marc-Antoine Muret (Coffin, p. 78-83). Note that Panofsky distinguished Carracci's painting from all that preceded on account of its *zeitlose Idealität des künstlerischen Gesamtcharakters* that was equally distant from overly realistic as from overly abstract representations (Panofsky, p. 129).

[15] Cesare Ripa, in his identification of « heroic virtue » with Hercules' moderation of anger, temperance of avarice and disinterest in pleasure, drew on an older tradition that went back at least to Lelio Gregorio Giraldi, whose life of Hercules (1514) described his three virtues (corresponding to the apples of the Hesperides) as *non iracundus, non avarus, non voluptuosus.*

[16] For discussion of this didactic context see Dickerman and Walker, Vivanti, Jung, and Baxter.

remained « canonical », demand a wider optic. The extraordinary presence of Hercules at the Crossroads in the seventeenth century suggests that the appeal of Carracci's version simply cannot be explained in formal terms alone. Some other, fundamental, chord was being struck. To recover this part of the story we need to look beyond the frame and towards the world of taste inhabited by aristocratic patrons and scholars.

In fact, the years in which Carracci's image triumphed were those in which the ideal of the free and strong mind captured the attention of the most innovative and influential thinkers. The popularity of neo-Stoicism at the end of the sixteenth century and the first decades of the seventeenth has been recognized for some time – at least since the work of Wilhelm Dilthey, Léontine Zanta and Morris Croll at the beginning of this century – though it is in recent years that its importance for a range of philosophical and political issues has been the subject of an increasing number of studies[17]. The strength of mind possessed by the neo-stoic hero enabled him to serve as a loyal soldier and a loyal servant of the new bureaucratic state[18]. But beyond a service ideal, *constantia* presupposed a mind that was free. For this was the strength that enabled individuals to distinguish between those few things worth worrying about and the many that were not. This power to discriminate was the power that liberated the individual from the chains of fashion, convention and short-term utility. And so the one possessed of *constantia* could also be described as the free man who was able to choose the right course of action because possessed of, and guided by, reason.

During the same century in which neo-Stoicism thrived, from about 1580, Hercules, long a figure associated with strength of body, became increasingly refigured as an emblem of strength of mind. While his Twelve great Labors were often seen as a myth of civilization or, alternately, as an allegory for the travails of the virtuous man, what is so striking about the story of the young Hercules at the Crossroads as presented in the seventeenth century is that this was a heroism of *inaction*, or self-restraint: the decision, in the end, lay within. *Labor et Constantia* – it would be hard to capture the distinctiveness of this new cultural emphasis more precisely than did Plantin's famous printer's mark.

Carracci's image became canonical because some of the most interesting and influential thinkers of the day were fascinated with the kind of heroism that this story taught. Justus Lipsius, Michel de Montaigne, Pierre Charron, Francis Bacon, John Eliot, Balthasar Gracián, John Milton, and the Third Earl of Shaftesbury all invoked the story of Hercules at the Crossroads in analyses of the dynamic of choice because they saw in it a way of presenting a crucial aspect of what it meant to be free. By the end of the eighteenth century the story had become so popular,

[17] Morford, Tuck, Levi, James, Abel, Aymard d'Angers are important treatments of neo-Stoicism. The contributions of Zanta, Dilthey, and Croll remain fundamental.

[18] For the context in which this interpretation evolved, see Miller 2002.

such a commonplace and so central to evocations of the moral psychology of individual excellence that those who asserted that commercial society had fundamentally altered the nature of moral life ended up reinterpreting the meaning of Hercules's story. It is with this argument – which though made in 1759 still speaks truth to the present day – that we shall end.

The last decades of the sixteenth century were the high-water mark of a philosophy of living consciously shaped around the importance of choice. In his famous *De Constantia ... in Publicis Malis* (1584), written during the Duke of Parma's reconquest of the Netherlands, Justus Lipsius sought a method of constancy that did not require finding a place of tranquillity – something that, in any event, might not always be possible[19]. The dialogue opens with the young *Lipsius* trying to decide whether to flee the civil unrest in the Netherlands or remain amidst the violence. Like Hercules he, too, had « turned aside » to talk with his friend *Langius* in Liege (Charles Lang, canon of the cathedral) who showed him « the path-way » whereby he might reach « the loftie temples of Sages » (near the dialogue's end, Langius announced that he would now « descend from that craggie hill of philosophy »)[20]. If, in *De Constantia*, the unphilosophical path of least resistance lay in fleeing the war-torn Low Countries[21], the harder road was to change oneself by oneself. *Langius* told of Socrates, who when asked to explain to a returned traveller why he felt no better was said to have replied, « Because thou forsookest not thy selfe[22]. » Instead of changing countries Langius suggested changing « your owne mind wrongfully subiected to affections[23]. » The mind distracted and at war with itself describes the condition of someone living, perpetually, at a crossroads. The healthy mind, by contrast, could claim « that great title, the neerest that man can have to God, *to be immoveable* »[24]. This entire discussion seems almost a pastiche of Seneca's presentation of the advantages and disadvantages of travel – but is also a reply to Petrarch's greater emphasis on physical relocation as therapy for the mind[25].

[19] Lipsius, p. 207. For details of the publication history see Oestreich, 1982, p. 105. On Lipsius, see in addition to Morford and Oestreich, Blüher, 298-308; Salmon, Lagrée, Mouchel and Papy.

[20] Lipsius, p. 71.

[21] Lipsius, p. 72.

[22] Lipsius, p. 74-5.

[23] Lipsius, p. 77.

[24] Lipsius, p. 84-5. Even the most vengeful tyrant, Lipsius thought, could be denied victory by a mind that had mastered itself (196).

[25] The place where one lives, however, can contribute little towards tranquillity; it is the mind which must make everything agreeable to itself. I have seen men despondent in a gay and lovely villa, and I have seen them to all appearance full of business [negotium] in the midst of a solitude [Seneca, *Epistulae* 1, 371]. Hence men undertake wide-ranging travel, and wander over remote shores, and their fickleness, always discontented with the present [Seneca, *De Tranquillitate Animi*, 1985, 2, 221]. Are you surprised, as if it were a novelty, that after such long travel and so many changes of scene you have not been able to shake off the gloom and heaviness of your mind? You need a

Montaigne, too – of whom Lipsius wrote that « I have found no one in Europe whose way of thinking about things is closer to my own, »[26] and who, in turn, described Lipsius as « the most sufficient and learned man now living; of a polished and judicious wit »[27] – insisted on the liberating character of self-knowledge. But where Lipsius upheld the need to choose between reason and opinion (or virtue and pleasure), Montaigne rejected the implied hierarchy of values.

In « Educating Children », he asserted that philosophy offered an education in virtue « which is not (as they teach in schools) perched on the summit of a steep mountain, rough and inaccessible. Those who have drawn nigh her hold that on the contrary she dwells on a beautiful plateau, fertile and strewn with flowers. » Only those unfamiliar with virtue could paint a harsh and false « portrait of her, sad, shrill, sullen, threatening and glowering, perching her on a rocky peak, all on her own among the brambles – a spectre to terrify people. »[28]

Montaigne envisioned a way to virtue that was as attractive and easy as that to pleasure. Indeed, in the following passage he recounts his tutor's pedagogic device of forcing him to choose between two of Ariosto's heroines, Bradamante and Angelica, so that he would learn that virtue was easy, useful, and pleasurable and for that reason had always been celebrated[29]. It is precisely Montaigne's desire to recreate philosophy as a practice of living, rather than as a school for dying well, that is reflected in the contrasting views of his tutor and those others who made Cato a hero to be emulated[30]. But while dispensing with traditional claims, Montaigne emphasized the crucial role played by choice. If philosophy had to be lived, learning to do it well meant learning « how to select the right ones [arguments] and to apply them. »[31]

Even more emphatically than Lipsius, Montaigne's redefinition of solitude addressed the mind's condition. While family and property and physical health were all good, Montaigne emphasized that « we should not become so attached

change of soul rather than a change of climate ... Do you ask why such flight does not help you? It is because you flee along with yourself [Seneca, *Epistulae* 1, 199]. But the mere place avails little for this purpose, unless the mind is fully master of itself, and can, at its pleasure, find seclusion even in the midst of business. The Socrates quote follows. Can wisdom, the greatest of all the arts, be picked up on a journey? I assure you, travel as far as you like, you can never establish yourself beyond the reach of desire, beyond the reach of bad temper, or beyond the reach of fear; had it been so, the human race would long ago have banded together and made a pilgrimage to the spot [*Epistulae* 2, 195, 201]. Zanta goes so far as to describe Petrarch as the founder of « une sorte de stoïcisme christianisé, et que nous pourrons appeler le *néo-stoïcisme* (p. 12).

26 Quoted in Tuck, p. 45.

27 Montaigne, « Apology for Raymond Sebond », p. 652.

28 Montaigne, p. 181.

29 Montaigne, p. 182.

30 The idea that stoic virtue was terrifying is made even more explicit through Montaigne's criticism of the legendary Cato (« On Cruelty »).

31 Montaigne, p. 189.

to them that our happiness depends on them. »[32] It was here that he introduced the famous metaphor of the arrière-boutique, or back room, to which one could retreat amidst the hurly-burly of life. « We should set aside a room, just for ourselves, at the back of the shop, keeping it entirely free and establishing there our true liberty: our principal solitude and asylum. »[33]

The arrière-boutique was the domain of « true freedom » which Montaigne defined as the « power over oneself to do *anything* with oneself. »[34] And yet, he believed that the most heroic demonstration of that power wielded by the truly free mind actually lay in *not doing*, that is to say, in self-restraint[35]. This is precisely the heroism of Hercules at the crossroads who judges well enough *not* to elect the immediately pleasing but ultimately perilous path of *voluptas*. This kind of self-restraint spared men the greater exposure to fortune that eventually brought low the mighty and curious alike[36]. « Greatness of soul, » he continued, « consists not so much in striving upwards and forwards as in knowing how to find one's place and draw the line. »[37] The real sage, Montaigne wrote, « can contemplate both pain and pleasure with eyes equally restrained ... doing so with eyes equally steady. »[38]

Pierre Charron (1541-1603) placed the constellation of ideas bound up with the story of the young Hercules at the heart of his philosophy[39]. He argued that threats to peace of mind pressed in upon us from without through the mediation of the senses and assaulted from within through the domination of the passions over a weakened (after the Fall) human constitution[40]. The problem, as depictions of Hercules showed, was that the path of least resistance was generally that of worst consequences: *lata est via ad mortem*[41].

[32] « Ce n'est pas assez de changer de place, il se faut escarter des conditions populaires qui sont en nous; il se faut sequestrer et r'avoir de soy » (p. 234).

[33] Montaigne, p. 270.

[34] Montaigne, p. 1184.

[35] Although « it is less in the daylight », he declared, « refraining from action is often more noble than action: what little I am worth is virtually all on that side » (p. 1158).

[36] Montaigne, p. 1175.

[37] Montaigne, p. 1261.

[38] Montaigne, p. 1262.

[39] Valuable discussions of Charron's ideal of perfection are in Rice, ch. 7, Battista, ch. 5, Keohane, ch. 4; Gregory.

[40] « From the weakness and uncertainty of our senses come ignorance, error and all discontent » (Charron, p. 112) since their inability to perceive more than the appearances of things produced « un-considered opinion » (p. 156-7). Aside from the feebleness of the senses, there was « such a great diversity, even a contrariety of opinions in the world ... that what I believe I cannot make my friend believe. » It could not even be certain that one would believe tomorrow what one believed strongly today (149). Thomas Browne developed the implications of this in the *Religio Medici*. « I could never divide my self from any man upon the difference of an opinion, or be angry with his judgment for not agreeing with me in that from which perhaps within a few days I should dissent my self. » Moreover, « no man can judge another, because no man knows himself » (Browne, 7, 72).

[41] Charron, p. 378.

Like Hercules, the sage possessed the strength to decide for himself[42]. The difficulty people had with studying themselves produced an equal and opposite reaction: they studied everything *but* themselves. It was because, on the contrary, that the sage understood himself that he was capable of judging wisely[43]. Judging did not mean « to resolve, to affirm, to determine » but rather « to examine, to weigh, to balance the reasons and counter-reasons on all sides. »[44] Judgment was the proper emblem of the sage insofar as it represented the most noble and difficult of human actions[45]. The « suspension of judgment » that was the demonstration of freedom – that evanescent moment just before a decision is reached – was founded on the « celebrated propositions » of the Pyrrhonists that « there is nothing certain, that we know nothing, that there is nothing in nature other than doubt, nothing certain but uncertainty. »[46] Although Charron acknowledged that there would be those who would argue that doubt bred anxiety, he believed that only the presumptuous, the partisan and the passionate – precisely those driven by opinion – would be discommoded by suspension of judgment.

The wise man knew how to withstand both prosperity and adversity. « This was what the great philosopher Epictetus very well signified, » Charron wrote, « comprehending in two words all of moral philosophy, sustine et abstine. Support the evils, that is adversity; Abstain from the goods, that is to say from voluptuousness and prosperity. »[47] Temperance protected against prosperity, which worked its charms by « relaxing and enervating the spirit and insensibly stripping it of its hardness » in the same way that Dalila worked on Samson[48]. Withstanding and enduring bad fortune required fortitude, which Charron termed « not a quality of bodies but of soul; firmness not of arms and legs but of courage. »[49]

[42] « Or celuy, qui veut estre sage, doit tenir pour suspect, tout ce qui plaist et est approuvé du peuple, du plus grand nombre; et doit regarder à ce qui est bon et vray en soy, et non à ce qui le semble, et qui est le plus usité et frequenté » (Charron, p. 379).

[43] Charron, p. 386.

[44] Charron, p. 386.

[45] Charron, p. 389.

[46] Charron, p. 400; also p. 506.

[47] Charron, p. 479.

[48] p. 81. Charron's younger contemporary, Joseph Hall, described Dalila as attractive in appearance « but in the end she will bereave thee of thy strength, of thy sight, yea of thy selfe » (p. 121-22). See Audrey Chew's critical evaluation.

[49] *Constantia* meant, for Charron, a « strong, noble and glorious impassibleness » (Charron, p. 383). This was a view of fortitude that specifically displaced classical strong men, including the Hercules of the Labors, and was popular among Counter-Reformation writers. Thus, for example, the archetypal Counter-Reformation treatise, *On the Christian Prince*, by the Jesuit Pedro de Ribadeneira replied to Machiavelli's dismissal of the courage of Christians by arguing that true fortitude was best exemplified not by the « extreme bodily force » of Hercules and Milo of Croton, but by the Christian fortitude *que resista al vano temor y modere la demasiada osadia, y acometa cosas dificultosas en que haya peligro de muerte, y sufra los asaltos y penas con valor y constancia* (Ribadeneira, p. 567). Note that the discovery of Hercules' « other » heroism seems not yet to have been made in a Spain that would

Yet, he cautioned against an overindulgence in this sort of temperance. Like his master, Charron condemned an excessive « impassiveness and privation of all pleasure » and argued that the most admirable of the ancients took a moderate view of the self-control and self-deprivation that was a part of virtue[50]. « It is, therefore, » he wrote, « a sick opinion, fantastic and unnatural, that rejects and condemns generally all desires and pleasures. »[51]

If *constantia* was an essentially defensive posture, the ability to choose marked out the active potentiality of someone able to govern his passions. This is emphasized in two contemporary English presentations. In his posthumously published *Valerius Terminus* (1603?), Francis Bacon presents at length an argument made in narrower compass in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605). Solomon's assertion that « The fool putteth to more strength, but the wise man considereth which way » was interpreted as « signifying the election of the mean[s] to be more material than the multiplication of endeavor »[52]. Bacon explicitly identified wisdom with the ability to choose well and foolishness with the inability to do so[53]. As with Charron, « prejudged inquiry » and dependence on authority or superstition marked the path of intellectual least resistance and « led to no way or a mere labyrinth. » The choices facing the inquirer, Bacon added,

> are not unlike the two ways of action commonly spoken of by the ancients; the one plain and smooth in the beginning, and in the end impassable; the other rough and troublesome in the entrance, but after a while fair and even[54].

In contrast to Bacon, John Donne focused on the pre-conditions for a free choice, which he identified with true piety. Satire III is believed to have been written in the 1590s, during Donne's own period of religious uncertainty as he moved away from Catholicism. The poem offers sketches of Catholic, Calvinist, Anglican, and skeptical versions of truth. His sympathies are with the two skeptics whose arguments he seems unwilling or unable to utterly controvert. The « Carelesse Phrygius », as Richard Strier points out, freed himself from anxiety (*ataraxia*) by attaching himself to no church[55]. The claim of the other skeptic, Gracchus, was

remain, on the whole, resistant to the appeal of this ideal for some time. A later Spanish writer, the diplomat Saavedra Fajardo, was equally disturbed by Machiavelli's assertion and contrasted the Romans, who had to rely on shields and armor, with the Christians, who needed no such assistance, *porque solamente aquel es vedaderamente fuerte que no se deja vencer de los afectos, y esta libre de las enfermedades del ánimo.* This was the teaching of the stoic sect *y después con más perfección la escuela cristiana* (p. Saavedra Fajardo, 176). Robert Birely is a good introduction to this style of thought.

50 Charron, p. 471.

51 Charron, p. 472.

52 Bacon, p. 189.

53 Bacon, p. 194.

54 Bacon, p. 203-4.

55 Strier, 1995, ch. 3.

harder for Donne to reject because it accommodated the diversity of beliefs and practices in the world.

In asserting, in the following lines, that only one of the six speakers could be right and that it was not Gracchus, Donne seems to be rejecting the skeptics. Yet, his own answer is couched in their very terms. « To adore, » he wrote, « or scorne an image, or protest, / May all be bad; doubt wisely, in strange way / To stand inquiring right, is not to stray » (ll, 76-77). Following authorities was the problem; inquiring for oneself, wherever it led, was « not to stray ». If anything, the problem with Phrygius and Gracchus was their complacency. For Donne, even more than Charron or Bacon, truth lay in continuous self-examination. Transforming the familiar classical locus of the temple on its lonely height, he wrote that « on a huge hill, Cragg'd, and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will / Reach her, about must, and about must goe » (ll, 80-1). The ongoing and unending pursuit of truth was real truth, just as the freedom to choose was real freedom.

John Eliot's *Monarchie of Man* is a concise presentation of the view that the highest good was the ability to think, and the greatest strength the mastery of the self that made it possible. This tract, along with an *Apology for Socrates* that used Socrates as a cipher for his own exculpation, were both written while Eliot, a member of the House of Commons, was held prisoner in the Tower of London for his part in the tumultuous conclusion to the 1629 session of Parliament[56]. (When he was sent to the Tower his friend Sir Robert Cotton sent along a copy of Lipsius' *De Constantia* for sustenance[57].) Eliot's work represents the attempt to put stoicism to work and to demonstrate that it could keep one free even when bound[58].

Eliot presented his ideal of individual excellence in the terms of Seneca, who had asserted that no life could be happy unless grounded upon « rectitude & certaintie of iudgement ». From this, again in Seneca's words, flowed « tranquilitie of mind, raigning in all securitie, a sublimitie & ioy firme & immoveable. » The tempering of the mind made it « impenetrable, invulnerable by attempts, erect, undaunted, constant[59]. »

The value of training the mind was that it created a space in which choices could be freely made, that is, according to reason's own reckoning. Hercules and Ulysses, « those many-labor'd, many tryal'd men » celebrated in the pantheon that was the frontispiece of Lipsius' edition of Seneca's Opera (fig. 28), were examples of this link between strength of mind and freedom of mind[60]. Eliot declared that « this habitt & position of the mind, to constitute that happiness, must be both cleere & firme; cleere without cloud or shadow to obscure it; & firme in all

[56] For Eliot, see Hulme, ch. 16.

[57] Sharpe, p. 106.

[58] See similarly Tommaso Campanella, quoted in Headley, p. 5.

[59] Eliot, 2, 92.

[60] Eliot, 2, 197.

constancie. »[61] It was the relation of free inquiry to self-knowledge that Donne had celebrated in an extraordinary couplet « We doe those shadowes tread/ And to brave clearnesse all things are reduc'd. »[62]

It is this apotheosis of the inquiring mind that is celebrated in the paintings of Hercules at the Crossroads and in contemporary discussions of moral choice. Balthasar Gracián's (1601-1658) presentation draws together the ideal developed from Lipsius to Eliot with the specific image animating the visual tradition. In his *Discreto* (1646). Gracián reinterpreted Hercules as a hero of the mind for a courtly age in which learning was a survival aid. In so doing, he fit Charron's sage to the last of Hercules. « Discretion, » he wrote, « gave Hercules more triumphs than his valor. »[63] This Hercules was more « *discreto* than valiant, » reflecting a contemporary redescription of fortitude as a virtue of mind rather than body[64]. The *discreto* developed this ability through a « continuous discussion with the wise » through their books and conversation. In Gracián's succinct formulation, « exact experience, judicious observation, the management of sublime matters, the variety of employments – all these things come to make a complete man. »[65]

But the acquisition of knowledge was the external sign of a greater talent. Since « all of human knowledge, » Gracián wrote, relying on a saying attributed to Socrates, « amounts to the success of a wise choice » the discreto was the « man of the good choice » (*hombre de buena elección*)[66]. Human beings lived by choosing and nothing remarkable could be accomplished without the « great gift of the knowledge of choosing » (*el grande don del saber elegir*). As in Bacon's *Valerius Terminus*, no amount of study or *ingenio* could compensate for consistently poor choices. « There is no perfection where there is no choice, » Gracián declared, and with it he placed the free exercise of the mind at the core of any model of living well[67].

For rulers and courtiers living in a political environment shaped by the ground rules laid down by reason of state, the inability to choose well was a potentially catastrophic failing. Because passion was the enemy of common sense « and, consequently, of choice, » the successful ruler had to be able to rule over himself[68]. Similarly, the *discreto* was able to keep aware of his passions by the self-reflection (*reflexión sobre sí*) that enabled him to act « as master of his soul » (*señor de su ánimo*)[69]. These rules had to be spelled out because the world was so complex

[61] Eliot, 2, 103.

[62] Donne, ll, 7-8.

[63] *Más triunfos le consiguió a Hércules su discreción que su valor; más plausible le hicieron las brillantes cadenillas de su boca que la formidable clava de su mano.*

[64] Gracián, 1990, p. 63.

[65] Gracián, 1990, p. 108.

[66] Gracián, 1990, p. 79.

[67] Gracián, 1990, p. 82.

[68] Gracián, 1990, p. 80-2.

[69] Gracián, 1990, p. 95.

that there was always a risk of straying. While « the way (*el camino*) of truth and certainty is one and difficult » the paths to ruin were various and enticing[70].

Gracián's romance-novel *El Criticon* (1658), an allegorical journey of discovery through contemporary intellectual life as a progress through the three ages of man, gave these metaphors body and soul. Early in their adventure, the guide *Critilio* and his younger partner *Andrenio* were discussing the role of reason when they « arrived at that famous crossroads where the path divided and life differentiated itself, a station celebrated for the difficulty that it created, not so much for the knowledge as for the will to choose the path. » Their uncertainty over which way to choose was complicated by their knowledge of the « common tradition » of the two ways, the easiest at the left hand with a smooth descent and the rugged, stony and steep ascent on the right. « Is not this, » *Critilio* asked, « that wise *Bibio* where even Hercules found himself perplexed over which of the ways to take? » In a recapitulation of this theme, Gracián has Critilio wonder aloud whether this were not the *docta letra de Pitágoras* – the Y – in which was contained all knowledge: beginning together and then separating into a narrow path to virtue and a broad one to vice. This series of recognitions led him to call out to *Andrenio* to keep an eye out for the marks of Epictetus, the Abstine on the path of vice, and the S*ustine* on that of virtue[71].

In this crucial passage, situated at precisely the stage in *Andrenio*'s life that corresponded with that of the young Hercules, he confronted the role of reason and the question of how to live. Gracián's identification of the crossroads with the Pythagorean letter and with Epictetus' motto demonstrates his familiarity with the story in its various forms.

The quest for knowledge of world and self that gives epic shape to *El Criticon* is a fictionalization of the philosophical precepts that Gracián shared with contemporaries across Europe. The fundamental importance of choice, and hence, of its prerequisite – the strength of mind needed to rule over passions and opinions – is acted out by the characters in this book as the ideas are brought to life. In Gracián's hands the allegorical novel offered an ideal vehicle for a philosophy of living in which freedom to choose was everything. Petrarch's counter-factual *velut in bivio* – « *as if* at a crossroads » – created the metaphor of life as choice. The novel, as it was to evolve, was the artistic genre given shape by this insight and, therefore, by its characters' choices. John Bunyan's exactly contemporary *Pilgrim's Progress* comes immediately to mind. Maren Røstvig has written insightfully about the Choice of Hercules embedded in Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749)[72].

[70] Gracián, 1990, p. 123.
[71] Gracián, 1975, p. 45-6; 1681, p. 72.
[72] See Røstvig.

There were many stoic dramas in the seventeenth century – and Professor Fumaroli's comments on Corneille's are amongst the most persuasive[73] – and many plays about Hercules. But none better brings to life the ideas of heroism that were associated with the virtues displayed by Hercules at the Crossroads than John Milton's *Samson Agonistes*. The confusion of Hercules and Samson in seventeenth-century drama and opera has been discussed by modern scholars and was noted by contemporaries such as G.J. Vossius, who viewed them as parallel mythological types, and Hugo Grotius, who saw biographical similarities[74]. The received explanation for the seventeenth-century preference for Hercules or Samson has generally been stated in confessional terms with Catholics said to be more comfortable with classical themes and Protestants with biblical ones[75].

But Milton's *Samson Agonistes* puts paid to any of these straightforward explanations. For it is, in addition to all else that can be said about it, an example of the synthesis of stoic and Christian thought that dates back to the 1580s and was popular in the circle of scholars and political figures whose works we have been encountering. Milton's *Samson* bears the imprint of stoicizing readings of Job, a classic hero of the Counter-Reformation, who demonstrated his strength by conquering himself[76]. Jacques-Auguste de Thou, under the impact of Lipsius' work, penned a Latin paraphrase of the Book of Job, entitled *Iobus, sive de Constantia* (1587), Jéronimo de la Cruz fashioned out of a Lipsius' texts his *Job Evangelico, stoico illustrado. Doctrina, ethica, civil y politica* (Saragossa, 1638), and Francisco Quevedo left a *Constancia y Paciencia del Santo Job* (written in prison c.1641 and published posthumously). In his *Meditations sur Iob* (after 1590) Guillaume du Vair described Job's travails as the « trophies of his constancy. »[77]

Right from the start Milton signals that Samson's torment, like *Lipsius'* in *De Constantia*, was mental and that its remedy, as in *De Constantia*, lay less in solitude than self-help. « I seek/ this unfrequented place to find some ease », Samson says, like Hercules in his solitary place; « Ease to the body some, none

[73] See Fumaroli. Also Maurens and Stegmann.

[74] In his *Annotationes in Veterum Testamentum* Grotius explained that *Herculem Thebanum Samsoni non male compares, ingenti robore corporis animique, mulieribus addictum* (quoted in Tissot, p. 91). Grotius' close friend G.J. Vossius presents this same claim (Vossius, p. 169). While Tissot's is the most through examination of the uses of these figures on stage he is less interested in explaining how it is that they were so often used interchangeably.

[75] See for example, Sparn, p. 92.

[76] Richard Strier (1997) has noted the identification of Jesus in Book IV of *Paradise Regained* as the stoic able to actually deliver on the ideal promised by that school: « th' utmost of mere man, both wise and good, / Not more. »

[77] Du Vair, p. 929. For dating I rely on Radouant, p. 227. An anonymous, contemporary, English discussion of Job singled out his patience, which showed that « the highest point of Valour is to suffer bravely, and to be a standing rule to all Ages, how men should deport themselves in their misfortune » (*The Pattern of Patience*, A4v).

to the mind[78]. »Samson's self-examination turns on the consequences of choices he had made: « Whom have I to complain of but myself » (l.46). His great physical strength was undone by « impotence of mind » in yielding to Dalila, whose arrival is one of the great *ekphrases* of *voluptas* in literature (ll.710-21). « But what is strength without a double share/ Of wisdom? » (ll.53-4), asked Samson like a good Counter-Reformation Christian. He lamented his « servile mind / Rewarded well with servile punishment » (ll.412-13).

Tortured by this recitation of his failure of mind and the daily experience of its consequences, Samson enumerates the woes predicated of those who lacked *constantia*:

> My griefs not only pain me,
> As a ling'ring disease,
> But finding no redress, ferment and rage,
> Nor less than wounds immedicable
> Rankle, and fester, and gangrene,
> To black mortification.
> Thoughts, my tormentors, armed with deadly stings
> Mangel my apprehensive tenderest parts,
> Exasperate, exulcerate, and raise
> Dire inflammation which no cooling herb
> Or med'cinal liquor can assuage.[79]

This description of a soul at sixes and sevens recurs in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century operas whose characters lament their inability to make decisions and then demonstrate it by oscillating back to their initial thought *da capo*[80]. This hesitancy is not at all to be confused with suspension of judgment. On the contrary, it shows exactly the opposite: *absence* of the strength required to suspend judgment and find freedom.

By story's end, with Samson's mind healed and his stay in prison ended, he felt free to ascend to the Temple of Dagon: « The Philistian lords command./ Commands are no constraints. If I obey them,/ I do it freely ... » (ll, 1371-73). We are told that he was led « patient but undaunted » to the Temple (l.1632) and that, when finally placed against the pillars he paused « as one who prayed,/ Or some great matter in his mind revolved » (1637-38). A painting of this would, surely, provide an apt companion to Carracci's of Hercules. Those who pondered his story, Milton concluded – and, we might add, those who pondered paintings of Hercules at the crossroads – would gain « peace and consolation ... And calm of mind, all passion spent » (ll, 1757-8).

[78] Milton, LL, 16-22.
[79] Milton, LL, 617-27.
[80] See Miller, 2001a.

The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, as is well known, was fascinated by the Choice of Hercules[81]. He commissioned a painting from the Neapolitan Paolo de Matteis (1712; Ashmolean Museum; fig. 29) and then wrote an essay using it to describe the task of history painting. Shaftesbury distinguished between three moments in the story: the first, when the two goddesses « accosted » Hercules, the second, when the debate was in full flight, and the third, when virtue began to gain the upper hand. At the first moment, Hercules is taken by surprise. In the second, he is « interested, divided, and in doubt. » The third moment, when Hercules freed himself from passion and thus made ready to choose was the one that Shaftesbury recommended to painters and patrons. « According to the third, he is wrought, agitated, and torn by contrary passions ... He agonizes, and with all his strength of reason endeavours to overcome himself. »[82] The virtue to which Hercules was won over, « the moral philosophy of highest note among the ancients, » was, he wrote, « expressed in the double effect of forebearance and endurance, or what we may otherwise call refrainment and support » – what Charron and Gracián cited directly out of Epictetus: *Sustine et Abstine*[83].

That the problem of choosing wisely lay at the heart of Shaftesbury's interpretation of the Hercules story is made clear in the accompanying text. « Thus frequently in other Losses of Mind not knowing which way to turn, when beset, when urg'd, when divided in opinion on Family & Publick – Emergencyes: & in reality Distracted thus. »[84] Addressing the question of how a painter could convey this struggle in a single image, Shaftesbury suggested that the « transition » or inner « victory » could be conveyed to the viewer « if one considers, that the body, which moves much slower than the mind, is easily outstripped by this latter; and that the mind on a sudden turning itself some new way, the nearer situated and more sprightly parts of the body (such as the eyes, and muscles about the mouth and forehead) taking the alarm, and moving in an instant, may leave the heavier and more distant parts to adjust themselves, and change their attitude some moments after. »[85] The full citation enables us to note how precisely this describes the face of Hercules in Carracci's painting. The eyes have shifted to their right, towards the figure of Virtue, the brow has furrowed and the lips pursed. The head itself remains straight but the shadow falling down the center accentuates the movement of the face in the direction of Virtue. If Hercules were depicted after having been won over by Virtue « there would be no room left to represent his agony, or inward conflict, which indeed makes the principal action

[81] See Wind and Sweetman.
[82] Shaftesbury, 1914, p. 34.
[83] Shaftesbury, 1914, p. 58.
[84] Quoted in Klein, p. 72.
[85] Shaftesbury, 1914, p. 37.

here; as it would do in a poem, were this subject to be treated by a good poet. »[86] Shaftesbury's presentation of Hercules is Carracci's by way of Milton.

Shaftesbury's interest in Hercules and his descriptions of the dynamics of moral choice, like that of the other thinkers we have examined, reflects his own affinity for early modern stoicism.[87] In his dialogue *The Moralists* (1709), the highest good is said to be reached by learning « to know ourselves, and what that is, which by improving, we may be sure to advance our worth and real self-interest. »[88] Shaftesbury made moral choice the basis for his portrait of individual excellence.

> A mind subordinate to reason, a temper humanised and fitted to all natural affections, an exercise of friendship uninterrupted, a thorough candour, benignity, and good nature, with constant security, tranquillity, equanimity (if I may use such philosophical terms)[89].

This ideal, in turn, also represented the new model of the citizen behind which Shaftesbury hoped the fractious subjects of the newly-created Great Britain could unite[90].

From Shaftesbury's treatment we could continue on through the eighteenth century, finding additional evidence for both the diffusion of the story of Hercules at the Crossroads and the ethical commonplaces it carried. To the examples given by Panofsky, which include Bach's cantata of the same name, we could add Metastasio's treatment of the « Dream of Scipio », later set by Mozart, and the suggestion by John Adams in the summer of 1776 that Shaftesbury's

[86] Shaftesbury, 1914, p. 35.

[87] Klein is particularly clear that it is the philosophy of the middle and late, rather than « austere » early stoa that Shaftesbury found appealing (p. 79).

[88] Shaftesbury, 2, p. 144. This nicely illustrates Levi's argument about the contiguity of neo-stoic and neo-Platonic arguments

[89] Shaftesbury, 1955, 2, 148.

[90] Even before Shaftesbury put pen to paper, we find Joseph Addison resorting to the story of Hercules in an attack on the feared « Distemper » of Idleness (*Tatler*, n° 97, 22 November 1709). He thought the solution lay in better education of the young and then proceeded to narrate, in great detail, the story as told by Xenophon with the same attention to details of carriage, clothing and demeanor that Shaftesbury was to show. Like Shaftesbury, Addison's use of the story is wedded to a broader conception of the reformulation of a modern British citizen. « I have translated this Allegory, » he wrote, « for the Benefit of the Youth of *Great Britain.* » While not expecting of them the heroism of a young Hercules who began strangling the snakes of vice in his crib, Addison did feel confident in citing Cicero's discussion of the meaning of this story of the young Hercules choosing. « [A]s the finest Author of all Antiquity has said upon this very Occasion, Tho' a man has not the Abilities to distinguish himself in the most shining Parts of a great Character, he has certainly the Capacity of being just, faithful, modest, and temperate » (*The Tatler*, 2, p. 100-3 citing Cicero, *De Officiis* I, 33, 121).

image, as painted by de Matteis, be adopted as the Great Seal of the new United States of America[91].

But, in conclusion, it might be more intriguing to look at the work done by the story – or, rather, the re-working of the story – in the hands of those uncomfortable with the philosophical presumptions relied upon by Shaftesbury and those who preceded him in this tradition. And, here, we must begin with Shaftesbury's great intellectual antagonist, Bernard Mandeville, author of the notorious *Fable of the Bees* (1714). In the hands of his able interpreter, Edward Hundert, Mandeville emerges as the most powerful challenger to the complacent rationalism that Shaftesbury – but by no means only Shaftesbury – embodied. In a latitudinarian and « Newtonian » Britain, invoking the power of reason to tame the wayward soul would have seemed obvious. Not so, however, to a spiritual heir of Jansenists like Pascal and Nicole. « Mechanizing » their Augustinianism with the medical learning of Leyden, Mandeville presented a picture of passions far more powerful and refractory than accounted for by thinkers like Shaftesbury[92]. Even the might of a Hercules would have been insufficient to overcome this sort of pressure.

But there was more. For Mandeville rejected the spatial and temporal assumptions built into the story. Not only was reason too weak to dominate the passions as Shaftesbury, and all those before him, had assumed, but there was no « lonely solitude » in which this struggle took place. Man lived in society, and the struggle over how to live was, as Rousseau would make plain, driven by and made so acute precisely by the presence of others with whose conditions we cannot help but compare our own. Moreover, choices rarely presented themselves as Good and Bad. This was a simplified and simplistic morality that may never have been true, but was certainly false in commercial society. Finally, just as there was no solitude, there was no one « cross-roads », no once-and-for-all choice. In a society in which all value – not just that of goods, but also services, sentiments, and even ideas – was determined by the play of passions (desire and aversion), or what we still call, « the market », choices and challenges were constantly being put to the individual. No one-time choice, and no choice for all time. Modern society was a continuous, churning, challenge.

Yet, because of this realization, as much as Mandeville might have scorned Shaftesbury's moral psychology, his argument had the paradoxical effect of emphasizing the absolute primacy of the arena of choice[93]. If he, himself, did little to explore the question of how to pursue a moral life in an environment of continuous socially-conditioned choices, Mandeville's most careful and thoughtful reader devoted his first major work to this subject.

[91] For this last see McLachlan, p. 489; Patterson and Dougall, p. 4.

[92] See Hundert, 1994.

[93] For its prevalence in mid eighteenth-century England see Paulson, 1992, p. 304 and notes 26-27.

Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) is that treatment. As much as he followed Mandeville in recognizing the primacy of the social, or commercial, context for the modern moral life he strove to preserve what we can recognize as the neo-Stoic core of Shaftesbury's vision of individual excellence.

The first sentence of the work marks off his basic disagreement with Mandeville: « How selfish soever man may be supposed » there remained always some sympathy for the welfare of others. [I.I.1.3, p. 9]. Later in the book he describes Mandeville's as the « licentious » system, « pernicious », and « erroneous. » Smith rejects the claim that there is no difference between vice and virtue. [VII. II.6-7]. But he fully, if silently, accepts Mandeville's premise that moral life is lived in society and moral values shaped by social life.

Smith is convinced, axiomatically, that human beings are endowed by nature with a desire to please, and be pleased by, others. [viz. III.2.6-7] – what Hundert saw as Mandeville's discovery of the « performance practices of the public sphere ». But the success of this sympathy depends on our being addressed in an appealing way. The burden, then, falls on the « sufferer », or seeker of sympathy, to find the correct means of approach. This, in turn, gives central place to the reigning conventions of « society and conversation » [I.I.4.8-10, p. 22-23] because only knowledge of contemporary attitudes and beliefs could successfully win the sympathy of a spectator to one's own suffering. « We must, » Smith wrote, « view ourselves not so much according to that light in which we may naturally appear to ourselves, as according to that in which we naturally appear to others. » [II. II.2.2] Indeed, the sufferer must–Smith goes so far–« bring down his emotions to what the spectator can go along with » [I.I.5.1, p. 23].

Thus far Smith seems to acknowledge the thrust of Mandeville's critique of the « Hercules model. » But in describing the social modulation of one's own most immediate feeling, of pain, or injustice, as the foundation of

> the great, the awful and respectable, the virtues of self-denial, of self-government, of that command of the passions which subjects all the movements of our nature to what our own dignity and honour, and the propriety of our own conduct require
> [I.I.5.1, p.23],

Smith seems to be turning back to Shaftesbury. This is the first indication of Smith's effort to adapt the neo-Stoic pose of self-command for the social world of comparison. If, Smith continues, we are « disgusted with that clamorous grief » which demands and importunes our sympathy, then

> we reverence that reserved, that silent and majestic sorrow, which discovers itself only in the swelling of the eyes, in the quivering of the lips and cheeks, and in the distant, but affecting, coldness of the whole behaviour
> [I.I.5.3, p.24].

It is this that leads Smith to conclude, as if, perhaps, thinking of some of the characters of Italian opera who would have graced the London stage in his own time, that « the man, who under the severest tortures allows no weakness to escape him, vents no groan, gives way to no passion which we do not entirely enter into, commands our highest admiration. » [I.II.I.12, p.31].

The premise of this self-control is the capacity to view ourselves with the eyes of others. This requires a certain degree of self-distancing [III.I.3, p. 110] and Smith's famous instrument for achieving this is the « impartial spectator » or « the man within the breast » [III.2.3, p. 114]. It is the internalizing of the principle of self-command, an eighteenth-century version of the twentieth-century's Super-Ego – or the seventeenth-century's Stoicism. And only through this instrument « we can ever make any proper comparison between our own interests and those of other people » [III.3.1, p. 134].

The objection could, perhaps, be raised, that we do some violence to Smith in presenting these attributes as self-consciously « Stoic ». But Smith's own potted « history » of Stoicism shows how well he understood the ancient tenets of this school. « Mastery of the passions » is made the defining feature of this « wise man », an ability that enables him to live anywhere and be « superior to every situation ». Hence the judgment that this was a

> philosophy which affords the noblest lessons of magnanimity, is the best school of heroes and patriots, and to the greater part of whose precepts there can be no other objection, except that honourable one, that they teach us to aim at a perfection altogether beyond the reach of human nature.
> [I.III, p. 58-60 (in editions 1-5, in edition 6 at VII.II.1.23)].

And thus, it is to the Stoics, first among all the ancient schools of philosophy, that Smith turned when he wanted to indicate the moralists who anticipated the work of the impartial spectator by trying through their teaching « to correct the natural inequality of our passive feelings by diminishing our sensibility to what peculiarly concerns ourselves. » [III.3.11, p.140]. To the third and all subsequent editions, Smith added, that « Though few men have the stoical idea of what this perfect propriety requires, yet all men endeavour in some measure to command themselves, and to bring down their selfish passions to something which their neighbour can go along with ... The stoical philosophy, in this respect, does little more than unfold our natural ideas of perfection. » Being able to so modulate, or command, the passions would be « the most advantageous of all things, as establishing our happiness upon the most solid and secure foundation » [III.3.11, note x, p.141].

Even Smith's dissents from the Stoa are important – and it would be wrong to describe him, or his teachings, as « Stoic » *tout court* – because it shows him trying to walk that fine line between self-command and sociability. Thus, it is precisely because of Smith's recognition of the power of society and comparison that

he rejects outright the ancient Stoic goal of apathy [III.I.15, p. 143; also V.II.1.17, note e, p. 273]. The claim that, somehow, passions are illegitimate is, for Smith, the telling weakness of the Stoic theory. Moreover, with this the Stoics necessarily had to give up on the importance of the world outside. « That philosophy, » he wrote, « teaches us to interest ourselves earnestly and anxiously in no events, external to the good order of our own minds, to the propriety of our own choosing and rejecting. » [VII.II.1.46]

But moral choice, for Smith, was never made in private, off at some solitary crossroads because that was not how people lived. Moreover, in solitude « we are apt to feel too strongly whatever relates to ourselves » and so skew the fine calibration of the « impartial spectator » [III.3.38]. Elsewhere, Smith expressed his rejection of this part of the neo-Stoic narrative by emphasizing another of its central pillars, the famous *sustine et abstine*: « Are you in adversity? Do not mourn in the darkness of solitude ... Are you in prosperity? Do not confine the enjoyment of your good fortune to your own house. » [III.3.39-40, p. 154] (It is worth noting that precisely here, in the argument, Smith rejects Shaftesbury's « modern » system of balanced passions as fuzzy and, moreover, impossible to achieve without the device of the impartial spectator [VII.II.I.48-50, p. 293-4]).

For Smith, the « man of real constancy and firmness, the wise and just man ... has been thoroughly bred in the great school of self-command, in the bustle and business of the world. » He lives in the world. And yet, he « maintains this control of his passive feelings upon all occasions; and whether in solitude or in society, wears nearly the same countenance, and is affected very nearly in the same manner. » [III.3.25, p. 146] This is the result of constant practice of his innermost sentiments « according to those of this awful and respectable judge. » [III.3.25, p. 147]

Stoical self-command, but also a « yes » to sociability: this is Smith's triangulation between Shaftesbury and Mandeville.

> Our sensibility to the feelings of others, <he wrote>, so far from being inconsistent with the manhood of self-command, is the very principle upon which that manhood is founded ...The man of the most perfect virtue, the man who we naturally love and revere the most, is he who joins, to the most perfect command of his own original and selfish feelings, the most exquisite sensibility both to the original and sympathetic feelings of others.
> [III.3.34-35, p. 152]

In fact, the more developed the capacity for self-command, the greater the capacity for sympathy.

Smith contrasts the man in the world who possesses this internal gyroscope, and the one who does not. Commercial society in England challenged conventional moral absolutes by making exchange the basis of all worth, moral and aesthetic as well as economic. Without any internal restraint individuals would be set afloat on the sea of superficial good.

> It is from our disposition to admire, <Smith wrote>, and consequently to imitate, the rich and the great, that they are enabled to set, or to lead what is called the fashion. Their dress is the fashionable dress; the language of their conversation, the fashionable style; their air and deportment, the fashionable behavior. Even their vices and follies are fashionable; and the greater part of men are proud to imitate and resemble them in the very qualities which dishonour and degrade them.

This sense of the power of fashion is something which Mandeville could gesture at as fundamental – like it or not – to the new age. Half a century later it had become an obvious driver of modern social life – and Smith did not like it. Nor did he like the kind of debased form of friendships – really arrangements for the pursuit of mutual self-interest – that came with it [V.II.1.18, p. 225][94].

Smith's comment on this sad state of affairs is presented in terms of the tale of Hercules. « To attain this envied situation, » of being fashionable, he wrote, « the candidates for fortune too frequently abandon the paths of virtue; for unhappily, the road which leads to the one, and that which leads to the other, lie sometimes in very opposite directions. » [I.III.3.8] If listening to the wrong sort of chatter could lead one to make the wrong choice, listening to, and learning from, the impartial spectator, could ensure making the right one. Sometimes this teaching could be painful, and require of the « wisest and firmest man » the most « painful exertion ». His natural feelings could pull him in one direction, and his learned, acquired habit, in another.

He does not, in this case, <Smith observed>, perfectly identify himself with the ideal man with in the breast, he does not become himself the impartial spectator of his own conduct. The different views of both characters exist in his mind separate and distinct from one another, and each directing him to a behavior different from that to which the other directs him.

This is a choice. And while Smith expects the man to choose the teaching of the spectator, he acknowledges that he will still suffer physically whatever the rewards of self-approbation and the approval of others [III.3.28, p.148]. Smith does, however, hold out the hope that a complete identification with the impartial spectator might eventually be possible [III.3.29, p.148].

Smith is no idle worshipper of antiquity. He is aware that in polished societies the humane virtues are more common, in barbarous ones those of self-denial. The inhabitants of North America, he wrote, possess a « magnanimity and self-command ... almost beyond the conception of Europeans. »

> When a savage is made prisoner of war, and receives, as is usual, the sentence of death from his conquerors, he hears it without expressing any emotion ... While he is hung by the shoulders over a slow fire, he derides his tormentors, and tells them with how much more ingenuity he himself had tormented such

[94] For a seventeenth-century prequel, see Miller 2001b.

> of their countrymen as had fallen into his hands ... The same contempt of death and torture prevails among all other savage nations.
> [v.2.9, p. 206]

Smith's ethnography, with its echoes of classical heroes like Mutius Scaevola, who burned his own hand in the fire of the Tuscan King Porsenna, or Regulus who preferred slavery and torture in Carthage to betrayal of Rome and principle, looks back a century to St. Evremond's re-description of Roman virtue as savage and inhuman[95].

This kind of heroism, with its ingrained habit of suppression of the passions leads, he wrote, to « the habits of falsehood and dissimulation », whereas the « weakness » of more polished peoples is part of a progress toward becoming « frank, open, and sincere ». [v.2.11, p. 208]. The one tends to diminish « humanity », the other « firmness of character ». [v.2.13, p. 209]. The challenge was, then, and remains today, somehow to preserve the best part of both.

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[95] See Saint-Evremond.

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