



**Treatise of Stoic Value Theory &  
Corresponding Understanding of Emotions**

by

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**Abstract**

In this thesis, I argue that the Stoic value theory and understanding of emotion is a theoretical abstraction of human agency over values and emotions that has limited pertinence to empirical human life. Towards this effort, I discuss the Stoic ethical naturalism that relies on *oikeiôsis* to illustrate their notion of *eudaimonia*. Moreover, I discuss Stoic epistemology and action theory to illustrate how the Stoics can place well-being completely within human agency. Drawing on their understanding of both human nature and agency, the Stoics derive a value framework and corresponding understanding of emotions that proposes a radical detachment and devaluation from all that lies beyond the moral character. However, I show through empirical evidence and logical reasoning how human agency is restricted and therein, disallows for the proposed radical detachment. Nonetheless, their philosophy on ethics can still be applied in a limited capacity to achieve therapeutic benefit and value.

## **Introduction**

By our very existence in the universe, we are exposed to fortune and countless external factors that affect our physical and mental well-being. Our physical well-being is by its natural connection to our human body exposed to physical harm. Beyond following the healthcare directives of scientific research, our physical bodies are at the mercy of fortune and the universe. At any time, we are prone to physical harm either by external factors or internal bodily failures. Therefore, our physical well-being is largely outside of our control irrespective of how conscientiously we care for our bodies. Instead, our greatest possible physical well-being is determined by the limits of life sciences. Further investigation of physical well-being and possible improvement thus pertains to scientific research.

Our mental well-being pertains to the emotional state of our spirit and exists more abstractly. As such, it exists not within the physical realm where it can suffer physical harm. Nevertheless, external influences and factors can still affect our mental well-being if we believe them to have a bearing on our values, i.e., if an external factor or an internal thought affects our values, the factor can serve as an emotional trigger that can induce specific emotions and thereby affect our emotional state. Although external influences and internal thoughts can induce different emotions, depending on the value system of an individual, emotions themselves are a common human experience.

The abstract existence of our mental well-being further implies that it is governed by different rules and laws and can not be easily quantified or researched in the same manner as our physical well-being. In the realm of physical well-being, life sciences produce accurate and objective theories that can be applied to achieve quantifiable and universal physical well-being improvements. Mental well-being however is more nuanced and governed by unique value

theories that depend on the individual. As a result, the sciences that deal with mental well-being will struggle to produce accurate and universally applicable care directives. Often unique and tailored care directives are instead necessary to improve an individual's mental well-being. Nevertheless, investigation and research of what affects our abstract emotional state can still provide overarching insights that can be of help to an individual. Ultimately though, mental well-being is not subject to exact and objective scientific research as it depends on personal meaning and values.

In the context of uncontrollable external factors influencing our well-being, it becomes essential to explore the extent of control we have over our well-being to determine how we can care for our well-being and deal with external influences. As established, our physical well-being is mainly at the mercy of the universe and our control over physical well-being is bound by the limits of life sciences. Although our mental well-being is similarly affected by external factors, the factors' influence depends on the extent of their bearing on our values. Furthermore, the values we have are of our own choosing and thus, allow for a certain amount of control over the extent of influence external factors have on us. Our physical body's natural configuration and exposure to external factors however disallows for a similar control over what affects it. Thus, the difference between our mental and physical well-being is the possibility of control over what can affect each kind of well-being. Physical well-being as such is given and thus subject to scientific research. Mental well-being is however dependent on what we value and attach meaning to and as such, is subject to philosophical inquiry.

Consequently, we must devote our philosophical inquiry toward finding a value theory that allows for a refined exposure to external factors as they can become emotional triggers that can alter our emotional state. Especially important in our inquiry is the consideration of our

physical connection to the world, i.e., our physical body. Depending on the meaning we attach to our physical body and how we value our physical well-being, we are more or less exposed to physical harm affecting our mental well-being. An external factor impacting our body will always affect our physical well-being. However, our mental well-being will only be affected if we have previously determined to value our physical body. Beyond the physical body and other physical factors, our mental well-being can also be affected by external factors that affect abstract goods, such as honor or justice, depending on how we value them. Thus, our value theory determines the susceptibility of our mental well-being to the influence of external factors since they become emotional triggers that can alter our emotional state.

Beyond our inquiry into the proper value theory, we must also explore the extent of control we have over the emotions that appear simultaneously with affected values. As established, external factors can become emotional triggers that can alter our emotional state if we perceive our values to be affected. External factors, emotional triggers, and emotions thus appear to be all interrelated, yet their relationship is unclear. If we consider emotional triggers and emotions as natural byproducts and outflows of our value theory, then the resultant emotions are beyond our control. In such a scenario, our inquiry into emotions would shift its focus away from controlling emotions toward determining how we should deal with emotions. On the contrary, if we believe that we have some control or influence over the process of affected values resulting in emotions, we must explore what kind of emotions we should allow ourselves to experience. Ultimately though, we must inquire what emotions we should allow ourselves to experience, irrespective of whether we experience emotions by choice or as a result of emotion management, as emotions directly affect our well-being.

The inquiry of what we should value, what control over emotions we have, and what emotions we should allow ourselves to experience, are all questions that aim at maximizing our well-being. Furthermore, the insights we gain from these questions will dictate how we should live. In philosophy, the field that deals with the proper way of life is known as ethics. There are several schools of thought that provide different answers for how we should live based on their distinctive understanding of human agency, value theories, and perspectives on emotions. Here, I will concern myself with eudaimonist virtue ethics, the branch of ethics that considers living according to virtue to be the key to a flourishing life and well-being, or as the ancient Greek philosophers would call it, *eudaimonia*.<sup>1</sup> Within that branch, I'm focusing on the Stoic ethical framework with its unique value theory and perspective on emotions that relies on their unique understanding of human agency and finds its derivation in *oikeiôsis* and the human telos.

For the Stoics, the development of emotions from emotional triggers lies within human agency, granting an individual complete control over their emotions. They consider emotional triggers to be initial emotional inclinations of our current environment or mind that are only developed into specific emotions if we assent to them. As such, emotions become acts of judgment that lie within human agency.<sup>2</sup>

The Stoics further believe that we should only value our moral character and devalue everything else. Our moral character exists abstractly and pertains to our virtuousness that solely depends on our voluntary actions. Moreover, seeing that our well-being solely concerns itself with the state of goods that are valued, the Stoics aim to tie our well-being completely to our moral character by solely assigning value to the moral character. Thus, external influences can

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<sup>1</sup> Rosalind Hursthouse and Glen Pettigrove, "Virtue Ethics," ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified 2023, accessed March 19, 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2023/entries/ethics-virtue/>.

<sup>2</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. J. E. King (London, UK: W. Heinemann, 1927), 403.

not affect our well-being since they affect goods that are devalued and irrelevant to our moral character. Only voluntary actions that pertain to our moral character can affect our well-being. As such, their value theory effectively allows us to place our well-being completely within our agency and beyond the reach of external influences or fortune.

Furthermore, they also believe that a virtuous moral character will provide an individual with “knowledge of the rational order of the universe” and a “desire to accord with that rational order” that serves as the motivation for an individual’s actions.<sup>3</sup> Such a desire will lead an individual to always select the appropriate emotional response in any given situation through their knowledge that allows them to judge the extent to which their moral character is affected. If a situation or event affects an individual’s moral character, the individual will choose to assent to the experience of either a good or bad emotion. If however the situation does not pertain to an individual’s moral character, the individual will categorize the affected good among one of the three types of neutrals: preferred, rejected, and indifferent. All three types of neutrals have no bearing on our moral character and therein, also not on our well-being. Thus, the individual will refrain from assenting to the experience of emotions. Nevertheless, the Stoics advise that an individual seeks out preferred neutrals while avoiding rejected neutrals. Ultimately, a virtuous moral character then becomes the key to a flourishing life where well-being is only impacted by our own agency.

By living in accordance with their ethical doctrine, the Stoics believe that an individual can live free from agitating emotions and achieve a flourishing life. However, the extent of human agency proposed by the Stoics appears unrealistic to me and forms the foundation of my philosophical inquiry. I believe that their understanding of complete control over emotions and

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<sup>3</sup> Marcia Homiak, "Moral Character," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified 2019, accessed March 31, 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/moral-character/>.

the ability to radically devalue anything beyond our moral character pushes beyond the empirical limits of human agency. Thus, I consider their ethical doctrine a theoretical abstraction of human agency over values and emotions that has limited pertinence to empirical human life.

Despite the apparent shortcomings of their theory, the Stoic ethical framework has the appealing benefit of placing our well-being completely within our own control. Commonly, we consider externalities to be beyond our control, even if only to a limited extent, placing our well-being at the mercy of fortune and external factors. Such exposure to external influence can easily lead to unnecessary distress, anguish, or other emotions that can impact our well-being. Under the Stoic framework however, these unnecessary emotions are the result of judgment that stems from and lies entirely within our agency implying complete self-accountability for our own well-being. The notion of complete accountability for well-being is reminiscent of Aristotle's consideration of attribution of blame and praise only to voluntary actions.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the Stoic ethical framework may still provide valuable insights into well-being improvement and therein, therapeutic value and application.

### **Stoic *Oikeiôsis***

The Stoics derive their ethics from their understanding of human nature and *oikeiôsis*. Similar to the Epicureans, they begin their inquiry into human nature by considering the natural behaviors of infants and animals. However, while the Epicureans perceive pleasure and pain to be the motivation for our actions, the Stoics consider actions to be motivated by the natural disposition toward what is in accordance with our natural constitution.<sup>5</sup> In Stoic philosophy, this

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<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), III.

<sup>5</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. Robert Drew Hicks (London, UK: William Heinemann, 2005), 2:195.

natural disposition is considered an instinct that they call *oikeiōsis*.<sup>6</sup> They reference infants who persist, despite pain, in attempting to stand on their legs and tortoises that relentlessly attempt to return to their feet when positioned on their back, despite a lack of pain or pleasure.<sup>7</sup> Thus, they conclude that infants and animals are disposed to act toward their “natural condition,” irrespective of pain and pleasure.<sup>8</sup> Pleasure and pain then become a “by-product” of a thriving or deteriorating state that results from actions suitable or unsuitable to the beings’ constitution.<sup>9</sup>

The claim that all animals, including humans, are disposed toward what is in accordance with their natural constitution implicitly implies that all beings also have an understanding of their natural constitution. For the Stoics, all animals are endowed with a “consciousness of their physical constitution” by nature.<sup>10</sup> As proof, they again use empirical evidence and reference “the fact that no animal is unskilled in the use of its body.”<sup>11</sup> However, they argue that an animal’s consciousness of their constitution only implies a sensational understanding of its constitution, not a rational understanding of their constitution as a whole.<sup>12</sup> The comparison to human consciousness of the soul best illuminates what they mean: humans are cognizant of their soul, yet ignorant of the soul’s “essence, place, quality, or source.”<sup>13</sup> Beyond an understanding of the constitution, the senses also provide animals with interoception. Together, the sensing of the physical state and constitution provides animals with a perception of what is favorable to their constitution.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:192.

<sup>7</sup> Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales*, trans. Richard Mott Gummere (London, UK: W. Heinemann, 1917-1925), 3:401.

<sup>8</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:401.

<sup>9</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:195.

<sup>10</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:399-401.

<sup>11</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:401.

<sup>12</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:403.

<sup>13</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:403.

<sup>14</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:409; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:193.

When comparing itself to the external world through its senses, the animal perceives the extent to which the external object is favorable to itself. Based on the animal's perception of the object as favorable or unfavorable, the "inborn desire for self-preservation" of its natural constitution will generate a natural impulse toward or away from the object depending on the perception.<sup>15</sup> It must be noted that animal impulses are developed without reason or deliberation and instead solely stem from *oikeiôsis*.<sup>16</sup> They reference animals that immediately upon birth fear death, and all that is harmful, as empirical evidence for the natural desire for self-preservation.<sup>17</sup> In their argument, they further claim that self-care and the "skill to do so" are necessarily endowed by nature as the lack thereof "would make [their] birth useless."<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, when considering that for the Stoics animals do not possess any reason, following the "direction of impulse" is living according to their natural constitution.<sup>19</sup> Thus, these impulses toward or away from objects, derived from *oikeiôsis*, allow animals to select and pursue actions that are favorable to their constitution and essential for "the maintenance of their existence."<sup>20</sup>

For the Stoics, there is for "each age" a different human constitution.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, humans are at each age "adapted to the constitution wherein they find themselves," i.e., *oikeiôsis* toward the age-specific natural constitution.<sup>22</sup> During infancy and childhood, humans are without reason and as such, are similar to animals acting based on non-rational impulses derived from *oikeiôsis*.<sup>23</sup> However, as humans evolve from infancy to adulthood, their constitution changes

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<sup>15</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:409; Anthony A. Long and David N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1:Stobaeus, 53Q.

<sup>16</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:409.

<sup>17</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:407-409.

<sup>18</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:411.

<sup>19</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:195.

<sup>20</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:195; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Stobaeus, 53Q; Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:411.

<sup>21</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:405.

<sup>22</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:405.

<sup>23</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:403-405.

from non-rational beings into rational beings.<sup>24</sup> They argue that the possession of reason allows for a more “perfect leadership” and impetus of action as “reason supervenes to shape impulse scientifically.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, the change to a rational constitution implies an *oikeiōsis* toward the selection of action favorable to nature “according to reason” instead of the non-rational animal’s *oikeiōsis* toward the selection of survival-based action.<sup>26</sup>

From *oikeiōsis*, the Stoics attempt to formulate an ethics framework that they consider to lead to a life of flourishing. They argue that *oikeiōsis* illustrates how “nature guides us” toward a “life [that is] in accordance with nature,” i.e. in accordance with the rational human nature as well as the nature of the universe.<sup>27</sup> Acting contrary to *oikeiōsis* and therein, contrary to nature, is unfavorable as it makes the agent “unhappy.”<sup>28</sup> They consider such adverse action a perversion of “a rational being” that is “due to the deceptiveness of external pursuits” and influence of society.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, they argue that *eudaimonia*—“translated as ‘happiness’ or ‘flourishing’ and occasionally as ‘well-being’”—can only be achieved by “living agreeably to nature ... which is the same as a virtuous life.”<sup>30</sup> Here, it is important to note that for the Stoics virtue is “perfected reason.”<sup>31</sup> And since the Stoics believe that *eudaimonia* is the “rational agent’s” telos, the virtuous life forms the core of Stoics ethics that selects action—and all other matters in life—favorable to nature according to “good [or perfected] reason.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:405.

<sup>25</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:195.

<sup>26</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:195-197; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Stobaeus, 61L.

<sup>27</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:195, 197.

<sup>28</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Stobaeus, 63B.

<sup>29</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:197.

<sup>30</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Stobaeus, 63A; Marion Durand, Simon Shogry, and Dirk Baltzly, "Stoicism," ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified Spring 2023, accessed April 10, 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/stoicism/>; Hursthouse and Pettigrove, "Virtue Ethics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:195.

<sup>31</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Seneca, 63D.

<sup>32</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Stobaeus, 63A; Durand, Shogry, and Baltzly, "Stoicism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:195-197.

## Stoic Epistemology & Action Theory

Before we can further explore Stoic ethics, we must first examine their epistemology and action theory as both provide essential insights into the human agency that their ethics relies on. They begin their inquiry of epistemology by considering “impressions” that they believe to be at the foundation of cognition.<sup>33</sup> In their inquiry, they define impressions as “a sort of stimulus received from the outside world” that can be received through “one or more sense-organs” or “the mind itself.”<sup>34</sup> They further distinguish impressions into “rational and irrational” impressions that are particular to rational and irrational animals respectively.<sup>35</sup> Rational animals receive an external stimulus similarly to irrational animals, yet their reason implies a possession of “conceptions and preconceptions” that allow them to make sense of the external stimulus by forming them into a “proposition.”<sup>36</sup> Therefore, “rational impressions express propositions” that irrational impressions do not.<sup>37</sup> However, these propositions are passively received from rational impressions and as such, are only initial interpretations that require “judgment” to be considered true.<sup>38</sup> For the Stoics, such a judgment of impressions is a rational act that is within “our power and voluntary.”<sup>39</sup> Moreover, they name such a judgment of impressions as true “assent.”<sup>40</sup>

An example might be an impression of a table that we perceive through our sight and touch. The rational impression of the table only provides the human with a belief that there is a

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<sup>33</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:159.

<sup>34</sup> Brad Inwood and Lloyd P. Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*, second ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), Cicero, *Academica*, 1.40-42; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:161.

<sup>35</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:161.

<sup>36</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Galen, 53V; Durand, Shogry, and Baltzly, "Stoicism," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:159.

<sup>37</sup> Durand, Shogry, and Baltzly, "Stoicism," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

<sup>38</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Cicero, 39C, Origen, 53A, Cicero, 62C; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:159.

<sup>39</sup> Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cicero, *Academica*, 1.40-42.

<sup>40</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:159.

table. However, through reason, we deliberate about whether we want to assent to the proposition of there being a table in front of us and therein, accept the proposition as true.

The Stoics further argue that by assenting to a reliable impression, the agent attains a grasping “that is itself guaranteed to be true.”<sup>41</sup> For them, an impression is “reliable” if it provides “a distinctive kind of clear” proposition that reveals the object involved in the impression.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, a reliable impression also needs to be discernible “all on its own” for it to be considered “graspable.”<sup>43</sup> As such, reliable and graspable impressions involve propositions that are “true and of such a kind that ... [they] ... could not turn out false” and therein, also serve as the criteria of truth.<sup>44</sup> Since both reliable and unreliable impressions are received, the agent must use reason to only assent to reliable and graspable impressions to attain a “grasping.”<sup>45</sup> Assenting to unreliable impressions implies “ignorance” of the truth that leads to opinions that are “weak and a state shared with what is false and not known,” e.g. sensory illusions.<sup>46</sup> Only assent to reliable and graspable impressions allows for grasping, i.e., true “knowledge,” that can “not be shaken by argument.”<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the Stoics claim that only a “solid and stable assent” to reliable and graspable impressions, and a withholding of assent from unreliable impressions, is characteristic of virtue as it allows for knowledge of the truth.<sup>48</sup>

Thus far, we have only considered epistemic impressions that allow for knowledge to be acquired. However, the Stoics argue that there also exist action inducing impressions that can

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<sup>41</sup> Durand, Shogry, and Baltzly, "Stoicism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

<sup>42</sup> Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cicero, *Academica*, 1.40-42; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Cicero, 40B.

<sup>43</sup> Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cicero, *Academica*, 1.40-42.

<sup>44</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Sextus Empiricus, 41C; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:155.

<sup>45</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Plutarch, 41E; Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cicero, *Academica*, 1.40-42.

<sup>46</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Plutarch, 41E; Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cicero, *Academica*, 1.40-42.

<sup>47</sup> Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cicero, *Academica*, 1.40-42; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:157.

<sup>48</sup> Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cicero, *Academica*, 1.40-42; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Sextus Empiricus, 41C.

induce action by creating an impulse toward or away from the object of an impression.<sup>49</sup> I have partly discussed these impressions earlier when I explained how the Stoics believe perceptions of favorable objects can generate impulses toward or away from objects and thereby, motivate action.<sup>50</sup> While I called these impressions perceptions for simplicity earlier, they should now also be considered as action inducing impressions.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, by reexamining how action inducing impressions combined with *oikeiôsis* generate impulses, I can complete the discussion of action inducing impressions and therein, illustrate how the Stoics believe there to be human agency over impulses and action.<sup>52</sup>

As discussed earlier, the Stoics argue that an action inducing impression allows all animals to perceive an object as favorable.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, such an action inducing impression is “capable of directly impelling a proper function” by “[activating an] impulse” that motivates a particular action.<sup>54</sup> For non-rational animals, the lack of reason disallows the possibility of assent to impressions.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, non-rational animals develop impulses from impressions purely on the basis of their non-rational and survival-based *oikeiôsis*.<sup>56</sup> However, rational animals, including humans, have reason that allows them to assent to or withhold assent from action inducing impressions in the same manner as they can do with epistemic impressions.<sup>57</sup> Cicero provides a more in-depth explanation of such assent to action inducing impressions by referencing the Stoic Chrysippus: “[Chrysippus] resorts to his cylinder and cone: these cannot

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<sup>49</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Stobaeus, 53Q; Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cicero, *Academica*, 2.24-26.

<sup>50</sup> See chapter on Stoic *Oikeiôsis*; Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cicero, *Academica*, 2.24-26.

<sup>51</sup> See chapter on Stoic *Oikeiôsis*.

<sup>52</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Cicero, 62C; Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cicero, *Academica*, 2.24-26.

<sup>53</sup> See chapter on Stoic *Oikeiôsis*.

<sup>54</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Stobaeus, 53Q.

<sup>55</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Origen, 53A.

<sup>56</sup> See chapter on Stoic *Oikeiôsis*.

<sup>57</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Origen, 53A; Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cicero, *Academica*, 2.24-26.

begin to move without a push; but once that has happened, he holds that it is thereafter through their own nature that the cylinder rolls and the cone spins. ‘Hence’, he says, ‘just as the person who pushed the cylinder gave it its beginning of motion but not its capacity for rolling, likewise, although the impression encountered will print and, as it were, emblazon its appearance on the mind, assent will be in our power.’<sup>58</sup> Beyond the rational agency over assent, rational animals also have *oikeiōsis* toward selecting action favorable to nature according to perfected reason.<sup>59</sup> Thus, rational animals have the agency, and are inclined by *oikeiōsis* and therein, nature, to use reason to assent to, or withhold assent from, an action inducing impression of a favorable or unfavorable action respectively and therein, form an “impulse scientifically” toward action that is favorable to nature.<sup>60</sup> And as mentioned above, the impulse created by the agent’s assent will result in a corresponding action.<sup>61</sup>

Here, it must be noted that the agent can obtain a false action inducing impression of an action as favorable or unfavorable to nature through in clarity, similar to unreliable epistemic impressions, or through a mistake in reasoning.<sup>62</sup> Unclear action inducing impressions, i.e., impressions that can “cannot be distinguished from what is false,” can lead to actions that are unfavorable to nature if the agent assents to them.<sup>63</sup> Mistaken reasoning can lead the agent to obtain a subjective impression of a favorable action that is objectively false, i.e., the action is unfavorable to nature.<sup>64</sup> They argue that such mistaken reasoning can be either the result of a bad moral character, due to the “influence of society,” or the result of an external “deceptiveness”

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<sup>58</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Cicero, 62C.

<sup>59</sup> See chapter on Stoic *Oikeiōsis*; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Sextus Empiricus, 60G, Stobaeus, 61L.

<sup>60</sup> See chapter on Stoic *Oikeiōsis*; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Origen, 53A; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:195, 197.

<sup>61</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Stobaeus, 53Q.

<sup>62</sup> Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cicero, *Academica*, 2.24-26; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Epictetus, 60F.

<sup>63</sup> Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cicero, *Academica*, 2.24-26.

<sup>64</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:197; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Galen, 65M.

that deceives the agent about what is favorable and unfavorable to nature.<sup>65</sup> Consequently, the virtuous agent must be careful to use “good reason” to only assent to clear, and withhold assent from unclear, action inducing impressions of actions favorable to nature.<sup>66</sup>

From the analysis of both action inducing and epistemic impressions, the Stoics conclude that human agency lies not in the passively received impressions but instead in the capability to assent to, or withhold assent from, such impressions.<sup>67</sup> As such, all knowledge and action is the result of the agent’s assent to a particular epistemic or action inducing impression. Moreover, the Stoics argue that the voluntary nature of assent allows for the attribution of blame and praise for all resultant knowledge, or lack thereof, and action, virtuous or vicious.<sup>68</sup> Non-rational animals do not have the capacity for assent given their lack of reason and as such, can not be blamed or praised for their ignorance and action. Ultimately, the Stoic analysis of epistemology and action theory, i.e. the motivation for action, yields an understanding of a complete human agency over assent that allows the Stoics to develop a radical ethics framework where the agent is completely responsible for their actions and resultant mental well-being.<sup>69</sup>

With the establishment of the Stoic notion of human agency over assent, we can focus our attention on actions and action inducing impressions as they are at the center of Stoic ethics. Assent to a clear action inducing impression of a good or bad action leads to an impulse toward virtuous or vicious action similar to how assent to a reliable and unreliable epistemic impression

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<sup>65</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:197.

<sup>66</sup> Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cicero, *Academica*, 2.24-26; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Epictetus, 60F; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:195, 197.

<sup>67</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Cicero, 39C, Origen, 53A, Cicero, 62C; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:159.

<sup>68</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Alexander, 61M, Cicero, 62C; Durand, Shogry, and Baltzly, "Stoicism," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy; Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cicero, *Academica*, 1.40-42.

<sup>69</sup> Durand, Shogry, and Baltzly, "Stoicism," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

leads to knowledge or ignorance.<sup>70</sup> Thus, we must now analyze how action inducing impressions and resultant actions should be valued to determine what impressions should be assented to.

### **Stoic Value Theory**

The starting point for the Stoic valuation of actions, and all matters in life, is their telos which posits *eudaimonia* at the center of human life.<sup>71</sup> They believe that “what is natural,” for the rational human agent and the universe, must necessarily also be favorable and therefore argue that *eudaimonia* can only be attained by living in accordance with human and universal nature.<sup>72</sup> Consequently, they are ethical naturalists who value all goods based on whether they are according to nature.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, I illustrated earlier how the Stoics believe that, for humans, living in accordance with nature is living according to virtue, i.e., selecting goods favorable to nature according to perfected reason.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the Stoics build their value framework by using reason to determine what goods are according to nature and therein, of value, i.e., what attribution of value to objects, states, and actions is in accordance with nature.<sup>75</sup>

Although Stoic naturalism implies that any valued good is favorable to nature, only goods with favorable moral value pertain to the agent’s *eudaimonia*. Such a correlation between moral value and well-being can be seen when a morally valued good is lost or gained. For example, if an agent morally values health, then sickness or any other impairment to health would be valued morally negatively, and therein, have a negative impact on the agent’s perceived overall well-being. Conversely, the healing of a broken bone would be valued morally positively, and

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<sup>70</sup> Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cicero, *Academica*, 1.40-42, 2.24-26; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Epictetus, 60F.

<sup>71</sup> See chapter on Stoic *Oikeiōsis*.

<sup>72</sup> See chapter on Stoic *Oikeiōsis*; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:195, 197.

<sup>73</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Plutarch, 60A; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:211.

<sup>74</sup> See chapter on Stoic *Oikeiōsis* and Stoic Epistemology & Action Theory; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Sextus Empiricus, 60G.

<sup>75</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Sextus Empiricus, 60G, Stobaeus, 60J-M.

therein, have a positive impact on the agent's perceived overall well-being. In both cases, the attachment of moral value to bodily health subjects the agent's well-being to their body's health since the agent's well-being is per se the state of their morally valued goods, i.e., the state of goods that the agent considers of importance. Thus, the attribution, and therein, the attachment of moral value to any good will directly affect the agent's *eudaimonia*.

In light of the correlation between moral value and well-being, the Stoics claim that the morally valued "human good" should be within human agency, "consistent, firm, and unchangeable."<sup>76</sup> If the morally valued human good were outside human agency, as is the case with bodily health, then human *eudaimonia* would be at the mercy of external factors. However, such a lack of agency over *eudaimonia* can not be the mark of the moral human good.<sup>77</sup> They further argue that by assigning no moral value to external goods, the virtuous agent can separate their well-being from external factors and accept the misfortunes of life without complaint.<sup>78</sup> Only the unvirtuous and vicious agents assign moral value to external goods, such as bodily health, and therein, tie their well-being to external goods that are beyond their control.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, a moral value framework that includes uncontrollable external goods gives rise to "discomforts [from misfortune that] drive us wild" since they are beyond human agency.<sup>80</sup> Thus, the Stoics claim that morally valuing external goods is "foolish" and instead, the agent's moral character, i.e., the agent's virtuousness or viciousness, is the only human good of moral value.<sup>81</sup>

To argue their claim, the Stoics illustrate how the moral character fulfills all conditions necessary to be morally valued as the human good. However, before their defense can be

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<sup>76</sup> Homiak, "Moral Character," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy; Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:389; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Diogenes Laertius, 61A, Plutarch, 61B; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:197.

<sup>77</sup> Homiak, "Moral Character," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy; Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:389-391.

<sup>78</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:389, 393.

<sup>79</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:393, 395.

<sup>80</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:391-395.

<sup>81</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:391-395; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:197, 233; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Plutarch, 61B.

explained, the Stoic notion of virtue must be defined more granularly: virtue is “a certain character and power of the soul’s commanding-faculty” to assent to impressions with “rational consistency.”<sup>82</sup> As such, virtue is an “expertise” and “state of mind which tends to make the whole of life harmonious [with nature],” since the virtues are “inter-entailing.”<sup>83</sup> Moreover, the expertise and knowledge gained from virtue are further made complete by the Stoics’ belief that there exists “nothing intermediate” between virtue and vice, implying that there is no partial virtue or vice.<sup>84</sup> Thus, virtue is a supremely virtuous moral character that allows for the consistent selection of goods favorable to nature according to perfected reason in all matters of life.

With virtue defined more granularly, the Stoics move to advance their claim about the moral character being the only valued human good. They argue that the moral character exists abstractly and pertains to the virtuousness of the agent, i.e., the agent’s possession of virtues or vices.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, they also argue that the agent’s moral character only depends on the agent’s assent to impressions where repeated assent leads to a habit of consistent assenting and therein, to the development of virtues and vices.<sup>86</sup> As such, the moral character can not be affected by external influences since they can not affect the agent’s virtuousness.<sup>87</sup> An example of this can be seen in someone slandering your reputation. Despite a potential negative effect on your

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<sup>82</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Sextus Empiricus, 60G, Stobaeus, 60L, Diogenes Laertius, 61A, Plutarch, 61B, 383; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:197.

<sup>83</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:197; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Diogenes Laertius, 61A, Plutarch, 61B, 61F, Stobaeus, 61G, 383; Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:393; Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Stobaeus, *Anthology* 2, 5b8.

<sup>84</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Plutarch, 61T, 383; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:201, 231; Durand, Shogry, and Baltzly, "Stoicism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

<sup>85</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Plutarch, 61B.

<sup>86</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:197-201; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Cicero, 40N, Diogenes Laertius, 61A, 383.

<sup>87</sup> Durand, Shogry, and Baltzly, "Stoicism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

reputation, your moral character is unaffected since the slander does not impact your virtuousness, i.e., the slander does not alter your possession of virtue or vice.

To further understand the Stoic claim about the moral human good, we must consider how the consideration of moral character as the only morally valued human good also allows the Stoics to establish virtuousness as the single determining factor of well-being since well-being solely depends on the state of morally valued goods.<sup>88</sup> As such, virtue becomes “sufficient to ensure well-being” and vice sufficient for wretchedness.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, recalling the earlier Stoic claim where the agent is completely responsible for their knowledge and action, since the agent has unrestricted agency over assent to all impressions, allows us to understand how the moral character also lies completely within human agency.<sup>90</sup> Concretely, the moral character directly results from the agent’s voluntary assent to impressions of goods favorable or unfavorable to nature.<sup>91</sup> Thus, the Stoic’s consideration of the moral character as the only morally valued human good allows them to place well-being completely within human agency, making the agent “entirely” responsible for their well-being.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, a virtuous moral character lies completely within human agency, and therein, is free from external influences and “misfortunes,” and leads to a “rational consistency” in the selection of goods favorable to nature and therein, *eudaimonia*.<sup>93</sup>

From the establishment of moral character as the only morally valued human good and therein, the sole determinant of well-being, the Stoics move to explore the moral notions of good

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<sup>88</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Plutarch, 61U; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:197; Homiak, "Moral Character," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

<sup>89</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:233; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Plutarch, 61U.

<sup>90</sup> See chapter on Stoic Epistemology & Action Theory; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Plutarch, 61B, Alexander, 61M.

<sup>91</sup> See chapter on Stoic Epistemology & Action Theory.

<sup>92</sup> See chapter on Stoic Epistemology & Action Theory; Durand, Shogry, and Baltzly, "Stoicism," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Plutarch, 61U, Epictetus, 65U.

<sup>93</sup> Homiak, "Moral Character," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Diogenes Laertius, 61A, Plutarch, 61B, 383.

and bad. They argue that similar to how the earlier notions of favorable and unfavorable objects, states, and actions are beneficial or harmful to nature, good and bad objects, states, and actions benefit or harm the agent's moral character.<sup>94</sup> As such, the moral notions of good and bad are subspecies that only pertain to the morally valued good, i.e., the moral character, while the general notions of favorable and unfavorable pertain to all of nature.<sup>95</sup> Thus, an object, state, or action is perceived as good, if it is favorable to the moral character, and bad, if it is perceived as unfavorable to the moral character.<sup>96</sup>

Beyond good or bad moral value, the Stoics believe that objects, states, and actions can also have "neutral" value with respect to moral character, and therein neutral moral value.<sup>97</sup> To the category of goods with neutral moral value, they assign "life, health, pleasure, beauty, strength, wealth, fair fame and noble birth, and their opposites, death, disease, pain, ugliness, weakness, poverty, ignominy, low birth, and the like."<sup>98</sup> Moreover, their neutral moral value implies that they have no effect on moral character and as such, also have no effect on well-being.<sup>99</sup> An example of this can be seen in bodily health which the Stoics consider to be a neutral good. As a neutral good, bodily harm or health does not affect the moral character, i.e., the virtuousness remains unchanged, and therein, allows well-being to remain unaffected. Thus, the Stoics consider external goods, including bodily health, and all goods beyond the moral character as having neutral moral value and therein, of no benefit or harm to the agent's well-being, i.e., the agent's moral character. Nonetheless, the Stoics consider some neutral goods to still hold positive or negative value as they are favorable or unfavorable to human and

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<sup>94</sup> See chapter on Stoic *Oikeiōsis* and Stoic Epistemology & Action Theory; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Sextus Empiricus, 60G; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:201-203, 205-207, 209.

<sup>95</sup> See chapter on Stoic *Oikeiōsis* and Stoic Epistemology & Action Theory.

<sup>96</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Sextus Empiricus, 60G; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:201-203, 205-207, 209.

<sup>97</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:209.

<sup>98</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:209.

<sup>99</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:209.

universal nature.<sup>100</sup> To illustrate this, they divide neutral goods into “preferred, ... rejected, ... indifferent” neutral goods.<sup>101</sup> Both preferred and rejected neutral goods pertain to bodily, social, and even intellectual “qualities” of nature and are either of positive or negative value to nature, i.e., the qualities are beneficial or harmful to nature.<sup>102</sup> The neutral goods of positive value “are taken by preference” while those of negative value “are rejected.”<sup>103</sup> Examples of these can be seen in bodily “health” as a preferred neutral good and “disease” as a rejected neutral good.<sup>104</sup> Thus, the Stoics consider preferred neutral goods as favorable to nature and rejected neutral goods as unfavorable to nature.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, they consider indifferent neutral goods as inconsequential, i.e., they are neither favorable nor unfavorable, since they lack value for the agent’s moral character and nature.<sup>106</sup> Consequently, the Stoics consider neutral goods to be of value to nature, despite lacking moral value that could affect the agent’s well-being.

It is important to note that the analysis of neutral goods also illustrates how the Stoics consider “virtue and vice alone” to be “good and bad respectively,” i.e., only virtue and vice have moral value.<sup>107</sup> This conclusion logically follows from the consideration of all goods beyond moral character as neutral goods with neutral moral value. Moreover, the consideration of virtue and vice as the only elements of morality implies that they are also the sole determinants of morality. Thus, virtue or perfected reason becomes the Stoic’s objective measure of morality in all matters of life.

With the establishment of virtue as the objective measure of reason and given that ethics is per se the investigation of what actions are appropriate or inappropriate, we need to focus our

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<sup>100</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:209-211.

<sup>101</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:209-211.

<sup>102</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:211-213.

<sup>103</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:211.

<sup>104</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:211-213.

<sup>105</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:209-213.

<sup>106</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:211.

<sup>107</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 3:393; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Alexander, 61N.

analysis of value more closely on actions to further understand Stoic ethics.<sup>108</sup> To accomplish this, the Stoics define actions more granularly by classifying them into three different act-types: “befitting,” “unbefitting,” and neutral.<sup>109</sup> Befitting act-types they define as act-types “which reason prevails with us to do” while unbefitting act-types they define as “acts that reason deprecates.”<sup>110</sup> And since good reason, i.e. virtue, directs us to select or omit action that is favorable or unfavorable to nature, corresponding actions from befitting and unbefitting act-types are per se favorable and unfavorable to nature respectively.<sup>111</sup> Beyond befitting and unbefitting act-types, the Stoics also account for neutral act-types that “reason neither urges us to do nor forbids.”<sup>112</sup> As such, the corresponding actions from neutral act-types are per se neither favorable nor unfavorable to nature since good reason, i.e., virtue, would otherwise direct us to select or omit these actions.<sup>113</sup> Consequently, a corresponding action from a neutral act-type can only gain its value through an analysis of the circumstances involved in the situation.<sup>114</sup> Depending on whether the action is according to, neutral to, or contrary to nature as a result of the circumstances, the action becomes favorable, indifferent, or unfavorable to nature respectively.<sup>115</sup>

It is important to note here that all three act-types lack inherent moral or non-moral value as they are only concepts, similar to how an impression is a concept, and as such, exist abstractly. Explained differently, act-types are not an instance of an action or a state that can be pursued. Consequently, the corresponding actions from act-types must be considered for the valuation of actions.

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<sup>108</sup> "What is ethics?," Canada.ca, last modified July 23, 2015, accessed May 12, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/values-ethics/code/what-is-ethics.html>.

<sup>109</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:213-215.

<sup>110</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:213-215.

<sup>111</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:213-215.

<sup>112</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:215.

<sup>113</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:215.

<sup>114</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:215.

<sup>115</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:213-215.

Taking into account the more refined understanding of different act-types and reconsidering how only actions favorable or unfavorable to the moral character have moral value, we can move to consider what kinds of actions have moral value. Through reason, we find that only the selection of action, i.e. the assent or withholding of assent, is directly favorable or unfavorable to the moral character. Evidence for this can be found in the earlier definitions of virtue and character that are per se the manner in which action is selected, i.e., character implies a selection of action according to virtue or vice. Consequently, only actions that lead to the development of virtue or vice are favorable or unfavorable actions pertaining the moral character. Explicitly, if the agent assents to, or withholds assent from, an action inducing impression of an action favorable, or unfavorable, to nature according to “good reason,” then the action of assenting, or withholding of assent, pertains to the moral character and is considered virtuous.<sup>116</sup> However, the action inducing impression is only perceived and as such, can only be reasonably assented to if it is clear, i.e., “it must be [distinguishable] from what is false.”<sup>117</sup> Thus, only if good reason leads the agent to believe that the action inducing impression is clear, can the agent rationally assent.<sup>118</sup> Otherwise, the rational agent withholds assent from the impression.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, the Stoics argue that the rational agent is inclined by nature, i.e. from *oikeiôsis*, to use reason to assent to or withhold assent from clear action inducing impressions of actions favorable or unfavorable to nature.<sup>120</sup> Consequently, assenting to or withholding assent from clear action inducing impressions of actions favorable or unfavorable to nature is acting according to or contrary to reason and therein, virtuous and vicious. As a virtuous action, it is also good, i.e. the

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<sup>116</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:195-197.

<sup>117</sup> See chapter on Stoic *Oikeiôsis* and Stoic Epistemology & Action Theory; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Galen, 65M; Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cicero, *Academica*, 2.24-26.

<sup>118</sup> See chapter on Stoic *Oikeiôsis* and Stoic Epistemology & Action Theory; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Epictetus, 60F; Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cicero, *Academica*, 2.24-26.

<sup>119</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Epictetus, 60F

<sup>120</sup> See chapter on Stoic *Oikeiôsis* and Stoic Epistemology & Action Theory.

action is favorable to the agent's moral character, and will lead to the development of a habit of assenting according to perfected reason in the selection of "what is natural," i.e., virtue, and therein, a virtuous moral character.<sup>121</sup> Conversely, if the agent assents or withholds assent contrary to reason, then the action of assenting or withholding of assent is unfavorable and therein, vicious. Moreover, assenting contrary to reason will lead to the development of vice and therein, a vicious moral character. Thus, the selection of action through assent or withholding of assent is the only action that pertains to moral character and results in the development of virtues or vices. Moreover, the action of assenting or withholding of assent will also result in well-being or wretchedness depending on the resultant moral character.<sup>122</sup>

It is important to note that despite the distinction between moral and non-moral value of actions, the action of assenting to clear action inducing impressions of favorable action is always virtuous while the action of assenting to unfavorable actions is always vicious. The moral value, or lack thereof, of the action solely determines if the action is favorable or unfavorable to nature. Specifically, only actions corresponding to befitting act-types and neutral act-types can lead to actions favorable to nature as they are in genus according to or neutral to nature.<sup>123</sup> Unbefitting act-types are in genus contrary to nature and therein, corresponding actions are per se unfavorable to nature, making the selection of these actions vicious.<sup>124</sup> Nonetheless, action favorable or unfavorable to nature solely affects whether the selection of a particular action can be virtuous or vicious while the particular action resulting from assent only affects nature and does not affect the agent's moral character, and therein, is irrelevant to well-being. It follows that all actions resulting from assent are neutral actions with neutral moral value. Thus, only the

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<sup>121</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Cicero, 40N, Sextus Empiricus, 60G; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:195-197, 201-203.

<sup>122</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:233.

<sup>123</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:211.

<sup>124</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:211.

selection of any favorable or unfavorable action impacts the moral character and therein, the agent's well-being, while the resultant action from assent only affects nature itself, that is nature excluding the moral character of the agent.

An example of a proper selection of an action from a befitting act-type is the action of caring for a fellow citizen that corresponds to the befitting act-type of human sociality.<sup>125</sup> Specifically, the Stoics argue that our reason allows us to discern an impression of sameness of other humans that, coupled with our inborn desire for "self-preservation" that we derive from *oikeiosis*, leads to an action inducing impression of the action, to care for a fellow citizen, as favorable to nature, i.e., an impression of the action as in accordance with nature.<sup>126</sup> Thus, an action inducing impression of caring for a fellow citizen should be assented to by the rational agent as it is an action favorable to nature. Moreover, the selection of the action itself is virtuous, i.e., assent to the action inducing impression of caring for a fellow citizen is favorable to the agent's moral character, yet the action itself is without moral value. Explained differently, caring for a fellow citizen is neither favorable nor unfavorable to the moral character as it does not develop virtue or vice. Only the selection of the action favorable to nature is virtuous, and therein, favorable to moral character. Ultimately, caring for a fellow citizen is favorable to nature yet the outcome of the action does not affect the agent's well-being.

In essence, the Stoics thus create a value framework where all goods are valued based on their accordance with human and universal nature. And given that humans are rational beings, accordance with nature is equivalent to accordance with virtue, i.e., consistent selection of goods favorable to nature according to reason. Consequently, virtue is the objective measure of morality. Moreover, moral value is only attached to the moral character, i.e., the degree to which

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<sup>125</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Hierocles, 57D, Stobaeus, 61H.

<sup>126</sup> See chapter on Stoic *Oikeiôsis*; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Hierocles, 57D, 57G.

the agent can rationally and consistently select or omit actions favorable or unfavorable to nature. All other goods favorable or unfavorable to nature should be pursued or avoided, yet without moral value attachment as they do not affect the moral character. Consequently, all goods beyond the moral character do not pertain to well-being and as such, do not affect it. It follows that well-being is completely free from external influences and within human agency. Ultimately, a proper understanding of value allows for the rational pursuit of, and adequate moral value attachment to, goods according to nature and therein, leads to *eudaimonia*.

### **Treatise of Stoic Value Theory & Corresponding Understanding of Emotions**

How a proper understanding of value allows for a life of *eudaimonia* can be particularly seen in emotions. For the Stoics, emotions are contractions or expansions of the soul, i.e., emotional depressions or elations, that stem from rational assent to the impression of morally valued goods being positively or negatively affected.<sup>127</sup> Thus, a virtuous agent with a proper value framework, i.e., the agent only values their moral character, will only assent to emotions that pertain to morally valued goods and therein, pursue action favorable to nature.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, only valuing the moral character will lead a virtuous agent to withhold assent from emotions about affected neutral goods, i.e., any good beyond moral character, and therein, avoid unnecessary “disorder,” i.e., emotional depressions or elations about non-moral goods.<sup>129</sup> However, to continue the investigation of Stoic emotions, we must define emotions more granularly and specify technical terms to avoid ambiguity.<sup>130</sup> It must be noted that in my

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<sup>127</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Andronicus, 65B; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:217, 221.

<sup>128</sup> See chapter on Stoic Value Theory.

<sup>129</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 243, 361, 367-369; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:221.

<sup>130</sup> Sarah Catherine Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine: A Stoic-Platonic Synthesis* (n.p.: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 57.

assignment of technical terms, I make use of the technical vocabulary from Doctor Sarah Byers' *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine: A Stoic-Platonic Synthesis*.<sup>131</sup>

To define emotions more granularly, we begin by considering the neutral and general notion of emotion that Doctor Byers simply terms "emotion."<sup>132</sup> Emotions can be divided into two categories: "present" and "expected" emotions.<sup>133</sup> As such, emotions can stem from an impression of a present or expected benefit or harm to morally valued goods.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, among emotions, the Stoics distinguish between "passions" and "affections" based on their accordance with nature.<sup>135</sup> Emotions stemming from "false propositions," i.e. emotions resulting from assent to impressions of neutral goods being affected, Doctor Byers terms "passions."<sup>136</sup> As such, these emotions are contrary to reason and therein, vicious, as they wrongly consider neutral goods to have moral value.<sup>137</sup> Moreover, these passions will lead to the experience of unnecessary and disturbing "disorders," i.e., unnecessary emotional depressions or elations, which can be best understood by considering its four species: distress, fear, craving, and pleasure or "irrational elation at the accruing of what seems to be choiceworthy."<sup>138</sup> Emotions stemming from "true propositions," i.e., emotions resulting from assent to impressions of the moral character being affected, Doctor Byers terms "affections."<sup>139</sup> As such, affections are according to reason and therein, virtuous, as they correctly consider moral character to have moral value.<sup>140</sup>

Furthermore, affections allow the rational agent to pursue good emotion as can be seen in its

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<sup>131</sup> Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine: a Stoic-Platonic Synthesis*.

<sup>132</sup> Byers, *Perception, Sensibility*, 57.

<sup>133</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Andronicus, 65B.

<sup>134</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Andronicus, 65B.

<sup>135</sup> Byers, *Perception, Sensibility*, 57; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:217, 221; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 339.

<sup>136</sup> Byers, *Perception, Sensibility*, 57; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 339.

<sup>137</sup> See chapter on Stoic Value Theory; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 233; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Scobaeus, 65A.

<sup>138</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 339; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Andronicus, 65B; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:219; See chapter on Stoic Value Theory.

<sup>139</sup> Byers, *Perception, Sensibility*, 57; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 339.

<sup>140</sup> See chapter on Stoic Value Theory; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Stobaeus, 65A.

three species: joy, caution, and wishing, i.e., “the counterpart of ... craving.”<sup>141</sup> Ultimately, the rational agent will solely pursue affections and avoid passions as only such action is favorable to nature.<sup>142</sup> Such reasoning follows from *oikeiôsis* that propels us to pursue what is favorable to nature according to reason.<sup>143</sup> And since reason indicates that the only morally valued human good is moral character, only assent to emotions pertaining to moral character, i.e., affections, and withholding of assent to emotions pertaining to neutral goods, i.e., passions, is favorable to nature. However, when considering humans around us, we find that many are experiencing passions. As such, we must explore what causes their failure to select affections and refrain from passions.

However, before we can explore what causes failure to select emotions according to reason, we must consider the agency involved. Although implicitly implied, we must now explicitly note that the selection of emotions lies completely within human agency since they result from voluntary acts of assent.<sup>144</sup> As human beings, we find ourselves constantly confronted with a variety of impressions of goods being affected irrespective of our environment. Pure empirical analysis of nature suffices to illustrate how we are subject to these. Moreover, the Stoics believe that there is an initial emotional reaction, such as a frenzy, to a situation that can not be controlled and is “devoid of reason.”<sup>145</sup> However, after the initial reaction passes, it is within the agency of the individual to select how to emotionally respond afterward.<sup>146</sup> Moreover, the Stoics claim that the agent has immediate agency over assent following the initial emotions, allowing the agent to completely refrain from passions per se.<sup>147</sup> Thus, there is for the Stoics in

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<sup>141</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:221.

<sup>142</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 367-369; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:221.

<sup>143</sup> See chapter on Stoic *Oikeiôsis* and Stoic Epistemology & Action Theory.

<sup>144</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 403.

<sup>145</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 239, 383.

<sup>146</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 315, 415.

<sup>147</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 305.

each situation an appropriate emotional response that the wise individual would follow.<sup>148</sup>

Concretely, each event affecting the agent's moral character should either cause an affection or passion depending on the extent to which the situation affects the agent's moral character and thus, the agent's well-being that is tied to the state of the agent's moral character.<sup>149</sup> Anything not affecting the agent's moral character falls within the category of neutral goods with neutral moral value about which the agent should not have any emotions. An example of this might be a friend frightening the agent when jumping out of a hiding spot to scare the agent. Although the agent is initially scared, it would be unwise for the agent to continue feeling scared as there is no threat to your safety. Such a prolonged fear would produce undue stress that serves to the detriment of the agent's well-being. As outlined in their *oikeiôsis*, humans should seek out, and also possess a natural instinct toward, what is favorable to nature according to reason.<sup>150</sup> Therefore, the experienced emotion is a direct result of voluntary action contrary to or according to nature.<sup>151</sup>

Having established human agency over emotion, we can return to the inquiry of what causes failure within the agent to select appropriate emotions and effectively eliminate the lack of agency as the cause for the misguided selection of emotions. Instead, the Stoics consider action contrary to nature to be the result of society since nature would otherwise guide us toward affection and away from passions.<sup>152</sup> Specifically, they argue that an inappropriate value framework is the result of society that has led to "deceptions" about moral value.<sup>153</sup> Moreover, they argue that moral character is within human agency and determines what the agent will value. Thus, the selection of passions is the result of misconceptions about moral value. Most

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<sup>148</sup> Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Stobaeus, *Anthology* 2, 5b8.

<sup>149</sup> Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Stobaeus, *Anthology* 2, 5b8; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 318, 321; Byers, *Perception, Sensibility*, 58.

<sup>150</sup> See chapter on Stoic *Oikeiôsis* and Stoic Epistemology & Action Theory.

<sup>151</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Epictetus, 65U.

<sup>152</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 226, 227, 233.

<sup>153</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 227.

commonly, it includes falsely morally valuing the preferred neutral goods where preference, i.e. favorable non-moral value to nature, is mistaken for moral value. This can be seen in the common notion of bodily health being a moral good. However, the only morally valued human good is moral character.<sup>154</sup> Thus, the Stoics propose a radical devaluation of anything beyond the moral character and therein, detachment from these goods.<sup>155</sup>

However, such a radical detachment appears difficult and insensible as illustrated by the frequent failure of humans to do so. Moreover, to argue how their value theory is valued, I will illustrate their value theory and corresponding understanding of emotions in the example of love and heartbreak. Heartbreak often causes suffering, i.e. grief, that stems from assent to the impressions of having lost something or somebody of moral value. However, the assent to the impression of a morally valued good being impacted is irrational, and therein, the experienced grief is a passion.<sup>156</sup> The reason for this is that we can discern through reason that these past relationships are irrelevant to our moral character and therein, of no value to our well-being. Thus, the impression of our well-being being impacted is contrary to reason, and therein, unfavorable to nature. Nonetheless, these impressions arise from our social nature. Specifically, our soul only appears to focus on the good parts of a past relationship and disregard all problems in an attempt to pull the agent back to the other person and therein, prevent the agent from detaching.<sup>157</sup> This aligns with our social nature that drives us to emotionally attach and to stay attached. However, through reason, we can determine that these past attachments are no longer beneficial to us and therefore, our social tendency with respect to the other person is misaligned similar to how the senses can provide a sensory illusion.

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<sup>154</sup> See chapter on Stoic Value Theory.

<sup>155</sup> Byers, *Perception, Sensibility*, 60.

<sup>156</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 411.

<sup>157</sup> See Stoic Value Theory; Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Hierocles, 57D, 57G, Stobaeus, 61H.

Ultimately though, the Stoics consider rational love, i.e., love “free from disquietude, from longing, from anxiety, [and] from sighing,” to be a preferred neutral good as it is favorable to nature but lacks moral value as it does not produce virtue nor vice.<sup>158</sup> However, I can not fathom how love can be of no moral value given that at the most fundamental level, we need another to reproduce. Nature makes us social beings so how can we not care about them if we are inherently, i.e. by *oikeiôsis*, inclined to care for others? Thus, I believe that the Stoic argument of preferred neutral goods lacking moral value breaks down. Similar disapproval for this can be found in Augustine who “disagrees with the Stoics that moral goods are the only goods, arguing instead that ontological goodness is a real kind of good, and that nonmoral goods such as friends and family, freedom from pain, and health are necessary for complete happiness.”<sup>159</sup> Moreover, Augustin even claims that “he does not even think the Stoics “really” believe this, but that they are engaged in a verbal quibble, given that they classify the preferred indifferent things as valuable.”<sup>160</sup> Thus, it follows that the Stoic value theory of only valuing the moral character is incredibly difficult to implement and also simply incoherent.

Further evidence for the Stoic value theory being flawed I find within initial emotional reactions that we have by nature. The earlier example of a friend jumping-scaring the agent illustrates how the agent will experience resultant fear of bodily harm. Moreover, fear in the Stoic framework is a passion and as such, implies that its underlying good, i.e. bodily health, lacks moral value. Consequently, assent to fear after the initial emotional reaction has passed would be a passion since valuing bodily health as a moral good is irrational. Moreover, the Stoic claim is that the valuation of bodily health as a moral good is due to the influences of society. Such a claim, however, I believe to be nonsense. Instead, I consider the natural existence of

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<sup>158</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 411.

<sup>159</sup> Byers, *Perception, Sensibility*, 60.

<sup>160</sup> Byers, *Perception, Sensibility*, 69.

initial emotions as an inherent indication of the underlying goods' moral value. I argue that nature's governance according to reason, combined with the natural existence of initial emotions, indicates that the underlying goods of initial emotions have intrinsic value since lack of value would render the existence of initial emotional reactions obsolete and as such, contrary to reason.<sup>161</sup> Consequently, initial emotions are an indication of what nature values. Moreover, it follows that moral character is not the only morally valued good.

Therefore, we can conclude that the Stoic value theory is flawed. In particular, the Stoics commit the logical fallacy of forgetting human complex nature, i.e., irrational and rational nature, in their value theory as they only consider the rational part of human nature. As such, nature implies a valuation of both the rational and irrational nature, not just the rational, i.e., the moral character, as humans require the well-being of both the rational and irrational part of their nature for *eudaimonia*. Consequently, the valuation of only the moral character and devaluing everything else is flawed, as humans should value both the irrational and rational nature.

Our irrational and rational nature further implies that we are imperfect in our actions as the consistent selection of action according to reason requires perfect rationality. Perfect rationality is reserved for the divine and as such, perfect rationality would imply that we are divine but we are merely mortal humans.<sup>162</sup> Thus, the wise man that the Stoics propose does not exist as a human as such perfect rationality is not humanly attainable.<sup>163</sup> We can see the failure of humans to be perfectly rational simply by observing the suffering that all humans experience. The Stoics partly concede the difficulty of attaining this wise state as well.<sup>164</sup> It follows that their framework can only be an indication of what we should strive toward, i.e., we should strive

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<sup>161</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:195-197.

<sup>162</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:197.

<sup>163</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent*, 2:227.

<sup>164</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic*, 1:Alexander, 61N.

toward virtue. Moreover, *oikeiôsis* inherently disposes us toward this state so it only appears natural and logical to strive toward this state. However, such striving must be done with consideration of human imperfection as otherwise the attempt to be perfectly rational will lead to self-destruction as perfection is impossible in light of human nature. Ultimately, humans do not possess perfect reason, and therein, can not and should not, because of their complex human nature, solely morally value their moral character.

Beyond the failure to radically devalue everything and therein, to consistently only assent to things of moral value, I believe that there is also a restriction in human agency over emotions that stems from the complex nature, and therein, the corresponding imperfection. To illustrate how human agency over emotion is restricted, I will use the example of the death of a family member. Upon the family member's death, grief takes instant hold of the agent, i.e., grief is the initial emotion. Recalling how the Stoics believe that the agent has instant agency over assent to the emotions following the initial emotion and can even prepare themselves for all events of life through foresight to render their occurrence as weaker, i.e., the initial emotion will be weaker.<sup>165</sup> And since grief is a passion, i.e., other humans are neutral goods without moral value, the agent can wholly avoid the process of grieving over the death of a family member.<sup>166</sup>

However, I believe that such agency to avoid grief as a whole is simply impossible as illustrated by empirical evidence of all humans grieving. Instead, I argue that the initial emotion, here grief, lasts for a while as sometimes initial emotion can be particularly strong, no matter the foresight, and take control over the agent. Thus, the agent can only over time reflect and assess if an initial emotion, here grief about a family member's death, is an emotion favorable or unfavorable to their moral character. Moreover, the need for time to reflect before the agent can

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<sup>165</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 403.

<sup>166</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 305; Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Seneca, *On Peace of Mind*, 13.2-14.2.

assent implies a revision of the Stoic notion of agency over emotions. The Stoics partly concede this as they mention that despite the agent's immediate withholding of assent, the agent will still experience some residual effects regardless of the withholding of assent to passions.<sup>167</sup> Thus, human agency over emotions is limited to the extent that it requires time for deliberation under particularly challenging circumstances.

Ultimately, the initial emotions that persist without your assent, you can't bring under control by reason, and the lapses during which we fall prey to assenting to passions, because we fail to devalue the underlying goods, are the human condition. No matter how hard we try, we can never completely avoid all passions, as this unavoidable occurrence of passion is the human condition, passions make us human and remind us of our humanity. Thus, the Stoic notion of all emotions being "due to belief, due to an act of judgment, due to voluntary choice" must be rejected.<sup>168</sup>

### **Stoic Therapy**

Despite the aforementioned drawbacks, the Stoic doctrine still provides great value with respect to therapy. For the Stoics, therapy pertains to a bad mental state that entails "an intense belief, persistent and deeply rooted, which regards a thing that is not desirable as though it were eminently desirable."<sup>169</sup> Consequently, the Stoics believe that therapy is a correction of a disordered valued framework that can be achieved through philosophy, i.e., through reason.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 323-325.

<sup>168</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 415.

<sup>169</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 353.

<sup>170</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 231.

Concretely, they consider three different approaches to correct the disordered value framework of a rational agent: correcting the false value dichotomy of everything being good or bad, foresight about future events, and decatastrophizing bad goods.<sup>171</sup>

The correction of the false dichotomy of good and bad value is perhaps the most intuitive and valuable therapeutic approach. The therapeutic approach aims to remind the agent of neutral moral goods that tend to get forgotten, i.e., the agent tends to only value goods based on whether they are perceived as good or bad.<sup>172</sup> Moreover, failure to identify a good as a neutral good without moral value often stems from confusion of value to nature and value to well-being. However, such a valuation will lead to the attachment of moral value to neutral goods and therein, to passions that induce disturbing emotional depressions and elations.<sup>173</sup> The application of this approach can be best illuminated through an example: a rational agent may want to consider the value of human life, i.e. existence, and erroneously values it as morally good. With life morally valued, the agent perceives death as harmful to life. Moreover, human mortality allows for an impression of future harm to life and therein, the agent will assent to the impression of fear of death. However, the attribution of moral value to life is flawed as life does not pertain to moral character. Thus, the agent must be reminded that there are also neutral goods and that only the moral character is a morally valued good that pertains to well-being. By understanding how life is a preferred neutral good without moral value, death is of no moral value and therein, the agent will no longer assent to fear. Thus, the therapeutic approach allows the agent to understand that most goods are neither good nor bad, as they do not pertain to moral character; only the selection of action pertains to moral character.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 317.

<sup>172</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 395-397.

<sup>173</sup> See chapter on Treatise of Stoic Value Theory & Corresponding Understanding of Emotions.

<sup>174</sup> See chapter on Treatise of Stoic Value Theory & Corresponding Understanding of Emotions; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 317;

Beyond correcting the false dichotomy of moral value, the Stoics also propose that the rational agent can use foresight of future events to weaken the resultant initial emotion that will eventually ensue.<sup>175</sup> Concretely, the Stoics argue that by considering what future events you are exposed to, you can prepare yourself for them by rationalizing how they lack moral value and therein, do not affect your well-being. These future events can be classified as neutral goods as they are external and as such, do not affect your virtuousness, i.e., your moral character.

Finally, the Stoics also propose the notion of decatastrophizing all goods by reminding the agent how disordered emotional depression or elation is of “no possible advantage.”<sup>176</sup> Explained differently, this therapeutic approach simply aims to remind the rational agent that even if there is some perceived bad to the moral character, distress or other passions about it will not provide any benefit to their well-being, i.e., passions harm well-being. Thus, the therapeutic approach will allow the rational agent to regard all matters “in a calmer spirit” by valuing all goods with lesser intensity<sup>177</sup>

## Conclusion

The Stoics derive their entire philosophy from nature, i.e., they analyze nature for empirical support in all aspects of their philosophy, as they believe that nature will provide for *eudaimonia* somewhere else. Specifically, they begin their inquiry into human nature to determine what kind of being we are and find that humans are rational animals. An Animal, they argue, has an inherent knowledge of its constitution and sense perception that allows the animal to determine what is favorable or unfavorable to its constitution. Moreover, the animal has an instinct toward self-preservation, i.e. *oikeiōsis*, that induces the animal to pursue action favorable

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<sup>175</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 317, 403.

<sup>176</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 317, 397-399.

<sup>177</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 317.

for survival. As rational animals, we have in addition to the animal *oikeiōsis* also a rational *oikeiōsis* toward action according to reason.

From *oikeiōsis*, the Stoics move toward the exploration of action and knowledge that is pursued according to reason. They argue that the rational animal gains impressions of objects, states, or actions through the senses or from the intellect itself. Moreover, human rationality allows humans to make sense of these impressions based on concepts and form rational impressions, i.e., impressions that express propositions, in addition to non-rational ones. From these impressions, reason allows humans to determine if they are clear and reliable, i.e., the rational agent can determine if the impression is true or a deception. Moreover, rational animals have the capacity to make a rational judgment about impressions of underlying goods' benefit or harm to their nature, i.e. human agency to assent or withhold assent from impressions of goods favorable or unfavorable to nature. Assent to such impressions can either lead to knowledge or action.

Just all action is rationally assented to according to its value to nature, so is their value theory also grounded in nature. Thus, their value theory aligns with their entire philosophy that investigates all matter based on nature. With ethical naturalism at their base, the Stoics use their established understanding of human nature to determine what is natural for humans to value. They find that as distinct rational beings with *oikeiōsis* toward reason, it is natural to value all things based on virtue, i.e., rational consistency in the selection of action favorable to nature. As such, virtue is a moral character that allows for perfected reasoning in all matters in life. And given that virtue is the perfection of human reason, the Stoics establish virtue as the objective measure of morality.

In the introduction, I illustrated how our actions to improve our physical well-being are limited and as such, we really should only focus our attention on psychological well-being as we only have agency over psychological well-being. The Stoics identify this and decide to only value moral character, i.e., the virtuousness of the agent, to be the only human good of moral value. They argue that only moral good is completely within human agency, free from external influences, and the distinct natural good of humans. Consequently, all other goods are of no moral value and therein, do not pertain to well-being. Well-being is per se the state of morally valued goods, implying that goods of moral value can affect well-being.

For the Stoics, only actions pertaining to the development of virtue or vice affect the moral character. And since moral character exists abstractly and pertains to a habit of assenting in a particular manner, only assentor withholding of assent pertains to moral character. If the assent is to a clear impression of a good favorable to nature, then the action of assent is according to good reason or virtue. Conversely, if the assent is to a clear impression of a good unfavorable to nature, then the action of assent is according to bad reason or vice. The repetition of virtuous and vicious actions leads to the development of habit and therein, the development of a virtuous or vicious character.

All actions beyond the action of selecting action are without moral value and as such, are classified as neutral actions. Preferred neutral goods are favorable to nature and should be pursued, while rejected neutral goods are unfavorable to nature and should be avoided. It is important to note that these goods are only pursued because they have value to nature, yet their lack of moral value implies that the goods do not affect the agent's well-being. Beyond goods with value to nature or moral character, the Stoics also argue for the existence of indifferent neutral goods that are inconsequential and therein, lack any value.

Given that only moral action affects well-being, the Stoics further argue that only assent to impressions of morally valued affected goods can lead to good emotions that they define as emotional depressions or elations. If these emotional depressions or elations are the result of assent to the impression of a morally valued good being affected, then the Stoics call them affections. Conversely, if these emotions are the result of assent to the impression of a nonmoral good being affected, then they call them passions. Hence, affections and passions are true or false propositions of morally valued, or morally neutral, affected goods. Moreover, considering how emotions are actions, the Stoics attribute complete human agency to them. They argue that after the initial emotions, that are natural and beyond human agency, subside, the agent has immediate and complete control over emotional depressions or elations. Thus, the Stoics argue for an understanding of emotions being completely within human agency, and therein, allow for well-being to also be completely within human agency and free from any disturbing emotional depressions or elations.

However, I believe that such complete control is dubious and contradictory to empirical human agency. Specifically, initial emotions about particularly salient preferred or rejected neutral goods being affected, such as life or death, do not appear to allow for immediate withholding of assent to the corresponding emotions, here elation or grief. Humans instead require time to reflect and deliberate about whether the particular emotion is a passion or affection. Thus, the proposed complete human agency over emotions by the Stoics must be revised to a more restricted and limited notion of human agency.

Moreover, the initial emotions are experienced by nature and as such, must have meaning. Lack of meaning would imply that they are devoid of reason, yet since nature is governed according to reason, such lack of meaning is implausible. Thus, initial emotions are

indicative of the underlying good's natural moral value. Moreover, for complex humans, i.e., beings with both a rational and irrational nature, initial emotions indicate a natural moral value of both the rational and irrational. Thus, humans require the well-being of both the rational and irrational to attain *eudaimonia*.

From the understanding of natural moral value of the entire complex human nature, it further follows that the Stoic value theory of the moral character being the only morally valued human good is flawed as it disallows valuing anything beyond the moral character. However, I believe that such lack of moral value attached to preferred or rejected goods, and therein, goods favorable or unfavorable to nature, is illogical as it mandates the pursuit of an action yet with no moral value attached to it. Moreover, simply valuing moral character doesn't seem to be within human agency given the complex human nature, i.e., humans are rational and irrational beings. As such, humans are not perfectly rational, like God, and therein, imperfect in their selection of action according to nature. Consequently, humans will pursue actions and emotions that are without moral value and yet still falsely attach moral value to them.

To alleviate the troubles that our imperfect human agency over value and emotions causes, the Stoics propose three different therapies. Firstly, they propose a correction of the false value dichotomy of everything being good or bad that helps the agent to reframe the understanding of value by considering neutral goods in addition to good and bad goods. Next, they argue that by having foresight about future events, the future initial emotions can be weakened. Thus, foresight about future events allows for a reduction in disturbance experienced from the initial emotions. Finally, by decatastrophizing bad goods, the Stoics argue that the agent can obtain a more calmer attitude as the agent will value all goods with lesser intensity, which, in turn, allows for an avoidance of disturbing emotional depressions or elations.

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