
In his *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* of 1662 the Anglican divine Henry More unflatteringly compared the capacity of deluded enthusiasts to endure pain to a ‘sullen and inconsiderate Stoicism’. Upon first reading this phrase I was somewhat surprised; after all, More’s three-part cure for enthusiasm – centred on temperance, humility and reason – struck me as bearing at least a superficial resemblance to much of what the Stoics recommended by way of therapy for a distempered mind. Reading Christopher Brooke’s very fine study helped me to see more clearly what More might have been getting at. For while temperance and reason were qualities often associated with Stoicism, humility, Brooke repeatedly tells us, was not. It was the Stoics’ lack of humility, their prideful insistence that man was not irreducibly fallen and that a life without disturbance or sin was possible, that incurred the wrath of Augustinians, theologians and Epicureans alike. The Stoics’ quest to achieve indifference towards externals and their ‘paramount concern with their own virtue’ at the expense of other considerations, made them in many eyes suspiciously detached from the regular course of human emotional life, not to mention untrustworthy political subjects (69). *Philosophic Pride* then, as Brooke admits in the Preface, is as much a history of how Stoics have been loathed and distrusted as of how they influenced early modern European political thought (xiv).

That said the book is very far from being a straightforward exposition of a debate between a coherent band of modern Stoics and their opponents. The battle lines between Stoicism and anti-Stoicism are murky and Brooke’s book is at its richest when

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1 More 1966 [1662], p. 41.
considering those figures who might explicitly disavow Stoicism while subtly adopting Stoic doctrines for their own purposes (or vice versa). Henry More himself might have disclaimed against the ‘sullen’ Stoics but, Brooke informs us, he ‘mined the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius’ when compiling his own Enchiridion Ethicum (110). Hobbes is perhaps the most interesting among those who resist easy capture by the terms of the Stoic/anti-Stoic debate. Although himself infamously reluctant to admit to influences on his thought, Hobbes’s readers have frequently presented him as an Epicurean of one sort or another. Brooke encourages us to look again, uncovering, for example, an intriguing ‘architectural resemblance’ between Hobbes’ theory that our passions emanate from our beliefs and the similar doctrine of the Stoics (70). One of the virtues of the book is that a coherent debate between Stoicism and its alternatives remains in view throughout, while the exact positioning of the disputants on each side shifts constantly.

Even the third Earl of Shaftesbury, for many the principal torch bearer of Stoicism in the early eighteenth century, is portrayed by Brooke as extremely selective in what he appropriated from his favourite Hellenists – Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus. Shaftesbury’s project of cultivating our moral sense was a distinctively modern one, Brooke argues, and can be more profitably read as an ‘extended response’ to Locke’s critique of innate ideas and hedonistic theory of moral motivation than as an attempt to resuscitate ancient Stoicism (114). This is all quite convincing and well argued, but in directing our attention (as others have done) towards Shaftesbury’s complex relation to Locke, Brooke curiously

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2 Brooke rightly observes that Shaftesbury’s posture towards his tutor was not only critical. He sums up his position thus: ‘Shaftesbury’s theory was more likely to be persuasive to the extent that it shared its philosophical foundations with those of Locke’s own enterprise rather than presenting itself as a fundamental alternative substantially derived from ancient models’ (119).
glosses over the earl’s explicit targeting of Hobbes, and specifically those moments where he seems to literally treat Hobbes as a stand-in for Epicurus. ³ It is at such moments that Shaftesbury’s appropriation of the Stoics’ argumentative style, and not only their doctrines, is most on display. Take for example Shaftesbury’s claim in Sensus Communis that Hobbes refuted his own doctrine of human unsociability by labouring intensively to ensure that his fellow human beings would benefit from his ideas. Why would someone truly convinced that ‘by nature we are all wolves’ go on to ‘take such pains to communicate such a discovery?’⁴ Shaftesbury here echoes, almost to the letter, Epictetus’s line of rhetorical questioning from Discourses, II, 20: ‘What was it then, that roused Epicurus from his sleep, and compelled him to write what he did? What other than that which is the most powerful of all things in mankind, nature… For since, says she, you hold these unsociable opinions, write them down and bequeath them to others... and become by your own practice the denunciator of your own doctrines’.⁵ Shaftesbury did more than just selectively incorporate Stoic concepts into a modern philosophical system; he also adopted their favourite rhetorical strategies for dealing with Epicureans.

Brooke is able to reconstruct a single debate across two centuries and several countries by making a key methodological assumption that he helpfully states up front: that although the ‘vocabulary of pride might have changed according to time and place… the moral, social and political anxieties’ underlying those vocabularies were sufficiently similar to be considered side by side (xv). This assumption will probably meet with resistance from scholars

³ Brooke does, however, acknowledge that Shaftesbury saw the sermons of Benjamin Whichote he had translated as an effective ‘antidote to Hobbes’ (111).
⁴ Cooper (1999), pp 43-4.
specialising in the work of several thinkers examined here. For my part, I was happy to accept it right up until the Epilogue. For it is here that what was hitherto a self-contained historical argument bursts its bonds with the result that, all of a sudden, the tension between Stoicism and its critics becomes the thread connecting developments as diverse as Marxism, German Idealism, Scottish Enlightenment political economy and the political theory of the French Revolution. I’m a little unsure whether Stoicism really is as powerful an interpretive lens as Brooke here seems to suggest but I, along with doubtless many others, will delight in taking up the provocative interpretive challenges *Philosophic Pride* lays down.

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**Works Cited**

