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Büyükokutan, Barış. 2021. "Sociological Stoicism." *Civic Sociology* 2 (1). https://doi.org/10.1525/cs.2021.18389.

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Sociological Stoicism

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Keywords: bourdieu, weber, marx, puzzle-driven research, stoicism, virtue ethics

https://doi.org/10.1525/cs.2021.18389

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This article initiates a conversation between sociological theory and the contemporary revival of Stoicism. Identifying four problems common to historical and contemporary incarnations of Stoicism and tracing them to their shared individualism, I contend that only a sociological Stoicism is viable. I then sketch this sociological Stoicism by redefining key Stoic terms in the collective register; outlining a Stoic logic of case selection; assessing the fit of redefined Stoic concepts and logic of case selection with Marxian, Weberian, and Bourdieuvian frameworks; and developing a Stoic research agenda. These exercises culminate in the proposal to significantly alter sociology's methods and epistemology.

Social theory often benefits from infusions originating in unexpected sources. One such infusion may be provided by the recent revival of Stoicism (Becker 1998; Brennan 2005; Graver 2007; Irvine 2009; Jedan 2012; Pigliucci 2017; Vogt 2008), which social scientists have yet to take advantage of. In this article, I attempt to initiate a sociological conversation about Stoicism: I ask whether and how Stoicism can be a valuable resource for sociology and vice versa.

I proceed in six steps. First, I briefly outline the characteristics of historical Stoicism, identifying four problems that must be solved if any Stoicism can stand today. Second, I discuss the main contours of the revival, tracing them to the reappraisal of virtue ethics; to the interest of analytical philosophers in psychology and neuroscience; and to the Roman Stoics' appropriation by the self-help/spirituality sector. I find that the contemporary Stoicism that results from these developments is unable to solve the four problems due to the individualism they share. Third, I revisit key Stoic concepts in preparation for a less individualistic approach. The four problems are solved in the process, showing that a tenable Stoicism is necessarily a sociological one.

I thus move on to imagine what that sociological Stoicism would look like: fourth, I develop its logic of case selection and criteria of evaluation; fifth, I consider the implications of this approach for various prominent sociological traditions and subfields, including other contemporary propositions to remake sociology in the image of virtue ethics. I conclude by developing the insights and questions that emerge from the previous steps into a research agenda.

The sociological Stoicism I advocate is, in many ways, sociology as it is already known—it is cautiously optimistic about the prospect of deploying rigorous empirical research to produce reliable and politically meaningful knowledge of the social world. In a small but important number of ways, however, it problematizes current practices: it is not easily reconciled with the puzzle-driven approach, sociology's reliance on universities, or Weberian thought. A Bourdieuvian outlook expunged of Weber's worst influences, however, promises to be an excellent conduit of sociological Stoicism.

HISTORICAL STOICISM: A SYNOPSIS

Stoicism began in Greece in the fourth century BCE, going through two distinct phases there before dominating the cultural life of the early Roman Empire (Gill 2003; Sedley 2003). It exerted limited but decisive influence on early Christianity (Engberg-Pedersen 2004; Normore 2004; Sorabji 2004), and Stoic ideas were rediscovered several times afterwards (Lagrée 2004; Long 2003). Nevertheless, disruption is the more prominent feature of Stoic history; especially after Marcus Aurelius (121–180 CE), what we are dealing with, including my reconstruction here, is not Stoicism per se but a series of neo-Stoicisms—that is, variably successful and friendly appropriations.

Historical Stoicism was a eudaemonistic virtue ethics based on a materialistic ontology and an empiricist epistemology.[1] In what follows, I will unpack this description.

Eudaemonia. Like other Hellenistic philosophies, Stoicism took *eudaemonia*, usually translated as happiness, to be both the normative and empirical end (*telos*) of human action. Because eudaemonia refers to a quality of one's whole life, it may be better translated as *well-being*, *success*, or *flourishing*.[2] I will use *flourishing*, as it allows a socio-

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1 The Stoics also contributed to logic, but that falls outside the scope of this article.

2 See Nussbaum 2001.

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logical reinterpretation of Stoicism. That raises the difficult question of what exactly human flourishing is. Roman Stoics are useful here: they zero in on a generalized, lasting tranquility that results from living in harmony with one's environment.

However, adopting tranquility as the end could lead to endorsing political conservatism. That tended to be the political stance of historical Stoicism, which came to be the philosophy of duty, obedience, and order (Lane 2014, 297-309). Showing that this need not be the case with all Stoicisms is my first problem—the **problem of progressive political action**.

Stoic ontology. Greek Stoics were materialists—rejecting Platonic and Aristotelian dualism, they held mind/spirit to be material. This could have played a significant role in the development of Western thought by providing an early alternative to the Cartesian mind-in-a-vat[3] if the Roman Stoics, especially Marcus Aurelius, had not brought dualism back. One can only wonder what would have happened if the works of Zeno, the founder of the school, and Chrysippus, its great systematizer, had survived; all that we have of them are fragments preserved for ridicule by hostile and unreliable commentators.

The Greeks and the Romans both agreed, however, in taking reason as the great animating principle of the universe—observing nature closely, they argued, one can only conclude that all movement is lawfully determined and orderly. Additionally, they held this Ruling Reason that pervades all being—a.k.a. God—to be benevolent. Their argument here was weak because it was circular: in order to prove that God cares about human affairs, they pointed out that the universe is orderly; in explaining that the universe is orderly, they provided a reminder that God cares for humans.

Untenable as it may be for the (post)modern mind, this providential pantheism has a humanistic kernel—it takes the defining feature of human nature to be a spark of the divine reason able to commune with its source by perfecting its agency. Because all humans are endowed with that spark, Stoicism has an egalitarian streak, one that culminated in a cosmopolitanism quite ahead of its time. My second problem is finding a way to preserve that streak while discarding providentialism—the **problem of grounding egalitarianism**.

Stoic epistemology. The central tenet of Stoic epistemology is *katalepsis*, which refers to vivid, forceful, and true impressions—impressions whose obviousness makes it all but impossible to deny their truth. Against the Skeptics, Stoics held that such impressions exist—Stoic epistemology is clearly not in the Humean/Kantian mold. This helps to explain why the reawakening of interest in things Greek did not lead to renewed interest in Stoicism in the nineteenth century; it should also show that Stoicism can be a resource for postpositivists today.

Kataleptic impressions do not always succeed in impressing themselves on human actors, however. Even when they are assented to, the assent in question is usually weak in that most humans can be swayed away from obvious truth by demagoguery and manipulation. Only a rare kind of person, someone who has assiduously trained her/his reason to perfection, can give strong assent; this is the Sage. Sages assent only strongly, and they assent only to kataleptic impressions (Brennan 2005, 71-81).

Such assent is what constitutes knowledge for the Stoics. Since Sages are rare—historical Stoics could not even identify Socrates as one—it follows that few people have ever known anything at all. Worse, historical Stoics held the difference between the Sage and the nonsage to be absolute—progress toward sagacity does not make one more sage-like; a clean and total break is involved in the abrupt transition to it. With the bar set so high, historical Stoicism appears cheerless, even pointless. Showing why other Stoicisms do not have to be so is my third problem—the **problem of salient knowledge**.

Stoic virtue. With such premises, historical Stoicism rejected other forms of eudaemonism of the time—namely, Aristotle's and Epicurus's. It implicitly held the following impressions to be kataleptic: power, prestige, and property are dispensable for eudaemonia; human nature is rationally oriented toward fellowship with all humans (and perhaps with the entire cosmos); and therefore virtue, (re)defined as a mind that has become irreversibly consistent with nature and thus perfected practical wisdom, is the only path to eudaemonia.[4] When humans fail to sufficiently strive to develop the potential inherent in their nature, they have vice instead of virtue—they assent to at least some wrong impressions, poisoning their entire stock of impressions—and develop false beliefs such as the intrinsic desirability of property. It must be mentioned here that the historical Stoics, like all other ancient Greek philosophers, understood by the nature of a being not only the actual state it is [usually] in but also the potential implicit in it—that is, the development for which it was providentially designed (Annas 1993, 135-141; Lane 2014, 197, 225; Stock 1990, 5-6).

The difficulties of sustaining such a view today should be obvious, and even in ancient times the Stoics' nature talk got them in trouble. Most famously, they held that some indifferents like security and good health are to be "preferred" or "promoted" because they observed that it is human beings' nature to take them when they can. Critics argued that "in this way all mundane and marketable goods, after having been solemnly refused admittance by the Stoics at the front door, were smuggled in at a kind of tradesman's entrance" (Stock 1990, 22). Historical Stoics' view of nature, and with it their treatment of the indifferents, must be revised; this is my fourth and last problem—the **problem of naturalism**.

In the meantime, the Stoic definition of virtue can be usefully unpacked—following Socrates and Plato, Greek Stoics took virtue to manifest in four main forms: justice,

3 This happened to some extent with Spinoza, but the loss of the leading Greek Stoics' works led Spinoza to exaggerate his differences from Stoicism. See DeBrabander 2004.

4 Aristotle advanced that health and wealth could help; Epicurus wrote that the absence of pain was enough.

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fortitude/courage, prudence/wisdom,[5] and temperance (Lane 2014, 139; Pigliucci 2017, 98).[6] Stoicism holds, simply, (i) that humans flourish if and only if they are reliably just, courageous/fortitudinous, prudent/wise, and temperate, and (ii) that virtue is one, therefore a truly just person and only a truly just person is also truly courageous, prudent, and temperate.

It may be objected that these four virtues can no longer be taken for granted 2,500 years after their introduction in a part of the world that a good deal of contemporary scholarship wants to provincialize. The four "cardinal virtues" were later (mis)appropriated in Christianity, and talk of the virtues is to this day associated politically with the right; therefore, invoking virtue, especially these four particular virtues, today will be odious to most social scientists. Nevertheless, the revival of virtue ethics in the second half of the twentieth century took place in the hands of progressive scholars and the empirical evidence in support of the four virtues is strong: the same six virtue-like characteristics—that is, the four cardinal virtues plus "humanity" and "transcendence"—are found in the history of practically every literate culture (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, and Seligman 2005); the Stoics may be forgiven for assuming that these two other characteristics are to be found in agents with the other four.

Uniting the four virtues is a matter of acquiring practical knowledge—it is possible only as a result of intensive training consisting of observing nature, including one's own, and making difficult choices based on those observations. As one's observations became more consistent with each other and more comprehensive, the historical Stoics thought, one would eliminate false beliefs, which would lead to moral progress. As such, practical wisdom too is the exclusive property of the Sage. In progressing toward sagehood, practitioners would replace excessive emotions—those that overwhelm judgment—with milder ones or destroy them outright. Four such "passions" are canonically listed: pleasure, pain, desire, and fear.[7]

The difficulty of such "sentimental education" has given Stoicism a bad reputation, leading to the ordinary usage of the term "Stoic" to describe those who have turned their backs on a crucial part of human experience. The Stoic argument here, however, is largely misunderstood—Stoics' target was not so much what we now call sentiments but the assent one gives to the propositions built into those sentiments (see Brennan 2005, 51-61). There may not be much to do about physical pain, but we can, their argument goes, resist the temptation to think that what is happening to us is truly bad. Similarly, the point is not so much to shun pleasure—although one must take care to maintain temperance—but to remind oneself that what one is experiencing is not truly good but at best a promoted indifferent. As such, the Stoic understanding of virtue is rationalistic—the virtues are knowledges that can be acquired—or rather experienced, since the Stoic understanding of knowledge was event-like (Brennan 2005), the way any other knowledge is acquired/experienced. Stoic sentimental education is, in fact, mental education.

STOICISM IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The contemporary revival of Stoicism results from three developments. The first is the reappraisal of virtue ethics vis-à-vis Kantian and utilitarian approaches. Following Anscombe (1958) and Foot (1958a, 1958b), major works by MacIntyre (1981, 1998, 1999) and Nussbaum (1994, 2006) have turned Aristotle from a figure of historical import to one who is central to contemporary discussions. Interest in Aristotle eventually stimulated interest in his rivals, including the Stoics. The most important issue here is the possibility and value of Stoic cosmopolitanism (Nussbaum 2004; Schofield 1991; Vogt 2008). A more general defense of (neo-) Stoic ethics is found in the work of Becker (1998), who argues that virtue, redefined as the perfection of agency, is necessary and sufficient for eudaemonia.

Second, the growing interest of analytical philosophers in neuroscience has prompted new thinking on the Stoic theory of emotions, especially Chrysippus's. Becker's work should be considered here as well, together with Graver (2007), but the major text is Brennan (2005). These works are revisionist and at times apologetic—while Becker insists on the centrality of virtue, he concedes that the historical Stoics' work on emotion must be revised radically or even scrapped altogether in light of the findings of recent research. Brennan similarly restricts his defense of Stoicism to noting that Zeno and Chrysippus understood different things by words commonly translated as "emotion," "pleasure," "pain," and the like.

As opposed to the predominantly academic nature of the work cited above, there is also a budding therapeutic appropriation of Roman Stoicism. This turns fragments of Stoic wisdom into "spirituality" for sale as self-help books, often by emphasizing similarities between Stoicism and other "spiritual" traditions such as what Buddhism has come to mean for most Westerners (e.g., Burkeman 2013; Pies 2008; Stockdale 1993; also see Pigliucci 2017); this group features the second most important scholar who identifies as a Stoic (Irvine 2009). Being the work of professional philosophers, some of these books come out of academic publishing houses, but their style stands out as non- or extra-academic. Similar to them in their purpose but distinct in their style are those works associated with rational emotive behavioral therapy (Ellis 1996, 2001; Robertson 2010), the semiofficial

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5 While Plato wrote of *sophia* and the Stoics preferred the term *phronesis*, which refers to a more practical sense of wisdom, this difference should not be exaggerated (Jedan 2012, 83).

6 Piety was sometimes added as the fifth virtue, but the inconsistency in its inclusion is itself un-Stoic. See Vlastos 1991, 210.

7 Pleasure refers to assenting to the proposition that something currently in one's possession is good. Pain refers to assenting to the proposition that something that one currently lacks is good. Desire and fear are similar propositions concerning the future. See Brennan 2005.

arm of the new Stoicism in psychotherapy.

Stoic individualism. There is a common thread tying these strands together, and that is an implicit focus on the individual—a distinct form of expressive individualism (Bellah et al. 1985). This is easily noticeable in the therapeutic strand, but the works of Becker, Brennan, Graver, and Vogt are also individualistic in their focus: compared to other virtue ethicists, they ask very few questions of public import. What they do, instead, is theorize the potential for acquisition of virtue by individuals given what we now know about their hardwired limits.

The four problems I identified above have yet to be solved within this individualistic framework. To take the problems of progressive political action and grounding egalitarianism, it is remarkable how seldom the issues of conservatism and justice have even been raised in the context of neo-Stoic virtue ethics. Becker is silent on the issue, and Vogt is apologetic—her solution involves reconsidering the definition of politics and law. So is Irvine (2009), who leaves it at noting that many historical Stoics were active political dissidents. Tellingly, the clearest call for a more socially engaged and politically progressive Stoicism comes from the arch-Aristotelian Nussbaum (2004).

Neo-Stoics have made headway in solving the problem of salient knowledge, but they have not been able to go all the way. Jedan (2012, 103-109) notes that the nongradualness of virtue has to do with Stoicism's now-forgotten religious roots: Chrysippus's model of learning was based on the model of rites of initiation. If this mystical/religious outlook is discarded, virtue may become attainable in small doses rather than all at once. Avoiding the question of the contemporary relevance of historical Stoicism, however, Jedan does not pursue that possibility.

In a more significant intervention, by basing the definition of knowledge on strong assent, Brennan has shown that what is in question is not true knowledge of how things are but rather true knowledge that we have true knowledge of how things are (2005, 69-71). It probably does not hurt too much to say that not many people have such metaknowledge. But the question remains of how to affirm the striving to acquire reflexive metaknowledge—neo-Stoicism may make its adherents feel comfortable about their current inability to know in this higher sense, but it cannot motivate them to make the arduous effort to become a different kind of actor. For an individualistic monad, having knowledge but not having knowledge that one has knowledge is not a priority due to the ethical, other-interested nature of this higher-order knowledge.

The only serious attempt to solve the problem of naturalism is found in Becker. For Becker, following nature simply refers to taking empirical research very seriously in the process of solving one's practical problems. The perfection of human agency is the process by which one becomes more receptive to new research, as a result of which one is expected to become more attentive to the limits of the faculty of assent and thus get accustomed to withholding assent on many more occasions than before. This is a victory all right, but some may find it Pyrrhic—given the inability to solve the problems of progressive political action and grounding egalitarianism, Becker's scientism threatens to reduce Stoicism to a form of utilitarianism.

EUDAEMONIA AND VIRTUE IN THE COLLECTIVE REGISTER

If the individualistic orientation of neo-Stoicism is a problem, the way forward involves rethinking key Stoic terms so that actors are reembedded in their social contexts. For eudaemonia, this means focusing on the extent to which social institutions contribute to the unfolding of collective human potential—that is, dealing with flourishing rather than happiness. Therefore the questions of how and to what extent social and political institutions can be intelligently designed and guided by humans are of central importance. As such, virtue is not the perfection of any agency in pursuit of any goal à la Becker; if it involves the perfection of agency at all, the agency in question and the problems that that agency is supposed to solve are both collective.[8]

Such public engagement is necessary because, among other things, it yields alternatives to existing institutions. Even perfectly virtuous institutions may not respond well to the challenges of a new era. Consequently, if propositions regarding new ways of doing things cannot survive, eudaemonia will likely not continue. A necessary condition of eudaemonia is thus a polity in which social and political arrangements arising from violations of existing rules are not immediately destroyed, provided that the violations in question are motivated not by the desire for power, prestige, and/or property but by justice and are guided by the ethic of responsibility rather than by the ethic of absolute conviction.[9]

As Stoicism holds virtue to be not merely necessary for eudaemonia, the question is under which circumstances this necessary condition is also sufficient. This, I contend, is a matter of attaining the right view of justice, which I take, following not just the historical Stoics but also Aristotle, to be largely a matter of practice. A strength of virtue ethics is its ability to show why exactly there is rarely consensus on what justice means: identifying the just course of action is not only about figuring out what the just state of affairs would be like; it is also a matter of finding the right means for its acquisition—that is, balancing prudence and courage. As such, it involves not one but two uncertainties,

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8 This does not mean that there can be no such thing as a virtuous individual, although it means that individuals cannot acquire virtue as mere individuals—it takes sustained engagement with others in broadly political settings to qualify.

9 Note that this proposition covers all the virtues and not just justice: it does not limit itself to rule-bound action, calling for a set of forbidden actions as an operationalization of courage/fortitude; the renunciation of power, prestige, and property as motivations as an operationalization of temperance; and the celebration of the ethic of responsibility as an operationalization of prudence/wisdom.

getting rid of which is guaranteed only for the Sage—others must look for the answer in the dark. There is something bleak about this, but also something hopeful: getting closer to justice is possible, and it takes only focused attention and (lots of) practice. This is because a proper reanimation of Stoicism must take the sense of justice to be natural in the sense explained above—the foundations of the sense of justice are, as experimental psychology increasingly suggests, innate, but these foundations must be arduously developed by intense practice along a direction to be revealed in trial-and-error fashion as that practice matures.

The problem of progressive political action revisited. The solution of the problem of progressive political action follows directly from the redefinitions of eudaemonia and virtue. If eudaemonia can be attained only collectively and if virtue is continuous collective agency in pursuit of better institutional arrangements, participation in politics is neither a burden nor a luxury but a basic necessity for human flourishing.

This is, again, something sociologists have argued for a long time. Indeed, the idea goes back much longer: it was Aristotle who most famously made the argument for conceiving of humankind as political animals—that is, animals who flourish fully only in the context of the *polis*. Sociological Stoicism differs from Aristotle in that virtuous activity will not always be in the political realm in the narrow sense, since familial and civil societal institutions are also subject to constant renegotiation in practice. These presumably nonpolitical institutions in presumably nonpolitical realms are caught up in politics, since identity and autonomy are key concerns in the postindustrial paradigm (Buechler 2000; Castells 1997, 2000; Melucci 1989; Touraine 1974, 1981, 1988), if not always.

The question at this point is how this view of politics is progressive. That has to do with the fact that institutional arrangements are at any moment acknowledged to be imperfect at best. The goal of political activity is therefore not so much to preserve gains as it is to permanently seek improvements. Sociological Stoicism has an inherent forward thrust.

The problem of grounding egalitarianism revisited. To some degree, the solution of the problem of grounding egalitarianism also follows from the collectivization of virtue and eudaemonia. For continuous institutional rearrangement to bring its practitioners closer to the practice of justice, it should involve as many different kinds of people as basic constraints on human interaction—for example, the number of people who can meaningfully interact face-to-face—allow. There is a problem that must still be solved, however: interaction is easier in homogeneous groups; and groups that are able to solve their organizational problems develop a kind of solidarity that at times tends to harden the group's boundaries, preventing diversification. In other words, homogeneity both causes and is caused by institutional innovation, and it is not clear how to break out of this cycle without damaging the innovative impulse. While I have no perfect solution to this problem, I tentatively propose, as an organizational principle, nesting relatively homogeneous groups in cascading confederations. If the representatives of each group are selected with an eye to their similarities to other groups rather than to the group to be represented, the gathering of such representatives at a higher level can form bridging social capital (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993; Putnam 2000).

A key question, then, is to what extent such small groups can shield themselves from systemic powers and preserve the record of their institutional solutions—that is, survival—while maintaining a friendly attitude to other groups that are superficially different but are trying to solve similar problems—that is, growth. That is an empirical problem I cannot fully address here, but I would propose, again tentatively, that the tension between survival and growth is exaggerated. Survival may even require growth—for systemic forces arrayed against communities of virtue to fail to destroy those communities, the latter may need to bond together. As another tentative proposition, this is probably a matter of suitable cultural codes of friendship and difference.

Readers may wonder if the idea of the Sage can fit into this egalitarian recasting. There are two reasons why I believe that is the case. First, a Stoic polity that wants to relinquish all political power to Sages, supposing that such a polity is not a contradiction in terms, will be hard-pressed to find even one. In their near-total absence, we are left to our own devices, and we have no good reason to leave anybody out. Second, when virtue is cast primarily as a property of the collective, it is the collective that will variably approach Sagehood. That individuals may or may not attain any level of virtue is, after all, beside the point for a *sociological* Stoicism.

The problem of salient knowledge revisited. Cultural codes of friendship and difference also provide the solution to the problem of salient knowledge. Means-ends calculations may lead the median individual to conclude that the likelihood of attaining sagacity is vanishingly small, but human motivations are not always provided by such calculations, and there are other kinds of rationality: value rationality does greater justice to the Stoic understanding of reason, and its object is always historically and culturally specific. The internalization of such objects is long accounted for in sociology: the striving for metaknowledge may be part of the habitus in spite of—or, as in Weber's account of the Protestant ethic, precisely because of—the likely failure of such striving. Such cultures are not numerous, but that is the point—eudaemonia is rare.

The problem of naturalism revisited. The final problem, that of naturalism, boils down to the question of whether there is a single desirable direction for the development of human capacities. This question can be answered in the affirmative without appealing to providence—contemporary evolutionary biology, for instance, provides a sufficiently powerful alternative. More importantly, such biological imperatives can be overridden in culture: it may, for instance, be objectively desirable for humans not to feast—that is, eat more than what is necessary to sustain their current body mass—frequently, but the diet of most contemporary Westerners involves feasting multiple times each day, resulting in various avoidable mass diseases in Europe and North America while hunger continues to riddle much of the rest of the world. Such imbalances not only call for correction; they call for correction by collective decisions whose implementation will manifest virtue.

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TOWARD A STOIC LOGIC OF CASE SELECTION

If flourishing is objectively the *telos* of the institutions that create the knowledge of ever newer arrangements of the social life, the question is what sociology, as such an institution, can do to enhance flourishing. As a first step, I take it for granted that sociology must itself practice virtue. That is, sociologists must be prepared to antagonize political authority in search of justice, but they must adopt an ethic of responsibility while doing so. They must also denounce the usual rewards associated with such breaches such as fame and money in advance of the breach and, for the sake of temperance, restrain any tendency to overgeneralize from their findings.

These propositions raise an issue concerning the logic of case selection: the puzzle-driven mode of operation that characterizes much, if not most, North American sociology is problematic. From the point of view of justice, puzzle-driven research is neutral—it allows but does not dictate engagement with political issues. From the point of view of prudence/wisdom, it may actually be preferable to other modes if it turns out that puzzles are a prerequisite for capturing the target audience's attention; there are some good reasons why this may indeed be the case (Davis 1971; Healy 2017). Nevertheless, one must have the courage/fortitude to step outside the puzzle-driven framework if and when that is necessary. And one must never undertake puzzle-driven research solely in order to advance one's career.

More importantly than these, however, there is an irresolvable problem: puzzle-driven research is necessarily intemperate. It involves advancing bold hypotheses in the full knowledge that many of those hypotheses will eventually prove unsustainable (see Burawoy 1989; Lakatos, Motterlini, and Feyerabend 1999; Lakatos and Musgrave 1970; Polanyi 1962). In other words, individual overreach is a built-in feature of collective puzzle solving. Unless a mechanism is introduced to check this tendency, therefore, sociological Stoicism cannot in good faith follow the puzzle-driven approach. Individual practitioners may at times find themselves solving puzzles, but they cannot commit themselves to that mode of operation as a matter of course and must always be watchful of its excesses.

The lack of virtue of puzzle-driven research raises the question of where sociological practice should take place: contemporary North American sociology is puzzle driven largely because it belongs with a field of universities that is larger than any other, one that has learned to settle internal differences by schismogenesis. As goal-displacing institutions, universities may prioritize their continued survival over their stated goal of producing knowledge. Since this requires them to collaborate more with the market and with the state than with small communities, temperance, justice, and courage/fortitude are immediately compromised.

This is not to call for abandoning the campus, at least not yet. With centuries of experience under its belt, the university has perfected the craft of transmitting method and literature. As things currently stand, it is hard to imagine any other institution that can take over the preservation of this gigantic archive. Stoically inclined scholars should thus try to found such alternative archives as part of their experimentation with new institutional arrangements. They may fail the first few times, but this should be no reason to give up. If they can preserve the account of their failures, they will have helped.

THE PRACTICE OF SOCIOLOGICAL STOICISM: SCHOOLS AND SUBFIELDS

In summary, redefining the four virtues and eudaemonia in collective terms yields a version of Stoicism that promises to solve its four historical problems while strengthening sociology's commitment to the pursuit of objective truth in service of (social) justice. In polities in which breaches of existing rules do not necessarily fail to leave traces behind, sociologists can realistically aspire to the practice of virtue qua sociologists, contributing to human flourishing.

The trial-and-error nature of this striving raises the issue of what sociological Stoicism can learn from the history of sociology: there may be some sociological ideas that have, in hindsight, already proven themselves to be more suitable than others to the practice of virtue. In pursuit of these insights, in this section I will first assess three prominent traditions in contemporary sociology: those associated with Marx, Weber, and Bourdieu. I find that Marxian sociology is more compatible with Stoicism than Weberian sociology, which, surprisingly given the use I have made of the ethic of responsibility, is devoid of virtue as defined here. Bourdieuvian sociology, however, is superior to both provided that its Weberian roots are carefully removed. Second, I will identify two subfields in which the application of Stoic insights have better prepared places; these are the sociology of knowledge and political sociology.

Marxism and/versus teleology. The first thing to note about Marxism, as an academic tradition as well as a revolutionary political practice, is that it sometimes deemphasizes practical wisdom: assured of their final victory, some Marxist scholars as well as activists (used to) find that their problem is not so much minimizing the chances of failure as succeeding as soon as possible. The guarantee of eventual revolutionary success also compromises temperance—the statements that all human history is the history of class struggles and that that struggle will eventually result in proletarian revolution constitute obvious theoretical overreach.

The problem for Marxist sociology, therefore, is moving beyond these ideas, which, fortunately, has already happened to a remarkable degree in the twentieth century (e.g., Althusser 2006; Brenner 1977; Gramsci 1971, 1994). In a similar vein, the recognition, in some strands of twentieth-century Marxism, that social action almost always has unintended consequences (e.g., Anderson 1974, 1977) can be considered an appreciation of the ethic of responsibility. In spite of these numerous attempts to build a "Marxism without guarantees" (Hall 1983), however, it should be noted that others felt the need, in the same time period, to denounce Marxism precisely in order to remain revolutionaries (e.g., Castoriadis 1987, 1992; also see Laclau and Mouffe 2000). The compatibility of Marxism and Stoicism, while not entirely lacking, may be less than perfect.

Weberian cynicism. Scholars who have managed to renew Marxism have done this largely by silently importing We-

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berian insights into their work—by speaking of domination rather than of exploitation; by accepting the primacy of the political; and by affirming the constitutive role of culture. As such, Weberian sociology may appear to be a more appropriate alternative than the Marxian: the propositions that actions have unintended consequences; that political struggle is fundamentally unpredictable; and that the ethic of responsibility is at least as important as the ethic of ultimate ends all enjoy enthusiastic support in Weber's and his followers' work.

For these propositions to count as contributions to the practice of virtue, however, they must be accompanied by a clear commitment to justice, which is entirely lacking in Weber's oeuvre. Constrained by the ideal of value-free science, Weber and his most prominent early followers have disqualified their own work in this regard. In addition, Weber took conflict as the only constant of social life and built an individualistic methodology, making the idea of coming together in solidaristic fashion in small communities seem naive and unsociological. In his politically motivated pieces, moreover, Weber is positively vicious: the nation takes precedence over humanity; deploying power for its own sake is affirmed; and cultures are ranked in terms of their development, allowing nationalists to justify the domination of some peoples by others.

It might be argued that Weber and Weberians are two different stories, but this has not frequently enough been the case. State-centered political sociology has uncritically adopted Weber's cynicism, arguing that revolutions lead to nothing but stronger (and therefore more dangerous) states (Skocpol 1979); that ordinary people are usually election fodder to political elites (Tilly 1985); and that a certain kind of corruption and nepotism is conducive to economic development (Evans 1979, 1995). The recent, more culturalist reinterpretations of Weberian thought also feature little commitment to justice and are written clearly in the puzzle-driven mode (e.g., Gorski 2003, 2011; Steinmetz 2007), making them imperfect models for sociological practitioners of Stoic virtue.

Bourdieu and resentment as the ur-passion. Considering that his theoretical framework relies heavily on Weberian thought, Bourdieu may at first appear to be an unlikely model for sociological Stoicism. Not only does he see struggle as a constant of social life, but he also takes struggles to usually involve vicious actors and to lead to more vice—symbolic violence is ubiquitous in his account, and artists and intellectuals are just as responsible for this as bankers and politicians are (Bourdieu 1993b, 1996). For this gritty vision, Bourdieu has been called a mere reproduction theorist, unable to make sense of meaningful social change, especially of the progressive sort (e.g., Calhoun, LiPuma, and Postone 1993).

There are important differences between Bourdieu and Weber, however: unlike the latter, the former does not exalt the nation, take capitalism for granted, or celebrate the projection of power for its own sake. Bourdieu also maintained a clear commitment, throughout his long career, to social justice (Bourdieu 1998a). Relatedly, more recent reviews of Bourdieu's work have recast it as an account of social change and transformation (Gorski 2013a). Others, meanwhile, have pointed to a solidaristic kernel in it (Goldberg 2013); this is a fundamental challenge to the image of the jaded theorist of elite competition.

As such, perhaps Bourdieuvian sociology can be thought of as providing a way of salvaging some valuable themes and insights from Weber. In this view, the notion of the corporatism of the universal (Bourdieu 1996, 337-396) translates the ethic of responsibility to the sociology of intellectuals. The imagery of colliding fields (Bourdieu 1988, 1991, 1996) turns an otherwise deterministic picture into one of open systems and contingency. And ultraculturalist critics (e.g., Alexander 1995) notwithstanding, the notions of cultural and symbolic capital do a good job of recovering the constitutive role of culture (Büyükokutan 2011, 621-622; Gartman 2007; also see Dromi 2016).

To be sure, Bourdieu and his associates have been accused of imperialistic tendencies, perhaps indicating the kind of theoretical overreach that makes some versions of Marxism intemperate. It should be noted, however, that the universalism of Bourdieuvian sociology is one of concepts and mechanisms (Bhaskar 1998, 2008; Collier 1994) rather than one of covering laws. Most propositions to be found in Bourdieu's work are historically situated and carefully specified for scope conditions: the corporatism of the universal concerns Bourdieu's own time and not others; the conservative role accorded to high culture in postwar France is explicitly rejected both for earlier (Bourdieu 1996) and for later (Bourdieu 1998b; Bourdieu and Haacke 1995) periods; and fields of cultural production are described as existing in some times and places and not in others (Bourdieu 1993a).

There is a notable exception to this, however, and without its correction, sociological Stoicism cannot get much mileage out of Bourdieu. This is the idea that each human individual has a habitus that is for the most part complete and extremely resistant to change by the time that individual is an adolescent at the latest. This view of the habitus is obviously incompatible with character development, making all virtue ethics unviable. Suffusing Bourdieu's midcareer work, this assumption was silently relaxed as Bourdieu turned his eye toward fields of cultural production and their nonroutine transformations in the 1990s, more clearly noting that the relationship between habitus and field is two-way. Unsurprisingly, the idea of the fixed habitus can be traced back to Weber's influence on Bourdieu—it properly belongs with Weberian methodological individualism and its self-centered actor rather than with the relational view of human subjectivity that Bourdieu's mature work was meant to develop.

With the relatively flexible view of the habitus, Bourdieu's lifelong project of deploying sociological knowledge against the "terrorism of resentment" (Bourdieu 1982, 28-29) comes home to Stoicism. While the significance of resentment is part of Bourdieu's Weberian inheritance, the concept can nevertheless be developed fruitfully in the virtue ethics paradigm: resentment can be viewed as the combination of the four passions. In its first analytical moment, resentment is pain one feels because of one's inferior status vis-à-vis richer, more respected, and more powerful others. In the second and third moments, it is fear that this inferior status will continue and desire for quick fixes that promise but fail to deliver an end to inferiority. In its final moment, it involves pleasure that a representative of

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the inferior group symbolically gets the better of the superior group—for example, when a populist politician takes "elites" to task. The specifically Stoic version of this account holds that all four moments have their root in the false belief that power, prestige, and property are truly valuable.[10]

For Bourdieuvian sociology to be developed among virtue ethics lines as above, however, the philosophical treatments of virtue currently in vogue must be set aside, and virtue ethics must be understood as going well beyond Aristotelianism. There are at least four differences between Aristotle's discussion of virtue and mine: following historical Stoicism, I take virtue to be something other than a mean between two extremes; hold the cardinal virtues to be of determinate number; pursue the possibility that virtue is sufficient for eudaemonia; and restrict my discussion of the virtues to cognitive ones. Of these, the last one is of paramount importance in the Bourdieuvian context: for sociological Stoicism, the continuity between Aristotle's hexis and Bourdieu's habitus-as-semi-unconscious-dispositions means little. On the contrary, sociological Stoicism raises the possibility that dispositions are more amenable to rational self-analysis—and, if need be, self-correction—than standard Bourdieuvian accounts make them out to be; this Stoic view is more in tune with the historicist reappraisal of Bourdieu's work offered in place of the cynical, *plus-ça-change* version.

Such a view, of course, goes against current forms of dispositional thinking, but it is better able to ground the Bourdieuvian fight against resentment: in the absence of rationally malleable dispositions, conservative attacks on cosmopolitanism can derail Bourdieuvian sociology and turn it to the conduit of lower middle-class resentment.[11] As such, contemporary efforts to bring sociology closer to virtue ethics (e.g., Flanagan and Jupp 2000; Haimes and Williams 2007; Gorski 2013b, 2017; Richardson and McMullan 2007) must go beyond the Aristotelian revival and consider the possibility that non-Aristotelian discussions of virtue are more suitable to their agenda.

Knowledge and power: Sociological Stoicism at work. Of various subfields, the sociology of knowledge is one of the most opportunely positioned to take advantage of sociological Stoicism. At the heart of the Stoic promise here is the notion of katalepsis, which provides a novel ground on which to develop epistemology. If a good modern rationale for the existence of kataleptic impressions can be developed in the way, for example, that critical realism revalorized ontology by inverting epistemology's main question and asking how the world must be for it to be knowable, katalepsis may allow a whole new theory of knowledge. Considering that humans learn in contexts built collectively and often do so in groups, that new theory of knowledge will not be restricted to philosophy but will also raise the question of how exactly institutional arrangements raise or level hurdles for katalepsis to clear.

In a way, this is an old question. More importantly, it is an old-fashioned question: following Foucault, the sociology of knowledge has for some time turned its back to the problem of identifying the determinants of true knowledge. It is possible, however, that this attitude was an overreaction to the failure of the Robert Merton generation of scholars to solve that problem in a satisfactory manner. In that context, the great promise of the notion of katalepsis is its offer of an alternative way of bridging the study of knowledge with that of politics. As knowledge is the model for Stoic virtue and as Stoic virtue can come alive only in the public sphere, Stoic epistemology resolves into the study of how exactly scholars can serve the principle of justice effectively—that is, the circumstances under which unsuccessful challenges to injustice will inform successful ones.

The foregoing should make it clear that political sociology also stands to benefit significantly from sociological Stoicism. In addition to reestablishing the power-knowledge link in a nonrelativistic manner, sociological Stoicism lends new credence to the thesis that political action and not rest in the private sphere is the ultimate source of human flourishing. This thesis sensitizes us, in the current context of the rise of opportunistic and nativistic populisms, to the inherent problems of basing democracy on representation—of "freeing" citizens from the work of politics that liberalism, like authoritarian populism, takes to be an unnecessary burden. In Stoic political sociology, therefore, the focus will fall not so much on actors—status groups, parties, classes, cultural and political entrepreneurs—as on processes, and processes will be assessed not according to their policy outcomes but according to how much they enable the ongoing learning process of ordinary citizens-as-participants.

It is true that these emphases are already in place in some corners of the scholarly world—the civic republican tradition, going back to Aristotle, has millennia of experience under its belt (Sandel 1984; Skinner 1978). The way sociological Stoicism presents these ideas, however, may be superior to extant fare: its list of the virtues being complete, it is less ad hoc and more systematic. As such, it is also more open to falsification, for what falsifiability is worth.

DISCUSSION: A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR SOCIOLOGICAL STOICISM

Sociological Stoicism is not only possible but also potentially quite useful for sociologists and philosophers alike: it solves the four historical problems of Stoicism; provides a sound critique of the standard sociological logic of case selection; saves valuable Weberian insights while discard-

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10 Note again that the emphasis is not so much on the admittedly powerful sentiments but on the assent that the vicious actor gives to the propositions built into the sentiments: if the Stoics are right, the passions can be prevented from taking over, provided that one has developed one's critical reason sufficiently by constant practice.

11 See, for example, Andrew Perrin, "Of Sandwiches and Cultural Exclusion," July 11, 2017, https://scatter.wordpress.com/2017/07/11/of-sandwiches-and-cultural-exclusion/.

ing Weber's cynicism; helps develop a solidaristic interpretation of Bourdieu; and makes important interventions in the sociology of knowledge and political sociology.

While the broad contours of the Stoic approach to sociology have emerged, however, it is not yet clear what exactly sociologists can do with it in the short term. I have made suggestions for a few subfields and traditions, but in the absence of an alternative logic of case selection, an overarching mode of sociological operation is not forthcoming, and my critique of puzzle-driven research has not yet yielded such a logic. I thus conclude by developing that alternative logic and discuss four concrete goals to be pursued within the mode of operation it calls for.

Recall that the problem with puzzle-driven sociology is its inability to reliably bring together justice and temperance. Sociologists can start from a Marxian or Bourdieuvian perspective, identify anomalies, and deploy additional mechanisms and/or propositions to account for the divergence, in the process enriching the perspective and coming up with new ways to prosecute injustice. Yet this procedure requires willful overstepping of the sensible limits of knowledge production—it asks sociologists to make claims that are guaranteed to be excessive so that others can find new puzzles. Moreover, the solution of the puzzle does not have to be even in the nominal service of justice.

What if, instead of looking to defend their chosen perspective by focusing exclusively on its weaknesses, sociologists develop it by also working on its *strengths*? The puzzle-driven logic is based on the notion that scientific research programs are in a state of perpetual conflict that none can win; in that case, scientific development happens not between but within competing programs as each patches up its weaknesses in progressive problem shifts. From a Stoic point of view, on the other hand, the ubiquity of conflict between scientific research programs is not a given—while some programs may in some instances be opposed, there is no reason why they might not at other times seek to be allied or even fuse together. For such collaborations to be viable, however, it is not enough for each party to be convinced that the other cannot be overwhelmed; they must also understand that, behind the impregnable walls they face, there is a city worth beholding.

Working on a tradition's strengths takes multiple forms, but perhaps the most important one is simply cataloging one's inventory. This is not exclusively a matter of taking stock of things that one already knows to be there—it may involve discovery and even invention. As a first example, consider the discussion of the four passions as moments of resentment. While politically consequential resentment typically features all four moments, not all historical manifestations of resentment will feature them equally—some will involve primarily one of the four passions; in others two may predominate; and in some instances, the schadenfreude of pleasure may be entirely lacking due to the current unavailability of a David to challenge the Goliath du jour. These different forms of resentment may be differently pliable—they may constitute bigger or smaller problems for a functioning democracy. At the very least, it makes sense to think that different blends must be fought in different ways. Thus, comparative-historical and ethnographic studies of specific cases of resentment are called for.

As a second example, consider the proposition above regarding the tension between innovation and ease of interaction. Recall that the wisdom and courage to try new institutional forms is often—some would say always—to be found in small groups in which face-to-face interaction occurs smoothly due to the homogeneity that usually characterizes such groups. The same homogeneity may, however, eventually smother the innovative impulse—the emergence of new ideas is frequently the result of the emergence of new people. In other words, while virtue is born in small communities, unless those communities grow and diversify, there is a good chance it also dies there. I offered a method of confederation with other small groups as a way to negotiate this tension; does it work? If it does, under what circumstances does it work better? And what other ways are there to stimulate organizational innovation in small groups? These questions are the domain of economic sociology and the sociology of organizations; sociological Stoicism will benefit from a dialogue with these subfields.

The archive is the third area in which cataloging our inventory will go a long way toward making sociological progress; the sociology of organizations can also help here. Recall that the modern, corporate university is hardly an ideal setting for sociological Stoicism, but in the absence of other ways to pass down methodological know-how and the record of past work, it cannot be discarded. Developing better ways of archiving knowledge requires us to take account of what has worked in the past in solving similar problems.

Lastly, we may want to catalog the impediments katalepsis must clear. As social scientists of all varieties have denied the existence of what the historical Stoics called kataleptic impressions, the problem of epistemology has been identifying the inherent shortcomings of our sensory apparatus. In contrast, sociological Stoicism raises the possibility that the problem is not with our sensory apparatus but with obstacles placed in front of it in the form of manipulation, distortion, and psychological coercion. Social psychology has shown that facts do not always manage to convince, but there is more to be learned about how exactly this plays out in situations involving political and organizational decisions. We may want to find out.

Submitted: February 21, 2020 PST, Accepted: November 05, 2020 PST

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