# The Stoic Conception of the Sage

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SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU

HRVATSKI STUDIJI

ANA GRGIĆ

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DIPLOMSKI RAD

Zagreb, 2017.

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ODSJEK ZA FILOZOFIJU

ANA GRGIĆ

# THE STOIC CONCEPTION OF THE SAGE

DIPLOMSKI RAD

Mentor: izv. prof. dr. sc. Tomislav Bracanović

Zagreb, 2017.

**The Stoic Conception of the Sage**

**Abstract**

In this Thesis I discuss the conception of the sage in Stoic philosophy. The Stoics describe the sage as the embodiment of wisdom; ignorant of nothing; the only one who has knowledge and expertise; the only one who is fully rational, virtuous and happy; and, finally, as a person who does not have emotions, but only *eupatheiai*, or "good feelings". I discuss each of these features of the sage and show that the concept of a sage is constructed out of the main concepts of the entire Stoic philosophical system. It is a theoretical concept which is the consequence of their central philosophical tenets.

**Key words**: cognition, emotions, feelings, happiness, knowledge, sage, Stoics, virtue, wisdom

**Stoičko poimanje mudraca**

**Sažetak**

U ovome radu raspravljam o koncepciji mudraca u stoičkoj filozofiji. Stoici opisuju mudraca kao utjelovljenje mudrosti, kao nekoga tko nikad ne očituje neznanje, kao jedino biće koje posjeduje znanje, koje je u potpunosti racionalno, vrlo i sretno te, konačno, kao osobu koja nema emocije, nego samo *eupatheiai*, to jest "dobre osjećaje". Raspravljam o svakoj od tih značajki mudraca i pokazujem da je pojam mudraca konstrukcija sačinjena iz glavnih pojmova cjelokupnoga stoičkog filozofskog sustava. Riječ je o teoretskom pojmu koji je posljedica njihovih središnjih filozofskih postavki.

**Ključne riječi**: emocije, mudrac, mudrost, osjećaji, spoznaja, sreća, stoici, vrlina, znanje

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. The allurement of Stoicism

Stoic sage: the final frontier of this Thesis. These next chapters will be the voyages of one human mind. It was a one year mission: to explore a strange old world, where new form of life was invented in ancient Stoic civilization – the wise or the sage. I would not say that this was a bold mission, where no man has gone before, but it was certainly vivid enough to bring a new perspective on the concept of the sage. In the 21st century, Earth is still occupied by humans, and roughly there are three types of humans: ones who use the term "Stoic" in a proper way (let's call them "savants" or just "philosophers"), others who *try* to instantiate the term "Stoic" by imitating the attitude and sometimes even the hand gesture of "live-long-and-prosper" made popular by Mr. Spock in *Star Trek* (let's call them "the ones who aspire to become savants"), and those who do not know the meaning of the term "Stoic", but who use phrases like "Stoic endurance" or "Stoic calmness", even though, when the term "Stoic" is singled out from the phrase, they do not recognize it and cannot decode its meaning (let's call them the "fools").[1] The Stoics would approve such categorization with different terminology and with one category less. They would say that only the wise have knowledge, whereas the fools have only opinions. In Stoic world, there are only two types of people – sages and fools. Those who are in progress towards wisdom are still fools. In today's world, the eliminated group of those in progress make the majority of human population, provided that they are interested in making progress. The reason why the eliminated group is at the center of interest is because Stoic philosophy is going through a revival in popular culture. It is partially so due to the sense of the word "Stoic", and probably entirely so due to its allure and lucrative potential as evidenced in popular culture.

In our culture, the term "Stoic" and its cognates have come to refer to the state of being calm, steady and emotionless. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "Stoic" as "one who practices repression of emotions, indifference to pleasure or pain, and patient endurance", and the popular representation of Stoic philosophy, both in the past and

[1] On Mr. Spock as a Stoic, see Thorsrud 2008, who contrasts Spock's attitude towards emotions as impediments to a good life with Data's, who thinks that life is better with moderate amount of emotions. A more skeptical view of Spock as a Stoic is found in Farren 2014, who thinks that Spock cannot be a genuine Stoic.

today, portrays the Stoic as a person of such a posture. For Stoics, emotions or passions arise from false beliefs, and emotions like fear and distress should be abandoned since they are obstacles to virtuous life. As opposed to the popular conception of an Epicurean, as someone who indulges in sensual pleasures, modern associations of "Stoics" are not misleading with regards to the philosophical origins of the term (see Baltzly 2014). Even though modern associations are not completely misleading, they seem superficial in comparison with the contents of the original ancient Stoicism. The popular social status that the Stoics enjoy is far from its origin and the same goes for the Epicureans: when someone advocates an Epicurean ideal, from the perspective of popular culture, this will be considered as a whimsy choice. On the other hand, being a Stoic, or promoting Stoic ideals, is considered to be desirable, chiefly because in popular culture Stoic behavior manifests itself in active repression of emotions, calmness, etc. In certain corners of popular culture, to be in a state without emotions is considered appealing and is thought to be achievable through psychotherapy or certain techniques of meditation.[2]

The ancient Stoics, however, restricted virtuous or meaningful and happy life to one type of people only – the sages. Popular culture, on the other hand, promotes Stoic repression of emotions, steadiness in accepting what is inevitable without posturing a Stoic sage and without accurately following ancient Stoicism. Mr. Spock would say that "insufficient facts always invite danger", but a sufficient fact is that there is no other Western philosophical tradition that made such an impact on modern popular culture as Stoicism did (except, perhaps, Christianized versions of Platonism). From the popular point of view, Mr. Spock is the embodiment of Stoic posture even though he is far from being called a Stoic sage or even a Stoic with the capital S. He represses emotions, accepts what is inevitable ("What is necessary is never unwise"), does not get emotional or illogical.

The selling point that makes the content of Stoic philosophy more approachable and interesting is the recipe for happiness that it offers, even though it requires eradication of pleasure, desire and other emotions. For the Stoics, emotions should be eliminated from decision-making process because they are false beliefs. Albert Ellis, the founder of

[2] On the other hand, one might ask why anybody would want to live this way. If life without emotions is an appealing choice, why should we study and practice Stoicism instead of taking some chemical tranquilizer? For consequences of the distortion of the meaning of original ancient Stoicism, see Brennan 2005: 3-9.

rational emotional behavior therapy (REBT), used the Stoic idea that emotions are false beliefs in developing REBT. The main assumption of REBT is that the origins of mental disturbance are not to be found in external situations but in the perspective that one chooses when one decides to react to them. Ellis chose a sentence from Epictetus as a slogan of his therapy, "Man is disturbed not by things, but by the views he takes of them" (*The Encheiridion* 5). According to REBT, by changing the attitude and altering the perspective, one can cope with mental disturbance. The approach that Ellis offers is basically the core of Stoic philosophy. By disregarding good old-fashioned reading and first-hand inquiry, and transforming philosophical thoughts and arguments into easily understandable quotations, Ellis and many like him made Stoicism more appealing for many people who are keen on self-help subdivision of popular culture. (The same can be said of the so-called logotherapy, a school in psychotherapy founded by Viktor Frankl.)

The most ambitious attempt at reviving the ancient Stoicism is a project launched several years ago at the University of Exeter. The central part of their project is called the Stoic Week, during which the savants of Stoicism are trying to make those who aspire to become savants more aware on how to study and use Stoicism in everyday life. Thousands of people from all around the world, some by being physically and some by being virtually present, participate in the Stoic Week. Its most important part is a conference called "Stoicon". In 2016, Stoicon was held in New York, where more than three hundred people gathered to listen and talk to various speakers, including experts in ancient Stoicism such as Julia Annas and Christopher Gill (one of the initiators of the Stoic Week), author Jules Evans, media strategist Ryan Holiday, etc. Philosopher Massimo Pigliucci, one of the participants of the Stoicon, summarized the goal of the Stoic Week by describing his daily routine:

> I begin the day by retreating in a quiet corner of my apartment to meditate. Stoic meditation consists in rehearsing the challenges of the day ahead, thinking about which of the four cardinal virtues ... one may be called on to employ and how.
> I also engage in an exercise called Hierocles' circle, imagining myself as part of a growing circle of concern that includes my family and friends, my neighbors, my fellow citizens, humanity as a whole, all the way up to Nature itself.
> I then pass to the "premeditatio malorum," a type of visualization in which one imagines some sort of catastrophe happening to oneself (such as losing one's job), and learns to see it as a "dispreferred indifferent," meaning that it would be better if it didn't happen, but that it would nonetheless not affect one's worth and moral value. ...
> Finally, I pick a Stoic saying from my growing collection ..., read it to myself a

> few times and absorb it as best as I can. The whole routine takes about ten minutes or so.
> Throughout the rest of the day, my Stoic practice is mostly about mindfulness, which means to remind myself that I not only I live "hic et nunc," in the here and now, where I must pay attention to whatever it is I am doing, but, more importantly, that pretty much every decision I make has a moral dimension, and needs to be approached with proper care and thoughtfulness. For me this often includes how to properly and respectfully treat students and colleagues, or how to shop for food and other items in the most ethically minded way possible (there are apps for that, naturally).
> Finally, my daily practice ends with an evening meditation, which consists in writing in a diary ... my thoughts about the day, the challenges I faced, and how I handled them. I ask myself, as Seneca put it in "On Anger": "What bad habit have you put right today? Which fault did you take a stand against? In what respect are you better?" (Pigliucci, 2015)

At first sight, Pigliucci is strictly holding on to different recommendations and attitudes that are characteristic of the original ancient Stoicism. He is thinking of "the four cardinal virtues" – indeed, the Stoics followed Plato in considering wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice as the most important virtues.[3] He begins the day with meditation – which is the practice introduced by some Roman Stoics, notably Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. Furthermore, he engages in an exercise called Hierocles' circle. Hierocles, a Stoic from the 2nd century, described the individual life through a series of circles, which begins with human mind, individual and extended family, and ends with humanity as a whole (LS 57G). *Premeditatio malorum* or pre-rehearsal of future evils is a Stoic consolation technique, which consists in one's "looking far ahead to misfortunes that are to come, and this makes their arrival easier to beat" (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 3.29). "Dispreferred indifferent" is a technical term in Stoic ethics – to be discussed below, in Chapter 4 – which refers to a class of things that are neither good nor bad, but which should be dispreferred, like illness, poverty, and the like. The idea that pretty much every decision we make has a moral dimension, and needs to be approached with proper care and thoughtfulness cannot, strictly speaking, be found in the ancient Stoic sources, but may be taken as a reasonable interpretation of the idea that thoughtfulness in action is an important feature of the Stoic sage. Finally, quotations from Seneca are good examples of the way in which Roman culture understood the position of the original Stoics.

[3] They hold that these virtues are inseparable. More on this below, p. 26 and note 13.

Can Stoicism be practised in a way in which some people practise Christianity or Buddhism – not, to be sure, as a religion, but as a kind of "philosophy of life"? Undoubtedly. The attitudes and recommendations that Pigliucci is following may be called "stoical". Moreover, the ancient Stoics considered philosophy as an "art of living", not as an academic discipline, so that Stoicism can be considered as a system of views and attitudes that can be practised in everyday life. That is how it is understood by the "New Stoicism" that is promoted in the Stoic Week.

Pigliucci does not mention the Stoic sage in his description, and the New Stoics do not put the figure of the sage in the center of their activities. However, as I said, the Stoics restricted happy life for one type of people only – the sages. Hence, one may plausibly ask whether what Pigliucci is promoting as his daily routine is really Stoicism. It can be acknowledged that the New Stoicism has elements of diluted Stoicism. But is it possible to speak of Stoicism in the proper sense of the term without taking into consideration the notion of the sage? This is the central question I will address in this Thesis. I will try to show why the notion of the sage is indispensable for understanding the Stoic philosophical system.

### 1.2. A brief history of ancient Stoicism and sources

The term "ancient Stoicism" refers to a movement which lasted for almost five centuries. It begins around 300 BCE, when Zeno of Citium started teaching in the Painted Stoa in Athens, and ends with the death of Marcus Aurelius, the last Roman Stoic, in 180 CE.

The founder of the school Zeno attracted many followers who started to gather informally around the so-called *stoa poikilê* (the Painted Porch, situated on the north side of the ancient agora of Athens), which is how the Stoics got their name. History of Stoicism is divided into three stages: 1. Early Stoicism (main representatives are the founder of Stoicism Zeno of Citium, Aristo of Chios, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus, who is considered to be the greatest Stoic philosopher; as the saying goes, "if there had been no Chrysippus, there would have been no Stoa" (Diogenes Laertius 7.183)); 2. Middle Stoicism (Panaetius and Posidonius); and 3. Late or Roman Stoicism (Seneca, Musonius Rufus, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius). Unfortunately, the Stoic writings from the period of early and middle Stoicism have been lost, and we have to rely on fragments and reports of other, often unsympathetic authors. Stoic philosophy is known today mostly from the

perspective of the Roman Stoics, mainly from Epictetus and Seneca. The most important non-Stoic source is Cicero, who manifests good knowledge of Stoicism, with a critical perspective. In this Thesis, I will rely mostly on the Stoic sources gathered in the collection by A. Long and D. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (abbreviated LS).

### 1.3. Overview of the Thesis

The Stoics describe the sage as the embodiment of wisdom; ignorant of nothing; the only one who has knowledge and expertise; the only one who is fully rational, virtuous and happy; and, finally, as a person who does not have emotions, but only *eupatheiai*, or "good feelings". These are stunning claims, hard to believe. The purpose of this Thesis is to provide some explanation of them. I will consider them within the contexts in which they arise.

The Stoics divide philosophy into logic, physics, and ethics (*LS* 26A-D). The statements that concern the sage's knowledge fall within the field of logic, since this discipline, according to the Stoics, comprises, among other things, the doctrine of "yardsticks and criteria" (LS 31A), that is, epistemology. Hence, in Chapter 2 I will analyze some basic notions of Stoic epistemology – impression, assent, cognition, opinion, knowledge, etc. – in order to see what meaning can be given to the Stoic claims that only the sage has knowledge and expertise and that he is ignorant of nothing.

The subject of chapters 3 and 4 is the role of the sage within the Stoic ethics. To show why the sage is the only one who is virtuous and happy, I will discuss the Stoic conception of virtue, their idea that all things besides virtue and vice are indifferent, and their claim that virtue is necessary and sufficient for happiness. I will also address some seemingly paradoxical features of the process of becoming a sage. In Chapter 4, I will discuss Stoic views on emotions (which are also part of the ethical division of their philosophy: Diogenes Laertius 7.84 = LS 56A) and their introduction of the so-called "good feelings", which are appropriate for the sage. As for the physical part of Stoic philosophy, in Chapter 3, I will briefly discuss some ideas that lay behind the sage's possession of virtue and rationality.

In Chapter 5, I will draw some conclusions. In my opinion, the concept of a sage is constructed out of the concepts of the entire Stoic philosophical system. It is a theoretical concept which is the consequence of their central philosophical tenets.

## 2. THE SAGE'S KNOWLEDGE

### 2.1. Only the sage has knowledge

The Stoics put forward three theses concerning the sage's knowledge: they say that it is only the sage who has knowledge; that he is ignorant of nothing; and that only the sage is expert in various skills. In this Section, I will discuss the first of these theses, while the remaining two will be the subject of the next Section.

To see what it could mean to say that it is only the sage who has knowledge, a brief account of Stoic epistemological notions is needed. The Stoics defined knowledge as a type of cognition (*katalêpsis*). Cognition is assent (*sunkatathesis*) to a specific type of impression (*phantasia*), the so-called cognitive impression (*phantasia katalêptikê*). Impression or presentation, as the Stoic word *phantasia* is often translated, is an impression of external things as they impinge on our mind. Our assent is our reaction, i.e. the acceptance or non-acceptance of the presented, which is under our control. For instance, it is presented to me or impressed upon me that there is a dog in front of me, and I assent to this presentation or impression, which amounts to my belief that there is a dog in front of me.

Impression is the passive element of the cognition: at every moment, we are exposed to a multitude of impressions, and this is something that happens without our willing it. Assent, on the other hand, is the active element of the cognition, since we choose which impression we will assent to. Cognition is not assent to just any kind of impression, but to cognitive impression and it only. According to the classical Stoic definition (LS 40D, E), cognitive impression is an impression which

(a) arises from that which is (i.e. from that which is real);

(b) is stamped and impressed in accordance with that very thing; and

(c) is of such a kind as could not arise from what is not (i.e. from what is not real).

The incognitive impressions are all other impressions that do not satisfy these criteria (LS 40C).

The definition of cognitive impression was a subject of many disputes between the Stoics and their opponents, especially Academic Skeptics. That (a) cognitive impression arises from something real means, roughly, that it cannot be a product of a dream or hallucination. (b) means that a cognitive impression accurately represents the

thing from which it arises, e.g. impression of a horse accurately represents real existing horse. The condition (c) is the most controversial one. It seems that it has been introduced by Zeno as a response to a challenge made by the Skeptic Arcesilaus, which is concisely described in the following passage:

> [Speaker: Cicero on behalf of the New Academy] (i) We may take him [Arcesilaus] to have asked Zeno what would happen if the wise man could not cognize anything and it was the mark of the wise man not to opine. (2) Zeno, I imagine, replied that the wise man would not opine since there was something cognitive. (3) What then was this? Zeno, I suppose, said: an impression. (4) What kind of impression? Zeno then defined it as an impression stamped and reproduced from something which is, exactly as it is. (5) Arcesilaus next asked whether this was still valid if a true impression was just like a false one. (6) At this point Zeno was sharp enough to see that if an impression from what is were such that an impression from what is not could be just like it, there was no cognitive impression. (7) Arcesilaus agreed that it was right to add this to the definition, since neither a false impression nor a true one would be cognitive if the latter were just such as even a false one could be. (8) But he applied all his force to this point of the argument, in order to show that no impression arising from something true is such that an impression arising from something false could not also be just like it. (9) This is the one controversial issue which has lasted up to the present. (LS 40D)

This dispute between Arcesilaus and Zeno can be mapped out like this: Arcesilaus asks Zeno: what if your sage cannot know anything since nothing is knowable and nothing can be a subject of knowledge? Then the sage could only hold opinions. However, if he opines, then he could be mistaken or have a false judgement, which is not a characteristic of a sage. Zeno replies (3) that the subject of knowledge is cognitive impression, which he defines as an impression stamped and reproduced from something which is, exactly as it is, reclaiming (a) and (b) part of classical Stoic definition of cognitive impression. Arcesilaus objects (5) that there may be a false impression which is qualitatively indiscernible from a true one. For instance, suppose that I have an impression that in front of me is Mary, and that that impression strikes me as an accurate representation of Mary, but that person whom I am looking at is actually her twin sister, who is unknown to me. Zeno replies ((8), which is part (c) of the definition) that cognitive impression is such that an impression arising from something false could not also be just like it. Cognitive impression cannot arise from something which is not. This means that for the impression

of Mary to be cognitive, the impression has to be such that it cannot arise from Mary's sister.

The dispute between the Stoics and the Skeptics did not come to an end by Zeno's remark, but the details of further arguments need not interest us here. What is important is to note the role of the character of the sage. The character of the sage is introduced to stress that there is something stronger than opinion, i.e. cognition. The Stoics, however, do not reason as follows: if there were no cognition, there would not be a sage; since there is a sage, there is cognition. Rather, they are just insisting that since there is such a thing as cognition, the objection that the sage does not exist or that he is forced to opine should be rejected.

Cognition is assent to cognitive impression. As opposed to cognition, opinions or beliefs (*doxai*) are defined by the Stoics as weak or false assents which do not capture impression truly and firmly enough (LS 41B, C); hence, they are assents to incognitive impression (LS 41G). Due to lack of firm grasp, opinion can be true or false. I can have an impression that Mary is in front of me but that impression can be vague and I can assent to it without certainty, which means that I have an opinion that Mary is in front of me, but I do not have a cognition of that fact.

Besides *cognition* and *opinion* there is *scientific knowledge* (*epistêmê*), which only the sage has:

> (1) The Stoics say there are three things which are linked together, scientific knowledge, opinion and cognition stationed between them. (2) Scientific knowledge is cognition which is secure and firm and unchangeable by reason. (3) Opinion is weak and false assent. (4) Cognition in between these is assent belonging to a cognitive impression; and a cognitive impression, so they claim, is one which is true and of such a kind that it could not turn out false. (5) Of these they say that scientific knowledge is found only in the wise, and opinion only in the inferior, but cognition is common to them both, and it is the criterion of truth. (LS 41C)

Both the sage and the inferiors (or fools: see next chapter) have cognition, but only the sage has knowledge, while inferiors or fools have opinion. Sage does not have opinions. The fact that the fools have cognition means that they also assent to cognitive impressions; however, their cognition is changeable, unsecure and weak, which is why they cannot have knowledge. Here we can notice an important distinction between Stoic and contemporary epistemology. In contemporary epistemology, knowledge is seen as a

kind of belief: belief is a necessary but not sufficient condition for knowledge. For Stoics, on the other hand, knowledge and belief are two incompatible states, just like sages and fools are two incompatible types of people. Since belief is weak assent, its main feature is fallibility; consequently, you cannot convert belief into knowledge by adding to it some further attribute, as in contemporary epistemology. This reasoning is similar to Plato's in the *Republic*. Plato thinks that knowledge and opinion or belief differ in types of their objects: the objects of knowledge are unchangeable things such as Forms, while the objects of opinion are changeable things, i.e. material particulars. One cannot have knowledge of particular physical things because they change, while knowledge has to be permanent, unchangeable. Likewise, in Stoicism, fools cannot have knowledge because they can be mistaken.

Now the Stoic position may be summarized thus: to hold opinions is to be prone to error; hence, those who hold opinions are those who are prone to error; since the possession of knowledge precludes the possibility of being in error, it follows that knowledge can only be possessed by those who cannot hold opinions, i.e. of sages.

The above quotation makes it clear that one difference between knowledge and cognition is in firmness, not in the corresponding objects: cognition is not as firm as knowledge. This is well illustrated by Zeno (LS 41A): he displayed the open palm of a hand and said that impression is like this – we just receive impressions without our intervention. Then he clenched his fingers and said that this is assent; after that, he made a fist, which corresponds to cognition. And then he took his other hand to tightly and forcefully hold his fist and then he pointed that this represents the knowledge that only the sage has.

However, firmness is not the only differing point between cognition and knowledge:

> Scientific knowledge [*epistêmê*] is [1] a cognition which is secure and unchangeable by reason. [2] It is secondly a system of such *epistemai*, like the rational cognition of particulars which exists in the virtuous man. [3] It [scientific knowledge here = science] is thirdly a system of expert *epistemai*, which has intrinsic stability, just as the virtues do. [4] Fourthly, it is a tenor for the reception of impressions which is unchangeable by reason, and consisting, they say, in tension and power. (LS 41 H)

The Greek word *epistêmê* can mean both "knowledge", as a mental state or disposition, and "science", as a body of propositions. Scientific knowledge is a cognition which is

secure and unchangeable and as such it demands systematic character. Particular cognitions cannot be qualified as knowledge if they are not rationally connected ((2): "rational cognition of particulars which exists in the virtuous man") or if they are not connected in systematic manner. Thus, the fools have only isolated cognitions, whereas knowledge consists of a *network* of cognitions, with explanatory relations among them. The network of cognitions has to be (3) stable or intrinsically firm just as the virtues are stable.

Knowledge is, furthermore, (4) tenor for the reception of impression. "Tenor" (*hexis*) is important term in Stoic philosophy. It signifies "the pervading 'breath' which accounts for the unitary existence of natural substances" (Long and Sedley 1987: 289). It is not clear whether in the above quotation tenor is used in its general sense, as sustaining principle of all things, or in a narrower sense, of a "character" (*diathesis*) as a permanent disposition specific to human beings (Brouwer 2014: 31-32; see also Long and Sedley 1987, 376, and pp. 19-20). Be that as it may, the stress is again on stability. Knowledge requires stable disposition to receive impressions, and such stability is available only to the sage.

Why, then, the Stoics insist that only the sage has knowledge? It seems that this follows from the fact that they, like other ancient philosophers (notably Plato), maintain that to be called "knowledge", a mental state has to meet very strict criteria: (a) it must be always true; and (b) it must be unchangeable and stable. Obviously, such mental state is not available to those who tend to assent to false impression or who tend to withdraw their assent, that is to say, to change their opinion. This is characteristic of ordinary human beings: we are all susceptible to error, and we all change our opinions when faced with convincing counterarguments. If knowledge requires such strong requirements, then only two options seem available: either knowledge does not exist or knowledge does exist but is reserved for the sages. Stoics have chosen the second way of dealing with this problem – knowledge exists and is a privilege of the sages.

### 2.2. What does the sage know?

Let me now turn to the second question, that of the content of the sage's knowledge. What does the sage know? Some Stoic sources may seem to suggest that the sage is omniscient, since they say that the sage is "ignorant of nothing" (LS 41G; Kerferd 1978: 128; Brouwer

2014: 62). Now, if the sage is ignorant of nothing, does it mean that he knows every detail and event from the past, present, and future? This is a highly unlikely interpretation of the Stoic position, but not impossible. For, it is not clear whether any sage really existed, or whether he can be conceived of as a perfect ideal which was never instantiated. If he is just a perfect ideal, then nothing prevents to ascribe to him omniscience in a literal sense of the word. However, the Stoics have pointed out Socrates, Heracles and Odysseus as examples of sages (see Brouwer 2014: 164, and below, p. 25) The problem is that none of them can be considered to be omniscient in a literal sense nor even to have extended knowledge of different facts (see Kerferd 1978: 126-128).

The Stoics, however, do not say that the sage is literally omniscient. What they say is only that he is free of ignorance. Hence, the best way in which the attribute of all-knowing should be interpreted is by considering ignorance as a disposition or mental state which *cannot* be attributed to the Stoic sage.

The Stoic sage "never makes a false supposition" and "does not assent at all to anything non-cognitive, owing to his not opining and his being ignorant of nothing" (LS 41G), which means that the sage cannot be in a disposition that manifests itself as a false supposition or to assent to something non-cognitive (see also LS 41B, C, D). This does not mean that the sage knows, or cannot be ignorant of, every piece of information that could be known. Rather, this means that the sage never gives a kind of assent characteristic of ignorance. For, ignorance is, according to the Stoics, changeable and weak assent, and the sage never assents to an impression in such a way (LS 41G). His assent is always firm, and always has only cognitive impression as its content. As opposed to this, the fool's assent is weak (LS 41B, F). A fool can assent both to cognitive and incognitive impression. When he assents to a cognitive impression, this is not yet knowledge, as his assent is not firm. (One might even say that the fool's assent to cognitive impression is a stroke of good luck.) When he assents to an incognitive impression, then he manifests his ignorance.

Hence, the sage is omniscient in the sense that he always assents to cognitive impression and that every cognitive impression that he assents to becomes a part of his entire system of knowledge. The sage will assent to something only if it is presented to him in the form of a cognitive impression. For instance, if there are exactly 25 people on the Jelačić Square right now, he will firmly assent to impression that there are 25 people

on the Jelačić Square right now only if it is presented to him as a cognitive impression, e.g. if he has counted all and only the people on the Jelačić Square (none of them left or came while he was counting, etc.). If it is *not* presented to him at all or it is not presented as a cognitive impression (if he could not clearly count the people on the Square), he will not assent to it, and, consequently, he will not know it (see on this Vogt 2008: 121). So, there is a sense in which we can call him ignorant of the fact that there were, in fact, 25 people on the Square, but this is not the relevant sense. The relevant sense would be if he would have given assent to a false impression, i.e. if his mental state contained a false belief. He is not ignorant – in that sense – of the fact that there are 25 people on the Square. In fact, he is not ignorant – in that sense – of anything. What he has in mind is all and only true beliefs. It is in this sense that he "knows everything" – his mental attitude towards everything which is available to him through impressions is knowledge, as opposed to the fools, who have opinion and ignorance.[4] Both opinion and ignorance are defined as weak assent (LS 41B, C, G), and the difference between them is not always clear. As Long and Sedley (1987: 257) explain, "'Ignorance' accommodates all cognitive states ... which fall short of the impregnable stability and systematic consistency ... that belong to the wise man's scientific knowledge. The absolute disjunction between scientific knowledge and ignorance is an important instance of the Stoics' ruthless insistence on excluding any mental disposition intermediate between excellence and its opposite."

Taken in this way, the phrase "ignorant of nothing" does not sound as lavish as it sounded before. "Ignorant of nothing" simply refers to mental state, not to the content of the sage's knowledge.

This kind of mental state, according to the Stoics, is reserved for kings, generals, rich, free, beautiful, consuls, praetors, emperors, seers, poets, priests, etc. That is to say, only the sages are true kings, generals, rich, free, beautiful, etc. (see Vogt, 2008: 118-119, who gives a list of passages). Cicero refers to such statements as to the Stoic paradoxes, along with statements like "virtue is the only good", "virtue is sufficient for happiness", "all the vices and all virtues are equal", and "all fools are madmen" (and discusses them

[4] The same holds for the Sage's doing everything well: "They [the Stoics] also say that the wise man does everything well – that is to say, everything that he does: for as we say that the flute-player or the lyre-player does everything well, with the implications 'everything to do with flute-playing', and 'everything to do with lyre-playing', so the prudent man does everything well, *so far as concerns what he does, and not of course also what he does not do*" (LS 61G, emphasis mine).

in his work *Stoic Paradoxes*). It is clear why the idea that only the sages are true kings, generals, etc. seems paradoxical. It combines two things discussed thus far. First, it reemphasizes the thesis that only the sages have knowledge. Second, it gives an object-based interpretation of the sage's "omniscience": take any field of expertise, the Stoics will claim that only the sage can be an expert in this field. This, of course, does not seem possible. For, to be a good poet, king, general, etc., the sage will have to collect an enormous amount of information, which is impossible to accomplish within a single lifetime.

Stoic idea that only the sage is king, general, etc. suggests one more thing. Julia Annas points out that there are two conceptions of the sage in ancient philosophy. According to the first, the sage is a person living according to an ideal which transcends the everyday, rising above it and regarding ordinary life, its concerns and troubles, as petty and fleeting (Annas 2008: 14). This conception was implied in Plato's *Theaetetus* where Plato talks about those who escape from earth to heaven, becoming like god as much as possible (176a-b). According to the second conception, the sage is somebody who does not rise above everyday life but stays at the ordinary level of life. The concept that should be preferred when interpreting the Stoic sage is the second one, since he is said to be such that he can get married, have family, do politics and earn money.[5]

What does it mean, then, to say that only the sage is, for instance, a general? As above, this has nothing to do with the content of the sage's knowledge: the Stoics do not want to say that only the sage knows the facts that are necessary for being a general. Of course, they cannot deny that someone's being a general is a matter of his having mastered a vast amount of information from various domains. But this is not all that is needed for someone's being a general. Generalship is a skill, which means that general is the person who is able to exercise his knowledge in the right, i.e. skillful, way. What that means is that only the Stoic sage has a virtue, which is a disposition to act for the right reason. Only the sage can act for the right reason, since he is the only one who has knowledge and skill to use his knowledge in the right or virtuous way (LS 61G, 63C). Since the sage is the only one capable of acting for the right reason, he will be able to perform virtuously in any domain of life, not just in specific domain as generalship. When knowledge is

[5] Chrysippus mentions three ways in which the sage could make money – by being a king or king's advisor, from friends and from lectures (LS 67F).

exercised virtuously or for the right reason, then skill is mastered to the perfection. Since only the sage can use knowledge in a perfectly skillful way, only the sage can be a general. Dio Chrysostom, discussed by Annas (2008: 20-21), offers an example: a sage may not be a better farmer then the professional farmer if we look at it from a common point of view, since a sage is cut off from information relevant for farmership. But on the other hand, the sage is in some way superior to an ordinary farmer "in his acting, or not, advantageously, and in recognizing when and where to act, and in recognizing the right moment (better even than the craftsman) and what is possible" (quoted by Annas 2008: 21). Everything that he does, the sage does in accordance with right reason: he knows when, how, where, etc. he should exercise his knowledge, he knows his priorities, he knows when *not* to act, etc., and all this because he has virtue as a disposition to act for the right reason.

Let me finally say a few words about what does the sage's *wisdom* consist of. According to LS 26A,

> The Stoics said that wisdom is scientific knowledge of the divine and the human, and that philosophy is the practice of expertise in utility. Virtue singly and at its highest is utility, and virtues, at their most generic, are triple—the physical one, the ethical one, and the logical one. For this reason, philosophy also has three parts—physics, ethics and logic.

Wisdom is described as scientific knowledge of the divine and the human, which can be interpreted as meaning that wisdom is scientific knowledge of everything, since human and divine, for the Stoics, captures the whole universe. For, politics, morality, art, etc. are considered to be parts of human affairs, while nature is by itself divine. Hence, if wisdom is scientific knowledge of the divine and the human, and if the divine and the human is everything, then he who has that type of knowledge or wisdom can be called the sage.

Etymologically, philosophy is a pursuit of wisdom; hence, philosophy is a pursuit of scientific knowledge of the divine and the human. However, in the above quotation philosophy is described as a practice of expertise in utility. There are three virtues or types of virtues – the physical one, the ethical one, and the logical one – and this is why philosophy has exactly three parts. Virtues are excellences in mastering whatever it is that is being mastered: for instance, excellent shoemaker is a person who is good at making shoes, i.e. who has mastered the art of making shoes to a highest degree. Thus, virtues mentioned in the above quotation can be described as excellences that one achieves when

dealing with moral, physical and logical problems. In other words, he who has virtue or excellence is good in ethics, physics and logic. He who has virtue is good in everything. He who has virtue knows ethics, physics and logic. He who has virtue and knows everything is a sage. But is that all it takes to be a sage?

It takes a bit more to be called a sage. There are at least two further conditions that must be met as far as the sage's knowledge is concerned. First, the sage must have a unified knowledge of ethics, physics and logic, since these three disciplines are inseparable from each other. The sage cannot have knowledge of logic without having the knowledge of ethics, nor knowledge of ethics without having knowledge of physics.[6] The second condition is proposed by Seneca and it entails that the sage must possess the knowledge of the *causes*:

> Wisdom is the human mind's good brought to perfection. Philosophy is the love and pursuit of wisdom; it strives for the goal which wisdom has achieved ... Some have so defined wisdom that they call it scientific knowledge of the divine and the human. Others have defined it thus: wisdom is knowledge of the divine and the human *and their causes*. (Seneca, *Letter* 89.4 = LS 26G, emphasis mine)

This new element expands the definition of wisdom: in addition to the idea that the goal of human life or the good of the human mind consists of having knowledge of the divine and the human, one must also know their causes. This modification is very important for overall understanding of the concept of sagehood. However, it is not clear what exactly Seneca has in mind here. Does he want to assert that for every divine and human event, sage can state its cause? He explains in letter 88 (= LS 26F) that the sage "both studies and knows the causes of the natural objects whose numbers and measures the geometer researches and computes". Sage does not know every detail of just any event. Rather, every divine and human event that he has knowledge of has a cause, and the sage knows that cause. What sage knows he knows in such a way that he knows its cause. For example, a sage would know why it is raining or why the Sun rises on the east and sets on the west or why the virtues are the only good of the human mind.

[6] The Stoics strongly insist on the unity and inseparability between the three parts of philosophy. Posidonius compares philosophy to a living being – "physics to the blood and flesh, logic to the bones and sinews, and ethics to the soul" (LS 26D) – thus stressing the strict unity of philosophy.

I have discussed three Stoic statements concerning the sage's knowledge: that it is only the sage who has knowledge, that he is ignorant of nothing, and that only the sage is expert in various skills. These characteristics are not supernatural capabilities nor are they ideals which people should strive to achieve. Rather, they are mere consequences from the criteria that are necessary for achieving knowledge and skill. *If* knowledge entails intrinsic stability and firmness, *if* knowledge exists (assuming that we want to avoid skeptical conclusions), and *if* ordinary people do not meet the criteria of stability and firmness, then it follows that knowledge is in possession only of the wise. Moreover, if skill includes the exercise of knowledge for the right reason and in the right way, then only the sage can possess skill, for only he can act for the right reason and in the right way.

# 3. THE SAGE'S VIRTUE AND HAPPINESS

## 3.1. Virtues, vices, and indifferents

The Stoics follow Socrates in maintaining that virtue is a necessary and sufficient condition for happiness. Virtue is the only constituent of happiness. It demands knowledge, firmness, persistence and right mental attitude towards indifferent things. The class of indifferents consists of all things that are not virtue or vice (health, life, wealth, etc.). Common people or fools do not have the characteristics requisite for possessing virtues; quite the contrary, they strive for indifferents as for something good.

As stated previously, virtue is a disposition to act for the right reason, and by acting for the right reason the sage exercises his virtue. Having a virtue is not narrowed down to having a right reason in a certain domain, but it expands to having an expertise concerned with the whole of life. It has been shown above (2.2) that the whole of life comprises the ethical, physical and logical domain, and there are correspondingly three main parts of virtue. Consequently, the sage is good or virtuous with respect to the whole of life. The sage is the only one who has a virtue and the virtue is the only good. The only bad thing is vice, and the one who is lacking virtue is vicious or bad, just like all his actions. It is perhaps misleading to translate the Greek words *aretê* and *kakia* as "virtue" and "vice" respectively, since this may suggest that their meaning is restricted to the moral domain. Rather, they refer to excellences and defects with respect to the whole of life, and indeed to inanimate objects, e.g. the Greeks would say that the excellence of a knife is sharpness.

To say that virtue is a disposition to act for the right reason is not sufficiently informative as a definition of virtue. Diogenes Laertius (LS 61A) says that virtue is "consistent character, choiceworthy for its own sake and not from fear or hope or anything external". Thus Diogenes only emphasizes the firmness and persistence of virtue. Plutarch (LS 61B) is more informative. He says that virtue is

> a certain character and power of the soul's commanding-faculty, engendered by reason, or rather, a character which is itself consistent, firm and unchangeable reason.

Thus, virtue is, first, described as "character" (*diathesis*). The difference between character and another kind of state, "tenor" (*hexis*), which I have already mentioned (p.

12), is in the fact that character does not admit of degrees (cannot be relaxed or intensified, see LS 47S; another example of character is straightness of a stick). This is why virtue is a state of moral perfection, which cannot have degrees. Furthermore, virtue is the power of the soul's commanding-faculty. The commanding-faculty of the soul is the seat of all mental states, and is identified with breath (LS 53G). Thus, virtue is not just a specific mental state, but a physical state as well.

Plutarch also says that virtue is "unchangeable reason", which means that it is entirely rational quality, while vice is irrational deflection from rationality. Stoic psychology is monistic: they insist that the soul is rational throughout, and the irrationality of the vice is just the aberration from it.[7] Finally, virtue is, as Diogenes says, "choiceworthy for its own sake", which means that it is sufficient for happiness. Happiness completely consists of virtue, and just as happiness is the ultimate goal that is choiceworthy because of itself, virtue is also choiceworthy because of itself.

A further feature of virtue is that it is the only thing that benefits (LS 58A, 60G). It may seem odd to say that only virtue benefits and that other things such as money, health and beauty are not beneficial. There are two things that the Stoics may have in mind when they say that virtue is the only beneficial thing. First, they are basically saying that virtue is the only thing that is always and without exception useful for *happiness*, given that it is the sole constituent of happiness. All other things are beneficial or detrimental for happiness relative to virtue and vice. This does not make all other things bad or vicious, it just makes them indifferent.

As I have said, all other things that are not virtues or vices are indifferents. Not all indifferents have the same status, however. Some indifferent things are in accordance with nature because they promote person's natural state, and this gives them value and reason to be preferred. Such things are life, health, beauty, strength, and the like. Other indifferents are in contrast with nature because they do not promote person's natural state, and this is why they are dispreferred. Such things are sickness, death, weakness, ugliness, and the like.[8] It is wrong to think of preferred indifferents as something good and of

[7] See LS 61B: "They suppose that the passionate and irrational part is not distinguished from the rational by any distinction within the soul's nature, but the same part of the soul (which they call thought and commanding-faculty) becomes virtue and vice as it wholly turns around and changes in passions and alterations of tenor or character, and contains nothing irrational within itself."

[8] See LS 58A-E. An exception from Stoic orthodoxy in this question is Aristo, who rejected all distinctions within the class of indifferents. See LS 58F and G.

dispreffered indifferents as something bad. Preferred indifferents are not good things, since they do not always benefit; dispreferred indifferents are not bad things, since they do not always harm. This is the second thing the Stoics may have in mind when insisting that virtue is the only thing that benefits: it is the only thing that is *always* beneficial. Preferred indifferents may be beneficial, but none of them is always such, as there may be situations in which they can be harmful and do not count as benefits.[9]

Yet, preferred indifferents are things that should be selected because this is in accordance with human nature. Chrysippus explains:

> As long as the future is uncertain to me I always hold to those things which are better adapted to obtaining the things in accordance with nature; for god himself has made me disposed to select these. But if I actually knew that I was fated now to be ill, I would even have an impulse to be ill. For my foot too, if it had intelligence, would have an impulse to get muddy. (LS 58J)

Chrysippus is naturally disposed to select health and he will continue to do so in the future since he is not a sage and does not have knowledge of the future. If he were a sage, things would have been substantially different. In that case Chrysippus would be differently disposed or constituted. He would be familiar with his fate and according to it he might have an impulse to be ill. For, if he knew that he would be ill, the sage would comply with this, and follow what is inevitable. The foot example is meant to stress the radical difference between the sage and the fools. If Chrysippus were a sage, he might have an impulse to be ill. Likewise, if his foot were intelligent, it might have an impulse to be muddy. The difference between the wise Chrysippus and the foolish Chrysippus is analogous to the difference between a regular foot and an intelligent foot. The difference between the sage and common people is just as enormous as the difference between an intelligent foot and a regular foot. This should be borne in mind when reading that the sage could choose some dispreferred indifferent, say, commit a suicide.[10] The difference

[9] Such is for instance health: "For if healthy man had to serve a tyrant and be destroyed for this reason, while the sick had to be released from the service and, therewith also, from destruction, the wise man would rather choose sickness in this circumstance than death" (LS 58F).

[10] "When a man has a preponderance of the things in accordance with nature, it is his proper function to remain alive; when he has or foresees a preponderance of their opposites, it is his proper function to depart from life. This clearly shows that it is sometimes a proper function both for the wise man to depart from life, although he is happy, and for a fool to remain alive, although he is wretched" (LS 66G). Diogenes Laertius (7.130 = LS 66H) says that the Stoic sage can commit suicide for patriotic reasons, on behalf of his friends, if he suffers severe pain, because of mutilation, and because of incurable illness. It does not

between the sage and common people is the perfect depiction of the action that the Stoic sage would do in the case of suicide – in which he would consciously choose dispreferred indifferent due to his knowledge of large portion of circumstances that would lead him towards such an act.

Actions by which we select preferred indifferents the Stoics call "appropriate actions" or "proper functions". Chrysippus is naturally disposed to select health and his action is appropriate. However, the sage will also select health and he will act in accordance with this proper function. Just like the foolish Chrysippus, the sage will feed himself, visit the doctor, exercise, etc. His action of choosing indifferents is called "completely correct" or "perfect appropriate action". The difference between "appropriate action" and "perfect appropriate action" is clearly shown in Cicero's example (LS 59F):

> For instance, if it is a right action to return a deposit in the just manner, to return a deposit should be counted as proper function. It becomes a right action by the addition, 'in the just manner', but the act of return just by itself is counted a proper function.

The sage would not just return the deposit: he would return it "in the just manner" or in accordance with his virtue and for a right reason, and in the right time and circumstances. This is not the only difference between the fools' and the sages' attitude towards indifferents. As opposed to the fools, the sages will not strive for a preferred indifferent – say, health – as for something good. They will accept health as what it is – just a preferred indifferent. Yet, there will be no difference in external appearance of sages' and fools' actions. The difference comes down to different mental and physical state, mental firmness, unchangeable character and having the right reasons for performing an act.

### 3.2. The attainment of happiness and virtue

The biggest difference between sages and fools is seen in the final goal of life, which only a sage can achieve. The final good is happiness (*eudaimonia*) and only the sage's life is assumed to be a happy one. Cicero gives clear and vivid description of why the sage is the only one who can have a sight of a final good:

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mean that the sage who opts for suicide would consider these things bad; he would only treat death as something indifferent (see Brennan, 2005: 39-42). Among Stoic philosophers, Seneca is famous for committing suicide in 65 CE.

> It is a peculiar characteristic of the wise man that he does nothing which he could regret, nothing against his will, but does everything honourably, consistently, seriously, and rightly; that he anticipates nothing as if it were bound to happen, is shocked by nothing when it does happen under the impression that its happening is unexpected and strange, refers everything to his own judgement, stands by his own decisions. I can conceive nothing which is happier than this. It is an easy conclusion for the Stoics, since they have perceived the final good to be agreement with the nature and living consistently with the nature, which is not only the wise man's proper function, but also his power. It necessarily follows that the happy life is in the power of the man who has the final good in his power. So, the wise man's life is always happy. (*Tusculan Disputations* 5.81-82 = LS 63M)

Cicero's description of the sage is based on a list of traditional characteristics that need to be satisfied in order to call someone wise and therefore happy. His notion is in accordance with the Stoic notion of wisdom and happiness. He says that the Stoics define happiness as agreement with nature and living consistently with nature. However, this is not the only Stoic definition of happiness. Sources (LS 63A and B) mention that there was a dispute among the Stoics about how to understand happiness. Zeno defined it as "living in agreement"; Cleanthes defined it as "living in agreement with nature"; and Chrysippus defined it as "living in accordance with experience of what happens by nature". The relationship between these three definitions is not entirely clear. Moreover, it is not clear whether "nature" refers to individual nature or nature as a whole. Elsewhere (*On Ends* 3.31 = LS 64A) Cicero takes "life in agreement with nature and living consistently with nature" as "life in which one applies knowledge of those things that happen by nature, selecting those in accordance with nature and rejecting those contrary to nature". Thus, the sage selects things in accordance with nature, and these things, as mentioned earlier, are considered to be preferred indifferents. Happiness consists in his consistent and rational (LS 64C) selecting these things, and not in their achieving.

According to the Stoics, philosophy is an art of living, and its primary goal is a transformation of human life necessary for the attainment of happiness. Since only the sage can be considered happy, one might expect that the primary goal of human life is becoming a sage, or at least as similar to a sage as possible. Indeed, the Stoics speak of those who make progress towards virtue and happiness. Yet progressors do not make the third class of people – they should be classified among fools, as is clear from the following passage:

> [J]ust as in the sea the man an arm's length from the surface is drowning no less than the one who has sunk five hundred fathoms, so even those who are getting close to virtue are no less in a state of vice than those who are far from it. And just as the blind are blind even if they are going to recover their sight a little later, so those progressing remain foolish and vicious right up to their attainment of virtue. (LS 61T)

This passage makes it clear, first, that progressors do not make the third class of people, since they either "remain foolish" or at one point attain virtue, i.e. become sages. Second, it makes it clear that there is no such thing as a process of becoming a sage, but that one's transformation into a sage must be instantaneous. Just as you are drowning regardless of how far you are removed from the surface, so you are a fool regardless of how far you have progressed along the path towards virtue; and just as you will emerge from water instantaneously, so you will become virtuous instantaneously.[11] A striking example of mockery of such a description is found in Plutarch's *Synopsis of the Treatise "The Stoics Talk More Paradoxically that the Poets"*:

> Among the Stoics the man who is most vicious in the morning, if so it happens to be, is virtuous in the afternoon, and having fallen asleep unstable, ignorant, unjust and licentious, and even, by Zeus, a slave, poor and without means, he gets up the very same day, having become a king, rich and blessed as well as moderate, just, stable and holding no opinions, not having grown a beard yet or pubic hair in a body young and soft, but having got, in a soul that was feeble and soft and unmanly and not stable, perfect insight, the highest practical wisdom, a character equal to the gods, unopining knowledge and an unshakeable tenor, and this not by any previous diminution of depravity, but instantaneously, one could almost say, by having become from the most vicious of wild beasts some hero or daimon or god. For, if one has received virtue from the Stoa, it is possible to say: "Ask, if there's anything you wish, all will be yours." It brings wealth, it comprises kingship, it gives luck, it makes men prosperous and free from all other wants as well as self-sufficient, though they have not a single drachma of their own. (Ch. 4, quoted by Brouwer 2014: 55)

Stoic ideas on sagehood now seem even more extravagant and paradoxical than before. What sense does it make to aspire to become virtuous and happy if it is a matter of instantaneous transformation? For, even you have made maximum progress, you are still unhappy and ignorant of your distance from the goal. What is worse, Plutarch also says (LS 61U) that it is even possible that you achieve virtue and happiness without noticing them. Furthermore, what motivation one might have in becoming wise if this

[11] One might object that it is just a part of you that first emerges from water, so that *you* do not emerge instantaneously, but the Stoics can reply that the part of you that emerges can be identified with you.

goal seems unattainable? For, as Cicero says, "it happens more often that a mule begets than that a sage comes into existence" (*On Divination* 2.61, quoted by Brouwer, 2014: 102). Some ancient sources mention Socrates, Odysseus and Heracles as examples of Stoic sages (see Brouwer, 2014: 164). However, while they might be called sages according to some criteria, they certainly do not meet all the Stoic criteria for sagehood. Finally, it seems that the Stoics did not consider themselves as wise, but as inferiors like the rest of us.[12]

### 3.3. The status of the sage

There are at least three difficulties concerning the role of the sage within the Stoic ethical theory: (1) the very idea that only the sage is virtuous and happy seems extravagant, just as extravagant as (2) the idea that the transformation into a sage is instantaneous; and (3) since Stoic sages have never existed, what is the point in trying to reach sagehood?

These difficulties arise if the notion of the sage is approached by imagining a person who is happy, virtuous, all-knowing, etc., and then trying to understand its ontological status. Then the sage is imagined either as a paradigm who once existed in flesh and blood (or who may exist), or as an ideal which serves as a motivation to become happy and virtuous (but who cannot be instantiated). However, the problem can be approached from another angle.

The Stoics try to give an explanation of some central philosophical notions, like knowledge, virtue, happiness, etc., and aim to show that they require very high standards. Take for instance virtues. Virtues are positive qualities, or properties on the basis of which someone (or something) may be called good. According to the Stoics, however, virtues include much more: for something to be called a virtue, it must always benefit, it must be a sole constituent of happiness, it must be completely rational and stable disposition to act for the right reasons. What is more, since virtue is disposition of the soul, and the soul is, according to the Stoics, material, having a virtue entails having a particular physical

[12] An extensive discussion of the sources is found in Brouwer 2014: 114-135. Sources mention several Stoic philosophers as candidates for the status of the sage: Sphaerus, Persaeus, Zeno, Cleanthes and Aristo. Brouwer shows that none of them considered himself a sage nor was treated as such within the school. In Roman period, a typical example of the Stoic sage was Cato the Younger, Caesar's political opponent, who is famous for his committing the suicide in order not to be captured by Caesar (see Sellars 2006: 39-40). However, he also does not meet the original Stoic criteria for sagehood.

constitution. Finally, the Stoics insist that the four cardinal virtues – wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice – are inseparable from each other.[13] These are very strict requirements indeed, and the Stoics' main task is to demonstrate that they are necessary.

Now, virtue is a property, and properties have their bearers or possessors, so the question now arises: who is the possessor of virtue thus conceived? Since ordinary human beings cannot live up to the standards prescribed by the Stoics, and since the Stoics want to avoid skepticism about virtue (i.e. the conclusion that there is no such thing as virtue), they are compelled to postulate a possessor of virtue. Likewise with other properties (knowledge, happiness, true emotions, etc.) – it is necessary to postulate a model possessor for each of them.

So, the existence of the sage cannot be the motivation for striving towards virtue and happiness. The sage is just a theoretical construct from the attributes that are the cornerstone of Stoic philosophy. As for the difficulty with instantaneous transformation into sage, note that the simile with drowning I quoted earlier (LS 61T) is not about becoming a sage, but about the radical difference between sages and fools, and Plutarch's passage is an obvious mockery.[14] The Stoic idea is presumably that even though the process of moral education is long and arduous, the transformation into the sage occurs at once. In any case, it should not be assumed that becoming a sage is the goal of human history and development, at least not primarily or as a driving motivation.

[13] The Stoic views on the relationship between particular virtues are rather complicated. According to Aristo, virtue is "essentially one thing" (LS 61B); all particular virtues are just dispositions of a single virtue (LS 61C). Zeno is sometimes reported as following him in insisting on the identity of allegedly various virtues (LS 61B). On the other hand, however, Plutarch (LS 61C) says that "Zeno admits several virtues ... on the grounds that although inseparable they are distinct and different from each other". According to Chrysippus, particular virtues are just different types of scientific knowledge (*epistêmê*) (LS 61H; see Long and Sedley 1987: 383-384).

[14] Plutarch's passage is extensively discussed in Brouwer, 2014: 55-91. See also LS 61S and U.

# 4. GOOD FEELINGS

The standard picture of a Stoic sage is of someone who either has no emotions at all or has suppressed them so they do not interfere with his reasoning and acting. As mentioned in the Introduction, *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines "Stoic" as "one who practices repression of emotions, indifference to pleasure or pain, and patient endurance". Since he knows that virtue is the only good, the sage can lead a tranquil life, patiently enduring any kind of suffering. This characterization of a Stoic sage made him an iconic figure of popular culture. However, this appealing to the emotional status of a Stoic sage is based on a distorted interpretation of Stoic philosophy.

Stoics do not claim that the sage is completely without emotions. Indeed, he does not have passions, affections (*pathê*) or emotions in a strict sense, but he has *eupatheiai* or "good feelings", or good and acceptable ways of feeling and being affected (see Cooper 2005: 176). In this chapter I will discuss emotions that the sage lacks, the reasons why he lacks them, and what are these good feelings.

## 4.1. Emotions of the fools

Stoic definition of emotions has two aspects. First, they say that emotions are irrational and contrary to nature (LS 65A; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 4.10). Since they are contrary to the standards of rationality and nature, they should be avoided. Stobaeus (LS 65A) explains in what sense emotions are irrational and unnatural. They are irrational in the sense of being "disobedient to reason", e.g. when someone rationally thinks through some problem and then decides to act differently and opposite to reason due to intensity of some emotion. Emotions are contrary to nature because they are contrary to the principle of reason: they turn us aside from reason in a special way. When I entertain a false belief, I can easily abandon it when faced with evidence to the contrary. But this is not so with emotions: even when I get a belief that some emotion is not appropriate or expedient to have, it tends to persist in me.

The second aspect of emotions according to the Stoics is somewhat more complicated. Namely, the Stoics consider emotions to be some kind of judgment or belief. The early Stoics did not agree upon the precise relationship between emotions and beliefs. It seems that Chrysippus thought that emotions are straightforwardly a kind of belief,

whereas Zeno more cautiously claimed that emotions are consequences or products of beliefs. The difference between their positions can be seen on the example of the Stoic definition of distress (or pain, *lupê*). According to one source (Andronicus, LS 65B), distress is fresh belief that something bad is present (this represents Chrysippus' position), while according to another (Stobaeus, cited by Knuuttila 2004: 54), distress is *caused* by the belief that some fresh bad thing is present (this represents Zeno's position). The latter definition may seem better (see Sellars 2006: 115). For, if I now believe that some bad thing is present, and if, as a result, I feel distressed, then perhaps tomorrow I will not feel distressed even though I may retain the belief that some bad thing was present. If emotions are simply identified with beliefs, then the loss of emotion would entail the loss of the pertinent belief, which does not seem necessary.

Either way, the claim that emotions are judgements or beliefs, or their consequences, makes one of the most important and original features of Stoic philosophy. The idea behind this claim is relatively simple. It is based on the notions of impression and of assent to impression. We are involuntarily exposed to impressions, but when we voluntarily assent to them, we make a judgment, or hold a belief, that a certain state of affairs obtains. In the case of emotions, we not only assent to an impression; we add an evaluative component, for instance that certain state of affairs is something bad. If we assent to such evaluatively colored impression, we make an emotional reaction. In other words, emotions, as beliefs, are assents to evaluatively colored impressions.

It should be clear why having emotions is a feature of the fools. Namely, emotions of the fools are necessarily *false* beliefs. They are false beliefs because nothing is good or bad besides virtue and vice. Hence, when I assent to an impression that some bad thing is present, and the thing in question is not vice, then I necessarily form a false belief, which is a characteristic of the fools. However, as I will show, assent to an evaluatively colored impression is not necessarily false, because impressions can be of things that really are good or bad. This is the source of the idea that there are emotions appropriate for the sage.

Before addressing the problem of sage's feelings, Stoic classification of emotions should be briefly examined. It is very well discussed in the sources, but perhaps it is best to rely on Cicero's account in his *Tusculan Disputations* Book 3, since it is comprehensive, systematic and incorporates the good feelings of the sage. Cicero divides

emotions according to two criteria: whether they include beliefs of good or bad things and whether the good and the bad things are given in the present or expected to happen in the future. Thus, *delight* (or pleasure, *hedonê*) is belief concerning a present good, i.e. it is the belief that something good is now present, whereas it is not in fact good, since only virtue is good; *desire* (*orexis*) is belief concerning a future good, i.e. it is the belief that something good will be present in the future, whereas it is not in fact good; *distress* (or pain, *hêdonê*) is belief concerning a present evil, i.e. it is the belief that something bad is now present, whereas it is not in fact bad, since only vice is bad; *fear* (*phobê*) is belief concerning a future evil, i.e. it is the belief that something bad will be present in the future, whereas it is not in fact bad. Further classification includes numerous subspecies of these four basic emotions. Thus, under delight come spite, enchantment, vainglory, etc.; under desire come anger, heatedness, hatred, rancor, yearning, etc.; under distress are classified envying, rivalry, jealousy, pity, anxiety, grief, sorry, worry, mourning, etc.; under fear come indolence, shame, terror, panic, etc. (*Tusculan Disputations* 4.16-21).

### 4.2. Volition, joy, and caution

The same criteria used in the classification of common emotions are used in the classifications of the good feelings of the sage. As a result, there is a "good" counterpart for every common emotion, except for the emotion which is based on belief concerning a present evil, i.e. distress.[15] Here is Cicero's explanation:

> By nature, all people pursue those things which they think to be good and avoid their opposites. Therefore, as soon as a person receives an impression of some thing which he thinks is good, nature itself urges him to reach out after it. When this is done prudently and in accordance with consistency, it is the sort of reaching which the Stoics call a *boulesis*, and which I shall term a "volition." They think that a volition, which they define as "a wish for some object in accordance with reason," is found only in the wise person. But the sort of reaching which is aroused too vigorously and in a manner opposed to reason is called "desire" or "unbridled longing," and this is what is found in all who are foolish. Similarly, there are two ways we may be moved as by the presence of something good. When the mind is moved quietly and consistently, in accordance with reason, this is termed "joy"; but when it pours forth with a hollow sort of uplift, that is called "wild or excessive gladness," which they define as "an unreasoning elevation of mind." And just as it is by nature that we reach out after the good, so also it is by nature that we

[15] Interestingly, Cicero translates the term *eupatheia* ("good emotion") as *constantia* ("consistency"). *Constantia* is Latin equivalent for Greek *homologia*, which in Stoicism refers to the agreement with nature and right reason that are characteristic of happiness. In the quotation that follows this word is used in both senses. More on this see in Graver 2002: 136.

> withdraw from the bad. A withdrawing which is in accordance with reason is termed "caution," and this, as they understand it, is found only in the wise person; while the name "fear" is applied to a withdrawing that is apart from reason and that involves a lowly and effeminate swooning. Thus, fear is caution that has turned away from reason. For present evil the wise person has no affective response, but the foolish person responds with distress. For those who do not obey reason lower and contract their minds in circumstances which they believe to be evil. Hence the first definition for distress is this: "a contraction of mind contrary to reason." Thus, there are four emotions, but three consistencies, since there is no consistency which corresponds to distress. (*Tusculan Disputations* 4.12-14, transl. by Graver 2002)

Thus, *volition* (or wish, *boulêsis*) is a good feeling concerning a future true good, whose counterpart in fools is desire. *Joy* (*chara*) is a good feeling concerning a present true good, whose counterpart in fools is delight. Finally, *caution* (*eulabeia*) is a good feeling concerning a future true evil, whose counterpart in fools is fear. As with common emotions, good feelings can be further classified. Thus, volition includes kindness, generosity, warmth, and affection. Joy includes gratification, sociability, and cheerfulness, while caution includes respect and cleanliness (LS 65F).

The impressions to which the sage gives his assent are all true. Hence, even when he assents to evaluatively colored impressions, those which concern something good or bad, he assents to true impressions. This is because they are impressions of really existing good or bad things – virtues and vices – as opposed to the fools' impressions, which falsely represent something other than virtue or vice as good or bad. However, the sage's assent to true evaluative impressions is not belief or opinion, but a piece of knowledge, since his assents are firm and consistent. Thus, when a sage assents to an impression that something good is present, he feels joy. The present good is, of course, virtue, either his own or of his fellow sage.[16] Hence, he can feel joy either towards himself or towards someone else. If he feels caution, this means that he assents to the impression that some evil is impending. For instance, he is cautious about the possibility that he or some other sage might lose his virtue. Finally, volition concerns his expectation that he will possess virtue in the future as well. All these emotions he will feel according to reason, quietly

[16] As stressed by Cooper (2005: 208), one of the differences between ordinary emotions and good feelings of the sage is in the fact that the sages "are just as joyous over the virtue and virtuous actions of anyone else as they are over their own", while emotional reactions of ordinary people are limited to themselves, their family, personal friends and fellow-countrymen.

and consistently, as Cicero says. Presumably, the reason why there is no counterpart of distress is the fact that the sage cannot assent to the impression concerning some present evil, i.e. vice, given that he is completely free from vice, and there is no evil producing impression nearby either (see also Sellars 2006: 119; Cooper 2005: 187).

This last point is important. It means that the sage is completely tranquil and quiet, since he cannot be distressed about anything that happens to him, given that he cannot succumb to vice. It is not that he has *some* emotional reaction towards present vice, for instance equanimity and the like; he has no emotional reaction at all. One might even conclude from this that he cannot live in a society of fools. For, if he lived in such a society, then he should have had some emotional reaction towards vice. From this it might be concluded that there are not, nor have ever been, flesh and blood sages. In fact, they cannot exist as long as circumstances are such that they should live among the fools. It is not surprising, then, that Zeno in his *Republic* claims that, in his state, only the sages can be citizens, friends, relatives, and free (LS 67B). It is also understandable that Seneca thinks that in a morally corrupt society, sage must go mad:

> Every place is full of crime and vice ... If you want the wise man to be as angry as the baseness of the crimes demands, he must not only be angry, he must go mad" (*On Anger* 2.9, quoted by Knuuttila, 2004: 78).

In the previous chapters I have argued that the Stoics introduced the notion of the sage as a theoretical model which is a consequence of some central philosophical concepts. Given the very strict criteria for knowledge, virtue and happiness, the sage is introduced as the only possible possessor of these attributes. Why did the Stoics introduce the idea of good feelings? Perhaps they wanted to respond to the charge of inhumanity which may be raised against them because of their dismissive view of emotions (Knuuttila 2004: 68). However, they wanted to stress another thing as well.

According to the Stoics, emotions are beliefs about what is good or bad. Since the fools have wrong conceptions of what is good or bad, every emotional reaction they have is wrong. Now, the Stoics must be well aware of the fact that there must be some emotional reaction towards that which is *really* good or bad, i.e. towards virtue or vice. What is really good and really bad must induce some emotional response. Otherwise, good and bad would have no practical import, which they most certainly have, since good

is, to put it simply, the object of wish, while bad is the object of avoidance. If there were no volition as, in Cicero's words, "a wish for some object in accordance with reason", then what is good could not be a motive for action. Thus, by their theory of good emotions, the Stoics just want to stress the simple fact that the good and the bad induce emotional reactions. Since they cannot induce emotional reactions in the fools, who have wrong conceptions of what is good and bad, the only subject of the emotional reaction towards what is really good and bad can be the sage.

## 5. CONCLUSION

If there had been no Chrysippus, there would have been no Stoa, and if there had been no Stoa, there would have been no sages nor fools. Since there is ancient Stoic philosophy and even the nowadays popular parts of the Stoic allure put in blockbusters and "get together projects" – there is a notion of the sage and a notion of people in progress who are trying to achieve tranquility and consolidation with regards to future events. To become a sage, on the other hand, is not an easy task to fulfill nor is a sage an easy concept to grasp. This is probably the reason why the Stoic sage is presented in popular culture superficially, but not less iconically. As opposed to this, in Stoic philosophy, the concept of a sage is constructed out of concepts of their entire philosophical system. In order to understand the concept of the Stoic sage, one must understand the principles of the Stoic philosophical system.

For the Stoics, wisdom is described as scientific knowledge of the divine and the human and of their causes, which covers everything that exists. Philosophy is a pursuit of wisdom or pursuit of scientific knowledge of the divine and the human and their causes – that is based on ethical, logical and physical virtue. Hence, philosophy is not only a pursuit of scientific knowledge of everything, but also a pursuit of virtue, and the only candidate for having a virtue is the sage. If there had been no unified virtue, there would have been no sage.

Virtue as a core point of Stoic philosophy can be described as the firm mental state of never making a false supposition or making an assent to non-cognitive impression. It is an entirely rational quality. Virtue is a feature strictly reserved for sages who have knowledge of the divine and the human, and their causes. The sage's omniscience, interpreted as freedom of ignorance, refers to the firmness, interconnectedness and unchangeability of his knowledge. Firm and unchangeable knowledge is a cognition which demands the like character – the character of a virtuous man. Virtuous man is someone who has a system of cognitions. As opposed to the sage's possesion of virtues and knowledge, opinions or beliefs are characteristics of fools. Opinions or beliefs are defined as weak or false assents, which can be true or false. Virtuous person makes no mistakes since his system of cognitions is stable and intrinsically firm. In addition, knowledge requires a stable disposition to receive cognitive

impressions, and such stability is available only to the sage. Consequently, it is clear that sage's mental state is tuned for having a knowledge that is always true, unchangeable and stable. The content of his knowledge is always cognitive impression. Fools can assent both to cognitive and incognitive impression without ever attaining knowledge, due to their weak assents.

Moreover, virtue is a disposition to act for the right reason, which means that virtue is unchangeable reason or entirely rational quality. Only the entirely rational quality is beneficial quality, everything else is indifferent, and if a sage selects an indifferent thing, he would have selected one that is useful and preferred, hence his selection would be proper or appropriate.

Emotions, being disobedient to reason, are contrary to nature, and by being contrary to nature they are contrary to the principle of reason, which is why emotions are false beliefs or their consequences. Emotions as beliefs are assents to evaluatively colored impressions, and all such assents, when made by the fools, are necessarily false, since they are assents to impressions that something is good or bad, while nothing is, according to the Stoics, good or bad except virtue and vice, respectively. However, not all assents to evaluatively colored impression are necessarily false, because impression can be of things that are *really* good or bad, namely, of virtues and vices. This is the source of the idea that there are emotions appropriate for the sage. However, the sage's assent to true evaluative impressions cannot be called belief or opinion, but knowledge, since his acts of assent are firm and consistent. Thus, when a sage assents to an impression that something good is present, he feels joy. The present good is, of course, virtue, either his own or of his fellow sage. Hence, he can feel joy either towards himself or towards someone else. If he feels caution, this means that he assents to impression that some evil is impending. For instance, he is cautious about the possibility that he or some other sage might lose his virtue. Finally, volition concerns his expectation that he will possess virtue in the future as well. All these emotions he will feel according to reason, quietly and consistently.

The ultimate goal of the sage's life is happiness that comes from reason and consistent character, meaning that the necessary and sufficient condition for happiness is virtue. Virtue is the only constituent of happiness. Virtue demands firmness, persistence and right mental attitude towards indifferent things. By having virtue one has an expertise

concerning the whole of life. Happiness is the agreement with nature and living consistently with nature. It includes selecting things in accordance with individual nature concerning nature and life as a whole.

Mr. Spock says:

> We have here an unusual opportunity to appraise the human mind, or to examine, in Earth terms, the roles of good and evil in a man – his negative side, which you call hostility, lust, violence, and his positive side, which Earth people express as compassion, love, tenderness.[17]

By saying this, he subtly introduces an idea that I have tried to develop in this Thesis: for every positive attribute that the sage has, there is a counterpart negative attribute intended for the fool. To understand the sage's positive attributes – his knowledge, virtue, happiness, and feelings – is to understand some basic notions of Stoic philosophy, since he is the only possible possessor of these attributes. Hence, the notion of the sage cannot be neglected or eliminated from the Stoic philosophical system. It is a necessary consequence of their central philosophical tenets.

[17] From "The Enemy Within", fifth episode of the first season of *Star Trek*; see https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Star_Trek:_The_Original_Series

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