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XXIV.10 On the Stoic school

- The Spirit of Law - Book XXIV. On laws in their relation with religion, considered in its doctrines and in itself -

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The various ancient schools of philosophy were religions of sorts. There never was one which had principles worthier of man, and better at forming persons of good will, than the Stoics ; and if I could for a moment cease to think that I am a Christian, I would have to list the destruction of the school of Zeno among the misfortunes of humankind.

It exaggerated only things in which there is greatness : the scorning of pleasures and pain.

It alone was able to make citizens ; it alone made great men ; it alone made great emperors.

Leave aside revealed truths for a moment ; seek in all of nature, and you will find no nobler object than the Antonines ; even Julian, Julian (such reluctant approval will not make me an accomplice of his apostasy), no, there has been no prince after him more worthy of governing men.

While the Stoics regarded wealth, human grandeurs, pain, worries, and pleasures as something vain, they spent their time doing nothing but work toward the happiness of men and fulfill the duties of society ; they seemed to regard that sacred spirit which they believed to be in themselves as a sort of favorable providence that kept watch over the human race.

Born for society, they all believed that their destiny was to work for it, which was all the less burdensome that their rewards were all internal, and that, happy through their philosophy alone, it seemed that only the happiness of others could increase their own.