

Stoic Conversion and Philosophical Paideia: Conceptual Difficulties and Thematic Affinities

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1. “Just as a drowning man is no more able to breathe if he be not far from the surface of the water, so that he might at any moment emerge, than if he were actually at the bottom already, and as a puppy on the point of opening its eyes is no less blind than one just born, similarly a man that has made some progress (*processit*) towards the state of virtue (*ad virtutis habitum*) is none the less in misery (*miseria*) than he that has made no progress at all.” (*Fin.* III, 14, 48; SVF III 530, transl. Rackman)
2. “«Yes» they [the Stoics] say, «but just as in the sea the man an arm’s length from the surface is drowning no less than one who has sunk five hundred fathoms, so even those who are getting close (*πελάζοντες*) to virtue are no less in a state of vice than those who are far from it. And just as the blind are blind even if they are going to recover their sight a little later, so those progressing (*προκόπτοντες*) remain foolish (*ἀνόητοι*) and vicious (*μοχθηροί*) right up to their attainment of virtue».” (*Comm. not.*, 1063A-B; SVF III 539; LS 61T, transl. Long-Sedley)
3. “The proof, says Posidonius in the first book of his treatise on *Ethics*, that virtue really exists is the fact that Socrates, Diogenes and Antisthenes and their followers made moral progress (*προκοπή*). And for the existence of vice as a fundamental fact the proof is that it is the opposite of virtue. That it, virtue, can be taught (*διδασκῆν*) is laid down by Chrysippus in the first book of his work *On the End*, by Cleanthes, by Posidonius in his *Protreptica*, and by Hecato; that it can be taught is clear from the case of bad men becoming good (*ὅτι δὲ διδασκῆ ἔστι, δῆλον ἐκ τοῦ γίνεσθαι ἀγαθοὺς ἐκ φάυλων*).” (DL VII 91, transl. Hicks. Cf. SVF I 567; III 223; LS 61K)
4. “So in philosophy we should assume neither progress nor any perception of progress, if the soul discards and purges itself of none of its stupidity (*ἀβελτερίας*), but deals in absolute badness right up to its acquisition (*λαβεῖν*) of the absolute and perfect good. In that case, the wise man has changed (*μεταβαλὼν*) in a moment from the greatest possible worthlessness (*φραυλότητος*) to an unsurpassable virtuous character (*ὑπερβολὴν ἀρετῆς διάθεσιν*), and has suddenly shed all the vice of which he failed to remove even a part over a considerable time.” (Plu., *Prof.* 75c; SVF III 539; LS 61S, transl. Long-Sedley)

5. “The conversion, however, which leads to divine things, the Stoics say, is effected by a change (μεταβολῆς), the soul being changed to wisdom.” (*Strom.*, IV, 6; SVF III 221, transl. Wilson)
6. “...that is not to be admitted for an argument, that dogs, asses and young children do it, who has no discretion (ἐπιστροφῆν) or consideration (ἐπιλογισμὸν) of such things.” (Plu., SR 1045a; SVF III 754, transl. Goodwin)
7. “The fool is not in love with words (φιλόλογον) or with listening (φιλήκοον), so from the very beginning he is not ready to receive correct speeches (τῶν ὀρθῶν λόγων), due to his permissive crassness owed to perversion, and because of the fact that no fool is converted (προτετραφθαί) or converts (προτρέπειν) towards virtue. Indeed, the one who converts others must be prepared (ἔτοιμο) to philosophize, and the one who is prepared for that is ready [for philosophy] without any problem; no fool (ἄφρόνων), though, is in such willingness. [...] Only the wise man is capable of being converted and only he is capable of converting another, but no fool is in such disposition.” (Stob., *Ecl.* II 104-105; SVF III 682, my own transl.)
8. “It is also considered that at first a [person] becomes wise without noticing it (Γίνεσθαι δὲ καὶ διαλεληθότα τινὰ σοφόν), as he doesn’t fancy (ὀρεγόμενόν) anything and doesn’t want to put for consideration [none of] the things which are specific in the willing sphere (τῶ βούλεσθαι εἰδικῶν), inasmuch as what is necessary (χρή) does not become present to the one capable of discerning (κρίνοντι). And such differences will appear not only in the case of prudence (φρονήσεως) but also in the rest of the technical skills.” (Stob., *Ecl.* II 113; SVF III 540 my own transl.)
9. “Lead me, Zeus and Destiny (Πεπρωμένη), wherever you have ordained for me. For I shall follow unflinching. But if I become bad and am unwilling, I shall follow none the less.” (*Ench.* 53; SVF I 527, transl. Long-Sedley)
10. “They have already arrived at a point from which there is no slipping back, but they are not aware of the fact; as I remember writing in another letter, «They are ignorant of their knowledge» (*scire se nesciunt*)”. (*Ep.*, 75, 9, transl. Mott Gummere)