

Comment on:

*Self-awareness and Affective Intentionality in the Stoic Theory of Oikeiōsis*

In order to discuss Mr Søvsvø's text, I would like, in the first instance, to highlight the contribution this article provides for actual research, and the doors it opens for future investigation. In a second time, I would like to present two questions that rose in my mind during my reading, and that I think could trigger interesting discussion.

As claimed by the speaker himself, this work is not only of interest for history of philosophy, but also for wonderings about affective intentionality. He refers more specifically to the work of Fuch and Koch's. It seems to me that not only Mr Søvsvø's arguments complement Fuch and Koch's work, but that they also enhance its explanatory power. In their article, they distinguish four aspects of emotions: affective intentionality, bodily resonance, action tendency, and function and significance. It seems to me that there are some causal relations between those aspects. Bodily sensations might explain why emotional intentionality is an evaluation that establishes a valence, rather than being a neutral cognitive evaluation (which is why the authors use the term "embodied appraisal"). For example, it seems defensible that the feeling of pain is *by definition* negative, which is why it can't entail a neutral appraisal. This valence could be said to shape the meanings that we give to objects through our emotional activity, and this meanings could explain our motivated attitudes. It seems to me that the re-interpretation of Stoic stances provided by Søvsvø is able to go deeper in this system of causal explanations, by providing the logical framework hidden behind the causal implications that tie together the different "aspects" of emotions. For example, it makes clearer why the experience of body sensations entail a valence. Pain is bad "by nature", because its nature is to signify that the individual's physical or mental integrity is damaged. This fact can be said to be "bad" only if individual survivance is seen as inherently "good", which is made understandable by the concept of self-concern. In a nutshell, by giving a fundamental role to the concept of "self-concern", Søvsvø goes to the root of the question "why does emotional experience have a valence?". Yet, valence of emotions seems to be the keystone of Fuchs and Koch's explanatory system: without valence, affective intentionality is hardly different from cognitive intentionality. It follows that Søvsvø's accounts doesn't simply provide additional ideas, but strengthens a key-concept for developments in affective intentionality, namely, valence of emotional experience.

Not only this contribution furthers existing research, but it also opens gates for future enquiries. For example, it would be interesting to encourage a more interdisciplinary revision of stoic assumptions. Cognitive science, ethology and psychology could probably provide a methodological and conceptual framework in order to study more empirically the self-awareness and self-concern displayed by different species. Stoic theory could shape scientific enquiries, and the empirical results could in turn sharpen philosophical theories. It also occurs to me that these reflections are valuable for contemporary ethics. Indeed, the stoic theory of *oikeiōsis* was intended to provide a background for ethics, and it seems very interesting to use this background for modern debates about animal welfare and animal rights. It is clear that works in history of philosophy are very valuable in such reinterpretations.

However, in spite of its interesting implications, this paper also made me wonder about questions that could be problematic, and need to be discussed. Two come to my mind.

The first one is related to the fact that the whole point is based on a “double aspect” of perceptual experience: the animal perceives the object, while perceiving the effect the object has on it. The danger that I see is the one of infinite regression: what about the perception of the perception of the effect the object has on me? (which we could call “third order perception”). Why would this third order perception be less fundamental? And, the other way around, why is the distinction between first order perception and second order perception so important? After all, we could say that by perceiving an object and perceiving the effect it has on me is actually the same thing, for I cannot perceive without being affected. The fundamental gap wouldn’t be between representation and feeling, which would be the same thing, but between first order and second order feelings (consisting in emotions about emotions, feelings about feelings). I think that the paper provides some clues to understand why the difference between first order and second order perception is more essential than its difference with third order perception, as well as with the following (fourth order, fifth order, etc). However, the theory would benefit from further development of those hints.

My second concern is that the assumption that there is a basic and universal self-concern among animals might be challenged. The most obvious counter-example is human suicide, but a lot of examples of self-destructive attitudes can be found in nature as well. In addition, it is not always clear that we feel positive feelings about what is good for our preservation, and negative ones about what is bad for it. It could be discussed that this is only made possible by ignorance: I could strive for what is bad for my survival only because I don’t know it is harmful. However, there also are solid arguments in favour of the existence of recalcitrant, ambiguous and sometimes contradictory feelings. Hence, the process by which we construe an object as *oikeion* or *allogrion* doesn’t follow simple rules. Once again,

I don't see the problem as unsolvable. My suspicion is that the way of addressing it is to account for a more complex definition of identity, and what could be said as being "mine" (notably in the case of animals capable of higher cognition processes). The self can be fragmented, and identification with one part of it might justify that we strive for something that is good for this part, but bad for another one. For example, Stoic thoughts about suicide could be understood as an identification with moral integrity rather than body integrity, which justifies such a radical choice. What I would pinpoint is that debates about identity and the process of identification might be useful to sharpen this reinterpretation of *oikeiōsis* theory.