

Stoicism

Of the doctrines central to the Stoic worldview, perhaps the most important is the unwavering conviction that the world is organized in a rational and coherent way. More specifically, it is controlled and directed by an all-pervading force that the Stoics designated by the term *logos*. The term (from which English "logic" and the suffix "-logy" derive) has a semantic range so broad as to be almost untranslatable. At a basic level it designates rational, connected thought—whether envisioned as a characteristic (rationality, the ability to reason) or as the product of that characteristic (an intelligible utterance or a connected discourse). *Logos* operates both in individuals and in the universe as a whole. In individuals it is the faculty of reason. On a cosmic level it is the rational principle that governs the organization of the universe.¹ In this sense it is synonymous with "nature," "Providence," or "God." (When the author of John's Gospel tells us that "the Word"—*logos*—was with God and is to be identified with God, he is borrowing Stoic terminology.)

All events are determined by the *logos*, and follow in an unbreakable chain of cause and effect. Stoicism is thus from the outset a deterministic system that appears to leave no room for human free will or moral responsibility. In reality the Stoics were reluctant to accept such an arrangement, and attempted to get around the difficulty by defining free will as a voluntary accommodation to what is in any case inevitable. According to this theory, man is like a dog tied to a moving wagon. If the dog refuses to run along with the wagon he will be dragged by it, yet the choice remains his: to run or be dragged. In the same way, humans are responsible for their choices and actions, even though these have been anticipated by the *logos* and form part of its plan. Even actions which appear to be—and indeed are—immoral or unjust advance the overall design, which taken as a whole is harmonious and good. They, too, are governed by the *logos*.

But the *logos* is not simply an impersonal power that governs and