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My thoughts on the content will be reflected in footnotes at the bottom of each respective page. With the exceptions of annotations, page numbers, changes in font (for readability), name replacements or identifiers (protecting and indicating participants in discussion-based content), the original content is unedited.

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Date of commentary: January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017.

Date of original content (Approximate): September, 2013.

Format: Group reply.

Subject (Approximate): Nature, judgments, addiction, control, empathy.

Participants: 3.

Part (if Applicable): 1 of 2.

Synopsis: The conversation begins in late 2013 in the “Stoicism Group (Stoic Philosophy)” social media group with an open question on what should be considered natural for persons, and whether what seems to be natural to a person is in fact natural by virtue of being considered so by the person in question. The conversation shifts focus to whether helping afflicted persons (such as persons with addictions, gamblers, and thieves) is plausible and appropriate for a practicing Stoic.

~ Start of Original Content ~

### **Original question (original poster - poster #1):**

Another newbie question: Stoics believe in virtue and what is natural. Wouldn't the alcoholic argue that alcoholism is natural for them? Wouldn't the gambler argue that gambling is natural for them? The thief argue that stealing is natural for them? But we know that these three things are not virtuous. Because they are not virtuous - therefore they cannot be natural? I am not sure on the stoic thinking regarding this.

### **Reply (Travis Hume):**

Stoics believe that virtue is the only good, and vice is the only evil. By following Nature, the Stoics mean the appropriate use of our faculty of reason, which is our unique quality as human beings. External goals, such as securing alcohol for the alcoholic, incite vice in the alcoholic, because of a lack of self-restraint, and dependence upon the alcohol. Both the lack of restraint, and the dependence cause additional harmful behaviors that are more animalistic than humane, because the faculty of reason is commanded to serve basic desires.

This may cause the alcoholic to turn against other human beings when prevented from getting more, which violates their social nature, causing additional harm. I believe the same argument would be made for the gambler, and the thief.

I am not suggesting either that the alcoholic, thief, and gambler should expect help only from themselves in the beginning. They can see the truth in what is said, and may even acknowledge it, but without practice and an example to follow, it is far easier to give in to the harmful behaviors than make constructive changes.

Paraphrasing a Stoic quote, "No man can scale walls in battle alone. If you are struggling, or injured, there is no shame in accepting help."<sup>1</sup>

**Response (Poster #2):**

If the alcoholic, the gambler, and the thief are not troubled by their actions, then (Stoic) philosophy has nothing to offer them.

**Reply to Poster #2 (Travis Hume):**

As far as they're aware. They will do what appears best to them, until they are shown a way that appears better to them. If they are unable to be convinced, it is not their failure, but failure on the part of those trying to convince them, because all human beings possess the faculty of reason which is incapable of ignoring apparent truths.

If the truth is not presented clearly, or well, there is no reason to change their behaviors, even if they recognize them to be destructive. It is the responsibility of the Stoic to act for the betterment of others, and to try to help these people included, but only if they are confident they can.<sup>2</sup>

**Response (Poster #3):**

If the alcoholic, gambler, and thief fail to act on the advice they (presumably) requested from the student making Stoic progress, the failure never lies with the student (provided the advice was appropriate), but with the alcoholic, gambler, and thief. The actions of others are not in our power.

**Open question (Poster #4):**

Can i ask are most of you philosophy students in some way? Or truly practicing the excellence of our skills in reason, deduction, reaching out, etc??

**End of Part 1.**

**~ End of Original Content ~**

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<sup>1</sup> The physical properties of a person are changed through the repeat introduction of new agents, such as alcohol and drugs. When addictions are formed, addicted persons may either take steps to combat this physical dependence and restore themselves to their original physical states so far as they can, or permit the addiction and take steps to contribute to it. Both scenarios involve personal choice – the choice to abstain from sources of addiction while pursuing all available opportunities for guidance and helpful resources, and the choice to pursue additional resources to indefinitely sate the addiction.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, accomplishing convincing an addicted person, gambler, or thief that their actions are actually against their own interests as a social and rational animal can be extraordinarily difficult. This is often in part due to long-standing judgments that serve as the foundation for individual choice. A person can acknowledge a simple truth that is presented to them about their addiction, but convincing them to begin the process of changing their methods of thinking requires substantial thought on part of the person doing the convincing. The person that will attempt to do the convincing must take into account the state of mind of the afflicted person, their perceived relationship with the afflicted person, the recent actions taken by the afflicted person to either feed or combat their habits, their current skill in persuading others to reconsider positions, and their willingness to assist the afflicted person to find the resources they need to combat their habits.