

The Stoics on the Good, the Evil and the Indifferents*

DOI: 10.14746/PEA.2025.1.7

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The concept of evil has raised debates and has been the key topic of approach for reflection and analysis in all philosophical schools, without exception, from antiquity to the present day. As a factor of negative effects on the world, on the relations between people and on each person individually, does evil ultimately touch upon the cognitive or ethical norms from which it deviates? Why does the existence of evil persist and, despite research and the identification of its causes and effects, does it nevertheless exist, influence behaviour, participate in and guide thoughts and decisions while shaping events with its negative power?

This paper will approach the concept of evil and its relation to moral action both in terms of man and in terms of its power as a factor in shaping and influencing the universal order, according to Stoic philosophy. In order to proceed to a partial analysis of the subject, I will first focus on the definition of evil by the Stoics of the first period, as formulated and recorded by their scholars as early as antiquity. I refer to the scholars, as few original texts on the theories of the early Stoics exist, since their writings have not

survived, except for a few.¹ Next, I will refer to two other equally crucial concepts regarding the Stoics' moral philosophy: the good and the indifferents, as opposed to the concept of evil, since all three concepts are actively linked to each other, constitute and demonstrate rules of human behaviour. Finally, I will try to assess the overall impact of evil on man and the world, always in accordance with the philosophers of the Stoa.

Definition of the good, the evil and the indifferents

Stobaeus, in a text of his *Anthology*,² gives the definition of evil, which as he writes was formulated by Zeno, the founder of the School, around the end of the 4th century BC in contrast to the good and the indifferents. Stobaeus writes:

Zeno says that of things, some are good, some are evil, and some are indifferents. (...) Goods are wisdom, prudence, justice and vigour. Evil are folly, debauchery, unrighteousness and cowardice (...) Indifferents, moreover, are death, glory, lack of glory, pain, pleasure, wealth – poverty, disease – health, and such like.³

It seems here that the philosophers of the Stoa choose the four cardinal platonic virtues,⁴ as these are the ones that lead to eudaimonia, which is the end (τέλος), the target of the Stoic sage, as we shall see later in this paper. Good, after all, is a virtue, which, they argue, can be taught. Proof of this is the fact that vicious people become good.⁵ The Stoics most likely follow the Socratic teaching that virtue can be taught.⁶ In this way they clearly declare their membership in the chorea of Socratic philosophers, through Antisthenes,⁷

* This text is dedicated with gratitude to Livio Rossetti, a great teacher of Ancient Philosophy and an eternal friend.

¹ D.L. in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, book VII, dedicated to the old Stoics, gives the titles of their treatises. Additionally, we find some titles in different passages of other ancient researchers as well as in the texts of the Stoics of Rome.

² Cf. Konstan 2011: 19–20. Cf. Stob. *Ecl.* II, p. 57, 18 W. (= SVF I 190).

³ The fragment has no comma between the words: wealth poverty, disease health. It is for this reason that we put a hyphen for better understanding. Stobaeus uses these concepts without any punctuation marks, creating a total of opposite pairs.

⁴ Cf. Pl. *R.* 427c: Δῆλον δὲ ὅτι σοφὴ τ' ἐστὶ καὶ ἀνδρεία καὶ σώφρων καὶ δίκαια; *R.* 536a: Καὶ πρὸς σωφροσύνην, ἣν δ' ἐγώ, καὶ ἀνδρείαν καὶ μεγαλοπρέπειαν καὶ πάντα τὰ τῆς ἀρετῆς μέρος [...]; *Phd.* 69c: κάθαρσις τις τῶν τοιούτων πάντων καὶ ἡ σωφροσύνη καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀνδρεία, καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ φρόνησις.

⁵ D.L. VII 91: διδασκὴν τε εἶναι αὐτὴν, λέγω δὲ τὴν ἀρετὴν, καὶ Χρύσιππος ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ Περὶ τέλους φησὶ καὶ Κλεάνθης καὶ Ποσειδώνιος ἐν τοῖς Προτρεπτικοῖς καὶ Ἐκάτων· ὅτι δὲ διδασκὴ ἐστὶ, δῆλον ἐκ τοῦ γίνεσθαι ἀγαθοῦς ἐκ φαύλων.

⁶ Pl. *Prt.* 361b: σπεύδεις, ἐπιχειρῶν ἀποδείξαι ὡς πάντα χρήματά ἐστιν ἐπιστήμη, καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη καὶ σωφροσύνη καὶ ἡ ἀνδρεία, ὧς τρόπῳ μάλιστα ἂν διδασκὸν φανείη ἡ ἀρετή; *Men.* 95e: οἷόςθ' ὅτι ἐν τούτοις μὲν ὡς διδασκτοῦ οὐσίας τῆς ἀρετῆς λέγει.

⁷ D.L. VI 22. Upon arriving in Athens from Sinope, Diogenes became a pupil of Antisthenes. Later, Diogenes became the teacher of Crates, who in turn taught Zeno of Citium when he arrived in Athens (D.L. VII 2).

Socrates' interlocutor,⁸ since, according to the latter, no one is bad of his own free will but only of ignorance.⁹

Socrates, as we know, inspired his contemporaries such as Antisthenes, for example, who extensively adopted the Socratic theory of virtue and how to attain it, arguing that virtue can be taught.¹⁰ Socrates, moreover, in his *Apology* according to Plato, defended his innocence against the accusations of his prosecutors and countered that the goal of his life was the improvement of the Athenians. This goal focused exclusively on the transformation of *doxa*, that is, changeable opinion into a stable knowledge or awareness of the self through constant *control*.

The Stoics, for their part, divided people into two categories: the wise, meaning the virtuous, and the vicious, meaning the ignorant who are foolish and evil.¹¹ It is important to note that for the philosophers of the Stoa, there is no middle ground. One is either wise or vicious.¹² As a wise, one behaves in a virtuous and cultivated way being *ἀσπεῖος*, that is a person distinguished by a courteous and civil manner.¹³ His actions rely on reason and are regarded as true achievements (*κατορθώματα*) because they are, by nature, lawful and morally right. According to Chrysippus, every action rooted in continence, endurance, wisdom, or courage constitutes an achievement of the sage.¹⁴

⁸ D.L. VI 10: (Ἀντισθένης) διδασκὴν ἀπεδείκνυε τὴν ἀρετὴν.

⁹ Pl. *Prt.* 358c: οὐδὲ τὸ ἥττω εἶναι αὐτοῦ ἄλλο τι τοῦτ' ἐστὶν ἢ ἀμαθία, οὐδὲ κρείττω ἑαυτοῦ ἄλλο τι ἢ σοφία [...] ἐπὶ γὰρ τὰ κακὰ οὐδεὶς ἐκὼν ἔρχεται; *Rep.* 589c: οὐ γὰρ ἐκὼν ἀμαρτάνει, which are attributed to Socrates by Plato; *Ti.* 86d–e: κακὸς μὲν γὰρ ἐκὼν οὐδεὶς; *Euthd.* 281e: ἄλλο τι ἢ τῶν μὲν ἄλλων οὐδὲν ὄν οὔτε ἀγαθὸν οὔτε κακόν, τοῦτοιν δὲ δυοῖν ὄντων ἡ μὲν σοφία ἀγαθόν, ἡ δὲ ἀμαθία κακόν.

¹⁰ In his book *Socrates, Sein Bild in Dichtung und Geschichte* O. Gigon (1995: 219) argues that the textual tradition of the Socratic legacy is notably uneven. In Plato, the Socratic tradition is well-preserved, partly because Plato founded a school. However, none of the other Socratics established a school of their own. Despite this, two of Socrates' interlocutors were claimed as ancestors by Hellenistic schools: the Stoics traced their lineage to Antisthenes, and Epicurus to Aristippus. Although there is limited evidence of a direct relationship between Antisthenes and the Stoics, we frequently encounter Antisthenes' ideas embedded within the Stoic philosophy.

¹¹ It appears that a contradiction arises here regarding the Stoic teaching on virtue. How can virtue be teachable if, at the same time, they assert that only two types of human beings exist – sages and fools – with no possibility of moving from one category to the other? As we shall see later, the Stoics, particularly Chrysippus, gradually introduced some possibility for personal improvement and development.

¹² Cf. Brouwer 2020: 62–63.

¹³ The urban dweller (of ἄστυ) exhibits civilised behavior in contrast to those from the countryside who lack culture. Chrysippus wrote a treatise describing the behavior of the civilised individual (*ἀσπεῖος*) (SVF II 131), to whom the Stoics attribute all virtues and virtuous capacities. They assert that he is the only truly free person (that is liberated from all passions; cf. SVF III 362 and SVF III 15).

¹⁴ Cf. D.L. VII 107–109: Κατωνομάσθαι δ' οὕτως ὑπὸ πρώτου Ζήνωνος τὸ καθήκον, ἀπὸ τοῦ κατὰ τινὰς ἥκειν τῆς προσονομασίας εἰλημμένης. Ἐνέργημα δ' αὐτὸ εἶναι ταῖς κατὰ φύσιν κατασκευαῖς οἰκείον. As Diogenes Laertius reports, the term καθήκον constitutes a Zeno's neologism. It is the effect of an action familiar to things that are done according to the habit and the nature and as a determination and pursuit of good. Cf. Hicks 1958: 213, n. b. For a person to accomplish virtuous actions – κατόρθωμα, or right actions – the guidance of wise, correct thinking is essential, as exemplified by the sage. Thus, the κατόρθωμα, or correct action of the wise aligns with the laws and is morally ordered, well-mannered, fulfilling, and timely as it is carried out with self-control, endurance, prudence, and courage. Cf. Plu. *On Stoic Self-Contradictions* 15, 1041A; cf. Cic. *De finibus*, III 32.

Hence, the Stoics believe that only through logos, it is possible to become wise (virtuous), as the path that leads to *eudaimonia*, passes through the conquest of virtue.¹⁵ They even argue that it is this direction that Nature itself leads us to.¹⁶ The inextricably linked relation between reason, ethics and physics in the Stoic system is thereby emphasised, since Zeno in his treatise *On the Nature of Man* showed that the ultimate purpose of life is *living in accordance*: τὸ δὲ τέλος ὁ μὲν Ζήνων οὕτως ἀπέδωκε· ‘τὸ ὁμολογουμένως ζῆν’· τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶ καθ’ ἓνα λόγον καὶ σύμφωνον ζῆν.¹⁷ This simple definition, reported by Stobaeus, needs further analysis in order to be interpreted. What does the sage’s *accordance* consist of and in relation to what? Finally, what is the way through which nature guides us towards *ὁμολογία*?

Etymologically, the term *ὁμολογία* means consent, assent, acceptance, agreement between word and deed, as in music, when an agreement, an intelligible, ultimately audible result, comes from the practice of many musical instruments. According to A. A. Long, the noun *ὁμολογία*, can be synonymous of *harmonia* and *symphonia* as it happens in Plato’s *Symposium* 187b.¹⁸ The clarification by Cleanthes, Zeno’s successor in the School, – by adding ‘τῇ φύσει’ to the zenonian definition of *ὁμολογουμένως ζῆν* (D.L. VII 87), which thereby becomes: *ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν* – demonstrates that not only does nature itself guide us to *eudaimonia* but also that *eudaimonia* results from the identification of life with the observation, understanding and acceptance of the evolutionary course of the natural world.

Opposition to the evolutionary course of the world, as Stobaeus argues, creates unhappy people (*κακοδαιμονούντων*).¹⁹ Therefore, *ζῆν ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει* seems to be based on a fragile balance between natural events and man’s ability to constantly adapt to them, as only the wise man can achieve it while he processes situations rationally and thereby lives harmoniously and in accordance with nature.

The conquest of *eudaimonia* through the good

Therefore, one would argue that the attainment of *eudaimonia* is a simple process as long as we look at the nature around us, agree, consent and accept the facts and circum-

¹⁵ D.L. VII 127: αὐτάρκη τε εἶναι αὐτὴν (τὴν ἀρετὴν) πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν, καθά φησι Ζήνων καὶ Χρύσιππος ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ Περὶ ἀρετῶν καὶ Ἐκάτων ἐν τῷ δευτέρῳ Περὶ ἀγαθῶν.

¹⁶ For the notion of Nature to the Stoics, cf. Long 1986: 168, 180, 189. The Stoics attributed to God many nominations. Cleanthes calls him God of many names since God has many qualities. Cf. Zeller, 1880: 358. Cf. Protopapas-Marneli 2014: 232–233.

¹⁷ Stob. II, p. 75, 11 W.: τὸ δὲ τέλος ὁ μὲν Ζήνων οὕτως ἀπέδωκε «τὸ ὁμολογουμένως ζῆν» τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶ καθ’ ἓνα λόγον καὶ σύμφωνον ζῆν, ὡς τῶν μαχομένων ζώντων κακοδαιμονούντων.

¹⁸ Long (2001: 203 and n. 5) argues that “in technical harmonics symphonia applies only to certain aesthetically special and structurally crucial relations, especially those of the fourth, fifth and octave.” He continues by saying that the Stoics applied the term “harmoniously” as the mode of life and so they connected it to the art which comes first in mind that is music.

¹⁹ “ὡς τῶν μαχομένων ζώντων κακοδαιμονούντων”.

stances that are present. This process, however, proves to be, as we shall see below, long and arduous, as man rarely finds a way to reconcile, consent and accept the circumstances that arise, affect and alter the rhythm of his life.

Besides, neither Zeno, nor Cleanthes, not even Chrysippus, the third Scholarch of the School, seem to include themselves in the chorea of the wise. On the contrary, they maintain that most men are fool (*φᾶῶλοι*), but that there may have been (as is rumoured) one or two sages in the world; indeed, they admit that it is so paradoxical to find a wise person that it comes to be a rarer phenomenon than that of the phoenix, that strange bird which may once have lived near the Ethiopians.²⁰ For this reason, the rarity of the sage with his hard-to-find qualities is coloured by the Stoics with impressive tones. Perhaps this is a kind of human being that never appears in the context of a real city. This underscores how philosophical moral teachings are so impractical that they cannot realistically be applied, even when referenced by philosophers themselves. After all, the Stoics describe the wise as someone who never existed.²¹ What their philosophy claims about the sage is similar to what Plato says about the heavenly city, which he is not concerned with, whether it exists or will exist or how often it will appear on earth (Pl. *Rep.* 592b). Just as Plato's ideal city exists only as an abstract model, so does the Stoic sage represent an ideal – virtuous in every aspect of life, possessing all virtues to an absolute degree.²²

This 'extreme' description of the sage's personality, which encapsulates all virtues, emerges during the Hellenistic period as one model advocated by the philosophical schools that developed almost simultaneously in Athens. During this time, the emergence of individuality as a means of self-preservation disrupts traditional notions of collectivity and citizenship in the city-state. However, it also broadens the horizons of the reflective individual, who comes to realize that happiness can be attained through the continuous effort of self-improvement. The emphasis that the Stoics lay on self-improvement through philosophy inevitably leads to individuality and detachment from the bonds of the city, since the city is no longer able to guarantee with its institutions the security and cohesion of the citizens among themselves. A concomitant phenomenon

²⁰ The Phoenix is a mythological bird that, upon dying, is reborn from its own ashes. Its name, "Phoenix" (*Φοίνιξ* in Greek), derives from the word "φοινός", meaning "purple" or "deep red." Hdt. II 73, 1–4: "Ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἄλλος ὄρνις ἱρός, τῷ οὐνόμα φοῖνιξ. ἐγὼ μὲν μιν οὐκ εἶδον εἰ μὴ ὅσον γραφῆ· καὶ γὰρ δὴ καὶ σπάνιος ἐπιφοιτᾷ σφι δι' ἐτέων, ὥς Ἡλιοπολῖται λέγουσι. Cf. Alex.Aphr. *De fato*, ch. 28, p. 199, 7 Bruns. (= SVF III 658).

²¹ On this topic cf. O. Gigon 1975: 74.

²² The virtues of the sage, a part of Diogenes Laertius (VII 122) appear in a number of ancient Stoic Scholars. Cf. Clem.Al. *Strom.* II, p. 438 Pott. (= SVF III 658): (the citation begins with reference to Plato: εἰ γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία σπουδαῖον ὁ τε σοφὸς μόνος βασιλεὺς καὶ ἄρχων, ὁ νόμος λόγος ὧν ὀρθὸς σπουδαῖος· ἃ καὶ ἔστιν. τούτοις ἀκόλουθα οἱ Στωϊκοὶ φιλόσοφοι δογματίζουσιν, βασιλείαν, ἱερωσύνην, προφητείαν, νομοθετικήν, πλοῦτον, κάλλος ἀληθινόν, εὐγένειαν, ἐλευθερίαν μόνῳ προσάπτοντες τῷ σοφῷ· ὁ δὲ δυσεὔρετος πάνυ σφόδρα καὶ πρὸς αὐτῶν ὁμολογεῖται)» (The author has separated each letter of the cited words for added emphasis); but also in Stob. *Ecl.* II 7, 11d: Οἰκονομικὸν δ' εἶναι μόνον λέγουσι τὸν σπουδαῖον καὶ ἀγαθὸν οἰκονόμον, ἔτι δὲ χρηματιστικόν. Τὴν μὲν γὰρ οἰκονομικὴν εἶναι θεωρητικὴν ἔξιν καὶ πρακτικὴν τῶν οἴκῳ συμφερόντων· τὴν δ' οἰκονομίαν διάταξιν περὶ ἀναλωμάτων καὶ ἔργων καὶ κτήσεως ἐπιμέλειαν καὶ τῶν κατ' ἀγρὸν ἐργαζομένων· τὴν δὲ χρηματιστικὴν ἐμπερίαν περιποιήσεως χρημάτων ἀφ' ὧν δέον καὶ ἔξιν ὁμολογουμένως ἀναστρέφεσθαι ποιοῦσαν ἐν συναγωγῇ χρημάτων καὶ τηρήσει καὶ ἀναλώσει πρὸς εὐπορίαν· τὸ δὲ χρηματίζεσθαι τινες μὲν μέσον εἶπον εἶναι, τινὲς δὲ ἄσπετον. Cf. Edelstein 1966: 11.

of the era is the emergence of the portrait in art, where the figure depicted has its own particular characteristics rather than the ideal proportions of a model. Each person is depicted as they really are, with their imperfections.²³

It seems, however, that in combination with the perception of the rarity of the wise man, Stoicism is characterised by pessimism about the perfection of man, as can be observed from the fact that the representatives themselves recognised the difficulty of the goal pursued, namely, awareness. This pessimism also arises from the spirit of the era, characterised by the changeable and unexpected dictates of fortune. Apart from the fact that Fortune is deified at that time, her spherical pedestal or the depiction of her holding the rudder of a boat upright and steering it through the waves, further demonstrates the delicate, fragile and changeable balance of the world under the goddess's absolute control, as well as her power – half Providence, half *Eimarmene* – to which the world but also man obey. Moreover, Zeno attributes his arrival and settlement in Athens to a chance event, after the shipwreck of his ship loaded with porphyry, during his journey from Phoenicia to Piraeus, according to Diogenes Laertius.²⁴

On the basis of the above, we could, therefore, argue that the fool is the one who does not adapt to situations, but is outraged, regretful, revengeful, and opposed to a situation that upsets the course of his life, since the Stoic philosophy defines eudaimonia as “*εὐποία*”, namely, the good flow of life, which flows smoothly, similar to the flow of the waters of a river.²⁵ The ordinary man, at every adverse moment, considers himself treated unjustly, utterly unhappy, at the mercy of fortune, after some considerable loss, as was the case with Zeno. In the same context, that is, the inability to perceive events and the parallel opposition to them, falls, for example, the loss of a loved one, of one's property or health.²⁶ If this is the case, the Stoics will have to counter that these are part of human subjectivity and that such losses do not disturb the cosmic order. So, we should distance ourselves from our relation to loss, since all the above do not belong to the evils but to those things that are considered *indifferents*, as we have already seen. Indeed, the Stoics argue that the most appropriate attitude is one of constant vigilance and readiness regarding the arrival and confrontation of possible unpleasant situations. With this in mind, Chrysippus urged people to adopt a steadfast and rational approach toward events. Meanwhile, Poseidonius, a representative of Middle Stoicism, coined the term *παρενδμεῖν* (to ‘live with’ or ‘live close to’) to suggest that the wise person should ‘welcome’ adversity

²³ Hellenistic sculpture: Late 4th – early 1st century BC. “In sculpture, new local workshops and renowned sculptors that rendered the figures realistically, depicting their personal features, came to the fore”: <https://www.namuseum.gr/en/collection/ellinistiki-periodos-2/>

²⁴ D.L. VII 2: πορφύραν ἐμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ τῆς Φοινίκης πρὸς τῷ Πειραιεὶ ἐναυάγησεν.

²⁵ Stob. II, p. 77, 20 (= SVF III 658).

²⁶ Epict. *Discourses*, II 19, 14: “According to the Stoics, health belongs to the category of ‘preferred indifferents.’ This means that while everyone prefers health over illness, poor health does not hinder a virtuous life. The Stoics acknowledge that health is influenced by how one lives, making it our responsibility to care for ourselves to maintain it; otherwise, we would not be living in harmony with our natural inclinations. Thus, the pursuit of good health is essential for its preservation. However, this effort does not impact our moral character, as health, in most cases, remains beyond our control.” Cf. also, Long, Vertzagia 2020.

in his home, that is, in his soul, long before it appears so that he becomes familiar with it.²⁷ Later, Epictetus taught that we should not ask for things to happen the way we want them to happen, but wish for things to happen exactly as they do and then they will run smoothly.²⁸ This refers most likely to the sage's penetrating look at nature and acceptance of its dictates, whatever they may be. The dictates of nature cannot be violated with impunity, even if no one learns of it except himself. Nature gives imperatives necessary for the evolution of life. Our violation of nature or opposition to it imply real harm, injustice to the natural world (and this is related to the truth of our action or logos).²⁹

In this context of consensus and acceptance, the joy that Zeno of Citium felt afterwards – after the shipwreck – should be included.³⁰ The unpleasant event turns into an auspicious one, for if the circumstances do not change, then our perspective towards them must change.³¹ Therefore, Zeno acknowledges that thanks to the Fortune that caused the shipwreck, he was led towards philosophy.³² When the waves of the sea crushed his ship, he did not regret it. Instead, he went up to Athens and sat at a bookseller's shop (D.L. VII 2). After that, he consulted the oracle of Apollo in Delphi, to learn from the god what would be best to occupy himself with to attain the best life. The god's response was that he should acquire the colour of the dead; Zeno followed the oracle and devoted himself to the study of philosophy, so much so that he felt he was conversing with the ancient philosophers and becoming one of them. His negative feelings were transformed into the joy of knowledge, as is the case with the Stoic sage. Zeno had undoubtedly found, after twenty years of philosophical pursuits (D.L. VII 4) and painstaking efforts, the way to deal with events by abstaining from emotions, making a way of life out of the sage's apathy, meaning his detachment from all kinds of passions such as sorrow, fear, anger, frustration and the like.³³

But it is not always so, despite the fact that Nature (God or Logos) gave every man the gift of reason, since this divine Logos, in the capacity of a craftsman, penetrated the

²⁷ Gal. *De Placitis Hippocratis et Platonis libri novem* (= PHP); IV, 7, 393 (De Lacy 1981). Cf. Pigeaud 2006³: 277.

²⁸ Epict. *Manual*, 8: Μὴ ζητεῖ τὰ γινόμενα γίνεσθαι ὡς θέλεις, ἀλλὰ θέλε τὰ γινόμενα ὡς γίνεται καὶ εὐροήσεις.

²⁹ Epict. *Discourses*, I 14–15: ὅταν κλείσῃτε τὰς θύρας καὶ σκότος ἔνδον ποιήσῃτε, μέμνησθε μηδέποτε λέγειν ὅτι μόνον ἐστὲ· οὐ γὰρ ἐστὲ, ἀλλ' ὁ θεὸς ἔνδον ἐστὶ καὶ ὁ ὑμέτερος δαίμων ἐστίν. καὶ τίς τούτοις χρειαί φωτὸς εἰς τὸ βλέπειν τί ποιεῖτε;

³⁰ Cf. n. 24 above.

³¹ Epictetus advises that if noise outside your house disturbs you, remind yourself that it is simply the sound of a holiday celebration, and choose to interpret it as if you were listening to pleasant conversations. Cf. Epict. *Discourses*, IV 4, 24–25: τί λέγεις θορύβῳ; ἐν πολλοῖς ἀνθρώποις; καὶ τί χαλεπὸν; δόξον ἐν Ὀλυμπίᾳ εἶναι, πανηγυρίαν αὐτὸν ἡγῆσαι. κάκεῖ ἄλλος ἄλλο τι κέκραγεν, ἄλλος ἄλλο τι πράσσει, ἄλλος τῷ ἄλλῳ ἐνσεύεται. ἐν τοῖς βαλανείοις ὄχλος· καὶ τίς ἡμῶν οὐ χαίρει τῇ πανηγύρει ταύτῃ καὶ ὀδυνώμενος αὐτῆς ἀπαλλάσσεται; μὴ γίνου δυσάρεστος μηδὲ κακοστόμαχος πρὸς τὰ γινόμενα. ‘τὸ ὄξος σαπρὸν, δριμύ γάρ’· ‘τὸ μέλι σαπρὸν’, ἀνατρέπει γάρ μου τὴν ἔξιν.

³² D.L. VII 5: ‘ἄλλοι δὲ διατρίβοντα ἐν ταῖς Ἀθήναις ἀκοῦσαι τὴν ναυαγίαν καὶ εἰπεῖν, ‘εὖ γε ποιεῖ ἡ τύχη προσελαύνουσα ἡμᾶς φιλοσοφίᾳ.’

³³ Plu. *On Moral Virtue*, 7, 446F: καὶ γὰρ ἐπιθυμίαν καὶ ὀργὴν καὶ φόβον καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα, δόξας εἶναι καὶ κρίσεις πονηράς, οὐ περὶ ἔντινι γιγνομένης τῆς ψυχῆς μέρος, ἀλλὰ ὅλου τοῦ ἡγεμονικοῦ ῥοπάς καὶ εἴξεις καὶ

changeable and with no quality matter, and gave every creature a form with characteristics peculiar to each one.³⁴ Reason and matter coexist in every human being, cohabit within him, determining reactions and behaviours. Endowed as he is with reason, and because he knows how to distinguish good from evil, every man should always choose to do good, since theoretical occupation with philosophy leads to practice.³⁵ But most of the times, this is not the case. People engage in deceitful acts and reconcile themselves with evil, thinking that they will thereby satisfy their impulses, desires and expectations. In the *Hymn to Zeus*, Cleanthes describes this man, who irrationally turns towards the acquisition of all kinds of material goods and pleasures while in fact moving away from his goal, which is eudaimonia:

Thus, from all things, may emerge an eternal logos.
From mortals the vicious shun and defy it,
The unfortunate, who always desire the possession of goods
Nor they see the common law of God, nor hear it,
To him with prudence, if they had obeyed, they would have had a good life.³⁶

The early Stoics held that there is nothing between absolute virtue and absolute vice, because, they argued, wood is either straight or crooked. In the same way, there is no more just or more unjust but just or unjust.³⁷ Indeed, nature itself gives man the first principles (*predispositions*), as well as the principle of justice. So, the acceptance of good and evil to an absolute degree should probably push man to surrender to a fatalistic state and deny the possibility of self-improvement. However, the Stoics themselves believe that all men have a natural disposition towards virtue³⁸ and argue that virtue is an art, just as reason comes to be added as an absolute skill to man, limiting all instinctive impulses.³⁹ Art, however, they maintain, is a system of applied theory and practice,⁴⁰ and so they revert to their original position, according to which virtue can be taught, as the end (*τέλος*) of life, they set forth the constant exercise of man for the attainment of the good.

συγκαταθέσεις καὶ ὁρμὰς καὶ ὅλως ἐνεργείας τινὰς οὐσας ἐν ὀλίγῳ μεταπτωτάς, ὥσπερ αἱ τῶν παθῶν ἐπιδρομαὶ τὸ ῥαγδαῖον καὶ τὸ σφοδρὸν ἐπισφαλὲς ὑπὸ ἀσθενείας καὶ ἀβέβαιον ἔχουσι»; cf. also Plu. *On Moral Virtue*, 3, 441C: καὶ γὰρ τὸ πάθος εἶναι λόγον πονηρὸν καὶ ἀκόλαστον, ἐκ φαύλης καὶ διημιτημένης κρίσεως σφοδρότητα καὶ ῥώμην προσλαβούσης.

³⁴ Besnier 2003: 57. D.L. VII 134; cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 65, 2.

³⁵ D.L. VII 126: τὸν γὰρ ἐνάρετον θεωρητικὸν τ' εἶναι καὶ πρακτικὸν ποιητέον.

³⁶ Cleanthes, *Stoic. Hymn to Zeus*, 20–25 (Stob. *Ecl.* = SVF I 537).

³⁷ D.L. VII 127: Ἀρέσκει δ' αὐτοῖς μηδὲν μεταξὺ εἶναι ἀρετῆς καὶ κακίας, τῶν Περιπατητικῶν μεταξὺ ἀρετῆς καὶ κακίας εἶναι λεγόντων τὴν προκοπὴν· ὥς γὰρ δεῖν φασιν ἢ ὀρθὸν εἶναι ξύλον ἢ στρεβλόν, οὕτως ἢ δίκαιον ἢ ἄδικον, οὕτε δὲ δικαιότερον οὐτ' ἀδικώτερον, καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὁμοίως.

³⁸ SVF III 214, 215.

³⁹ D.L. VII 86: τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῖς λογικοῖς κατὰ τελειοτέραν προστασίαν δεδομένου, τὸ κατὰ λόγον ζῆν ὀρθῶς γίνεσθαι <τοῦ> τοῖς κατὰ φύσιν· τεχνίτης γὰρ οὗτος ἐπιγίνεται τῆς ὁρμῆς.

⁴⁰ *Anecdota graeca Paris*, vol. I, p. 171 (*Quomodo homines boni et mali fiant?* = SVF III 214: πᾶσα δὲ τέχνη σύστημα ἐκ θεωρημάτων συγγεγυμνασμένων).

Thus, he who is not yet virtuous will be able to attain virtue if he chooses the right *exercise*, while the virtuous will always and in every choice embody virtue (Reesor 1951: 105).

The Evil in Man and the World

In the last part of this study, I will try to assess the impact of evil on man and the world, according to the philosophers of the Stoa.

In view of the above, I believe that there is an ‘anxiety’ on the part of the teachers of Stoicism, not only because they themselves did not succeed in joining the category of the wise man, as they defined him, but also because they understood, already from the first years of the foundation of the School, that man’s constant effort against evil would never give him the opportunity to change category, but that he would constantly remain in the category of the one in progress (*προκόπτων*),⁴¹ the one who belongs to the second category after the ‘infallible’ sage. Unlike the vicious one, who does not understand the consequences of his actions and, precisely because of his ignorance, uncritically attributes them to the gods (or to others), the *προκόπτων* aims at self-improvement, by constant and arduous *exercise* of the self for the benefit of reason and at the expense of his emotions, even if he completely renounces his material nature in order to remain unfaltering – as far as possible – in the face of situations.

Evil, however, exists in any case, and maintains a special relationship with events, is in accordance with the *logos* of nature, and is not useless to the world. Without it, man, the Stoics maintain, would have no conception of the good. Evil exists and we know it, for it is what opposes virtue.⁴² Perhaps, then, evil is related to that without quality matter which exists because of our nature,⁴³ since the *Logos* united with it, giving us in seed the possibility of becoming wise.

In the *Hymn to Zeus*, Cleanthes describes God’s effort to guide everything on earth in the right direction. Yet, the unrestrained actions of the fools momentarily escape his control, affirming human free will. Meanwhile, the *Logos* (God) uses his intellect to bring order to chaos, striving to harmonize good with evil. Since, in the end, God subdues and integrates even the acts of the fools to maintain cosmic order and benefit the continuous course of the world, how does human free will truly persist? The answer comes down to two conclusions:

⁴¹ This is the theory, which the Stoics ultimately borrowed from the Peripatetics, who maintained that between virtue and vice, there is progress (*προκοπή*) (= D.L. VII 127).

⁴² D.L. VII 91: εἶναι δὲ καὶ τὴν κακίαν ὑπαρκτήν διὰ τὸ ἀντικεῖσθαι τῇ ἀρετῇ.

⁴³ D.L. VII 134: δοκεῖ δ’ αὐτοῖς ἀρχὰς εἶναι τῶν ὄλων δύο, τὸ ποιοῦν καὶ τὸ πάσχον. τὸ μὲν οὖν πάσχον εἶναι τὴν ἄποιον οὐσίαν, τὴν ὕλην, τὸ δὲ ποιοῦν τὸν ἐν αὐτῇ λόγον, τὸν θεόν· τοῦτον γὰρ αἰδίων ὄντα διὰ πάσης αὐτῆς δημιουργεῖν ἕκαστα.

1. There is a free disposition, if we call a free act the act that stems from the character of man and not an act caused by extrinsic causes (which the Stoics call *primaries*). This is because it is up to ourselves to have good or bad character (which is the primary cause of our act). Chrysippus uses the example of the cylinder and the cone to show that man's acceptance or rejection of an event (primary cause) is due to his character.⁴⁴ The reaction comes from ourselves. Each of us does not react in the same way to an event. Similar to the cylinder or the cone, which when given the initial impetus will cause the cylinder to roll while the cone will rotate, man reacts to the impetus of situations according to his character. A Stoic will say that it was fatal for me to break my leg (as an event beyond his control) but he will never say that "it was fatal for me to do a bad deed" (Frede 2007: 118). For we ourselves might have acted differently if we had not become the kind of person we are. The wise man is always the man of excellent *disposition*.⁴⁵
2. According to the Stoics, we perceive and act in a certain way. However, in order for any action to take place, it is necessary that there should be a cause, and this cause is created when we give our consent to a stimulus that stems either from our character (our natural inclination) or from our way of thinking that guides our action. Chrysippus argues that no emotion can arise without some external cause as mentioned above. As far as concerns humans, for example, the stimulus is not enough for a theft to take place; it takes the thief himself possessing that particular character, as Seneca mentions.⁴⁶ Events pass forward from one character to another, as it happens with a ball in a tennis match. The player holding the racket has the advantage. But there are good and bad players, who nevertheless have not chosen to be as they are. Thus, according to Cleanthes and the majority of the Stoics, it only remains to admit the dissimilarity between people since they are either wise or fools.⁴⁷

Our nature, however, is part of the Whole. It is up to each person to choose at any time the best decision for him/herself. Bad decisions though, lead to the deprivation of freedom and the disruption of the cosmic order, even if only momentarily. If the attainment of eudaimonia depends on the attainment of virtue, perhaps eudaimonia does not last since virtue also depends, according to Chrysippus,⁴⁸ on a bad mental and physical disposition such as melancholy, drunkenness, fever, diarrhoea, all being diseases, which reason has no control over. In formulating their portrait of the sage, the Stoics, however,

⁴⁴ Cic. *De fato*, 18, 42: "Chrysippus vult, quam dudum diximus, non ut illa quidem fieri possit nulla vi extrinsecus excitata (necesse est enim adsessionem viso commoveri), sed revertitur ad cylindrum et ad turbinem suum, quae moveri incipere nisi pulsa non possunt. Id autem cum accidit, suapte natura, quod superest, et cylindrum volvi et versari turbinem putat."

⁴⁵ S.E. *M.* XI 202: τὸν σοφὸν ἰδίον ἐστὶν ἔργον τὸ πράττειν ἕκαστον τῶν πραττομένων ἀπὸ ἀρίστης διαθέσεως.

⁴⁶ Cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 107, 10 (Lafont 1993: 1010).

⁴⁷ Cf. Veyne 1993: 1011 and n. 2.

⁴⁸ D.L. VII 127: ὁ μὲν (Χρύσιππος) ἀποβλήτην (τὴν ἀρετὴν) διὰ μέθην καὶ μελαγχολίαν.

assert that while he may drink wine, he will not succumb to drunkenness, madness, or the negative effects of melancholy or delirium on his intellect. Although these experiences may be contrary to nature, they acknowledge nonetheless, that such occurrences can happen as the sage is still, after all, a human being.⁴⁹ This demonstrates the extent to which reason depends on the body and supports the Stoics' claim that they do not regard themselves as truly wise. Although diseases are classified as indifferents, they still affect the conduct of even the sage, despite their belief that he can remain unwavering.

In conclusion, we realise that this assumption occurred because they realised that the coexistence of good and evil in the world and the constant change of worldly events should be transubstantiated into an effort to find even a temporary eudaimonia. Therefore, every human being, through constant practice, pursues the art of consensus, acceptance, and reconciliation with himself first and then with others, the world, and events, in order to chart his own course towards perfection, that is, towards eudaimonia, even if only temporarily.

⁴⁹ D.L. VII 118: (τὸν σοφὸν) καὶ οἰνωθήσεσθαι μέν, οὐ μεθυσθήσεσθαι δέ. ἔτι δὲ οὐδὲ μανήσεσθαι· προσησέσθαι μέντοι ποτὲ αὐτῷ φαντασίας ἀλλοκότους διὰ μελαγχολίαν ἢ λήρησιν, οὐ κατὰ τὸν τῶν αἰρετῶν λόγον, ἀλλὰ παρὰ φύσιν.

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The Stoics on the Good, the Evil and the Indifferents

In this paper, we examine the concept of evil in Early Stoicism, which is assessed alongside the concepts of good and indifferents within the Stoic classification of things that partake in essence. Adopting the Socratic theory of virtue, which holds that virtue can be taught, the Stoics divided humanity into two categories: the wise (those who act according to reason and are virtuous) and the fools (those who lack reason and are, therefore, ignorant and bad). In this framework, they introduced the notion of the ‘human in progress,’ a state attainable by all who make continuous and diligent effort. If this model holds true, why then do evil people exist, and why does evil persist in the world? The Stoics, we believe, ultimately provide a solution to this problem, which we aim to explore and substantiate in this paper.

KEY WORDS

evil, virtue, indifferents, free will, human in progress (*prokopōn*)

