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Aesthetics and Oikeiosis: Cicero *De Finibus* 3.16-31; 62-4

The Stoic doctrine of *oikeiosis* purports to chart the process whereby an individual develops from an infantile state of amoral self-interest into an adult rational agent concerned primarily with ethical action. It is sometimes defended in current scholarship as a philosophically plausible grounding for ethical action on the assumption that *oikeiosis* is understood by Stoic authors as, in essence, the process by which an individual comes to bind him- or herself to the Kantian categorical imperative.

Careful reading of Cicero's account of Stoic *oikeiosis*, however, indicates that the motivation behind the ethical action of the sage is better characterised as "aesthetic" than "altruistic". The Stoics do not claim that "reason" and "virtue" are identical because attainment of perfect reason entails an identification with every other human being *qua* rational agent. Rather, ethical understanding is thought to supervene upon perfect rationality because "reason" is conceptualised as the perception of the *ordo et concordia* present in and uniting Nature and all it includes. This *ordo et concordia* is intrinsically ("by nature") attractive and *per se* motivationally-binding once perceived.

This Stoic emphasis upon non-demonstrable supervenient qualities is hardly unique in ancient ethics and is not in itself a valid objection to Stoic ethics as such. It does, however, make the concept of *oikeiosis* less attractive from certain modern philosophical perspectives. For instance, the aestheticisation of ethical bases for action implies that certain perceptive individuals are ethically "gifted" in comparison with others. While some Stoics appear to have acknowledged this point and integrated it into their philosophical systems, such disparities are difficult to accommodate within a Kantian moral framework.