Review Article

Consciousness and Reality in a World of Boundless Communications: A Philosophical View of the Place Occupied by the Media and Social Networks in an Era of Crisis in Individual Consciousness

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Abstract: The present article discusses the phenomenon of human consciousness in eras of changes in the world's informative, social, and political networks. It focuses on the sensations experienced by cultured individuals in their struggle against and effort to cope with the political and economic trend of assimilation within a global totality. In addition, it presents some of the underlying principles of the stoa, which occupied a central place in post-Alexandrine political thought, as relevant to our present-day reality, insofar as the position of an individual concerning the global-media totality of the early third millennium is concerned—a totality, which is subject to the control of immensely powerful stakeholders, who employ big data and algorithms in the service of obtaining economic and political gains through their control and shaping of individual consciousness.

Keywords: Fake news, frustration, global media, individual-consciousness, megapolis, stoa.

FOREWORD

This paper discusses human emotions, especially human consciousness in eras of changes in the world's informative, social, and political networks. These are periods when individual citizens are forced to cope with new situations involving a transition from multinational to national frameworks and conversely, thus experiencing anonymity and a loss of identity within a totality, alongside conscious vagueness as a significant motivation for individuals' sense of confusion and their sense of losing their way.

The article focuses on the sensations experienced by cultured individuals in their struggle against and effort to cope with the political and economic trend of assimilation within a global totality. Most people are not aware and are not critical of the information they receive in shaping their minds. In addition to this phenomenon's economic, political, cultural, psychological, and ethical aspects, the foregoing represents a philosophical issue about the gap between individual uniqueness and assimilation within a totality. In this context, the paper discusses some of the underlying principles of the stoa, which occupied a central place in post-Alexandrine political thought as relevant to our present-day reality, insofar as the position of an individual concerning the global-media totality of the early third millennium is concerned—a totality which is subject to the control of immensely powerful stakeholders, who employ big data and algorithms in the service of obtaining economic and political gains through their control and shaping of individual consciousness.

As to individual sensations and consciousness, the article presents the similarities between the post-Alexandrine transition from city-state to mega-state and the workings of media-driven globalisation, and all the more so, during an age, which fluctuates between the decline of the nation-state as an actor in the intra-national and international theatre, and its rise during crises (wars, economic crises, pandemics, etc.) as a framework providing individuals with stability and security during times of economic and technological changes, conflicts, and global pandemics. It is easy to observe

confusion and de-individuation and discern a positioning akin to the perception of a point lost in an undefined, boundless, and infinite totality, where individuals are of no consequence. The present study does not thoroughly compare the two periods it describes but centres on the sensations and nebulous consciousness experienced by individuals. The transitions from state to superstate are not necessarily similar in every era, primarily due to the differences in historical circumstances, whether scientific, economic, or technological. The similarity we highlight centres on the sense of insignificance experienced by human individuals. This assumption rests, first and foremost, on solid philosophical grounds. Spinoza, for example, who has been influenced by Stoic thought, argues that the fundamental nature of humans as part of nature is invariable: "...for nature [and human nature] is always the same, and its virtue and power of acting are everywhere one and the same..." (Spinoza 2002, pt. III).,

The changes which followed the Alexandrine conquests led to resistance and insurrections due to a negative conscious sense of individuality loss in the transition from polis to megapolis. The present conquest is not territorial but—like its ancient predecessor— conscious. The focus of this "conquest" evinces the media and social networks as a factor, which shapes self-consciousness. This criterion permits us to explain why the sense of individuality is negative during eras of massive changes.

In its presentation of similarity and difference concerning the sensations of humans as Western political beings then and now, the article seeks to shift our gaze to the relevance of the Stoic approach as a stabilising rational factor standing against the media, and especially social networks, as an irrational, nebulising, and confusing factor in an individual's conscious handing of their position within a totality.

Disinformation, including the widespread phenomenon of fake news, has recently become a boundless global phenomenon. This gives rise to confusion and damage at the individual level and plays a decisive part in the emergence of harmful social repercussions. These phenomena are far from trivial despite the significant advances that have been made in research aimed at locating fake news and disinformation on account of their complexity, the multitude of models involved, and the costs of fact-checking.

The press changed its character during the 19th century and shifted from an institution concerned with the publication of news to a tool that guided political public opinion shaping. Its rational concern with the public sphere, free from the pressures of ideological standpoints, brought it in the 20th century to the position of a commercial press influenced by private interests. Accordingly, conflicts that were formerly banished to the private sphere have now entered the public sphere. This gave rise to the necessity of mediation between competing claims and interests (Downey and Fenton 2003).

The printed newspaper business encountered a crisis on account of the entry of online journalism to the media sphere and the public's preference for electronic media. This crisis led to reduced revenue and, in a contest between newspapers and commercial television, to a share in dwindling advertising revenue "pie" (Doug 1993). Newspapers were acquired by profit-driven corporations (Bagdikian 2007; Baker 2002), thus maximising their investors' profits (McManus 2000).

Media studies scholars have long been seeking to explain the media's modus operandi and examine journalists' perspectives within its discourse. Tankard found that the redirection of information is done consciously and that journalists skew reporting to deceive their readership in the process of framing (Tankard 2003, 97). Framing is a conscious action on news creators (Stephen D Reese 2001, 7).

Goffman (1974) defined framing as an "interpretive scheme", alluding to a socio-political interpretation of reality such that it becomes a kind of organisational tool and active mechanism. This shapes the news discourse so that a perception of reality is only based on those parts of reality that enjoy greater attention and are included in news coverage. The lack of alternative points of view thus skews the perception of reality. Accordingly, the concept of framing is best associated with the idea of 'reality construction' (Entman 1993; Morstatter et al. 2018), which often employs selected metaphors or connotations (D'angelo 2002).

Thus, readers [...] who seek "real stories" often fall behind. Contradictions in the news, mismatches in news agency reports and personal views have increasingly been creeping into personal columns and networks. Framing is thus applied at the macro and micro levels. Whereas the macro level refers to media manipulation, where the method of reporting addresses the recipients' existing schemas, the micro level refers to how readers interpret reports as a result of its manipulation (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007).

Those who receive these messages often possess unique subject concepts, which are often referred to as "frames in thought," which are, in turn, affected by "frames in communication" advanced by acts involving speech or written communication (Chong and Druckman 2007).

The latter's effect on the former may be considered as the framing effect. However, those topics most influenced by mediated communication tend to be complex issues that are often "invisible" to the public, which most people find difficult to understand (Lee, Ju, and You 2020; Morstatter *et al*., 2018; Schäfer and O'Neill 2017).

Fake News

There are presently three essential lines of research concerned with the automatic classification of false news stories: (1) at the conceptual level; it is possible to distinguish between three types of false news (Rubin, Chen, and Conroy 2015): fabrications, i.e., false stories, events that have never taken place or gossip concerning celebrities or politicians; (2) hoaxes, which manifest in the conveyance of false information via, say, social networks, which appears to have been taken from traditional news sources, satire (i.e., humorous stories, which simulate real news via irony and absurdity (Pérez-Rosas *et al*., 2017), and (3) fake news, which is created by manipulation, advertising, and propaganda. These are examined in relation to two metrics: ostensible facts and fraud (Tandoc Jr, Lim, and Ling 2018). These are manifested in media coverage, which finds that fake news refers to viral posts published from fake accounts, which are nonetheless presented in the same way as regular news reports (Salazar 2020). A recent study has defined fake news as "false news stories, which are deliberately published with the intent of misleading their readers" (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017 in Edson *et al*., 2018, p. 2) and affects election results (Barthel, Mitchell, and Holcomb, 2016 in Edson *et al*., 2018, p. 2). The main motives underpinning the production of false news are economical and ideological. Economically speaking, false and outrageous stories that become viral precisely because of their outrageous nature provide their producers with clicks converted into advertising revenue. Ideologically speaking, some providers of false news create these stories to promote specific ideas or people at the expense of others by often defaming them (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017 in Edson *et al*., 2018, p. 2; Gelfert, 2018, p. 87; Salazar, 2020). Politicians and political actors have a long history of disseminating false information (or even disinformation) to shape public opinion in their favour (Scheufele and Krause 2019, 7666). Salazar (2020) has found that false news is also associated with conspiracy theories, as was the case with the 2016 presidential elections in the United States (see Allcott and Gentzkow 2017; Silverman 2016) and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, the concept of fake news applies to cases where it has been used for slandering critical reporting by legitimate news organisations by alleging that this critical reporting is fake news. Such cases involve more than efforts to indicate false information; they also include actions toward demonising traditional news organisations (Edson *et al*., 2018, p. 2).

Moreover, the digitisation of news has undermined the traditional definitions of news. The Internet has given rise to platforms that permit non-journalists to reach a mass audience. The rise of so-called citizen journalists, who report, document, and take pictures as news actors, has subverted the critical connection between news and journalism, given that it permitted non-journalists to engage in journalistic activities, including news production (Robinson and DeShano 2011; Wall 2019).

Social media has not only altered the method of news dissemination but has challenged traditional beliefs on how news is supposed to appear. A tweet, commonly 140 characters long, is now considered news, especially when published by an authoritative person who writes fake news. This confusion, in turn, raises the question of how accurate news is assessed and identified. When we are concerned with significant and dramatic events that lead to the production of fake news, these exert a substantial effect on news consumers (Richardson 2006; Wardle 2017). The news is often perceived as a product of journalism and as a domain that is expected to provide "independent, reliable, accurate and comprehensive" reporting (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2007, 11) to supply necessary information in a free and professional manner. In this respect, Zhang *et al*., (2019) argue that false news is published to mislead consumers in making purchase decisions, often by employing reviewers with little or no experience of using or experiencing the products or services in question. In turn, this gives rise to a reckless sharing of information and disinformation that manifest in the creation and deliberate sharing of information that is known to be false (Wardle 2017), which leads to the manipulation of the audience's cognitive faculties (Gelfert 2018).

The most common beliefs are those which are repeated. In turn, this makes them more familiar and leads people to assume that what is expected is also reliable. Martel, Pennycook, and Rand (2020) have also found it increasingly difficult to distinguish between fake and true news the more the news repeats itself. In this respect, it should be stressed that the effort to correct misleading information may give rise to discomfort and misbelief in the long term since people tend to forget the particulars of the correction offered concerning the fake and false information to which they were exposed. The ability to establish networks of social ties and share or discuss information within a chosen network are the same traits that allow unsavoury players to take advantage of processes, where users who feel they are part of a collective will serve as an easy audience for the dissemination of false information (Scheufele and Krause 2019; Salazar 2020). Martel, Pennycook, and Rand (2020), who investigated the connection between emotions and reasoning/justification in fake news perception, found a strong association between emotions and the tendency to believe fake news. More

specifically, they discovered that momentary feelings about a particular pattern or the values associated with emotions have a predictive capacity and increase the trust placed in fake news and remove the distinction between true and fake news. According to Martel, Pennycook, and Rand (2020), the more a person relies on emotions rather than reason and common sense, the more they believe the truthfulness of fake news. Emotional involvement in reading news articles casts a shadow over the capacity to distinguish between true and fake news. Alternatively, people who rely on reason can differentiate between true and fake news and explain why a particular piece of news is untrue. The increasing incapacity to do so is the problem of our times. Martel, Pennycook, and Rand's (2020) conclusions reveal that the more participants relied on emotion rather than reason, the more they perceived fake stories as accurate. As a result, Shu *et al.,* (2020) found that people express their feelings or opinions toward fake news via social network posts such as comments, sceptical opinions, sensational comments, etc., thus becoming conveyors of fake news themselves.

The sense of confusion and helplessness also increases because the fake news phenomenon causes news consumers to doubt established news organisations, which adhere to ethical practices, act as gatekeepers, and cross-reference information to report facts and true, rather than fake, news (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017). According to Lazer *et al.,* (2018), the producers of fake news imitate the format of professional news publication but differ in terms of organisational processes or content. They tie false information to original and true news. The leading cause of fake news is that it can be created and published online at greater speeds and lower costs than traditional media. The rise of social media and its popularity also play a vital role in the confusion, vagueness, and feelings of helplessness expressed when news consumers are faced with an overwhelming torrent of fake news.

The outcomes of these kinds of cognitive shifts in global frameworks take us back to similar feelings experienced by Westerners after the conquests of Alexander the Great. In this respect, Sabine (1937) and Avineri (1981) describe the sensations of confusion and vagueness experienced among individuals to the extent of feeling lost in a colossal totality, feelings which, in turn, gave rise to such movements as Skepticism, Cynicism, and Hedonism.

A View of the Individual during the Post-Alexandrine Shift from Polis to Macropolis

The pre-Alexandrine socio-political structure of the city-state and its ways of life provided its citizens with a sense of security and belonging. Indeed, their day-to-day lives involved political, cultural, and ritual activities. This imbued citizens with a sense of stability in all forms of government known at the time (Plato 2019, bk. 8).

Alexander the Great's conquests and their associated mega-political trends undermined this system's equilibrium and senses of stability and belonging enjoyed by polis citizens.

Alexander's Global Objectives

Alexander the Great's expansion during the third and fourth decades of the fourth century B.C. reflects an intensification of his objective to assimilate Western culture in Eastern culture and vice versa. Alexander saw that the deep chasm between Western and Eastern culture would adversely affect his effort to stabilise his government in the mid- to long-run, which is why he acted to blur these cultural differences and establish a single geopolitical world state based on mixed cultural and social foundations. This objective also accorded with the shift from a city-state polis framework to a macropolis devoid of national boundaries.

It would be a stretch to claim that Alexander the Great established an empire during his short life. Even his military forces found it difficult to handle the challenges arising from cultural differences and opposing cultural attitudes. Nonetheless, Alexander himself was perceived as a single leader that fused city-states and many other national entities into a single political framework.

The Active Resistance to Alexander's Globalist Objectives.

Alexander's attempts at ethnic assimilation manifested in the coercion of mixed marriages between Macedonians and Persians. Alexander himself served as a role model for this with his marriage to the prince of Bactria's daughter and with his marriage to King Darius III's daughter. Alexander also established diverse cities, established a mixed army containing foreign legions, and encouraged bi-directional emigration from East to West and conversely.

The picture painted by available historical sources reflects an active resistance, punishable by execution on Alexander's part, driven by an emotional and cognitive objection to Alexander's objectives (Modrzejewski 1960, 92–101). Resistance to this assimilation was also manifested actively after Alexander's death. Shortly after Alexander's death, the Greek officers and soldiers banished the 'barbarian' women they were coerced to marry (Modrzejewski 1960, 94–105). A kind of elitist solidarity between Greek settlers and discharged veterans from all over the Hellenic world was also established after Alexander's death. These parties cancelled Alexander's universal regulations and encouraged the establishment of joint military and civilian settlements that served as an instrument of governance throughout Alexander's empire. Similarly, and in the same spirit, the Peloponnesians forcefully removed the Macedonian

dictatorship from their region (Malkin 2003, 154–55). Put differently, this kind of contrarian cohesion expressed an attempt to revert to the previous standings of polis citizens.

This trend of former polis citizens attempting to halt the global shift and revert to the status quo ante insofar as their feelings as individuals who lost their honour and standing went so far as to have citizens be willing to sacrifice their own lives for the cause of preventing ethnocultural assimilation.

The idea of an empire was not fully realised. Still, the new geopolitical reality that changed Westerners' conscious minds and caused evoked a sense of uncertainty and a loss of way without the surrounding totality was.

The Individual in the Pre-Revolutionary Polis

Before Alexander's conquests, polis citizens were free individuals who obeyed the laws they passed themselves. They selected their leaders that fought wars at their discretion and following a popular assembly's resolution. These sacrificed their property and lives for the sake of their goals and aspirations. Moreover, polis citizens lived according to internal imperatives that were imprinted in their conscious minds. Put differently, free citizens conducted their own polis life according to their laws and based on a conscious identification between public and private interests (Hegel 1948, 154–55). Hegel relates how negativity replaced a sense of individual smugness in local communal life due to the coercive nature of totality politics (Hegel 1936, 263). Beyond being a unique place to live, the polis was also a source of a significant identification with a social position, a culture, and a set of rites. The loss of political meaning gave rise to a sense of the ground falling beneath their feet, a fortress destroyed, and a political and cultural structure common to all individuals vanishing into the void.

The change of consciousness that arose from the decline of the polis as an exclusive source of social, political, and ritual identification led to a tendency toward reclusiveness and an aversion to political involvement. Once the chains of intimacy that bonded the citizens to each other had been severed, the individual citizen remains nothing but a person devoid of civil and political significance (Hegel 1936).

This collapse of a common denominator between individuals and the sense of a loss of national values led to a collapse of the cohesion between citizens whose lives were intertwined in the political system. Everyone was the equivalent of a brick in a building whose integrity depended on the adhesion between parts. Once the parts moved too much, the building collapsed. People who felt they were facing the world alone suddenly witnessed their helplessness in handling an all-encompassing political framework.

A person's political spirit continually weakens under such circumstances. The extent to which it was difficult to learn how to live together in a new form of human fraternity can be understood from "the effort of political and ethical philosophy to reinterpret social relations in terms other than those provided by the city-state [….] For the breaking down of the intimate tie that had held citizens together left him simply a man." (Sabine 1937, 142).

Failure of the Cynic and Hedonists' Remedies for Reinforcing Individuality in the Megapolis

Contemporary political philosophy sought to aid individuals and strengthen their spirits.

The main characteristic of the post-Alexandrine period was the rise of individualism and the tendency to avoid being involved in political affairs. The philosophical schools also diverted polis citizens' view away from their city-states' public life to their inner world. Against the background of the decline in individual citizens' ability to affect the conduct and fate of their cities, these new schools focused on teaching individuals to control fate itself.

Diogenes' Philosophy of Cynicism

The founders of this school were Diogenes of Sinope and Antisthenes. Not much of their writings remain, but the extant fragments, as well as later testimonies, allow us to paint a relatively clear picture of their ideas and the main tenets of their philosophy concerning the new political situation they sought to address.

In searching for the moral virtue (arete) that would guide human life, both philosophers recommended a complete avoidance of any contact with political life, which they depicted as a fire that would burn any person approaching it. A free person has the liberty not to consider social mores but rather to live as an integral part of the natural world. The central idea of Cynicism is that a person must be autarkic, that anything at hand or within a person's ability is what a person needs for living the right life. The Cynics' main intention lay in spiritual reinforcement. To attain happiness, a person does not require either society or a political framework. People need to introspect and discover their capacities as independent individuals that do not depend on political and social frameworks.

Epicurus' Hedonism

This school also sought to find a remedy for the ills of individual consciousness apparent against the background of the disintegration of familiar political frameworks. The Hedonist school, established by Epicurus (342 – 271 BCE), taught that, as opposed to the Cynics' reclusive extremism, people need to live within a limited social framework allowing them to attain self-actualisation without needing to identify with any political centre. The Hedonists' premise also arose from a worldview, which believed that the political domain is irrelevant. It was better to avoid any thought or practice of politics, but people must not enclose themselves within the walls of the self or seclude themselves in nature; instead, they must find shelter among friends. By remaining within this society of friends, people would be able to express their abilities and skills. A state is merely a tool for maintaining order, security, life, and property–a means to humanity's primary goal, which is pleasure and mental serenity. It is possible to develop the self's good traits among friends via philosophical discourse, meals, and feasts. The supreme value of the Hedonist-Epicurean philosophy lies in the fact that it avoided attaching itself to a social, religious, political, or pan-human ideal and established the individual aspiration toward pleasure and personal serenity as its goal.

Within the continuum between suffering and pleasure, moral virtue lies in striving toward pleasure insofar as possible. This is the supreme human aspiration—moral virtue—that guides us in distinguishing between good and evil (Diogenes Laertius 2018, bk. X).

These methods did not remedy the issue of the chasm between individual and society, and the task was left to be taken up by philosophy. The Stoic school took up the task of merging two opposing values. In this respect, the problem of the gap between individuals, who seek a joyful existence insofar as is possible, and the idea of human unity—universal humanism—was first bridged by Zeno of Cilium (336 – 264 BCE), the Stoic school's founder.

The Stoa [Stoic School]

This school, established by Zeno and his successors Cleanthes of Assos and Chrysippus of Soli, considered the new political situation from a macro perspective. Politically speaking, they adopted a clear position and preferred the post-Alexandrine mega politics over city-state politics. This legitimation of the Macedonian and later Roman imperialism arose, first and foremost, from the need to ease individuals' negative feelings. Successive generations of Stoics strived above all to advance human individuals toward happiness. This philosophy gives the conceptual bridge between the individual and state rise alongside the position stating that the philosopher must maintain close relations with the monarchy as a political adviser and thus take part in public life rather than become enclosed within her or himself.

"Natural Law": A View of the Totality through Politico-Ethical Lens

"Moreover, the much-admired Republic of Zeno, the founder of the Stoic sect, may be summed up in this one main principle: that all the inhabitants of this world of ours should not live differentiated by their respective rules of justice into separate cities and communities, but that we should consider all men to be of one community and one polity, and that we should have a common life and an order common to us all This Zeno wrote, giving shape to a dream or, as it were, shadowy picture of a well-ordered and philosophic commonwealth; but it was Alexander who gave effect to the idea[...] he brought together into one body all men everywhere, uniting and mixing in one great loving-cup [....] He bade them all consider as their fatherland the whole inhabited earth, as their stronghold and protection his camp, as akin to them all good men, and as foreigners only the wicked" (Plutarch 1936).

In Zeno's words, it is possible to discern the two components that encompass the Stoic political philosophy: 1. A cosmic, unitary, and determinist order in life which seeks to convey a message which may be paraphrased as follows: "fellow lost citizens of the polis, accept reality as it is since it necessarily exists as part of the predetermined cosmic structure; internalise this, and you will feel relieved", and 2. everything that occurs complies with a single law that states that all people are equal global citizens.

The conscious internalisation of both components will clarify that a person's place in the new geopolitical reality is not an occurrence meant to harm them personally but is rather deterministic and, as such, moral. On the cognitive level, this person will acquire a rational understanding of the changes around them. On the emotional level, they shall acquire a sense of resignation and calmness, which would bring them closer to their chosen destination—mental tranquillity.

The Stoic rational ethic removed the barrier between individual and totality and eased individuals' mental difficulties concerning their everyday functioning. It created a rational formula that accords with the human aspiration to find a common denominator for the multitude of events in the world and its constant changes. This logical-naturalistic principle, in turn, explained the position of all individuals in the new political state of affairs. The explanation on the necessary existence of a supreme natural law, whose ethical signification is acceptable to humanity as a whole regardless

of its ethnonational and geographical diversity, accorded with the mega-political reality and was well-received in the conscious rational minds of cultured individuals residing in Western city-states.

The very existence of this supreme law imbues the 'world city' established by Alexander with Stoic philosophical legitimacy. What we are concerned with here is a collection of universal laws which apply to every polis. Indeed, every polis contains local laws that may separate it from other poleis, such as taxation, the division and registration of property, penal severity, etc. However, when we are concerned with natural law, which expresses basic moral laws such as a total prohibition on murder, a duty to adhere to agreements and settle debts, a prohibition on stealing, burglary, and false testimony, then this natural law is common to all poleis. This common metaphysical constitutional baseline suggested by the Stoics accords with human reason, and it is possible to strive toward harmony among humans under its protection. The Stoics' method of extracting individuals from the sense of nullity that arose in the wake of the polis' downfall. The 'Natural Law' rationale formed a cognitive remedy that removed the barrier between human and universal nature and —at the same time and from a political perspective—imbued the world city with a positive meaning. The presence of this law throughout all poleis proved the existence of a logical/constitutional nullity among all human beings. Regardless of their place of birth, residence, or ethnic affiliation, every person can reason and acknowledge the authority of natural law. Therefore, it follows that the rational background common to all human beings allows each person to internalise that this supreme law necessarily exists and proves the existence of a constant and unchanging principle that underpins changes in general and political changes in particular. The changes in the world are not just minor concerning the eternity of nature but also advance its goals in the service of a harmonious totality.

Chrysippus the Stoic would have said: the wise man will handle politics, provided no obstacles are found on this path [...] Justice and the Good are natural concepts [...] The world is one big nation with one constitution and one law. He would have said: no person is a slave by nature (Ben-Shamay, Batscha, and Yassour 1948, 326).

This suggested Stoic remedy for the sense of individual loss was received well since it accorded with human reason's tendency to accept common principles, mainly when an association exists between the rational and the ethical. This idea was also welcomed on the political level since it justified the Macedonian imperialism and the Roman imperialism that followed it. While it is true that this idea required a long period of accommodation, it nonetheless served as a kind of tonic for individuals' negative feelings. The Stoic school thus became "The intellectual support of men of political, moral and religious convictions" (Ferguson, 1911: 261, as cited in Sabine 1937, 148). It is via universal law that it provided a rational backing and a moral underpinning for the idea of the world state.

The Stoics' supreme purpose was thus using reason to blaze a path to human happiness. The determinist worldview that recognises an individual's limitations in relation to the world surrounding them is the key to spiritual peace and happiness. In other words, and despite their limitations, an individual possesses a specific range of action they can influence. Hence, Stoic philosophy calls upon these individuals to play their part in society and the State. For example, an individual can serve as a positive role model and thus contribute to moral conduct at the state level, or – as Chrysippus phrased it, "Will handle politics as a wise man" - that is to say, will serve as an advisor to the political establishment. It is in this spirit that Seneca notes that Those who have been gifted with virtue, and those who aspire to virtue, should act as follows: if the hand of fate prevails and prevents a person from taking action, this person must not turn their back and flee as if any place is unreachable to the hand of fate. Instead, they must devote her or themselves to their public duties to a lesser extent and meticulously choose a course of action that might be of service to the state. If they cannot fulfil their responsibilities as a citizen, they should perform their duties as a person (Plutarch 1936).

A Problem of Consciousness: The Contemporary Relevance of Stoic Philosophy
The basic premise advanced by Zeno and Chrysippus was an examination of individual consciousness. The distress associated with the shift from polis to megapolis is a problem of consciousness. Their attempt to remedy this distress was also directed toward the source of this pain—conscious awareness. We believe that a similar situation exists among contemporary individuals and that its focus is one of consciousness. In this respect, the remedy offered by the Stoic school does not begin with a citizen as a political being but with conscious awareness, which must be examined to discover how individuals perceive themselves within a vortex of change.

Thus, Stoic philosophy amounts to the fact that the human thirst for knowledge needs to be satiated, allowing humans to aspire to implement their personal achievements for the common good. While Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus were not involved in political life, they did preach such involvement. In this respect, Seneca serves as a de facto symbol of Stoic political activism in his participation in political life as an individual.

The rational solution is also the cognitive change we require in the present day. I was born in my homeland, and I live in a world of boundless information, Google and Internet, instant global communication, Facebook, Twitter and more—a world of confusion and potential bias. As was the case in the ancient post-Alexandrine world, we must also

resign ourselves to a boundless world using the Stoic rationale of a natural law any intelligent person may observe and subsequently internalise their place as an individual in the universal totality. Even today, we still offer the Stoic, rational solution as a prelude to escaping the negative sensations evoked by our world's cognitive misdirection.

We should try to comprehend two commonwealths: one great and truly common to all […] and in which we should not look for this or that out-of-the-way place but the boundaries of a city as measured by the course of the sun; and another in which we are included by accident of birth, which may be that of the Athenians or of the Carthaginians or any other city which does not reach out to include all men but only specific ones. Certain individuals give service to both commonwealths simultaneously, to the greater and to the lesser; some only to the lesser, others only to the greater (Chandler 2012).

At the political level, these words reflect the premise that underlay the Stoic attempt to shape the idea of a logical continuum between the whole and its constituent parts.

Now, as well as then, an enlightened person who perceives reason as a common thread among humans regardless of borders, cultures, politics, and communicability will easily identify their place in the vortex of biased and false information and will stabilise their nebulous consciousness and sensations. The reasoned, reflective, and critical means offered by the Stoics are thus at our disposal as a tool for nullifying and rejecting the vagueness, confusion, and helplessness associated with distinguishing between false and true information.

The determinist rationale offered by the Stoics may still make it easier for individuals to cope with life in our present-day networked world of boundless information with no brakes and no distinction between true and false in everyday life.

In his theoretical joining of the narrative of knowledge and the narrative of benefit, Seneca prioritised knowledge over benefit via the development of personal knowledge, which, in our case, involves the internalisation of global communication without bounds and without brakes as a determinist process whose correction begins from below—from an individual cognition which empowers critical understanding, which makes use of internalised knowledge, and which distributes it for the common good. In our time, the wise person should not remain silent but should rather contribute and involve her or himself in critically educating others about knowledge and its sources and serving as an educational, moral, and rational role model.

This was our reason for showing magnanimity in not confining ourselves within the walls of a single city, in journeying forth to embrace contact with all the earth, in declaring the world to be our homeland, namely that we might have a broader field for our virtue (Seneca 2007, 120).

These words reveal the relevance of the Stoic approach to the individual's problem in a post-millennial world of rapid change. Seneca addresses the 'what' and the 'how' questions arising from the situation. The remedy is conscientious in essence since media globalisation is a problem of consciousness, and we believe that the cure begins in a rational critique of the problem itself.

Globalisation: The Contemporary State of Affairs

The new millennium witnessed a world being shrouded anew, but not in the political sense. Humanity's existing problems and challenges were joined by a new challenge: how territorial nation-states were to cope with the rising political and social power of mass media and social networks and their capacity to shape individual thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. We now turn our gaze to the Stoic solution—that produced positive results at the time—as possible relevant to individuals struggling with the dominant conscious power of this rising global force, or, to paraphrase Jean-François Lyotard, with the power that is increasingly taking control of human lifestyles and human consciousness (see, e.g., Lyotard 1992).

The appearance of the COVID-19 virus introduced a revolution whereby the nation-state ostensibly returned to being sovereign. It stands at the centre of decision-making, closes borders or supervises their opening, supervises individual conduct, movement from one place to another, and rules regarding the isolation or quarantining of individuals or groups. The nation-state also awards funds for day-to-day living and allocates budgets for monitoring and health. It raises funds and distributes them, and many other things. There is only one domain where it cannot return to sovereignty. That is controlling individual consciousness and reining in the industrial-scale framing and lying in the media and on social networks. It is a well-known fact that a tiny group in the networks affects public consciousness, primarily via fake news, and to a much greater extent than traditional media, which also exerted a significant effect through framing. It is currently impossible for individuals to verify or ignore information that channels their consciousness toward the "matrix" constituted by network-based knowledge suppliers. The disinformation scholar Heather Hughes, who spent ten days in

the town of Veles in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and risked her life by so doing, found that this small town was a source of false information that was distributed throughout the United States during the presidential election campaign, which pitted Hillary Clinton against Donald Trump. The results of her investigation reveal that more than a hundred news websites suddenly appeared and begun publishing false stories, propagating thereby sensational items, and attracting thousands of likes and comments on Facebook. These stories intensified the already serious confusion and mind-shaping that was taking place at the time.

According to Hughes, FYROM is an ideal location for the proliferation of such an industry. FYROM is a comparatively emerging country, and Veles is a relatively poor town with a 25% rate of unemployment, where even those employed residents can only expect an average monthly salary of about 380 USD. The town's residents claimed that Trump was elected because of their work. Moreover, FYROM authorities do not do anything against the local fake news industry, and local teachers even encourage their students to join it. The teachers even go further and teach their students how to locate a genuine story and render it sensational through lies. Hughes also visited the homes of people employed in the fake news industry and found that they enjoyed a much higher standard of living than their fellow residents. Their fake news stories generate a great deal of income from the accompanying advertisements. This shows the ease with which false yet consciousness-shaping information can be created anywhere in our present world of boundless communications.

Hughes concludes that we are concerned with a global problem, which cannot be resolved with any form of enforcement since any person with a computer can operate in a very sophisticated manner. There are no offences associated with fake news in most jurisdictions. Hughes believes fake news is a challenge for humanity, requiring educating people to distinguish between truth and lies from a very young age.

We are currently witnessing a 'thought police' led by a small number of people who either control boundless social networks or have the power of determining who should be blocked and who should not. This is a small group of white youths (primarily men) who choose the global discourse and its participants. They determine the political, media, and economic agenda and the parties that will take part and those that will be excluded from global discourse. The latter is often conducted through the publication of fake news. They are the self-appointed guardians of morality in a world of boundless information. They provide complete freedom to the rulers of North Korea and Iran and block other parties according to obscure criteria. They allow a small group to deceive hundreds of thousands of people and get countless people to purchase junk securities at inflated prices. In addition, each one of us is closely monitored by their algorithms. Say I talked to a friend about flying to Greece, or I was comparing prices for a set of new reading glasses. I will almost instantaneously be brainwashed by dozens of advertisements assigned to me by the algorithm's server apparatus, which has closely tracked my day-to-day activity. The above represents the forceful conduct of an uncontrollable and anti-democratic global power and the inflexion of continuous harm on an individual's control of their consciousness in a manner akin to what Alexander the Great forced upon the people he conquered.

The networks present misrepresentations and decide when policy should be adjusted, what is moral, what is worthy, and what should be censored. The individual's problem lies in the gap between their conscious reality and true reality. This gap can affect anything from consumer choices to voting decisions—all as a function of which content an individual has been exposed to and how each person will be presented with targeted content allocated by the algorithms, which follow each person close to the extent of tracking emotional reactions based on eye movements. In other words, we are concerned with a technological dictatorship that conquers, or—at the very least—directs and shapes individual consciousness through customised information and false content.

Nothing has been done about this thus far. Individual people live in a fake world of globalised communications, social networks, and information as limitless as it is boundless. The confusion and sense of nothingness place people in what is in effect a similar conscious position to that experienced by people in the Ancient World, who transitioned from polis to megapolis in the territorial globalisation that followed Alexander the Great's conquests.

Afterword

The reduced significance of state borders and the reduction in nation states' sovereign powers have been perceived by most individuals as spatial in nature. We, however, argue that the change is conscious in nature. When a clearly delineated and familiar environment becomes increasingly absorbed by a giant undefined totality, an ostensibly spatial change becomes threatening, thus involving a shift in consciousness.

When a person who believed in a false story realises its true nature and the fact that it had to some extent shaped their consciousness, we can expect that person to feel frustrated and angry. Our helplessness in checking and critiquing the false information that shapes our consciousness is similar to the frustration of spatial uncertainty since both cases concern a sense of self-nothingness and a lack of ownership on the part of a person's conscious mind. In the ancient

world, Stoic philosophy offered a rational solution to any person that would deliver them from vagueness and embarrassment, a solution we currently lack and which renders us defenceless against such emotions.

Philosophically speaking, it is possible to observe the rational common denominator Stoic philosophy offered people in the sense of expanding their narrow spatial worldview during the transition between city-state and world-city. In the cognitive sense, the Stoic rationality involved in internalising natural law worked to ameliorate the sense of helplessness and loss to the extent of allowing a person to resign her or himself to the change and suspend their active emotional resistance to it.

The attempt to ameliorate an individual's emotions in an era of transition from a restrained world to a boundless one did not remain a vestige of the past. To the best of our knowledge, and apart from the resignation to technological determinism offered by Thomas Friedman (2007), it appears that any serious attempts to provide people with remedies that would moderate their emotions and responses to present-day global changes have not even been considered on the part of contemporary scholars and educators.

We believe that the rational, reflective, and critical faculty shared by humanity as a whole is the common denominator, which will lead us out of our contemporary skewed perceptions and confusion, just as it did in the past.

The problem is that our generation is one that was born, raised, and has lived throughout the processes described above and that unknowingly, and—against the background of vagueness and the absence of new ideas— manifests its negative emotions in the irrational fashion of attachment to and symbiotic convergence toward the magic machine that ostensibly represents a true worldview. We believe that overcoming this network- and media-based colonialism, while the sovereign nation-state persists in its impotence, requires us to position the critical individual logic of consciousness as an interposer between us and the magic machine, which constitutes us as pawns in a grand content-creator game. In the absence of a presently applicable alternative, we should also look back to Stoic philosophy to become more familiar with our place in space and time and direct our consciousness beyond vagueness and confusion.

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