

VIRTUE AND HAPPINESS: A **PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY**

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Abstract

The position that holds that virtue, as a good, is sufficient for happiness has had illustrious exponents in the past. We will refer to this position as the sufficiency thesis. In recent times however this position has fallen into disfavour. This is largely due to the strong intuition that certain goods other than virtue are necessary for happiness. We will refer to this as the problem of external goods. The point of this paper is to respond to the problem of external goods by articulating an understanding of virtue as involving the ability to occupy a “distanced perspective” within which the virtuous agent becomes detached from external goods insofar as he comes to view them as indifferent. My articulation of this understanding of virtue will be based upon what I take to be the core of the Stoic description of virtue.

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

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On this ____ day of _____, 20__

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Introduction

What I discovered is that happiness is not something that happens. It is not the result of good fortune or random choice. It is not something that money can buy or power can command. It does not depend on outside events but rather on how we interpret them. Happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated, and defended privately by each person. People who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any one of us can come to being happy.¹

Much has been written on the nature of happiness. As we will see the precise nature of happiness is a contentious issue. Happiness like any object of philosophical inquiry is hard to pin down. However, despite the difficulties understanding the precise nature of happiness there is less disagreement about its value. We all seem to seek happiness. Given the apparent universality of the pursuit of happiness it is clearly seen by the majority to be constitutive of what we take to be a good life; happiness is for many a central feature of a good human life. In line with the ancient traditions I am in fact convinced that happiness is the central requirement for a good human life and it is primarily for this reason that I have become interested in the concept.

The difficulties and contention surrounding happiness has a lot to do with the ambiguity of the term “happiness”. Given this ambiguity it is necessary to clarify what is meant by happiness and briefly survey the philosophical landscape before we can embark on any meaningful investigation into it. Broadly speaking the term “happiness” has at least two significantly different senses. The first sense of the term uses the word as a purely descriptive psychological term. The other sense of the term is roughly synonymous with well-being or human flourishing.²

Now, “happiness” in the first sense is a purely psychological matter and is fundamentally concerned with certain states of mind. Happiness in this sense is a certain state of mind. It is very often this sense of happiness people have in mind when they talk of “being happy”.

¹ Csikszentmihalyi (1992: 2)

² Haybron (2011)

Similarly when we say that so-and-so “is happy” we seem to be making reference to a state of mind that they are in. Happiness in this sense is a property possessed by people who are in a positive state of mind.³ As to the question concerning what state of mind happiness actually is, there are numerous possible answers. There are for example life satisfaction accounts of happiness which identify happiness in one way or another with a positive attitude towards, or judgment of one’s life as a whole.⁴ Other affect-based accounts stress the affective element of happiness. Examples of affect-based accounts of happiness are hedonism and emotional state views.⁵

For the purposes of this paper we are going to avoid the contemporary debates on the nature of happiness in its first sense, leaving this question open. What I concerned with in this paper is happiness in its second sense, i.e. happiness in the sense of well-being. Happiness in the sense of well-being is a kind of value; more specifically it is a prudential value. Well-being is what is *good for* a person insofar as their life is going well for them. It is what benefits a person, makes her better off, or is desirable for her for her sake.⁶ . It should be noted here that, in the remained of this paper, I use the term happiness as synonymous with “well-being”, unless otherwise specified.

The question which naturally arises in relation to well being is: what is good for a person? There are numerous possible answers to this question. In the first instance, some accounts of happiness identify it with happiness as a state of mind, or happiness in the first sense. Welfare hedonism is an example of such an account of happiness according to which happiness consists in a greater balance of pleasures over pains.⁷ The intuitive idea behind welfare hedonism is that what seems good *to* a person surely must be good *for* them and since pleasure seems good to people it surely must be good for them.⁸ Some theorists have rejected hedonism in favour of some kind of desire theory according to which desire-satisfaction is what matters for happiness.⁹

³ Haybron (2011)

⁴ For authors who have defended some version of the life satisfaction account see Almeder (2000) and McFall (1989)

⁵ For a recent defence of hedonism see Feldman (2010). For a defence of an emotional state view see Sizer (2010).

⁶ Haybron (2011)

⁷ For a defence of welfare hedonism see Mill (2010).

⁸ Crisp (2013)

⁹ Crisp (2013)

Both hedonism and the desire-satisfaction accounts have advantages but also have significant difficulties. It is not at present necessary to spend time discussing the advantages and difficulties of these accounts as they are only mentioned in order to get a sense of the philosophical landscape. The account of happiness I am going to be working with in the remainder of this paper is most naturally referred to as an objective list account. Objective list accounts are most commonly understood as theories which list items constituting happiness that consist neither in pleasurable experience nor in desire-satisfaction. Such items might include things such as friendship, knowledge, virtue, etc.¹⁰ The central challenge for any objective list account involves determining what should go on the list and what should be left off it. It is clear that everything that is good for a person must be included on the list. Insofar as I am concerned with what happiness is and prefer an objective list account, the primary task in this paper is to determine what things are good for a person such that they should be included on the list.

My preference for an objective list account of well being is a result of my interest in ancient ethical theory and the tendency found there to think of happiness in terms of parts and wholes. This seems to me to be a natural and helpful way of thinking about happiness. Ancient ethics was highly concerned with happiness, which is one possible translation of “*eudaimonia*”, the word used by the ancient traditions. The central question in ancient ethics was the question “which life is best for one?”¹¹ Ancient ethics went so far as to endorse what Vlastos¹² terms the “eudaimonist axiom”, which is the claim that *happiness*¹³ is the ultimate end of all rational activity, including virtue. We see this commitment in Aristotle who understands well-being to be a self-sufficient good, the possession of which makes life choice-worthy and lacking in nothing [1097b10-15]. Epicureanism is similarly committed to the eudaimonist axiom, as is illustrated by their reference to happiness as the “final and ultimate good” [*On Ends I. 29*]. Other notable philosophers who endorsed the axiom included the likes of Socrates and Plato.¹⁴ Happiness then is to be understood as a practical good (insofar as it is a prudential value) of ultimate significance, it is the *final good* which is itself constituted by some other good, or plurality of goods if that be the case.

¹⁰ Crisp (2013)

¹¹ Parry (2014)

¹² Vlastos (1991: 203)

¹³ In the sense of well-being

¹⁴ Vlastos (1991: 203)

It is worth noting that there have been note-worthy philosophers who have denied the eudaimonist axiom. Most notably Immanuel Kant, who took both morality and happiness to be essential for the good life, but maintained that morality trumps happiness.¹⁵ The obvious concern that sits behind Kant's denial of the eudaimonist axiom is that it fails to recognise the value of morality. Ancient philosophical traditions did however find a central significance for moral value by incorporating virtue into their understanding of *eudaimonia* or happiness.¹⁶ I am not going to spend time defending the eudaimonist axiom as doing so does not further the dialectic of the paper but note that it is an implicit assumption of the tradition with which this paper primarily engages.

What I am fundamentally concerned with in this paper is the intimate connection, seen in the ancient traditions, between happiness and virtue. Happiness (*eudaimonia*) can be described as consisting in the possession of the good. Virtue (*arête*) for its part seems to me to be *the* prime candidate for such a good. The plausibility of such a connection between *eudaimonia* and *arête* becomes apparent when we translate "*eudaimonia*" as living well. Ancient philosophers thought that there are certain characteristic activities that are associated with human living. There is an intuitive plausibility to the idea that to carry out the characteristically human activities well or in accordance with human excellence, is to be living well and hence to be *eudaimon* or to have a good life, to be well off.¹⁷ Thus virtue (*arête*) is that which is to be possessed/attained in order for one to live well and hence be happy (*eudaimon*).

We see this connection between *arête* and *eudaimonia* exploited in Aristotle's function argument, which employs the concept of the *ergon* of man. Roughly the *ergon* of man is the proper function appropriate to a human being qua human being [1097b25-30]. Aristotle identifies the *ergon* of man as a being-at-work in accordance with reason [1098a5-10]. This, along with the principle of being that the good of any thing is to be found in its functioning well according to its proper function, allows Aristotle to identify rational activity of the soul *in conformity with excellence or virtue* as the good of human beings [1098a15-18]. Happiness or *eudaimonia* then for Aristotle, as for the majority of the ancient schools, is intimately

¹⁵ Kant (2005)

¹⁶ Parry (2014). A notable exception were the Cyrenaics who granted very little to no value to virtue whilst maintaining the eudaimonist axiom, see also Parry (2014).

¹⁷ Parry (2014)

connected to virtue, which is the good of the human being, such that we have the good of the human being as good for a human being.

In keeping with my engagement with the ancient traditions I am committed to the view that virtue and happiness are intimately connected, as we see in the ancient traditions. Connecting virtue to happiness is however not a straightforward exercise. There are numerous ways in which we can flesh out the link between virtue and happiness. One way is the view expounded by the Epicureans. The Epicureans were hedonists and as such maintained that human happiness is constituted by a pleasant state of mind.¹⁸ Even given their commitment to hedonism, as well as their commitment to the eudaimonist axiom, the epicureans still found a central role for virtue. Without going into details, Epicureanism achieved this by taking well-being to be freedom from pain such that the pleasures of the happy life are the subtle pleasures of merely being.¹⁹ Virtue plays an indispensable role in this account because it is only through virtue that the subtle pleasures of being can be appreciated. In the *Letter to Menoeceus* Epicurus asserts that virtue and happiness are inseparable and that living a virtuous life is the necessary and sufficient means to the pleasure that constitutes happiness [*Letter to Menoeceus*, 132]. According to Epicureanism the pleasant life and the virtuous life coincide insofar as virtue is the only means to the pleasant life; it is the sole source of happiness.

As should be clear, the Epicureans did not take virtue to be a *constituent* or component of happiness, they rather took it to be the *source* of happiness which was thought to be constituted by the subtle pleasures of being. This means then that, for the Epicureans, virtue (*arête*) is not a good whose possession constitutes happiness. Rather it is a good the possession of which produces the good that once possessed constitutes happiness, where this good consists in the subtle pleasures of being. Virtue is thus an instrumental good and nothing more. I do not favour this kind of connection between virtue and happiness. Practically speaking however I do not think there is a significant difference between holding that virtue is a source of happiness rather than holding that it is a constituent of happiness. The distinction between goods as sources and goods as constituents of happiness is significant as a theoretical distinction and plays a role in distinguishing kinds of goods and

¹⁸ Parry (2014)

¹⁹ Parry (2014)

how their possession benefits us. It is still the case that, in relation to virtue, the theoretical distinction lacks practical import because fundamentally both have it that virtue is productive of a certain way of being, which is identifiable as happiness.²⁰ Whether virtue constitutes that way of being or merely produces it is not such a significant question.

This being said, I do prefer the sort of view that makes virtue a constituent of well-being rather than a source of it. This is down to the fact that I am uncomfortable with the idea of ascribing mere instrumental value to virtue even though, practically speaking, virtue as a source and virtue as a constituent should produce the same sort of life, namely a life in accordance with virtue. Leaving this aside, there are numerous possible ways in which we could maintain that virtue is a constituent of well-being. In order to get a more precise handle on the view I aim to defend we can lay out three distinct theses, the necessity thesis, the sufficiency thesis and the identity thesis, each of which stipulate a distinct understanding of how it is that virtue constitutes happiness.

The necessity thesis maintains that virtue is a necessary element in happiness. According to the necessity thesis, the happy person is necessarily a virtuous person. The claim that virtue is a necessary element in happiness does not imply that the virtuous person is happy. There may be other components which are also needed for happiness. Priam is an example here. Though he was a good man he was allegedly reduced to misery by the events that accompanied the fall of Troy.²¹

The sufficiency thesis on the other hand maintains that virtue is a good which is, in itself, sufficient for happiness. Happiness is in need of no other good, either as a source to confer benefits not conferred by virtue or as a component in happiness alongside virtue. A consequence of this is that the happiness of one who has attained to full virtue is immune from misfortunes. So long as a misfortune does not affect his virtue then it cannot affect his happiness. The sufficiency thesis is a stronger position than the necessity thesis as it runs more sharply against most people's intuitions. The notion that the happiness of a good person is immune to misfortune will strike most as counter-intuitive and hence implausible. We may

²⁰ For a discussion of this issue see Hadot (2002); Hadot (1995)

²¹ We will look at this example again in the discussion of Aristotle in the next chapter. Aristotle considers the example of Priam at 1100a5-9.

once again refer to the example of Priam. Common sense tells us that no matter how good Priam was we would not call him happy after becoming aware of his horrifying fate. The strongest position of all would be the identity thesis which will maintain that virtue is both necessary and sufficient for happiness. This means to say that virtue is a necessary element in happiness, and in fact, the only element required for happiness.

The thesis I aim to defend in this paper is the sufficiency thesis. I find there is a definite plausibility to the identity thesis because I am of the opinion that, along with the sufficiency thesis, the necessity thesis is also plausible. I am however going to leave aside the question as to whether we should accept the necessity thesis. A defence of the necessity thesis will involve ruling out all logically possible constituents of happiness, such as the possibility that happiness can be conferred by God as a gift or whatever, which is a project I am not concerned at present with undertaking.²² Doing so would involve justifying the answer “no” to the question of whether we can be happy without virtue. It is worth noting that Aristotle’s function argument serves this end. In any case, the question we are going to concern ourselves with is the question of whether virtue, as a good, is sufficient for happiness, leaving aside the question as to whether happiness could possibly be constituted by some other good or goods. We may state the question in the following way: Can we plausibly maintain that one who has attained to full virtue is in need of no other goods, either as a source or as a component in happiness, so that the happiness of such a person is thus immune to misfortune?

My aim in this paper is to defend the sufficiency thesis by way of justifying the answer “yes” to the question stated above. Two points are worth expounding to clarify the sufficiency thesis. The first is that happiness is no longer identifiable with happiness as a state of mind. If the sufficiency thesis is correct, then happiness as a state of mind or experiential state is not an essential constituent of happiness in the sense of well-being. According to the sufficiency thesis it is virtue and not a pleasant state of mind that is good for a human being.²³ The second point is that the sufficiency thesis makes happiness an exclusively psychological

²² Noteworthy defences of the necessity thesis include that offered by Plato in the *Republic* as well as the defence offered by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean ethics*. We will consider Aristotle’s views in the next chapter but not in order to mount a defence for the necessity thesis but rather to provide theoretical substance to the problem posed by external goods which we will consider shortly.

²³ As we will see this is not to say that a pleasant state of mind is irrelevant for happiness, just that it cannot be analysed independently of the possession of virtue.

good, that is, a good of the soul. Virtue is a psychological good and if virtue is the sole constituent of happiness then happiness is also exclusively a good of the soul. Happiness is independent of any external goods whatsoever.

There are concerns which may arise in relation to both of these points. In relation to the first a concern may arise in the vein that the sufficiency thesis fails to recognise the centrality of a pleasant state of mind for happiness. We may re-iterate the intuition that what seems good to a person must be good for them. One may feel that the sufficiency thesis fails to recognise this.

This is not however a significant concern for the sufficiency thesis. We see in Aristotle the idea that virtue is a highly pleasant condition [1099a8-21]. As we shall see, the Stoics also take virtue to involve a certain form of pleasantness, more specifically the Stoics take virtue to be accompanied by a joyous tranquillity,²⁴ which forms part of the sage's ease with all outcomes. In the main, it seems that this concern arises out of the preference for the idea that what seems good to us must be good for us. Denying that what seems good to us must be good for us does not entail the claim that happiness as a state of mind is irrelevant. We can still place significance on a pleasant state of mind by maintaining that what is good for us must seem good to us, i.e. what is good for must be productive of a pleasant state of mind. This for my part is the more plausible manner of construing the relation between seeming good and actually being good.

There is a much more serious concern for the sufficiency thesis which arises in relation to the second of the two points noted above. The concern that arises is that the sufficiency thesis fails to recognise the role external goods play in happiness. In book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle raises the concern of external goods by pointing out that the happy person does not appear to be someone who is altogether ugly, disease ridden, low-born, child-less, has children who are bad, or suffers the loss of loved one's [1099a30–1099b10]. The substantive concern is that external goods confer benefit onto a person independently of virtue. They can do this either as a source of some good that is independent of virtue, perhaps

²⁴ It is worth noting that this is a similar state to the one the Epicureans identify with happiness. The core difference between Epicureanism and Stoicism is that the Epicureans relegate virtue to the status of a source of happiness. The Stoics, like the Epicureans, definitely take pleasure and emotions, as contemporary hedonists and emotional-state theories understand them, to be vicious. For the Stoics this is because they are thought to result from mistakenly judging indifferents to be good which is vice. Parry (2014)

insofar as they are required for the presence of a certain pleasantness that cannot be acquired or sustained by virtue alone, or perhaps as a component in happiness as we may perhaps see in the case of health where being healthy is in and of itself good for a person independently of any benefit it may confer. People who may feel comfortable with the idea that virtue is a part of happiness, insofar as it is good for people, will refrain from committing themselves to the idea of excluding external goods. We have a very strong intuition that being in a good state of health, having a loving family, having sufficient wealth, being a respected member of society, etc. are all good for a person and their absence is bad for a person and so people are naturally inclined to think that they should be included in any plausible account of happiness.

The remainder of this paper is in fact framed around a response to this second concern for the sufficiency thesis, which is explicitly raised by Aristotle in book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The Stoics address the problem of external goods raised by Aristotle. The Stoics explicitly maintained that the only thing required for happiness is virtue by denying that external goods are good for us at all.²⁵ According to the Stoics, health, beauty, strength, good reputation, wealth, etc. are neither good nor bad, they are indifferent. The only thing that is truly good is virtue [*On Ends III. 36*].²⁶

Now it seems we have to maintain something like the Stoic position if we are going to successfully defend the sufficiency thesis. As it turns out I find the heart of the Stoic position to be substantially plausible. The heart of the Stoic position seems to be the idea that the ostensible end of our action (which invariably consists in attaining indifferents) can be pursued without being desired and happiness can be located solely in the pursuit. Cicero doubts the coherence of this possibility claiming that the Stoic doctrine on indifferents cannot allow for action in the world. To pursue something, according to Cicero, is to take it as good, and hence we must be committed to the claim that the indifferents are good for us, and hence should form part of happiness (*On Ends IV. 69-74*).

In defence of the Stoics on this count is their doctrine that certain indifferents are to be preferred over other indifferents on the basis that human beings are naturally inclined to pursue them. Stoicism thus does not counsel complete indifference towards the indifferents.

²⁵ Parry (2014)

²⁶ We may note that whether or not saying this also involves a commitment to the necessity thesis is not a question I am going to consider, once again for the reason that the necessity thesis and its plausibility is a question I am leaving aside.

It rather counsels a sort of distancing of one-self from the things one pursues, making the pursuit the purpose and not the things themselves. Cicero was aware of this strategy but again thought that it is not coherent. He in fact seems to think that the Stoics say that indifferents are neither good nor bad, but practically and for all intents and purposes don't actually mean that indifferents are neither good nor bad, because saying they are preferred is just an obscure way of saying they are good [*On Ends IV. 69-74*]. I am convinced however that Cicero fails to recognise that, phenomenologically speaking, there does indeed seem to be a substantial difference between pursuing indifferents as good, and pursuing them as indifferent but preferred. The point that Cicero fails to recognise is that even though attaining indifferents may be the ostensible end of the action, i.e. the reason that would be given to explain the action, it need not be the formal end of one's action. The formal end of one's action may be virtuous activity, at the same time as indifferents form the ostensible ends of one's action.

The heart of the Stoic doctrine seems to consist in recognising and exploiting this distinction. One is to try everything in one's power to attain preferred indifferents but not make actually attaining them the formal goal of one's pursuit. At its core Stoicism counsels a shift from the goal of actually attaining indifferents to the goal of trying everything in one's power to attain them, and virtue manifests in the latter. As Cicero puts the point, indifferents "are 'to be chosen' but not 'to be desired'" [*On Ends III. 22*].²⁷ Virtue for the Stoics consists in seeking indifferents guided by right reason. Thus the formal goal of the virtuous agent must be the seeking in accordance with right reason. This means that for the Stoics virtue and hence happiness²⁸ consists in the way we pursue indifferents, and not actually in whether or not we attain them. Virtue paradoxically consists in pursuing virtue in one's pursuit of indifferents.

As an existential point I find this idea to be substantially plausible and substantially significant. We see in the Stoic attitude towards indifferents a form of detachment and it is in this detachment that we can come to see the plausibility of the sufficiency thesis. This detachment, which is an essential feature of Stoic virtue, can be shown to constitute an ease with all outcomes and hence can be shown to constitute happiness, where this happiness is in need of no other goods. Given the intuitive plausibility of this it is in fact rather bemusing to

²⁷ Cicero actually makes this point as a point about the art of archery but it is meant to illustrate the relation between virtue and the indifferents.

²⁸ As Parry (2014) notes, the Stoic conception of happiness is a bit discordant with the common ways of thinking about happiness but it is in no way idiosyncratic. We will explore the Stoic conception of happiness in greater detail in chapter 2.

me that the Stoic position is often viewed more as an interesting oddity than a viable ethical option. One possible reason for this is found in the fact that the Stoic understanding of the virtuous agent is completely alien to our modern way of thinking. This is in no way helped by the fact that it is seen to rely upon the doctrine of divine providence, which is no doubt a metaphysical doctrine which will have few contemporary philosophical supporters. Virtue is defined by the Stoics as a “connectedness with Nature”²⁹ and it is in this very definition of virtue that we see the employment of divine providence. As we shall see, nature for the Stoics is identified with Zeus. According to the Stoics, the universe is governed by right reason that pervades everything and is directly responsible for all that is and all that occurs, apart from the willing of rational animals. Given that Zeus governs the universe for the good, everything happens of necessity and for the overall good. Virtue is understood to involve acting and also desiring solely to act in accordance with this divine plan as it were, safe in the knowledge that everything that happens, happens for the good.

Insofar as Stoic ethics is so alien and is seen to rest on divine providence it is understandably viewed as an out-dated, yet interesting view. I feel however that a lot can be done to make the core of Stoic ethics more palatable to a contemporary audience. In the first instance I feel that the insights behind the Stoic description of the virtuous agent can be related to concepts we are more familiar with, and hence it can be shown that the Stoic understanding of the virtuous agent is in fact not as alien as it might initially appear. Furthermore I think that the core of Stoic ethics does not require the metaphysical doctrine of divine providence in any conceptually necessary sense. In essence then I am of the opinion that we can maintain the core of Stoic ethics whilst substantially diminishing the role played by its controversial metaphysics.

How this is to be achieved is by coming to recognise that the Stoic definition of virtue has both existential and metaphysical components. The notion of connectedness has to do with, at least, the sage’s ease with all outcomes. This state of connectedness is a state of virtue. But this means that there is room to distinguish the conception of virtue, at least logically, from its metaphysical presuppositions. We shall see that the state of connectedness involves the capacity to become detached from indifferents, that is, see them as indifferent and hence as irrelevant for our happiness. Virtue then involves the capacity to occupy a “distanced

²⁹ Parry (2014)

perspective” which renders the happiness of the virtuous agent immune to even the greatest of misfortunes.

The distanced perspective is to be understood as a psychological stance which involves a suspension of the practical standpoint in which our diverse desires for things such as health, wealth, friendship, etc. govern our experience and engagement with the world. The distanced perspective is a perspective from which our engagement with and experience of the world is not defined by these diverse desires we may be subject to, it is in essence a transcendence of a sort. The distanced perspective is to be understood as the psychological standpoint of contemplation where the capacity to adopt this psychological standpoint in any situation is a component of virtue. Since this psychological standpoint allows the one who adopts it to view indifferents as indifferent, it renders the agent’s happiness immune to misfortune and in need of no other goods beyond virtue. It is constitutive of an ease with all outcomes and a tranquil and stable joy that is free from the requirement for any and all goods other than virtue.

The core of my project then is to offer an interpretation of the Stoical project that does not rely in any conceptual sense on Stoic metaphysics. This is to be achieved by describing virtue as involving the insertion of distance where this distance renders the happiness of the virtuous agent immune. I feel that the defence of the sufficiency thesis hinges on the plausibility of this distanced perspective which is thought to accompany virtue.

The dialectic of this paper is going to be the following. Given that the substantial problem faced by the sufficiency thesis is the problem of external goods, I am going to start by considering an inclusive interpretation of Aristotle. What I hope to achieve by considering Aristotle is to provide some theoretical substance to the intuition that sits behind the problem of external goods, by giving an account of virtue that leaves space for external goods. This will leave us in a good position to recognise how it is that an account of virtue should go about excluding external goods. Once this has been achieved I will consider the Stoic answer to the question of external goods and see how it is that their account of virtue excludes them from happiness. I will then move on to the project of making the core of the Stoic answer more palatable by relating it to the distanced perspective.

By way of responding to objections, I am going to consider and respond to the objection which I find most pressing. This objection comes in the form of the concern that occupying the distanced perspective involves a certain form of misrepresentation of the world. The distanced perspective involves a mutation of one's experience of events such that one is at ease with what would otherwise be horrifying events. This is the manner in which virtue insulates the virtuous agent from the requirement for external goods and renders his happiness immune to the possibility of misfortune. The natural concern arises here that the distanced perspective involves a certain disconnection from the world, which is a world in which bad things happen. How is it, some may ask, that the virtuous agent can rationally be at ease with events that contain great evil? Are we to maintain that by adopting the distanced perspective the virtuous agent comes to see evils as good, and hence comes to misrepresent the world?

I have to admit here that this paper is limited in scope. This is because I am not going to have the space to articulate a full account of virtue. A detailed discussion of the virtues of action for example is conspicuous in its absence. I will also not have the space to respond to many of the objections that occur to me as worthy of a response. My ambitions are relatively humble. I aim only to articulate an understanding of the essence of Stoic virtue that entails the sufficiency thesis in a manner that seems plausible. I accept that I will be leaving more questions unanswered than those that have been answered.

I. Aristotle

The formal objective of this paper is to explore an account of virtue which renders the sufficiency thesis plausible. As was noted in the introduction, the most significant challenge faced by the sufficiency thesis is that posed by external goods. The objective of this chapter is the formulation of a theoretical justification for recognising the existence of external goods. This will be achieved by exploring a possible account of virtue that leaves space for external goods. This will progress the dialectic of the paper and furnish us with a better understanding of what needs to be achieved in order to render the sufficiency thesis plausible.

The account we are going to explore is the inclusive interpretation of the Aristotelian account of the relation between happiness and external goods.³⁰ The view we are going to explore is the view that virtue is a dominant part of happiness and the most choice-worthy of all the goods. Crucially however the things that the Stoics call preferred indifferents are also seen as necessary for happiness such that complete happiness is dependent on the possession of these goods.³¹ It is this latter claim that constitutes the substantial challenge to the sufficiency thesis. I should just note here that the point of this chapter is not to come to an accurate representation of Aristotle's account. Rather it is to get a sense of a possible account of virtue that leaves room for external goods, thereby giving theoretical substance to the intuition behind the problem of external goods. In order to make sense of this construal of Aristotle's position it is necessary that we have a general understanding of Aristotle's conception of happiness and his conception of virtue. We can then explore where external goods might fit into this picture.

Aristotle starts the *Nicomachean Ethics* with an examination of the good and of happiness as the final good. It thus makes sense to start with a discussion of Aristotle's thoughts on happiness then move on to discuss virtue. In the discussion of happiness that will follow we will see clearly how Aristotle builds virtue into happiness as a constituent element of happiness with the use of his notorious function argument. Aristotle's conception of virtue

³⁰ For a discussion of the inclusive interpretation of Aristotle see Crisp (1994).

³¹ We may note that the matter is slightly complex as it is in fact not entirely clear whether Aristotle in fact thinks that the happiness of the virtuous person can be limited in the manner in which it would be if external goods were thought to be constituent parts of happiness. We will return to this point in the last section of this chapter.

kind of falls out of the function argument so discussing happiness first is conceptually preferable. Once we have discussed happiness and virtue we can turn to the question of whether virtue is sufficient for happiness and identify the reasons for thinking that it is not.

1.1 Happiness

Aristotle begins the *Nicomachean Ethics* with a consideration of the good. Aristotle is here concerned with coming to understand happiness (*eudaimonia*), where this is taken to refer to the type of life which is best, or most worthwhile, or most desirable.³² Aristotle tells us there that “the good has been well defined as that at which all things aim” [1094a1-5]. As was noted in the introduction, happiness for Aristotle is understood as the final good or the highest good. Happiness/*eudaimonia* is the good which is “responsible for the being good of all these things” [1095a15-25]. Happiness/*eudaimonia* is to be understood as constituting the best possible life.

That happiness is this ultimate good is shown by the fact that we always choose happiness for itself and never as a means to something else [1097b1-5]. It is also shown by the apparent fact that happiness is a self-sufficient good. A thing is understood as self-sufficient if it in itself makes life desirable and deficient in nothing, in other words if it is complete. Happiness seems to be the good which on its own makes life desirable and all other goods are sought in relation to happiness [1097b5-20]. Happiness then is the good which completes a human life. To achieve happiness is to bring a human life to completion such that the life is lacking in nothing.

For happiness to be the completion of a human life it must include within itself, as constituents of the complete good, all the things that are good for a human being. These constituents will be pursued on account of themselves and also on account of happiness insofar as they constitute happiness. Happiness however will be pursued for no further reason since there is no other good for which it can be pursued; it is complete and lacking in nothing.

³² Ackrill (1973)

We see here Aristotle's commitment to the eudaimonist axiom and also what appears to be a commitment to an objective list account of happiness.

A more informative account of what happiness consists of is however required. What are the goods that bring a human life to completion such that it is lacking in nothing? In order to provide an account of his own Aristotle notes that the goodness for man (or any-thing for that matter) is determined by his/its proper function or *ergon* [1097b25-30]. Aristotle's point is that in order to understand what constitutes our happiness we must understand who/what we are. This is Aristotle's function argument which establishes that the good which brings a life to completion is excellence in carrying out the characteristic activities of the soul.

So what is the characteristic function of man? In order to determine the true function of man it is necessary to identify the function which is unique to man, that function which sets man apart from everything else that is. We must identify the characteristic activity which defines what it is to be human.³³ Aristotle identifies, as the *ergon* of man, the activity of the rational element in man. This is said to consist of two parts, (1) one part obeys and is persuaded by reason and the other (2) possesses reason and thinks things through [1098a1-5].³⁴ It is worth noting that the *ergon* is an *activity* and not a latent capacity. When discussing the *ergon* of man Aristotle refers to the *ergon* of man as a particular form of *energeia* or being-at-work [1098a5-6]. So Aristotle notes that if man were to have a proper function: "the proper function of man... consists in an activity of the soul in conformity with a rational principle or, at least, not without it"³⁵ [1098a5-10]. So for Aristotle we find that the characteristic function of a human being is activity of the soul in accordance with reason. As we will see more clearly in the next section, the proviso "or, at least, not without it" is required in order to include the functioning of the part of the soul that listens to reason as part of the *ergon* of man. So it seems we can specify that the *ergon* of man is to reason, both about action and about fundamental principles, but also to feel and desire which are activities of the soul that are not without reason.

Now surely if the function of a harpist is to play the harp, then the function of a good harpist is to play the harp well or excellently. Aristotle thinks the same must be true of a human

³³ Nagel (1972: 253)

³⁴ This partition of the soul has significant consequence, as we will see in the later sections of this chapter.

³⁵ As we will see in the next section, this proviso "at least not without it" is required to include the functioning of the appetitive part of the soul as part of the *ergon* of man.

being. If the function of man includes activities of the soul in accordance with reason, then the function of a good man is to carry out the activities of the soul in accordance with reason well or excellently. A good human being is to reason well, both about action (and hence to desire and feel in the right way) and about fundamental principles. Aristotle explicitly identifies this rational activity of the soul *in conformity with excellence or virtue* as the good of human beings [1098a15-18]. So the human good is to be understood as rational activity of the soul in accordance with virtue³⁶ since the *ergon* of man consists in “being-at-work of the soul and actions that go along with reason” [1198a10-15] and each way of being-at-work is only accomplished well when it is done in accordance with the virtue appropriate to it. What allows Aristotle to make this identification is the principle that the good of any thing is to be found in its functioning well according to its proper function. Happiness is at this point identified with the human good. Happiness is here defined as an “activity of the soul in accord with virtue” [1098a16-17].

1.2 Virtue

Aristotle, as with other ancient philosophical traditions, views virtue as a certain perfection of our rationality. Aristotle’s account of virtue kind of falls out of the function argument insofar as it is an articulation of what precisely constitutes excellence with regards to the activities of the soul that involve reason [1098a5-10].³⁷ We noted above that excellence in the activities of the soul that involve reason should also be thought to include the moral virtues, or the virtues which relate to feeling and desiring. Aristotle distinguishes between virtues which pertain to thinking and others which pertain to character [1103a10-13]. Aristotle has in mind the distinction between intellectual virtues and moral virtues. We see here that for Aristotle virtue is broader than the moral virtues. In order to properly understand Aristotle’s account of virtue it is necessary to understand each in turn and their relation to each other.

Aristotle tells us that a virtue is a characteristic (*hexis*) that renders good the thing of which it is a virtue, and causes it to perform its function excellently [1106a14-16]. As I said, Aristotle

³⁶ A more detailed account of virtue will be given in the next section.

³⁷ Kraut (2014)

distinguishes between intellectual virtues and the moral virtues. Within the intellectual virtues however there is one which is practical and the other which is theoretical in nature. Aristotle's distinction between the moral virtues and the intellectual virtues, as well as his distinction between a practical and theoretical virtue of the intellect is grounded in his partitioning of the soul. It seems that the possibility of including external goods lies within this partitioning of the soul we see in Aristotle and the distinction between virtue in its practical application and virtue in its theoretical application that this partitioning gives rise to.

Let us outline the partition of the soul in greater detail. As we noted in the previous section the soul is thought by Aristotle to have two elements, one rational and the other irrational [1102a25-30]. The irrational element has two parts. One is the vegetative part which we share with all living things and does not partake in reason in any way. The other part of the irrational element is the seat of the appetites, desire, as well as emotions such as fear or anger and does partake of reason.³⁸ This part of the irrational element of the soul is recognised through its tendency to oppose and react against the rational element. It may however accept the leadership of reason in a virtuous man or in a self-controlled man.

To say this irrational part of the soul may partake of reason means we must introduce subdivisions into the rational element of the soul. So Aristotle tells us that one part of the rational element possesses reason in the strict sense, contained in itself, and the other possess it in the sense of having the capacity to listen to reason as one may listen to ones parents [1103a2-4]. At 1098a4-6 Aristotle first introduces the partition within the rational soul. He says there that it is the part of our soul that puts into action that part of us that has "articulate speech". This is the rational element and it has two parts: "one aspect is what is able to be persuaded by reason, while the other is what has reason and is able to think things through." So we see that the irrational part that listens to reason corresponds with the upper part of the irrational soul and the lower part of the rational soul. The functioning of reason in the upper part of the irrational element of the soul is practical whereas the functioning of reason in the part that possesses reason in itself is theoretical/contemplative. The upper part of the irrational element is thought to be responsive to reason when reason "turns its gaze downwards" to deliberate about action.

³⁸ It may be the case that the irrational element that listens to reason should be separated yet again into two parts. Becoming explicitly clear on this matter is not however necessary insofar as we can get away with a rough description.

For present purposes I am going to suppose that the Aristotelian partition of the soul breaks the soul up into three parts.³⁹ The first of course is the vegetative part which does not partake in reason in any way. The second is the irrational part which does partake in reason but does not possess it in itself, rather it is responsive to reason; in a sense reason “occupies” the irrational part to deliberate about action. Lastly there is the rational part of the soul which possesses reason in itself and the characteristic function of this part of the soul is contemplation. As we will see, this partitioning of the soul, and consequent distinction between practical and theoretical virtue contains the possibility of including external goods as necessary for happiness.

Now there are no virtues corresponding to the vegetative part of the soul. Both the irrational part of the soul and the rational part of the soul however have virtues which are proper to them. We see in Aristotle’s partition of the soul the grounds for his distinction between the intellectual virtues and the moral virtues, as well as the distinction between the practical versus theoretical virtues of the intellect. Now since the appetitive part of the soul has characteristic activities that are both appetitive and rational, it contains within itself both the moral virtues and an intellectual virtue which is peculiar to it. The intellectual virtue that is peculiar to the lower part of the rational soul is *phronesis* or practical wisdom which is excellence with regards to the practical functioning of reason. Aristotle understands *phronesis* as a matter of excellence in deliberation about action. The intellectual virtue of *phronesis* then is concerned with thought as it pertains to action. *Phronesis* and the moral virtues are so closely related to each other that it is sometimes not clear in what manner they are distinct.

Aristotle defines a moral virtue as an “active condition that makes one apt at choosing... which is determined by the proportion and by the means by which a person with practical judgment [*phronesis*] would determine it” [1106b30-1107a5]. In other words moral virtue is concerned with desiring and feeling in the manner prescribed by *phronesis*. It is a matter of the irrational element of the soul being responsive to good reason. So *phronesis* is the intellectual virtue that belongs to the part of the soul in which we find the moral virtues, it is the intellectual virtue that governs the moral virtues or the ways of feeling and desiring that

³⁹ It is worth noting that the precise nature of the partition is not exactly clear in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. There is reason to believe that the soul should be partitioned into four parts. See Lorenz (2006) for a discussion of this topic. What is significant for my purposes is the clean distinction between “higher” and “lower” parts of the rational soul. The specific details of how we are meant to understand the lower part is not relevant for the current project.

are in accordance with right reason. It is the virtue of the intellect employed in its practical functions.

It is not currently necessary to map out the entirety of the relation between *phronesis* and the moral virtues. We may just note that the moral virtues consist in the selection of the mean between the two extremes of excess and deficiency. Where the mean lies in any given situation is for a person of *phronesis* to determine [1106b30-1107a5]. A moral virtue then is a *hexis* involving desiring and feeling in the manner a person with *phronesis* determines. What is essential to understand about the moral virtues and *phronesis* is that they are centrally concerned with which among ends is good for a human being. Aristotle in fact defines *phronesis* as “a truth-disclosing active condition involving reason, concerned with what is good and bad for a human being” [1140b1-10]. We are to desire only those things that are good and ensure that our feelings are directed appropriately, for example we should fear only those things that are fearful or bad and only to the degree to which they are fearful or bad.

So we see that the virtues proper to the irrational part of the soul include both the moral virtues and *phronesis* and they are concerned with desiring and feeling in the right way, such that we pursue only that which is good for a human being and avoid only that which is bad. It is this understanding of *phronesis* that I feel leaves room for the inclusion of external goods, more on this in the next section. For now I just note that the upper part of the rational soul also has an intellectual virtue that is peculiar to itself. The intellectual virtue of the upper part of the rational soul is *sophia* or theoretical wisdom, which is concerned with thought as it is directed to the fundamental principles and causes of the natural world, or things which are incapable of being otherwise, and it is the pure functioning of reason. We can see then that intellectual virtues are the virtues which pertain to thinking, *phronesis* as it is directed “downwards” towards action and *sophia* as it is directed “upwards” towards fundamental principles. The moral virtues are the virtues which pertain to character and are concerned with excellence in desiring and feeling.

1.3 Connection between Virtue and Happiness

Now we come to a consideration of external goods, and why Aristotle might have thought they constitute happiness. Aristotle does mention explicitly at 1099a32-33 that happiness needs goods other than virtue. Here he first lists two. Firstly he tells us that certain actions cannot be performed without the assistance of instruments such as power, wealth, friends, etc. [1099a34-35]. These are goods which are required for the being-at-work in accordance with virtue and so are necessary for one to achieve the human good. We shall refer to these goods by the phrase “instrumental goods”. Without these goods we will not be able to fully realise our capacity to act in conformity with virtue and as such be unable to fully realise the human good. We may also include into the considerations here goods that are required for the development of virtue, for without goods such as a good upbringing and a stable society we will not be able to develop into the sorts of beings who are able to act in accordance with virtue. I will refer to these with the phrase “developmental goods”. We see here that in both cases, i.e. cases where goods are instrumentally required and cases where goods are developmentally required, goods other than virtue are required to enable us to *achieve* virtue.

We can immediately take both developmental goods and instrumental goods off the table because they do not present a challenge to the sufficiency thesis. The person without either developmental or instrumental goods won't acquire, or exhibit virtue. This can be accepted. It is no counterexample to the sufficiency thesis because it is not a case in which a virtuous person is not happy. Both developmental goods and instrumental goods can only be understood as having an indirect impact on happiness because they are, for different reasons, a source of virtue. This again is not a problem for the sufficiency thesis. For external goods to pose a problem for the sufficiency thesis it has to be the case that they are *directly* relevant for happiness.

So of the two types of goods other than virtue, namely instrumental goods and developmental goods, neither present a challenge to the sufficiency thesis. The only goods other than virtue that present a direct challenge to the sufficiency thesis are what we shall refer to as “intrinsically good gifts of fortune” and it is these goods to which I refer when I use the term “external goods”. Aristotle tells us at 1099b2-4 that there are certain goods the absence of which spoils happiness.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ We may note that the absence of these goods cannot make a virtuous person wretched, they can only limit the happiness of the virtuous person. As Aristotle tells us: “[and] since it is activities that control life, as we

Further, deprivation of certain [external goods] - for instance, good birth, good children, beauty - mars our blessedness. For we do not altogether have the character of happiness if we look utterly repulsive or are ill-born, solitary, or childless; and we have it even less, presumably, if our children or friends are totally bad, or were good but have died [1099b1-6].

Aristotle also rather comically tells us at 1099a4-5 that a very ugly man cannot be classified as a truly blessed man.⁴¹ At 1100a5-9 Aristotle uses the legend of Priam to illustrate the point. Priam, who was a very good king to his people, suffered the sacking of his city, endured the horror of witnessing his son murdered and his wife raped and enslaved, only to be murdered himself. The example of Priam seems to show that no matter how prosperous and good a man was/is; if he meets a tragic and wretched end, he cannot rightly be called a blessed and fully happy life.

It seems that the strongest reason for acknowledging the existence of external goods is that doing so bears the full force of common sense. There are countless examples, both fictional and historical, that the defender of common sense can draw on to substantiate their point, the fate of Priam is just one such example.

What seems clear is that we desire external goods and in so doing treat them as good. Acknowledging external goods then is clearly our pre-theoretical base-line, simply because we desire them. It is in any case clear that Aristotle acknowledges external goods because doing so captures a strong intuition. Aristotle in fact seems to present the point about external goods as a sort of truism.⁴² Aristotle writes of someone who has suffered an immense misfortune, like that of Priam, that “no-one counts him happy” [1100a9]. Also, at 1153b21 Aristotle states that those who claim that the good man is happy even on the rack or when great misfortunes befall him are “talking nonsense”. He goes so far as to state that a person would only count such a man happy in order to “defend a philosopher’s paradox” [1096a1-2].

said, no blessed person could ever become miserable, since he will never do hateful and base actions” [1100b33].

⁴¹ We see here the distinction between blessedness and happiness. Staying true to his identification of happiness with the human good, Aristotle terms the good that includes both the human good and external goods “blessedness”. This different terminology must not however detract from the fact that the inclusion of external goods as good means that virtue in and of itself is not sufficient to complete happiness understood as a complete and self-sufficient good.

⁴² Elliot (2014: 45)

It is this intuition and its intuitive strength that I take to constitute the substantial obstacle for the sufficiency thesis. The question still remains however as to why this intuition does not contradict Aristotle's account of virtue and hence why an account of virtue may leave room for external goods. I am of the view that an account of virtue only leaves room for external goods if it acknowledges the legitimacy of the desire for them. Let us explore this possibility. By so doing we can give some theoretical substance to the intuition that external goods contribute to our happiness. This will give us a better sense of the obstacle which stands in the way of the plausibility of the sufficiency thesis. So how should we understand Aristotle's account such that it leaves room for external goods? As I have previously indicated, the answer I think can be found in Aristotle's partitioning of the soul. We have seen that Aristotle partitions the soul into the vegetative, irrational and rational parts. The irrational part, the part that merely listens to reason, has both the moral virtues and *phronesis* which are proper to it, whereas the rational part has *sophia* which is proper to it.

Now we said that happiness for Aristotle is identified with "activity of the soul in accord with virtue" [1098a16-17]. Now each part of the soul has a virtue that is proper to it. The irrational part of the soul has excellence in desiring and feeling⁴³ (the moral virtues) as well as excellence in practical thought (*phronesis*). The rational part of the soul has contemplation (*sophia*) which is proper to it. Since each part of the soul has a virtue or excellence which is proper to it, it seems that each part of the soul has a good which is proper to it. What we must be careful to recognise here is that it is essential for the excellence of the irrational part of the soul that the things, the external goods, it pursues are good, insofar as they are in accordance with *phronesis*, which is the excellence in choosing among ends. I remind the reader that Aristotle defines *phronesis* as "a truth-disclosing active condition involving reason, concerned with what is good and bad for a human being" [1140b1-10]. It is therefore implicit that the good of the irrational part of the soul involves treating external goods as good. *Phronesis* is the intellectual virtue which makes one able to recognise what amongst ends are good and hence rightly desired. To say that they are rightly desired is to say that they are good insofar as desiring something involves treating them as good.

⁴³ There is a question here as to where the desire to know fits into this equation. It seems wrong to analyse the desire to know as of the irrational soul. Man desires to know only insofar as he is rational so the desire to know surely finds its seat in the rational part of the soul. The desire to know, i.e. to attain to wisdom, is the striving of the rational part of the soul to attain to the virtue which is proper to it, namely *sophia*.

But what are these external goods good for? Surely the answer is that they are good for that part of ourselves which rightly desires them. In other words, if external goods are to be directly relevant for happiness in any degree then they must be thought to form part of the good of the irrational part of the soul. This would mean that external goods are good for the man of action, which is a man whose existence finds its excellence in *phronesis* and the moral virtues.⁴⁴ The good of the irrational part of the soul is the good proper to the practical man who is concerned with pursuing what is good and to the degree to which it is good, within the public arena.⁴⁵ It makes substantial sense to think that the good of the man of action should include actually attaining those things which he rightly desires and pursues. We see then that if external goods are going to find a place as necessary for happiness it will have to be as a necessary condition for the good of the irrational part of the soul. We can offer an example of this. Food is good for us because the nutritive part of the soul needs food, i.e. rightly desires food. Similarly with all other external goods, they are good for us insofar as they are good for the irrational part of the soul (or perhaps the nutritive part of the soul) insofar as they are needed/rightly desired by that part of the soul.⁴⁶

It must be said that such an interpretation of Aristotle, where we maintain that external goods are good for the irrational part of the soul, in the sense that they confer benefit independent of virtue, faces significant interpretive difficulties. In the first instance it is puzzling, given Aristotle's definition of happiness as an "activity of the soul in accord with virtue" [1098a16-17], as to why Aristotle would actually include external goods as part the good of even the irrational part of the soul. Aristotle's initial definition of happiness seems to be incompatible with acknowledging the existence of external goods which contribute to happiness.⁴⁷ There is also the problem that Aristotle clearly suggests that the vicious are altogether miserable [1100b33-1101a1]. Richard Kraut states the problem thus:

Suppose happiness consisted in a variety of goods, and not just in virtuous activity. Then misery, the opposite of happiness, would consist in the opposites of those goods. For example, if happiness consisted in a balance of virtuous activity, physical

⁴⁴ If we are to agree with Elliot and also Kraut then we would think that even this is inconsistent with Aristotle's views. See Elliot (2014: 44-53); Kraut (1989: 261)

⁴⁵ See Parry (2014)

⁴⁶ It is not clear where precisely friendship and the love for one's child fit into this picture. I am however going to leave this question aside.

⁴⁷ Elliot (2014: 44)

pleasure, power, and wealth, then a completely unhappy person would be impoverished, powerless, full of vice and pain, and devoid of pleasure. Now those whose strongest desires are for amusements or power or wealth stand a decent chance of getting some of these goods to some degree. At any rate, Aristotle would have to admit that so long as one has some of the other goods (besides virtuous activity) in which happiness consists, one will, like the virtuous person who has suffered great misfortune, fall between the two extremes of happiness and misery.⁴⁸

Lets us leave these interpretive difficulties aside. In any case, external goods surely cannot find a place within the rational part of the soul. The rational part of the soul has excellence in speculative thought, *sophia*, which is proper to it. The thought of the purely rational part of the soul is contemplative; it gazes “upwards” to understand fundamental principles and strives towards the divine. If there is an end to be attained from the activity of contemplation it does not consist in any external good, rather it will consist in knowledge of divine truths. The rational part of the soul in any case cannot be thought to desire any external good and hence cannot be thought to require any external good to supplement its good. This good of the rational part of the soul, which consists in contemplation of the more divine aspects of being, is the good proper to the man of contemplation, and it cannot be thought to require external goods in any sense.

So we have these two goods, the good of the practical man and the good of the man of contemplation and it is only in the former that external goods can find a place.⁴⁹ The question now is: how are these goods related to happiness? Now if external goods are to pose a challenge to the sufficiency thesis, we have to maintain that happiness is constituted by both the good of the irrational part of the soul and the good of the rational part of the soul, hence we refer to this as an “inclusive” interpretation of Aristotle. A simple way of saying this is that part of what it means to be human is for external goods to be good for us. It seems to me that this is precisely what the inclusive interpretation maintains. This just means that the virtue that constitutes happiness is compatible with desiring external goods and hence treating them as good such that they can rightly be deemed as necessary for happiness. In other words

⁴⁸ Kraut (1989: 261)

⁴⁹ Whether or not one should include *phronesis* as part of the good of the rational part of the soul is not of great significance. I include it as part of the good of the irrational soul because it is fundamentally concerned with practical thought which is concerned with excellence in choosing among ends. It, so to speak looks downwards.

it is consistent with virtue to desire external goods and insofar as we rightly desire them, they are necessary for our happiness. We may note that it will never be possible, even on the inclusive interpretation, for a virtuous person, grossly cursed by fate, to be wretched. This is because external goods are only necessary for a small part of the good of the lower part of ourselves. Nevertheless they can limit the happiness of the virtuous person because they are necessary insofar as they are necessary for the good of the irrational part of the soul.

So I have outlined a theoretical justification for including external goods as necessary for happiness. I have essentially opened a space in an account of virtue for external goods. They are good for us insofar as they are good for the part of our souls which rightly desires them.⁵⁰ One should recognise that the space has been opened by maintaining that it is in accordance with the virtue that constitutes happiness to rightly desire external goods and hence treat them as good. We may note that there are things Aristotle says in book X that cast doubt on this inclusive interpretation. In book X Aristotle says that if happiness is activity of the soul in accordance with virtue then it will be activity in accordance with the highest virtue, which is *sophia*. Again *sophia* belongs to the highest part of the soul, the intellect or rational part of the soul, which is the part of the soul which governs and is closest to the divine [1177a10-20]. So Aristotle seems to be saying that happiness is constituted by the good of the intellect or the rational part of the soul. He suggests that the life of contemplation, which is the life that participates in the good of the rational part of the soul, is secure against the need for external goods [1177a30]. If we accept this dominant interpretation of Aristotle which maintains that happiness is constituted by the good of the intellect, then we will have to conclude that Aristotle actually endorses the sufficiency thesis because happiness is secure against the need for external goods and is constituted solely by *sophia*.⁵¹

Now, my aim in this paper is clearly not to take a position in an interpretive dispute. My aim is to render the sufficiency thesis plausible. We may remind ourselves that the most prominent obstacle to the plausibility of the sufficiency thesis is the strong intuition behind the existence of external goods. We desire external goods and in desiring them we treat them as good. Placing value in external goods then is our pre-theoretical base-line. The above

⁵⁰ Note this is not anything like an orthodox desire-satisfaction theory of well-being, see Crisp (2013). External goods are to be objectively specified in accordance with *phronesis*, they are not subjectively defined as they would be on an orthodox desire-satisfaction theory.

⁵¹ See Hardie (1965) for a discussion of the dominant interpretation of Aristotle.

discussion of Aristotle has been dialectically useful since we now have some theoretical substance to the intuition that external goods contribute to happiness. External goods are good for us insofar as they are good for the part of us that rightly desires them. This just means to say that virtue is consistent with desiring external goods and hence treating them as good. If this is the substantial challenge to the sufficiency thesis then I feel the best defence to mount against it is to attempt to show that virtue involves detaching oneself from, or “purifying” oneself of these desires for external goods to attain to an existential position of invulnerable happiness. This can perhaps be formulated as the claim that our happiness consists in detaching from or “rising above” that part of ourselves which rightly desires external goods, which would be Aristotle’s view if we accepted the dominant interpretation.

To this end I am going to move the spotlight of this investigation onto the Stoics. The Stoic response in essence denies that there is a part of ourselves at all for which external goods are good. As we will see the Stoics deny the Aristotelian partitioning of the soul and instead analyse desires and feelings as involving a rational assent to some indifferent as good.⁵² The good of the soul then is seen to be solely constituted by virtue, which is the perfection of the rational part of our soul, and there is no place to be found for external goods as there is no part of the soul which rightly desires them and so there is not part of the soul for which they are good. Again, this is the line of response I aim to adopt. Essentially I am going to argue that external goods are not good for us at all because happiness consists in the divestment of all desire for them. In chapter 3 I will argue that this position can be rendered plausible by examining the existential position occupied by one who has detached themselves in such a manner. This will culminate in a description of wisdom as involving a distanced perspective which renders the agent’s happiness invulnerable. I will thereby have answered the substantial challenge to the sufficiency thesis by showing that virtue and hence happiness is constituted by the existential position in which external goods are no longer desired and are experienced as indifferent and hence are irrelevant for happiness.

⁵² Inwood (1985)

II. The Stoics

My defence of the sufficiency thesis is going to be formulated around a response to the problem of external goods raised in the last chapter. More precisely it is going to be formulated around a response to the inclusive interpretation of Aristotle which maintains that external goods can limit the happiness of the virtuous person insofar as desiring them is consistent with the possession of virtue. My goal ultimately is to present an account of virtue such that the possession of virtue transforms our relationship to external goods. This transformation is perhaps best referred to as a transcendence or “shedding” of our “lower” natures, which secures the virtuous agent’s happiness against the requirement for external goods, and diffuses the problem of external goods as posed in the previous chapter.

The present chapter begins this project by describing the Stoic answer to the problem of external goods, and providing the theoretical essentials that enable this answer to be given. Ultimately, my final position diverges from the Stoic account with regards to the metaphysical doctrine of divine providence. Even given this divergence I will maintain what I take to be the core of the Stoic insight. In this chapter then I aim to distil the Stoic position and identify the commitments I would like to keep and those I would like to set aside.

Before undertaking this endeavour it is worth noting that the Stoic school is made up of a diverse set of often seemingly contradictory doctrines and no complete corpus survives today.⁵³ Thus the literature on Stoic thought seems to involve piecing together fragments. Given this uncertainty around Stoic thought I am going to avoid getting lost in interpretive details and internal disputes. My aim is to provide the bare bones of how I understand the Stoic ethical doctrine. I aim to outline what I take to be the central tenets of the Stoic school as they are relevant to their ethical views and their endorsement of the sufficiency thesis.

⁵³ Edelstein (1966)

2.1 Virtue

The Stoics, like Aristotle, took virtue to consist in the perfection of our rationality, though they developed this differently to Aristotle. On the Stoic account virtue is a psychologically much simpler affair than it is for Aristotle. In Aristotle we see room for distinct but interconnected virtues in the soul, namely; *sophia*, *phronesis*, and the moral virtues. In Stoic doctrine however there is only room for one sort of virtue, that consisting in a well-trained mind that is able to recognise all the actual good reasons for or against certain actions, interests, commitments, activities and ways of living.⁵⁴ Virtue for the Stoics consists in the ability to select rationally between things which are natural but indifferent⁵⁵ with respect to human happiness.⁵⁶ As we will see, virtue for the Stoics is a unity constituted by wisdom and all the other virtues such as courage, temperance, etc. are accounted for in terms of different domains of application of wisdom.

The simplification of virtue is a consequence of the Stoics' moral psychology.⁵⁷ Unlike Aristotle, and indeed Plato, the Stoics do not partition the soul into rational and non-rational elements.⁵⁸ We see in Aristotle desires and emotions as non-rational drives in the soul that can, in and of themselves, move us to action. The Stoic view is radically different. Desires according to the Stoics are not analysed as non-rational; they are the result of rational assent to pre-rational feelings, which are aimed towards indifferents, as good.⁵⁹ What Aristotle and Plato call the appetites (active desires moving us to bodily gratification through eating, drinking, or sexual activity) are, according to the Stoics, a particular kind of thought, a thought which is a rational assent to a pre-rational feeling of hunger or thirst as good and

⁵⁴ Cooper (2012: 161)

⁵⁵ The standing of the indifferents will be considered in section 3 of this chapter.

⁵⁶ Inwood (1985: 206)

⁵⁷ We may note however that it is not entirely dependent on it. I am however going to leave the question of moral psychology open because I do not feel it is the most pressing issue I need to consider. The moral psychology of the Stoics is considered here in order to develop their position. Suffice to say that full virtue involves overcoming our desires for indifferents. Being committed to this does not in itself commit us to the Stoic moral psychology.

⁵⁸ Cooper (2012: 158)

⁵⁹ We will explore this in greater detail in the next section.

worth pursuing.⁶⁰ These pre-rational feelings do not amount to another part of the soul, at least not in the Aristotelian sense, because they cannot in and of themselves move us to act. The Stoics go so far as to maintain that all emotions (which can in and of themselves move us to act), including desire, fear, pleasure, and pain are in fact vicious because they all essentially involve the judgment of some indifferent thing as good and as such are incorporated within the singular rational part of the soul.

As is evidenced by the Stoic view that all desires and emotions are vicious,⁶¹ the Stoics maintained that external goods are not good at all but are rather indifferent. We see that Stoic virtue is clearly inconsistent with desiring external goods. The only thing that is good and the only thing that should be desired is virtue. Everything other than virtue is neither good nor bad and should be treated as such [*On Ends III. 10*]. The Stoics argue for the indifference of things such as health, pleasure, beauty, strength, wealth, etc. by noting that these things can be used well or badly. The good according to the Stoics is invariably good and because of this these assets fail to be good, they are neither good nor bad.⁶²

As I illustrated in the introduction however, the indifferents were thought to possess some sort of value.

That which is in itself in accordance with nature, or which produces something else that is so, and which therefore is deserving of choice as possessing a certain amount of positive value... this they pronounce to be 'valuable' (for so I suppose we may translate it); and on the other hand that which is the contrary of the former they term 'valueless.' [*On Ends III. 20*]

So for example, health, as an indifferent, was thought to be naturally preferred such that the virtuous person is to seek health and avoid illness, even though actually being healthy does not in any way contribute to a person's happiness. Indifferents are in fact seen by the Stoics to provide the raw materials for virtue. Chrysippus described virtue as a craft/art (*techne*) having to do with the things of life [*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta II 909*]. Virtue for the Stoics is the mastery of the art of living in the world. The mastery of the art of living in the

⁶⁰ Cooper (2012: 159-160)

⁶¹ Presumably all of the various vices such as gluttony, cowardice, etc. are to be analysed in terms of the presence of various desires and emotions. All vice is however of one kind, all vice is constituted by the same sort of failing, namely treating some indifferent thing as good.

⁶² Parry (2014)

world involved knowledge of what is good, bad and indifferent and desiring only that which is good. It is for this reason that the Stoics identify virtue with *phronesis*. *Phronesis* as we saw in Aristotle is practical wisdom, otherwise known as prudence. Put roughly, it is the ability to knowingly select, and pursue that which is of value and desire that which is good. Remember that for the Stoics things of value (preferred indifferents) are not good. It is only virtue that is good. Things of value are to be pursued, or in Cicero's language "to be chosen" [*On Ends III. 22*], but not to be desired. Virtue alone is to be desired.

The individual virtues, such as wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance (which are for the Stoics are the cardinal virtues with wisdom being the virtue within which the others are unified), were to be a certain sort of disposition, which accrue from knowledge of what is good, bad and indifferent. Virtues were called (*diatheseis*) and differ from ordinary dispositions (*hexis*) in that they do not admit of degree. The Stoics thought that virtuous action/response, or perfectly appropriate action/response,⁶³ involves a particularly stable and consistent disposition.⁶⁴ Any appropriate action has the potential to be virtuous. A response becomes virtuous, or perfectly appropriate if it is done by a sage, from the appropriate *diatheseis*. This means then that it is done with full knowledge of what is good, bad and indifferent. To act with the appropriate *diatheseis* is, at least in part, to act in the full knowledge that virtue is the only good. This means that the ultimate standard of goodness is not merely responding in a conventionally just, courageous or temperate manner; it is so responding because it is judged to be the virtuous response.⁶⁵ A response is only virtuous then when it is done for the sake of virtue, and from the stable disposition to desire only virtue. Virtue is the only thing that is truly good - so for an action to share in the goodness of virtue it must be done for the sake of virtue.

We see then that acting in the world for the sage consists in the pursuit of indifferents as indifferent and for the sake of virtue. Having mastered the art of living, the Stoic sage has knowledge of the manner in which indifferents are to be appropriately pursued.⁶⁶ The sage is

⁶³ A perfectly appropriate action/response differs from merely appropriate action/respond, which is just understood as the right thing to do or the right way to respond. Perfectly appropriate action (the virtuous response) is the right thing to do done in the right way, from a stable and consistent disposition.

⁶⁴ Inwood (1985: 208-209)

⁶⁵ We see here why Kant may be interpreted as in some sense Stoical. See Kant (2005)

⁶⁶ As we shall see, it is because the knowledge of what is appropriate is incomplete that the sage is to pursue indifferents with reservation.

to ensure at all times that the course of action to which he assents is in accordance with right reason. The sage alone is able to act as right reason dictates and thus only he knows what pursuit is appropriate; but he also knows that success in the pursuit is irrelevant - what matters is that the pursuit is correctly judged to be appropriate and is undertaken solely for the sake of living virtuously. The Stoic sage is to select and pursue indifferent things with reservation⁶⁷ purely because attaining them is not his formal goal as he desires only virtue. We can see more clearly now what is meant when we say that the wisdom of the sage is constituted by *phronesis*, or the ability to knowingly select, and pursue that which is of value, and desire that which is good.

This Stoic understanding of virtue is greatly illuminated by the analogy drawn by the Stoics between virtue and the art of archery [*On Ends III. 22*]: A skilled archer should concern himself with practicing the art of archery excellently, i.e. he must attend to his stance, draw, sight profile, release procedure, etc. and ensure he gets all these things right. Whether or not the archer manages to hit the target is dependent upon factors that are external to the archer. Something might come in between the arrow's trajectory and the target, the target might move, some force may affect the flight of the arrow. As such the target is only relevant as a facilitator of the techniques of archery; it provides the raw materials for the practice of archery. Furthermore, it is only through such deliberate attention paid to the actions involved in archery that one can master the art of archery. Virtue, similarly to archery, is about a virtuous way of being and not about producing or realising a particular result, even if it may be considered appropriate. What is significant is that the sage recognises what course of action is appropriate (the virtuous/good course of action) and does it for the sake of virtue. This is what is in his power, whether or not the action realises in the manner otherwise expected is not within the sage's power, and so is not relevant to the sage's virtue.

This is illustrated in the Stoic account of acting with reservation. The Stoics called an impulse in pursuit of the good, which will in turn cause the relevant action or pursuit, an *orexis*.⁶⁸ An *orexis* involves assent to a proposition of the following form "It is fitting to..." A reserved *orexis* adds the clause "unless it goes against Zeus" such that a reserved *orexis* involves

⁶⁷ We will have more to say on what this reservation involves shortly.

⁶⁸ The Stoic account and classification of the different types of impulses is pretty complex. For our purposes we need only note *orexis* as it is sufficient for outlining what I take to be the most important aspects of Stoic ethics. For a detailed discussion of impulses in Stoicism see appendix 2 in Inwood (1985: 224-242)

assent to a proposition of the following form “It is fitting to... unless it goes against the will of Zeus.” We see that the Stoics advise that we should act in accordance with the will of Zeus.⁶⁹ This is the formal goal of the Stoic sage. Given that the will of Zeus is not always apparent to us however we are to act with reservation, with a reserved *orexis*. The only thing that we are to pursue with an unreserved *orexis* is virtue.

We see again in the Stoic account of acting with reservation the view that virtue is constituted by excellence in the pursuit of ends. As Cicero puts the point:

It is of the essence of virtue to exercise choice among the things in accordance with nature. [*On Ends III. 12*]

Actually attaining the ends of our actions is however irrelevant for virtue. The ends of our actions are to be chosen because they are of value but not to be desired because they are not good, they are indifferent [*On Ends III. 12*]. The Stoic sage knows what pursuits are appropriate because he knows what ends are of value; he knows what ends are to be chosen. He however undertakes the pursuit solely for the sake of virtue because virtue is the only good and is the only thing he desires. It is this that I take to be the core of Stoic ethics.

At its core then virtue for the Stoics is centrally concerned with desiring in the right way. The sage is to desire only virtue because to desire anything other than virtue is to treat what is indifferent as good, which is vice. The sage is also able to always recognise what course of action is required of him by virtue; he knowingly selects and pursues things of value but is not invested in attaining them. The wisdom of the sage then is constituted by *phronesis*. It can be described as a detached knowing, or perhaps better a knowing which produces detachment.⁷⁰ It can thus be described as a form of contemplativeness though it perhaps differs from the contemplativeness we see in Aristotle insofar it is essentially practical. It is a knowing that produces detachment because the sage has knowledge of what is good and what is of value where this knowledge sees to it that the sage views indifferents as indifferent and hence becomes detached from them. He desires only virtue and does not desire any of the indifferents and pursues them only if they are deemed to be of value and hence in accordance with virtue. These serve only as the raw materials for virtue.

⁶⁹ This, as we will see, means acting in accordance with fate which involves acting to bring about the next phase of Zeus’s divine plan.

⁷⁰ I will have occasion to refer to this description of Stoic wisdom in later chapters.

It is important to keep in mind that *phronesis* for the Stoics is perfected virtue. This differs from Aristotle. As Deverette puts the point:

There is one important difference, however, between the Stoic *sophos* and the Aristotelian *phronimos*. The Stoic expert is never wrong; his or her knowledge is infallible in the sense that it inevitably succeeds in making the sage virtuous and thus in bringing happiness.⁷¹

In Aristotle's view *phronesis* is a lesser virtue than *sophia* and is as such deficient. Perfected virtue is constituted by *sophia* and is roughly describable as the state of contemplation. For Aristotle, the highest achievement possible for a human being is not constituted by any achievement in the practical domain. For one to attain to *sophia* one must separate oneself from the practical sphere and lose one-self in the activity of contemplation. Contemplation and action then are mutually exclusive activities of the soul. Stoic *phronesis* is like its Aristotelian cousin insofar as it is essentially practical. Crucially however it differs insofar as it is inconsistent with any desire for indifferents and also does not exclude the contemplative activities of the soul. Stoic *phronesis* seems to be a practical contemplativeness.⁷² The sage is pursuing ends in the world but doing so from a contemplative perspective insofar as he is detached from those ends. It is practical because it is concerned with the selection of ends in the pursuit of virtue. It is contemplative however insofar as it involves a detachment from those ends and a concern for cosmic understanding. So, whilst the ends are pursued, they are pursued in a manner conducive to contemplation and from the contemplative perspective of cosmic understanding as it were.⁷³ We in fact see that there is a sense in which Stoic *phronesis* constitutes a bringing together of the contemplative and practical domains, which are held distinct in Aristotle, a bringing together of *phronesis* and *sophia*.⁷⁴ This should be expected given their simplified moral psychology.

⁷¹ Deverette (2002)

⁷² For Aristotle *phronesis* does not seem to be a form of contemplativeness as it is for the Stoics.

⁷³ We will get a greater sense of what this might entail in the next section and also in the next chapter.

⁷⁴ There is a very interesting question here about the nature of action from a contemplative standpoint. This will not be action that is motivated by a desire for the end that would be given as a reason for the action. I am of the view that the action of the virtuous agent is a form of autotelic activity in the sense developed by Csikszentmihalyi (1992). I am however not going to pursue this question in this paper, even though it is a substantially interesting one.

It is worth noting that, true to Hellenistic philosophies generally, the perfection of virtue was deemed by the Stoics to be almost inaccessible. This state of being constituted by *phronesis* is the goal of every Stoic, though actually attaining it is extremely difficult, and highly unlikely. It is for this reason that spiritual exercises were such a crucial element of Stoic philosophy, and indeed ancient philosophy in general. As Hadot puts the point:

With the help of these exercises, we should be able to attain to wisdom; that is, to a state of complete liberation from the passions, utter lucidity, knowledge of ourselves and of the world. In fact for Plato, Aristotle [in the form of *sophia*], the Epicureans, and the Stoics [in the form of *phronesis*], such an ideal of human perfection serves to define *divine* perfection, a state by definition inaccessible to man.⁷⁵

The sort of perfection involved in virtue was, for the Stoics, exceptionally difficult if not impossible to attain. The knowledge required (of oneself and the world) to always be able to recognise the appropriate pursuit, and to undertake it solely for the sake of virtue, was thought to be immense, indeed divine. Under normal conditions then what was expected of a Stoic was to be absolutely committed to the pursuit of attaining the perfection of the sage. “The only state accessible to man is *philo-sophia*: the love⁷⁶ of, or progress toward, wisdom.”⁷⁷ This is the state which defines one who is wholeheartedly committed to Stoic philosophy. The philosopher was thought to live in the intermediate state between the domain of the habitual and everyday and the domain of absolute consciousness and lucidity, which is the domain of virtue. To the extent that the philosophical life was inseparable from a life devoted to spiritual exercises of the sort described by Hadot,⁷⁸ the philosophical life constituted a deliberate tearing away from the everyday in search of the domain of virtue.

So, *Philo-sophia* is not *phronesis* or perfected virtue as it is envisioned in the sage. This point calls to mind the Stoic doctrine that virtue does not come in degrees. This doctrine was

⁷⁵ Hadot (1995; 103)

⁷⁶ The love of the philosopher consists in a deficiency, the philosopher does not possess the wisdom he loves and his love is in a sense an expression of this deficiency. This is love in the sense developed in Plato’s *Symposium*. This is not to be confused with the desire for virtue we see in the sage. The sage desires virtue and possesses it. Though it is sometimes more natural to express the sage’s desire for virtue by saying that the sage “loves virtue”, it is very important to remember that one should not impute from this a deficiency in the sage’s virtue similar to the deficiency we see in the philosopher. The sage is not a philosopher; he is higher than the philosopher insofar as he possesses virtue and the philosopher doesn’t.

⁷⁷ Hadot (1995; 103)

⁷⁸ Hadot (1995: 81-109)

expressed with the use of various metaphors and analogies. One of the metaphors the Stoics used was that to drown one foot under water is still to drown.⁷⁹ This makes it clear that *philosophia* is something less than virtue. No matter how far along the path an adept may have progressed, they will not have attained to virtue in the slightest degree so long as they have not attained it in its perfection. Until such a time as a person becomes a sage they will only ever have attained to *philo-sophia*, which is something less than virtue.

We should not however become uncomfortable here by thinking that Stoicism is unforgiving. We must remember that even though the philosopher is not a sage, he is not a non-sage. The philosopher is torn between two ways of being. He is torn between the non-philosophical domain of everyday life, and the domain of the sage, the domain of utter lucidity and knowing detachment.⁸⁰ The philosopher thus occupies a position between the sage and the non-philosopher. He is in a better position than one who has not come to recognise the value of virtue, and is blindly pursuing indifferents as good. He is in a better position because he is on the path to virtue and hence, as we shall see, on the path to happiness. His is a life of inquiry, of himself and of the world. He inquires within himself in order to attain to the detachment of the sage, and inquires in the world in order to come to know the things of value and the manner in which he should conduct himself.

2.2 *Virtue and Stoic Metaphysics.*

Stoic ethics is interconnected with metaphysics. It is probably impossible to avoid discussing Stoic metaphysics when expounding Stoic ethics; indeed I have already made reference to it in the preceding section. Even granting this however there is room for disagreement about the precise role Stoic metaphysics plays in their ethics. The most common view stresses that the Stoic conception of Zeus and his/its relation to all things has momentous consequences for Stoic ethics insofar as it is the *philosophical foundation* upon which Stoic ethics rests.⁸¹ Conventional wisdom, as expressed by Cooper, has it that the Stoic account of virtue is a

⁷⁹ Bett (2006)

⁸⁰ Hadot (1995: 103)

⁸¹ Cooper (2012: 1)

consequence of their metaphysical doctrine of divine providence and is completely dependent upon it. The Stoics indeed describe virtue as a harmony with the will of Zeus, or living in agreement with nature, a description which involves direct reference to this doctrine. But this is not the only way of understanding the Stoic programme. Another less common view has it that Stoic metaphysics is not the philosophical foundation of their ethics. Pierre Hadot is amongst those who defend this view.⁸² Hadot draws attention to the fact that Stoicism was first and foremost aimed at achieving a way of life, which constituted the virtuous way of being.⁸³ Given that the deliverable of Stoic doctrine generally was the production of a specific type of individual, we have reason to believe that Stoic metaphysics is best understood as a therapeutic device developed to assist in the ethical project, rather than the philosophical foundation of Stoic ethics. I am convinced that the Stoic account of virtue and of happiness does not require the metaphysical doctrine of divine providence in any logical sense. The Stoic account of virtue as *phronesis* can stand alone as a defence of the sufficiency thesis, without the metaphysical support provided by Stoic metaphysics. In order to show this we should first consider the doctrine and the role it plays in the Stoic account of virtue. I will only complete my analysis of this point at the end of the chapter once I have considered Stoic metaphysics, and the Stoic account of happiness.

A useful way of starting is by considering man's relation to the cosmos. Inwood tells us that central to Stoic ethics is their understanding of what it is for rational man to act in a providentially and rationally ordered universe.⁸⁴ Virtue for the Stoics, or *phronesis*, was described as living in agreement with nature (*phusis*) or being in harmony with the will of Zeus. The term "nature" here has a very specific meaning. *Phusis* refers to a rational unity governing all things. The Stoics refer to this rational unity as "Zeus". Zeus is in contact with all things; Zeus is present within and not distinct from the natural world; all that exists is a part of Zeus.⁸⁵ Zeus then is actually and actively present in the natural world, and governs it according to his teleological thought.⁸⁶ Zeus exists as an all pervasive force/principle responsible for the very being of things, and the occurrence of all events. The Stoic view can perhaps be cashed out in numerous ways and there isn't metaphysical consensus among the

⁸² Hadot (2002) and Hadot (1992)

⁸³ This will be developed in greater detail at the end of this chapter and the beginning of the next.

⁸⁴ Inwood (1985: 105). We see here again the view that Stoic ethics is a consequence of their metaphysics.

⁸⁵ Inwood (2012)

⁸⁶ Cooper (2012)

Stoics.⁸⁷ We can however avoid a fine grained discussion of how the Stoic conception of nature may best be cashed out as this discussion is not useful for the current project.⁸⁸

The crucial moral which we should draw from the Stoic metaphysical story is that it constitutes a rejection of the possibility of chance. The rationality and omnipresence of Zeus grounds the Stoic's providential determinism or fate, i.e. their doctrine of divine providence, which is a doctrine opposed to the possibility of chance. The Stoic doctrine of divine providence can be initially formulated as the following: every event in the natural world is determined by the will of Zeus.⁸⁹ Furthermore, since Zeus, as the active principle determining the very being of things, is rational, he is consequently, both in his formative activities of giving objects their physical properties, and in causing their subsequent movements, aiming at a maximally good product.⁹⁰ Given that there are no impediments to the rationality of Zeus, he succeeds in aiming at, and in realising the maximally complex, well-ordered, and integrated, and hence maximally good, life history of the world. So the Stoic doctrine of divine providence in its entirety is roughly is the following: Every event in the natural world is determined by the will of Zeus in order to realise the maximally well-ordered, complex and good whole which constitutes the cosmos.⁹¹

Now, the consequence this metaphysical picture has for us, as beings possessing a limited reason⁹², is that we must aim to act in accordance with the plan laid out by Zeus. We, as parts of the maximally good whole sequence of processes and events, are to endeavour to do our bit to realize the will or plan of Zeus. Living in agreement with Zeus for human beings then means acting in accordance with right reason, such that one wills in a manner that is consistent with the divine plan laid out by Zeus. This is what it means for the Stoic sage to recognise the appropriate course of action. It is to recognise the course of action that is consistent with the will of Zeus, and furthermore to pursue it because it is consistent with the will of Zeus. We are seen as partners of Zeus in bringing about the maximally good sequence

⁸⁷ Edelstein (1966)

⁸⁸ For a discussion of how this account of nature is to be cashed out see Lossky (1929).

⁸⁹ Bett (2006); Gould (1974: 17)

⁹⁰ Cooper (2012: 168)

⁹¹ It is very important to take note of this doctrine because I aim to free Stoic ethics from any conceptual reliance upon it.

⁹² I am leaving aside questions that relate to human free will in a providentially determined world. These questions serve to complicate the matter more than is presently useful.

that constitutes the life history of the world. The good of the world then is the only good we are to pursue.⁹³

We see then that central to being virtuous is the recognition of which action is required of us by the will of Zeus, and consequently acting to do our part in bringing about that which is deemed to be in agreement with the will of Zeus. Now this recognition of what is in agreement with the will of Zeus has a couple of distinct elements. Cooper notes that this state has been described by the Stoics both as living in “agreement with nature” and living “in accordance with nature”. When the Stoics tell us that we should live “in agreement” and “in accordance” with nature, they are not repeating themselves.⁹⁴ When the Stoics tell us to live “in agreement” with nature they seem to be telling us to do two things. Firstly perfectly virtuous living involves living in agreement with one-self such that the sage will have no divided thoughts about how he is living, and will never be conflicted in his feelings, and attitudes about himself, his actions, and his way of life. Living in agreement with nature also involves thinking the same thoughts as those of Zeus about one’s current circumstances.

Living “in accordance with nature” Cooper thinks means living in accordance with the natural outcomes themselves. Living in accordance with nature then will be the result of living in agreement with nature insofar as one thinks the same thoughts as those of Zeus which rule over what happens in the course of nature. This can be understood as acting according to normative principles which are derived from the recognition of the proper functioning of nature as caused by the thoughts of Zeus.⁹⁵ Human beings then, as rational animals, exist in relation to a divine mind which is actively and causally present in the world of nature. Either we act in agreement with it and in accordance with its will or we do not. If we do, then we live virtuously, and if we do not, then we live viciously. Both living in agreement with and living in accordance with nature are what defines the state of the sage.

So we see that virtue for the Stoics involves knowledge or wisdom. It involves knowledge or wisdom regarding the thoughts of Zeus, and what is naturally appropriate for a human being, given their nature and their relation to the things around them. The wisdom of the Stoic sage is essentially practical, it involves know-how. It is the knowledge of which among ends is of

⁹³ Cooper (2012:170)

⁹⁴ Cooper (2012: 151-154)

⁹⁵ Cooper (2012: 154)

value and hence to be pursued, and what is good and hence to be desired and, again, it is for this reason the Stoics identified virtue with *phronesis*.

The wisdom of the sage is a mastery of the art of living which is constituted by an immense knowledge of the thoughts of Zeus, and what is naturally appropriate for a human being.⁹⁶ The selection of the appropriate course of action will consist in a choice to pursue something that the sage judges appropriate for a human being to pursue. The object of the pursuit, whether it is eating and drinking to sustain our physical constitution, engaging in games to exercise our bodies and mental capacities, developing social relations with other human beings, or any of the other appropriate pursuits for a human being, is strictly indifferent, it is not the end. The sage will undertake these pursuits because he recognises them to be appropriate for him, he will pursue them with reservation as a partner of Zeus, for the end of living in agreement with Zeus.⁹⁷

We see then that what I identified as the core of Stoic ethics has been described as living in agreement with the will of Zeus. It must be said that the core of Stoic ethics does indeed fall out of the doctrine of divine providence. If the cosmos is indeed ordained by Zeus to be a maximally good whole, then virtue surely must consist in living in agreement with the will of Zeus, by doing what is appropriate because it is appropriate, given the will of Zeus. The doctrine of divine providence thus certainly necessitates Stoic ethics. It also incentivises the wholehearted pursuit of virtue which defines Stoicism as a way of life. One very important thing the doctrine of divine providence does do for stoic ethics is that it grounds the objectivity of value. Certain indifferents are to be chosen because they are deemed by Zeus to be of value, i.e. they are in accordance with nature. The doctrine of divine providence thus builds normativity into the world as it were.

I am however convinced that we do not need the doctrine of divine providence in order to ground the objectivity of value. Unless we are moral nihilist, such as John Mackie⁹⁸ or Alfred Ayer⁹⁹, the idea that normativity is built into the world is highly plausible even if we do not posit the doctrine of divine providence. All things considered I am of the view that understanding virtue as *phronesis* in the Stoic manner is sustainable independently of the

⁹⁶ Inwood (1985: 210-211)

⁹⁷ Cooper (2012)

⁹⁸ See Mackie (1988)

⁹⁹ See Ayer (1952)

metaphysical doctrine of divine providence. The Stoic way of life, as defined by *philosophia*, certainly does not require the doctrine of divine providence. Analysed to its most basic, *philosophia* is nothing but a striving for and progression towards wisdom or perfect virtue, whatever form that virtue may take. I will return to this once I have discussed the Stoic account of happiness. For now it is very important to keep in mind that the Stoic account of *phronesis* as a form of practical contemplativeness is inconsistent with the desire for indifferents. To desire so-called external goods is to fail to possess virtue.

2.3 Happiness

I have now outlined the Stoic account of virtue, identified what I take to be their core insight which I aim to adopt, and identified the primary doctrine I want to set to one side. In the next section I will say more about why I deem it necessary to set aside the doctrine of divine providence and also why I am justified in doing so. For now however it is necessary to consider the Stoic account of happiness as constituted solely by virtue.

Stoic ethics espouses a sophisticated conception of *eudaimonia* or happiness which is the constant goal or end for a well-lived human life. The Stoics identify the *eudaimon* or happy life with a life lived in accordance with virtue. In other words, to attain virtue is to have attained the good, and so to be happy.¹⁰⁰ The virtue in question here is of course *phronesis*. The Stoic account of happiness is one I aim to adopt, though again without committing myself to the metaphysical doctrine of divine providence. We will explore its plausibility in the next section by examining the characteristic experience of the sage.

Now, ordinarily we have the tendency to judge the things we possess and acquire, and the things which happen to us as good, or good for us at least. The quality of a human life, as good or bad, then is understood to essentially depend upon how the life stands in relation to these goods. Stoicism takes this ordinary understanding of the goodness of a human life to be completely and absolutely mistaken.¹⁰¹ As we saw in the previous section, the Stoics think that we should distinguish between things that are appropriately preferred, and what is

¹⁰⁰ Edelstein (1966: 1)

¹⁰¹ Cooper (2012: 184-185)

actually good for us, and worthy of desire. All of the things we ordinarily take to be good are only, on the Stoic account, preferred indifferents, and do not in any way add to happiness because they are not good.¹⁰² The only thing that is good is perfect virtue, or living in agreement with the will of Zeus.¹⁰³

Now to see why virtue constitutes happiness we must explore the manner in which the Stoics developed their account of the good. The Stoics described the goal of human life, or the good, in a number of different ways. On one description the good, for the Stoics, is understood as *apatheia* or freedom from passions, where the perfectly virtuous agent is never disturbed by events. On another description happiness is seen to consist in *homologia*, or a consistency of reason.¹⁰⁴ The different descriptions do not contradict each other, rather they complement each other. *Apatheia* for example was understood by the Stoics as a consistency of reason (*homologia*), such that a freedom from passions is accompanied by a “smooth flow of life”, or “living consistently” with oneself and a providentially ordered universe.¹⁰⁵ The description of the good as *homologia* is in fact the dominant formulation of the goal of human life and was seen to constitute happiness because it was seen to constitute a smooth flow of life.¹⁰⁶ To possess *Homologia*, as a supreme order and consistency of one’s reason, is to be connected with nature. To be connected to nature is to live in agreement with Zeus. As we saw in the previous section this state of being is identified with virtue. Let us endeavour to draw out why the state of connectedness with Nature or Zeus, understood as *homologia* and *apatheia*, can furnish an account of happiness, and identify the core of the account of happiness that can be maintained independently of understanding it terms of a connectedness with Nature.

As we noted in the previous section, to possess virtue is to aim at all times to act in accordance to the will of Zeus. The will of Zeus, with regard to any particular agent, is comprised by a single set of mutually consistent principles expressing what is appropriate to pursue, which define a single set of mutually consistent actions and responses. The sage desires to will in accordance with this set of mutually consistent principles, and cannot do

¹⁰² Note that I will take a different stance on the question of indifferents. I aim to maintain that things that are appropriately preferred are good for a part of us but that part does not constitute our happiness. The good of our higher part, which consists in attaining virtue, constitutes happiness.

¹⁰³ Cooper (2012: 186) We see here the Stoic endorsement of the sufficiency thesis.

¹⁰⁴ Edelstein (1966: 2)

¹⁰⁵ Inwood (1985: 105)

¹⁰⁶ We should note that *apatheia* and *homologia* are also terms which can be used to describe virtue, which is should be expected to be the case given the identification of happiness with virtue.

otherwise, or perhaps better, cannot *want* to do otherwise. In other words, living in agreement with Zeus means wanting to happen what does in fact happen. The happiness of the sage consists in his harmony with Zeus or Nature. The sage is free and happy because nothing external to himself ever hinders or impairs him. Such impediments are impossible since the sage is at one with the flow of events. This is what the Stoics meant by *homologia*.¹⁰⁷

Now, as a result of their determinism the Stoics did maintain that the thoughts of Zeus are knowable and hence it is possible to act in accordance with his will. The Stoics in fact devoted a lot of time to the logical analysis of valid inferences in order to predict the natural course of events, so they could follow it with their assent.¹⁰⁸ As we saw however, they accepted that even the Stoic sage cannot always follow the flow of nature with his assent. In some instances it may be appropriate for the sage to pursue an end which is doomed to end in misfortune. To account for this they maintained that the sage always acts with reservation. This reservation, which I noted in the previous section, ensures that even if the end the action aims at, whether it is health, the well being of one's family, etc. is not realised, one has still not willed in contradiction to the will of Zeus. The idea is that the appropriate course of action for the sage may ultimately be doomed to fail. This however does not contradict the sage's willing because he judges the pursuit to be appropriate, whilst recognising that Zeus may require that the pursuit does not achieve its end. Presumably if the course of action chosen by the sage does not achieve its ostensible end, the sage will be aware of why it had to fail, such that the sage greets the failure with an understanding of its consistency with the will of Zeus. Willing with reservation then enables the ability to adapt smoothly and without distress to the otherwise horrifying events that nature has in store for us.¹⁰⁹ Thus the stoics maintained that even in instances when it is not open to the sage to follow the will of Zeus with his assent and hence necessary that he have his pursuits frustrated, he can still greet the "frustration" with joy and acceptance, because he recognizes the necessity of the failure.

At its core then the happiness of the sage seems to consist in his ease with all outcomes. So what is truly good is held to be totally within one's power, and free from the possibility of frustration by the functioning of fate. Being at ease with all outcomes is completely within one's power, and dependent solely on the manner in which one is orientated to the world. The

¹⁰⁷ Inwood (1985: 105-111)

¹⁰⁸ Inwood (1985: 111)

¹⁰⁹ Inwood (1985: 123-126)

sage is at ease with all the eventualities necessitated by fate. What is truly good is understood to be virtue or the perfection of one's soul, the assimilation of one's reason with that of Zeus. This assimilation is the only thing that is to be desired in an unreserved manner. In the event that one achieves connectedness with nature, one will be at ease with all outcomes. Virtue constitutes the happiness of the sage because virtue constitutes an ease with all outcomes. All other things, such as health, the well being of one's family, etc. are considered appropriate and should be pursued with reservation but are irrelevant for happiness. Desiring indifferents in fact rules out the possibility of being at ease with all outcomes, and so rules out the possibility of being happy. Indifferents can just as easily produce despair as they can produce elation, both of which are emotions that are incompatible with virtue, and opposed to happiness. We see here, spelled out in black and white, the Stoic endorsement of the sufficiency thesis. Virtue constitutes the state of ease with all outcomes, and the ease with all outcomes constitutes happiness.

In this context the Stoic description of the good as *apatheia*, or freedom from passions, makes perfect sense. The passions, which include grief, anger, pity, pleasure, fear, elation etc., are a morally wrong kind of impulse.¹¹⁰ Passions were thought to be a kind of impulse which included an unnatural disturbance in the soul. This unnatural impulse is caused by a judgment that some indifferent thing is good, or, in other words, assent to a proposition identifying some particular indifferent thing as good.¹¹¹ The problem with passions is that they were thought to be a kind of excessive impulse, which caused unnatural disturbances in the soul, and for this reason are to be dispensed with.

Moreover the emotions of the mind, which harass and embitter the life of the foolish... these emotions, I say, are not excited by any influence of nature; they are all of them mere fancies and frivolous opinions. Therefore the Wise Man will always be free from them. [*On Ends III. 35*]

Passions arise from a mistaken *orexis* for non-moral things. Passions are the result of mistakenly judging that indifferent things are good. A life free of passions is a life in

¹¹⁰ As we have noted the Stoics understood passions as involving the same type of rational judgements that is involved in assent as it was discussed above. They rejected the Aristotelian and Platonic division of the Soul. Many have felt that this analysis illegitimately disregards the affective element of the passions. For a detailed discussion of this issue see Inwood (1985: 139-143) & Cooper (2012: 158-166)

¹¹¹ Inwood (1985: 144)

agreement with, and in accordance with nature. The person who has achieved *apatheia* is like a dog chained to a cart who walks in harmony with the cart. The life of a person who has not achieved freedom from his passions is like that of a dog who is chained to a cart but consistently wants to go in the opposite direction to the cart, and so gets dragged painfully along with the cart. *Apatheia* then is an alternate description of the state of being at ease with all outcomes.

We thus see in the descriptions of happiness in terms of *homologia* and *apatheia* a core insight. This insight consists in the idea that virtue can constitute happiness because it is constitutive of an ease with all outcomes. This ease with all outcomes was furthermore thought to be productive of an experience of tranquillity. This tranquillity is known as *eupatheia*, which is the pleasantness which accrues from virtue. This then is what I take to be the core of the Stoic defence of the sufficiency thesis.¹¹² By acquiring virtue he has acquired all that is needed to be happy. External goods are neither good nor bad for him, they are indifferent. The addition of any indifferent will not add to the sage's happiness because it will not add to his virtue. This then is what I take to be the core of the Stoic defence of the sufficiency thesis, and I feel it can be maintained independently of their metaphysical doctrine of divine providence.

2.4 Moving Away from Divine Providence

So the Stoics respond to the problem of external goods by denying that they are good at all insofar as desiring them is incompatible with virtue and opposed to happiness. The presence or absence of these indifferents does not add to nor detract from the happiness of a life because they are technically irrelevant for the happiness of a life.¹¹³ As has been illustrated in the previous sections Stoic ethics is intimately connected with the rest of their philosophy. In particular we see their ethical views supported by the metaphysical doctrine of divine providence. Again I hope to maintain the core of Stoic ethics, without accepting this doctrine.

¹¹² Cooper (2012)

¹¹³ Inwood (2012)

It should be clear why I want to side-line the metaphysical doctrine of divine providence. One will surely be hard pressed to find a contemporary philosopher who accepts it. Given this, resting my defence of the sufficiency thesis upon this doctrine will substantially weaken it. As I have indicated previously however I am not of the mind that a defence of the sufficiency thesis requires the metaphysical doctrine of divine providence. I am in fact convinced that Stoic ethics does not require it.

This possibility in fact is rendered substantially plausible if we note that Stoicism primarily was a way of life and their dogmas were therapeutic in nature.¹¹⁴ Given this it seems we have the liberty of viewing Stoic doctrine as an elaborate tool for producing greater consistency within one's self, and stability with regards to how one deals with loss and misfortune. It can be viewed as a tool to improve our capacity to cope in a world in which our plans often fail. Ultimately the aim of the Stoic project can be seen to be the production of individuals who are motivated by a moral ideal, which helps them attain greater self-mastery, and control over their experience of the world, i.e. the production of virtuous living. We in fact see spiritual exercises, such as the monitoring of inner discourse, and meditations on death,¹¹⁵ as being integral to Stoicism as a way of life. The point of the spiritual exercises was to train the soul to be less prone to unnatural and damaging emotions that detract from the quality of a human life, and impede our capacity to act appropriately. If virtuous living is the deliverable of the Stoic project then one can forgive them for being shocking, indeed we may perhaps think that the more shocking the better, if the purpose is to jolt people out of their complacency.

With this in mind we can perhaps view the doctrine of divine providence not as a metaphysical doctrine but rather as a therapeutic tool for producing virtue in people. This is highly suggestive of the point that the Stoic account of virtue, and of happiness, and their relation, is not dependent on the metaphysical doctrine of divine providence in any conceptually significant sense. The core of the Stoic ethics is simply that virtue is mastery of the art of living, namely the acquisition of *phronesis* (which is a practical contemplativeness), and happiness consists in this mastery.

So, to sum up what has gone before in this chapter we may note that at its core, virtue for the Stoics is a matter of acquiring *phronesis*. To acquire *phronesis* is to attain to an exceptionally

¹¹⁴ For more on this see Cooper (2012: 214-225). See also Hadot (2002) & (1995)

¹¹⁵ Hadot (2002, 135-139)

lucid epistemic position of immense knowledge of oneself and the world around one. This ensures that one is always able to recognise the appropriate/virtuous course of action and at all times pursues this virtuous course of action solely for the sake of virtue. *Phronesis* so understood is constitutive of an ease with all outcomes and productive of an experience of tranquil pleasantness, even in situations in which what is appropriate cannot be realised or contradicts what might otherwise be understood as one's self-interest. The acquisition of *phronesis* is however exceptionally difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. The pursuit of it in the form of *philosophia*, or the love of wisdom, is the only thing that is truly worthy of our efforts, and should be undertaken without reservation.

In the remaining three chapters of this paper I am going to pursue an articulation of the Stoical project that does not make reference to the doctrine of divine providence. Instead I aim to offer a psychological interpretation of the Stoical account of virtue. This will involve describing the virtue of the sage as involving a distanced perspective, which is a perspective of contemplation. I want to also illustrate how this perspective is constitutive of an ease with all outcomes. As the account develops we will get a sense of how we can reasonably maintain the core of Stoic ethics without appeal to the doctrine of divine providence. In the next chapter I will have some more to say about how it is that the distanced perspective manages to account for the essence of Stoic ethics by examining the mode of experience that is characteristic of the Stoic sage.

III. The Distanced Perspective

The aim in this paper is to defend the sufficiency thesis by way of offering a psychological interpretation of the Stoical project. Doing this will allow us to maintain the core of Stoic ethics, which is deeply insightful, without committing ourselves to the metaphysical doctrine of divine providence. This project will be significantly advanced by considering the mode of experience which characterises the Stoic sage. This will furnish us with an account of what it's like to possess the virtue of the sage. Literature on Stoic ethics very often neglects to analyse in sufficient detail the characteristic experience of the sage. Much can be achieved then by shining the spotlight of this investigation on it.

Stoic ethical philosophy can be seen as an elaborate justification of the possibility of a particular sort of experience. Pierre Hadot makes the point that producing and sustaining this sort of experience seems to be the core deliverable of Stoic ethics.¹¹⁶ If Hadot is right, and I think that he is, it is aesthetic experience of the world at large which in fact constitutes the wisdom of the Stoic sage. Stoic ethics, with its commitment to divine providence, seems to be aimed at attaining precisely this end. If this is plausible, this means that the Stoic description of virtue as living in agreement with nature, and all that it involves, is in fact a particular formulation of an existential position/state of being, which stands independent of it. This would mean that the validity of the Stoic project is not in fact dependent upon the plausibility of all of their doctrinal assertions. Rather it is dependent upon the plausibility of the existential position those doctrinal assertions are attempting to describe, and produce in the person of the philosopher. In this chapter I am going to say something about the nature of the experience and wisdom of the sage, and pursue an articulation of it that returns to its bare essence and does not make use of the doctrine of divine providence.

To this end let us follow Hadot and turn our attention to considering the figure of the sage and his/her relation to the world.¹¹⁷ Through such an analysis we may firstly distil the mode of experience which is characteristic of the sage, and which defines the virtuous way of

¹¹⁶ Hadot (1995:251-252)

¹¹⁷ Hadot (1995: 251-252)

being. This experience is then going to be described as constitutive of what I shall call the distanced perspective. The peculiarity of this manner of articulating the experience of the sage is that it is primarily psychological and does not require extensive metaphysical justification. We are describing the sage's psychological orientation towards the world. As we shall see the happiness of the sage will be seen to be constituted by the psychological stance he takes toward the world, where this psychological stance is justifiable independently of the doctrine of divine providence.

Now it should be clear that I aim to understand virtue as involving the distanced perspective. More precisely, I am going to understand perfect virtue (which, for the Stoics, is constituted by *phronesis*), as involving the distanced perspective. In essence I aim to achieve this by expanding on the notions of ease with all outcomes and detachment, in terms of which the Stoic account of virtue and happiness is developed. By doing so I hope to shore up the sufficiency of virtue for happiness, and thereby accomplish the aim of this paper, which is to articulate a perspective which renders the sufficiency thesis plausible.

I will have occasion to refer to *philosophia* in the coming chapters in order to get a sense of the plausibility of the distanced perspective as an account of perfect virtue. We can see in *philosophia* a move towards an ever greater state of distance, the perfection of which constitutes the distanced perspective (*phronesis*). It may also be said that this perspective seems to be shared by most, if not all, ancient schools and seems to be the ideal, though variously described, towards which they were striving.¹¹⁸ That being said, the present chapter is concerned with what the distanced perspective is, and why it captures the essence of the Stoical project.

3.1 *The Experience of the Sage*

We shall start by examining the nature of the sage's experience of the world. The sage's experience of the world is peculiar to him alone. The sage's agreement with the will of Zeus,

¹¹⁸ I am not going to say anything to justify this claim. For a justification of this claim see Hadot (2002) & Hadot (1992)

his connectedness to the cosmic totality, unlocks a peculiar experience of the world; it unlocks aesthetic experience of the world. As Hadot¹¹⁹ points out the fundamental characteristic of the Stoic sage is his fundamentally affirmative demeanour towards the entirety of existence. This was noted in the previous chapter where it was said that the state of agreement with nature constitutes an ease with all outcomes. We may recall that, in essence, the state of agreement with nature is a state of detached knowing, or perhaps better a form of contemplative, more precisely a practical contemplativeness. To see how the virtue of the Stoic sage, the state of detached knowing, is connected with aesthetic experience let us expand our understanding of the sage's ease with all outcomes.

What is clear when we say that the sage is at ease with all outcomes is that the sage does not seek to have things happen other than they do, he is not concerned to make the world conform to his agenda. The sage views everything as willed by Zeus, and consequently as a necessary part of the maximally well-ordered and complex life history of the world.¹²⁰ It is absolutely imperative that we recognize that this metaphysically grounded ease with all outcomes is constitutive of a higher and more divine perspective. The ease with all outcomes of the sage in fact seems to be constituted by a perspective akin to the perspective of Zeus, which is a view of the whole, or a view of the cosmos. We see in the sage a sort of "cosmic consciousness" or "divine perspective". The sage witnesses events from a cosmic perspective and, as I will show, it is this that constitutes his ease with all outcomes.

Now, the experience is termed cosmic because of the removal of any restrictions and partiality from the experience. The Stoic sage was to assume an impartial mode of observation in a manner akin to the perspective of Zeus, the impartial but appreciative observer who is at ease with all events.¹²¹ It is this perspective that poetry was thought to aim at expressing. Stephen Mitchell¹²² notes in his introduction to the *Iliad* that poetry must give joy, even when depicting the most desolating of human experience. Such experiences when raised to the level of poetry must be a joy to be savoured, provided one allows oneself to get lost in the words. The joy gained from true poetry, such as the *Iliad*, is the joy of understanding where everything – from cruelty to reconciliation, from suffering to ecstasy,

¹¹⁹ Hadot (1995 : 251)

¹²⁰ Cooper

¹²¹ Hadot (1995: 152)

¹²² See Introduction to Homer. Mitchell (2012)

from the revolting to the sublime – is appreciated for what it is, with the purest attention. Poetry such as the *Iliad* expresses the divine perspective of Zeus, the ideal observer, who, though deeply concerned, is in a state of pure joy.

I am concerned: so many of them will die.

But now I shall sit here at ease on a ridge of Olympus
where I can watch to my heart's delight.

[*Iliad*, 20.20-2]

The ideal observer looks at the world with a deep sense of peace, he is at ease with all outcomes. Not only is he at ease with all outcomes, but he also greets all events with a tranquil joy. He recognises the beauty in all he observes, even the most horrendous suffering. This is a perspective in which even the most tragic reality is accepted as it is, with tranquil joy. This is the experience of the sage, and it is this that constitutes his ease with all outcomes. The sage experiences all of life in such a manner. The cosmic consciousness of the sage transforms the horrendous into the beautiful.

It seems absolutely clear that this is the experience that was sought after by the Stoics. Marcus Aurelius for example wrote:

If a person has experience and a deeper insight into the processes of the universe, there will be hardly any of these processes that does not appear to him, in at least some of its aspects, as pleasant. And he will look upon the gaping jaws of wild beasts with no less pleasure than upon the imitations of them that sculptors and painters offer us [*Meditations* 3, 2].

In another quote we see Marcus Aurelius inciting us to raise the level of our experience towards a greater unity. We see him inciting us to strive towards the experience of the divine perspective where we can attain to the vision of the totality:

Don't limit yourself to breathing along with the air that surrounds you; from now on, think along with the Thought which embraces all things ... you will make a large room at once for yourself by embracing in your thought the whole Universe, and grasping the ever-continuing Time [*Meditations*, 8, 54; 9, 32].

It is worth noting again that the pursuit of this higher perspective was not only central to Stoicism. We see in other schools the same mode of experience held as an ideal. The Epicurean Lucretius similarly seems to capture the phenomenology of the cosmic consciousness of the sage when he describes how the world would look to one who saw it for the first time.¹²³ Implicit in this quote is the idea that the ideal mode of experience involves bringing what is usually outside one's awareness squarely and lucidly into one's experience:

First of all, the bright, clear colour of the sky, and all it holds within it, the stars that wander here and there, and the moon and the radiance of the sun with its brilliant light; all these, if now they had been seen for the first time by mortals, if, unexpectedly, they were in a moment placed before their eyes, what story could be told more marvellous than these things, or what that the nations would less dare to believe beforehand? Nothing, I believe; so worthy of wonder would this sight have been. Yet think how no one now, wearied with satiety of seeing, deigns to gaze up at the shining quarters of the sky [*On the Nature of Things*, 2, 1023-5].

What we see in writings about the sage is that the experience of the sage was thought to be an uncoloured experience of broadened awareness, where the world manifests itself to him as it is. This constitutes the elevation to the more divine perspective noted above. It is this experience that constitutes the sage's ease with all outcomes. It is very important to remember that this ease with all outcomes is to be attained by attaining to wisdom.¹²⁴ Wisdom for the Stoics, as with other ancient schools is purely a matter of elevating the soul to a higher and more divine perspective, the existential position which constitutes an ease with all outcomes.¹²⁵ Given this relation between the sage's ease with all outcomes and wisdom we can come to an understanding of the essence of wisdom through distilling the cosmic consciousness of the sage.

There are two parts to the experience of the sage which illustrate the nature of wisdom. The first thing we see in the experience of the sage is that each thing is experienced for what it is and for the relation it bears to the things around it. This is commensurate with an exceptional broadening of one's attention; the sage takes in the world as whole. There is thus a

¹²³ Hadot (1992: 258)

¹²⁴ Again, wisdom (*phronesis*) for the Stoics constitutes the entirety of virtue.

¹²⁵ Hadot (1995: 244-255) It is worth noting that this perspective seems to be accurately describable as wonder. We will have more to say on the connection between wisdom and wonder at the end of this chapter.

universality present in the experience of the sage, what would usually be outside one's awareness is to be brought squarely and lucidly back into one's awareness. The disposition of the sage is thus essentially contemplative, and when contemplating individual things, the thought of the sage spreads out beyond the obvious to include all those aspects of the thing that sit outside of the customary domain of awareness. This can perhaps be described as an expansion in understanding. The sage has an immense understanding of all things and events insofar as he is simultaneously aware of all of the diverse aspects of a given thing or event, many of which will customarily pass us by.

The second essential part to the experience of the sage is the transcendence present in it. We see in the expanded understanding of the sage the absence of any limit to understanding. The sage does not experience things as they relate to any agenda he may have; there is no barrier to understanding in the experience characteristic of the sage - there isn't anything preventing him from being aware. He has transcended those things that commonly limit our awareness to open up those aspects of the world which usually pass us by.¹²⁶ This is very significant. The expanded consciousness/understanding of the sage constitutes a transcendence or a "rising above" of the customary, practical way of looking at things.¹²⁷ We see the presence of this transcendence clearly in the Stoics. Marcus Aurelius tells us that we are to:

Look on earthly things below as if from some place above them – herds, armies, farms, weddings, divorces, births, deaths, the noise of law courts, lonely places... a mixture of everything and an order composed of contraries [*Meditations*, 7, 48].

This view from above bids us consider the whole of human reality from the perspective of the immeasurable dimensions of the cosmos that dwarf it, not only to see each thing as it is but to see each thing as it exists in relation to everything else. Marcus Aurelius is asking the philosopher to transcend the ordinary way of looking at things which grants central significance of the things of human pursuit, and limits one's awareness. The philosopher is strive to attain to a more divine and holistic understanding, such that he recognizes that the things of human pursuit are trivial. The sage's experience is cosmic insofar as he has attained to complete transcendence. From this perspective all the indifferents such as health, wealth,

¹²⁶ This will be developed more fully in the next section.

¹²⁷ Hadot (1995: 254-261)

fame, etc. are reduced to completely trivial dimensions.¹²⁸ They are reduced in dimension to the degree that they are no longer deemed worthy of desire. If the sage is to pursue them it must be from some motive other than desire.¹²⁹ We see here why virtue is inconsistent with the desire for external goods.

Wisdom for the Stoics is best understood as this existential standpoint or outlook; the detached perspective of Zeus. This is the perspective of an immensely broadened understanding, and a transcendence of the things that limit understanding, with the recognition that the things of human pursuit (indifferents) are trivial. We can see here the validity of describing the wisdom of the sage as a knowing detachment, i.e. as a form of contemplativeness. He is detached insofar as he has come to recognize the things of human pursuit as trivial. Wisdom thus described constitutes an ease with all outcomes because things that would otherwise be troubling come to be seen as trivial and not worthy of desire. The wisdom of the sage reduces human troubles to a more trivial dimension such that they are no longer troubling and as such constitutes an ease with all outcomes, and is accompanied by a tranquil joy. The reader should keep in mind that it is this ease with all outcomes (cosmic consciousness) that renders the happiness of the sage invulnerable. This is therefore the grounds for the possibility of the sufficiency thesis. My defence of the sufficiency thesis will therefore be deemed plausible only insofar as the cosmic consciousness of the sage is deemed to be a plausible existential position. The challenge now is to show the plausibility of the cosmic consciousness of the sage.

3.2 The Distanced Perspective.

It has to be admitted that the cosmic consciousness of the sage does seem to be, initially at least, completely alien to us. This will of course strike most as a problem because it is not entirely reasonable to assent to the value of an existential position that we are not able to grasp. However, it is in fact possible to show that the cosmic consciousness of the sage is not

¹²⁸ We see here that we can acknowledge that indifferents have value but maintain that virtue unlocks experience in which they become completely trivial to the one who has such an expanded consciousness.

¹²⁹ If the sage is to act then it is not action as we commonly understand it.

so completely alien to us. Our engagement with works of art, in particular our aesthetic experience of artworks, allows us to further imagine what the cosmic consciousness of the sage might be like and hence substantiate its plausibility.¹³⁰

The key theme that permeates all discussion of aesthetic experience is its disinterested/detached character. It is for this reason that aesthetic experience is unique in its poignancy. Aesthetic experience can be described as an appreciation of the world *for itself* and not for *how it is useful*. The appropriate form of engagement with an artwork is contemplation or attention to the thing as it is rather than attention to the thing as a tool for action. Aesthetic experience is “innocent” experience. The innocence of aesthetic experience seems to consist in its selflessness, or its emptiness of an agenda, i.e. its disinterestedness. This innocence of aesthetic experience gives an excellent insight into the psychological standpoint which constitutes it. Edward Bullough explicates very well the mode of engagement involved in aesthetic experience. He refers to this mode of engagement as psychical distance. Bullough illustrates his notion of psychical distance with the use of a wonderful example.¹³¹ It must be noted that Bullough’s notion of psychical distance is a notion that bears directly upon the cosmic consciousness of the sage.

Bullough uses the example of a heavy fog at sea to illustrate his point. To be on a ship that is in dense fog can be a distinctly unpleasant experience for both seamen and landlubbers. Fog can engender anxiety and fear over the possibility of hidden dangers and as such is regarded as a “dreaded terror” of the seas.¹³² The fog contains the possibility of numerous hazards. Perceived as such it is only natural that one’s experience of it be negative. But as Bullough points out so eloquently “a fog at sea can be an intense source of relish and enjoyment.”¹³³ It seems that the anxiety and fear exists only as long as the desire for self-preservation gets in the way.¹³⁴ What the subject needs to do is detach himself from his desire for self-preservation to open up the possibility of the perception of the world as it is transformed by the fog. He needs to detach himself from the habitual and utilitarian perception of the fog,

¹³⁰ Pierre Hadot makes precisely this point as well. Hadot (1995: 255)

¹³¹ Bullough (1989: 758-59)

¹³² Bullough (1989: 759)

¹³³ Bullough (1989: 759)

¹³⁴ The point is not that one cannot act to preserve oneself as it were. The point is rather than one’s experience must not be structured in terms of this agenda. One may still respond to preserve one’s constitution but one’s experience of the fog must not be the experience of a thing-threatening-my-constitution.

where after what is left is an experience of those aspects of the world, as it manifests through the fog, which transcend our ordinary experience.

[The] veil surrounding you with an opaqueness as of transparent milk, blurring the outline of things and distorting their shapes into weird grotesqueness; observe the carrying power of the air, producing the impression as if you could touch some far off siren by merely putting out your hand and letting it lose itself behind that white wall; note the curious creamy smoothness of the water, hypocritically denying as it were any suggestion of danger; and, above all the strange solitude and remoteness from the world, as it can be found only on the highest mountain tops: and the experience may acquire, in its uncanny mingling of repose and terror, a flavour of such concentrated poignancy and delight as to contrast sharply with the blind and distempered anxiety of its other aspects.¹³⁵

The three eloquent passages of philosophical writing of which the above quotation forms a part seems to highlight with impressive clarity the possibility of two seemingly contrary experiences of the same phenomenon, the first fearful and the second seemingly expressive of a deeper understanding. In the second the perceiver's eyes have been opened as it were to aspects of the experience which are ordinarily hidden. It seems to the perceiver as though the world has revealed itself.

I take it that the point of the example is that the experiences alluded to above are differentiated by the perspective the agent takes on the world. In the first instance the fog was perceived as the harbinger of danger, the agent adopted a practical standpoint towards the fog such that it is experienced in relation to the agent's practical agenda. The beautiful aspects of the world as it manifests in the fog were not perceived but hidden behind the practical import the fog presents. In the second instance the experience is radically different. The world itself is perceived (mutated as it is by the fog) in a more holistic manner whereupon the sublime characteristics which objectively constitute the experience reveal themselves. The world as it exists, irrespective of the agenda of the agent, reveals itself. This radical difference is indicative of a distinct psychological standpoint adopted towards the fog.

¹³⁵ Bullough, (1989: 759)

We should remember that our lives are for the most part conducted from a practical standpoint. From within this standpoint of practical perception we are selective in our perception, retaining only that which contributes to our action in the world. This practical standpoint hides from us the world qua world.¹³⁶ Distance, as Bullough articulates it, involves a radical transformation of our relationship to the world. This transformation entails a suspension of the practical standpoint. Our pragmatic attitude must be cut out of our apprehension of the world.¹³⁷ To adopt the distanced perspective is to become distanced in sense very similar to this. The distanced perspective is a psychological standpoint of “pure” attention to the world *as it is* and rather than thinking of it as a tool for some further use.

Bullough describes¹³⁸ this cutting out of the practical standpoint as putting the phenomenon ‘out of gear’ with one’s practical self. This means that there must be a distance between the self and the affections. Bullough uses the term “affections” in its broadest sense to mean anything that “affects our being, bodily or spiritually, e.g. as sensation, perception, emotional state or idea.”¹³⁹ Affections then include fears and desires such that one’s own instinctive affective responses become part of the phenomena and hence also become the object of contemplation and understanding. When putting a phenomenon out of gear with the practical self one allows the phenomenon to stand outside the context of one’s personal needs, ends and pragmatic agenda. At its core then what is required is a detachment from things we ordinarily take to be good. This is a distancing from our own ends and the suspension of our fascination with seeing these ends realised.

We see here the exceptional similitude between Bullough’s psychical distancing and the wisdom of the sage. One of the most distinctive characteristics of the sage is his detachment from indifferents. The cosmic consciousness of the sage, which, as we saw, is to be identified with wisdom, is the experience of one who has drawn away from the things of human pursuit. The sage becomes distanced (in a manner akin to the psychical distancing described by Bullough), takes in the world as whole, and hence becomes detached from his own affections, viewing them with disinterest, and thus, in a sense, withdrawing from them, that is, seeing

¹³⁶ Hadot (1995: 254)

¹³⁷ Bullough (1989: 760)

¹³⁸ Bullough (1989, 760)

¹³⁹ Bullough (1989: 759)

them as trivial and treating them as indifferent, neither good nor bad in themselves.¹⁴⁰ The Stoic sage's withdrawal from indifferents constitutes his ease with all outcomes (cosmic consciousness) insofar as it results in a joyous "Yes!" accorded to each moment.¹⁴¹

We see in Bullough's psychical distancing then the plausibility of the cosmic consciousness of the sage and hence the plausibility of my defence of the sufficiency thesis. We can make sense of the cosmic consciousness of the sage in a manner similar to the one with which we make sense of our aesthetic experience of artworks. The sage occupies a distanced perspective, like the one referred to by Bullough, where the insertion of distance transforms his experience. The insertion of distance expands the sage's awareness such that he rises above the practical standpoint which places such heavy significance on the value of indifferents. He thus becomes detached from his affective responses, such as fear, anger, envy, etc. because he deems the concerns which give rise to these responses as, in some sense, trivial; they are not deemed to be real concerns. As Seneca tells us:

The soul has attained the culmination of happiness when, having crushed underfoot all that is evil, it takes flight and penetrates the inner recesses of nature. It is then, while wandering amongst the very stars, that it likes to laugh at the costly pavements of the rich... But the soul cannot despise all these riches before it has been all around the world, and casting a contemptuous glance at the narrow globe of the earth from above, says to itself: "So this is the pin-point which so many nations divide among themselves with fire and sword? How ridiculous are the boundaries of men!" [*Natural Questions*, I, Preface, 7-9]¹⁴²

He is thus at ease with all outcomes, even those outcomes that produce instinctive negative responses. He does not take his negative responses seriously, because he is not attached to the interests that produce them but instead contemplates and understands them as part of the phenomena.

We see then that the invulnerability of the sage is not so bizarre. It is simply the result of the insertion of distance. To further illustrate the point we can look at an analogy. To attain to the

¹⁴⁰ I have Dylan Futter to thank for the formulation of this particular point.

¹⁴¹ Hadot (1995: 251)

¹⁴² Seneca, *Natural Questions*, I, Preface, 7-9

wisdom of the sage is to adopt a perspective similar to the perspective of a spectator at a play. As Sedgwick says:

The peculiar pleasure of the theatre then is the spectacle of life...and this spectacle, when it pleases or holds us, we do not view with the “swelling of pride” of superiority, but with a sort of paradoxical sympathy; for though it is sympathy, it is likewise detached.¹⁴³

The spectator does not experience the events in the play as relevant to his practical agenda. He is, or at least he should be, at ease with all eventualities which constitute the plot of the play. He observes objectively, taking note of the intricacies and intrigues of the plot, savouring the feelings and emotional responses that the play excites within, free from his practical mode of experience. The spectator is free to be moved by the events, never pushed to anguish or despair, free from anxieties that affect his own being and free from any sense of threat to himself. Even the negative affective responses excited by the play such as fear, pity, anger, etc. are blunted such they themselves are the object of appreciation and excite a certain pleasure in the spectator. The spectator is free to become aware of and understand the unfolding plot and his emotional responses to it in a manner which would be closed to him if he were to be one of the characters, caught up the events that constitute the plot. He observes as that divine spectator, uninvolved and immune, but deeply concerned. To attain to the wisdom of the sage is to become distanced in precisely this manner so as to experience all events as part of a grand play. It is to elevate oneself so as to experience all events, even one's own action and feeling, as an “audience member” and not as an “actor”, even though one finds oneself situated centre stage in the grand production.

The wisdom of the Stoic sage then is nothing other than a form of cutting out of the practical standpoint, of putting the phenomenon out of gear with the practical self. It is a transcendence of the obsession to have our particular ends realised. This transcendence is the result of an insertion of distance between the self and the affections. The insertion of distance is a matter of attaining to an expanded awareness. It is a matter of adopting the contemplative standpoint in each moment of one's life and consequently attaining to an immense understanding of things and their value. Indeed this is a matter of attaining to a cosmic understanding.

¹⁴³ Sedgwick (1967, 33)

It has to be admitted that there are differences between the distanced perspective occupied by the sage and the psychical distancing we see in Bullough. One possible difference consists in the distinct levels of control manifested in each. The distancing described by Bullough may occur when one's attention snaps like a wire for a brief moment to a higher perspective.¹⁴⁴ This description illustrates a lack of control over the insertion of distance. The distancing of the sage would presumably be something more controlled and less accidental; the sage surely is the master of his own distance.

It is important to stress however that there is no need to spend time exploring the differences between the distancing expressed by Bullough and the distancing of the sage. What is significant is how they are a-like. Both essentially involve the insert of distance between the self and the affections and thereby render the happiness of the person invulnerable. The distancing expressed by Bullough is a phenomenon we are familiar with since we often experience this sort of distancing in our engagement with artworks. Given that we are familiar with the distancing described by Bullough we can thus easily make sense of how the wisdom of the sage makes him invulnerable. The sage's happiness is invulnerable because his wisdom involves an insertion of distance of the like we see in Bullough. The essence of wisdom then is that it is a distanced perspective. We see the wisdom of the sage approximated by the distancing described by Bullough.

I should remind the reader here that the wisdom of the sage is an ideal. This is something we are to strive for but whether or not we will ever manage to get there, and whether or not we will ever manage to truly be happy, is doubtful. It is again for this reason that *philosophia* or the love of or progress towards wisdom, plays such a significant role in Ancient philosophy, not least in Stoicism. As Hadot tells us:

The Stoics... declared explicitly that philosophy, for them, was an "exercise." In their view, philosophy did not consist in teaching an abstract theory – much less in the exegesis of texts – but rather in the art of living. It is a concrete attitude and determinate life-style, which engages the whole of existence. The philosophical act is

¹⁴⁴ Bullough (1989:759)

not situated merely on the cognitive level, but on that of the self and of being. It is a progress which causes us to *be* more fully, and makes us better.¹⁴⁵

The role played by the consideration of the sage and his way of being is that it provides us with a goal to strive for with philosophical activity. The validity of this endeavour is grounded in the goodness that is thought to consist in the sage's way of being. The philosophical act is a worthy endeavour because the end it aims at is wholly good. The ideal represented by the sage represents the possibility of our own happiness. This is because happiness is to be understood as the possession of the good and virtue, as it is articulated in the person of the sage, constitutes that good.

Once all the dogmas of Stoicism have been stripped away we can come to the essence of the Stoic pursuit. The essence of the Stoic pursuit is to attain to the distanced perspective, to attain to the cosmic consciousness of the sage. This is to attain to virtue or greatness of soul. To attain to the distanced perspective is to rise above individual, passionate subjectivity to the universal perspective which holds within itself the thought of the Whole.¹⁴⁶ Stoic virtue is the fruit of the universality of thought. This understanding of virtue is not a consequence of Stoic doctrinal assertions. Rather all Stoic doctrinal assertions are sub-servant to virtue so understood. It is the pursuit of attaining the distanced perspective that is of primary significance and it is this that grounds Stoic doctrines and not the other way around. They exist solely to usher aspirants towards this most wondrous prize.¹⁴⁷ We should avoid the urge to judge the validity of the end based solely on the discomfort we feel with one articulation of it, especially if this articulation serves only to assist us in the pursuit of attaining the end. It would be unwise then to dismiss the validity of the Stoic endeavour solely because we are uncomfortable with one or more of the Stoic doctrines. This would be like denying the existence of a hospital based solely on the fact that we are uncomfortable with the description of hospitals provided in the map we are given to find the hospital.

Thus we have an idea of what psychological standpoint constitutes the cosmic consciousness of the sage. I noted at the beginning of this chapter that the defining attribute of the sage is the sage's possession of wisdom where wisdom is constitutive of the cosmic consciousness of

¹⁴⁵ Hadot (1995: 82-83)

¹⁴⁶ Hadot (1995)

¹⁴⁷ See Hadot (1995: 81-109)

the sage. I have subsequently illustrated how the wisdom of the sage involves the ability to adopt a distanced perspective similar to the psychical distancing described by Bullough. We may briefly remind ourselves here that the cosmic consciousness of the sage is immune to misfortune. The sage experiences the world with understanding and shares in the pleasure of understanding, even of the horrifying. This pleasure is immune from misfortunes because even the most horrifying misfortunes are experienced as indifferent. Furthermore the possession of the distanced perspective is immune to the possibility of misfortune because there can be no misfortune which shakes the sage from his perspective of detachment. The distanced perspective, once fully attained, is unshakable. This then is clearly an endorsement of the sufficiency thesis. Wisdom is to be viewed as the sole constituent of happiness because it elevates the sage to a position of understanding in which the sage is at ease with all outcomes and enjoys the sophisticated pleasure accrued from such understanding and furthermore, indifferents become trivial. We have a good case for the sufficiency thesis since we have a plausible analogue for the cosmic consciousness of the sage which comes in the form of Bullough's description of psychical distancing and the experience so accrued.

IV. The Rationality of the Distanced Perspective

We may remind ourselves that the aim of this paper is to explore a possible defence of the sufficiency thesis. In order to achieve this we introduced the distanced perspective as a psychological perspective/standpoint that enables a joyous response to all events. Virtue as involving the distanced perspective is thought to be a good which alone is sufficient to make a life good and worth living, even if it lacks all the goods common sense tells us are required for a human life to be good and happy.

We introduced the distanced perspective in order to account for the experience described by the ancients as the experience of the sage. The experience of the sage seems to be nicely describable as a form of aesthetic experience of the world. This is the cosmic consciousness of the sage which involves a detached and disinterested psychological standpoint. This psychological standpoint is the distanced perspective. The insertion opens up a broader awareness and understanding of the world which is so often hidden by the practical standpoint. The sage thereby rises above the practical standpoint and becomes detached from his desire for external goods and experiences them as indifferent. He is thus liberated from any constraint on his happiness and so becomes invulnerable such that his happiness is immune even in the face of the greatest of misfortunes. He has risen above the standpoint in which misfortune can spoil his happiness.

We however run into a serious challenge to the plausibility of our current defence of the sufficiency thesis. The difficulty is that it is not entirely clear why it is rational to have a such a transformed experience of otherwise horrifying events. The plausibility of our defence of the sufficiency thesis depends on adequately answering this concern. It is to this that we will turn our attention in the current chapter. Dealing with this difficulty will also provide an opportunity to further flesh out our understanding of the virtuous agent. Let us first start by explicating the nature of the problem in the required detail.

The difficulty is generated by the nature of the distanced perspective. The distanced perspective, we may remember was said to be a perspective which opened up the possibility of experiencing great misfortunes with no more unease and no less pleasure than one's

experience of great strokes of good fortune. This is illustrated by Mitchell's description of Homer.¹⁴⁸ As Mitchell notes, the poetic perspective, which is the distanced perspective, raises one to a level of experience where even the most horrendous suffering is mutated into something that can be affirmed and appreciated. We are faced here with a problematic question. What does the mutation of experience involved in the distanced perspective entail? Does it entail experiencing evils as good? The accusation here then is that the appreciation, or better yet affirmation, of evils we find in the distanced perspective must surely involve a misrepresentation of the evil events. If this is the case then we cannot accept the distanced perspective as a plausible component in wisdom because wisdom is incompatible with this kind of misrepresentation since wisdom also involves understanding.

We can rephrase this problem in terms of the rationality of the distanced perspective. It seems reasonable to maintain that our attitudes towards events are only rational and justified when they accurately represent the value properties of those events. It seems that, barring some exceptions, the rationality of the attitude we adopt toward a given event depends on its correlation with the value properties that objectively constitute the event. If we accept this then we must accept that it is irrational to respond to a despicable and morally detestable event with an appreciative and affirmative attitude. On these grounds some may claim that the distanced perspective is actually irrational in a world in which evil does in fact occur. What are we to say to this objection? What we need to do in order to deal with this problem is to illustrate how the positive and affirmative experience of negative events that accompanies the distance perspective is justified.

One thing we may want to do is to affirm that the world is wholly good. This, I feel, is the solution of the Stoics. We see here the substantial work done by the metaphysical doctrine of divine providence. The Stoic conception of fate ensures that the whole sequence of events that constitutes the cosmos is maximally well-ordered and good and also ensures that the only evil that could possibly befall us is the evil we do to ourselves.¹⁴⁹ The only evil that is present in the world for the stoics consists in mistaken judgments of indifferents as good or bad. This is not however really evil that is present *in the world* rather this is evil present in a moral agent who has failed to correctly orientate himself towards the world. The key to the Stoic defence of the sufficiency thesis is the idea that the only evil one can suffer is the evil of

¹⁴⁸ Mitchell (2012)

¹⁴⁹ Cooper (2012)

one's own moral failing. Evil and morally bankrupt events, including the actions of others, are themselves only apparently evil. If we were to fully appreciate them and their place in the cosmos we would recognise that they are in fact indifferent. To judge such events to be actually and objectively evil is to mistakenly judge some indifferent thing as good or bad and consequently to suffer evil of your own making. So the Stoic justification of the positive valuation of events with apparently negative value properties is two-fold. Firstly, the world is affirmed as good and secondly all apparent evils are just the result of mistakenly judging indifferents to be of genuine value, which they are not. In essence the Stoics deny that events can have negative value properties.

So we see that Stoic metaphysics provides a sort of ideological optimism about the goodness of the cosmos which rationalises a positive evaluation of events with apparently negative value properties. Note how this is different from maintaining that evils are instrumental goods, i.e. they are in fact bad but are necessary for some higher good. It is also different from moral nihilism,¹⁵⁰ the view that there are no such things as value properties such that there is no such thing as good and evil. It likewise differs from moral relativism, or the view that evils are only evil relative to a given individual or group. Now I feel that none of these are promising avenues, each for its own reason. I will not discuss these reasons here, except to note my reason for not pursuing the Stoic strategy. My reason for avoiding the Stoic strategy is not that it is incoherent or is conceptually deficient in any way. My reason is simply that the whole Stoic metaphysical picture is alien to the modern world-view. In particular, I imagine it to be a bit of a stretch to convince a contemporary reader that all evils are only apparently evil and that the world does not actually and objectively contain evil independently of the agent's moral will as it were. The beauty of the distanced perspective is that I feel that it can be maintained even if we accept that the world actually and objectively contains evil. I am going to pursue this avenue because doing so will make my position all the stronger.

A second and more promising option, and one which is worth exploring, is to appeal to the concept of organic unities. The strategy here is to accept that many events are morally despicable and worthy only of moral disgust and outrage and perhaps even despair and resentment, responses which are very far from appreciation and joyous tranquillity. Granting

¹⁵⁰ See for example Mackie (1988)

this it is however possible to maintain that these morally despicable events are always situated within a greater whole, constituted by some organic unity, which is good such that the appreciation when these events are experienced from the distanced perspective is an appreciation of the goodness of the greater whole within which these events are situated. Thinking that the whole is good and worthy of appreciation is consistent with the recognition that one, or perhaps more, of its parts has negative value properties and is not worthy of appreciation.

The distanced perspective would then involve the capacity to recognize and appreciate the goodness of an organic unity which is itself good when considered as a whole, even though it may be constituted by parts that are bad. Practically the idea would work something like this. If we were to watch a lion killing a zebra we may judge that an event of negative value has taken place. We may think that this event is distressing and is not something to be appreciated. If however we recognize that the lion killing the zebra is an essential part of an organized unity of a larger ecosystem we can wonder at the ecosystem itself. We can appreciate and be awe-struck at this organic unity, which is magnificent, even though we may have judged that the killing of the zebra, as an essential part of the ecosystem, is distressing.

The idea then is not that we appreciate the killing of the zebra. Rather we appreciate and wonder at the ecosystem within which the killing of the zebra is an essential part. Doing this would involve situating the killing of the zebra within the interconnected nexus of events, processes and beings that constitute the ecosystem. In other words we experience the ecosystem in the killing of the zebra and wonder at it – in a sense we see one thing as another. The killing of the zebra when experienced in isolation is distressing. When it is situated in the context of the whole ecosystem within which it is an essential part, it becomes a window into a greater reality, that constituted by the eco-system as a whole, which is good and worthy of a joyous response. Even when joyously wondering at the whole ecosystem we may feel distress over the death of the zebra. This distress will however be tempered by the rapturous appreciation of the greater reality of the ecosystem and the recognition that the killing of the zebra is an essential part of the eco-system. The concern over the death of the zebra will in a sense be trivialized in light of the awareness of the greater reality of eco-system

The key here is seeing the whole in the part. The distanced perspective is uniquely suited to this type of “double seeing”. Indeed this sort of expanded consciousness is an essential element of what it means to adopt the distanced perspective. This is surely what is sought when the ancients incite us to strive to attain to the “universality of thought”.¹⁵¹ We are to seek to perceive, understand and be aware of an event as it exists in relation to the greater whole within which it forms an essential part. We are to strive to experience the whole in its parts because to truly understand the part is to apprehend it as an essential part of the whole.

The advantage of this strategy is that it does not, like the Stoic strategy, involve analysing away evil.¹⁵² Instead it involves seeing past the evil. It involves adopting a broader perspective on the evil and in a sense reducing it to a more trivial dimension. This seems to be precisely what is achieved by the distanced perspective, the broadening of the agent’s awareness such that the trials and tribulations of humanity are reduced to a more trivial dimension. The distanced perspective is one which sees to it that one’s troubles, though still troubles are no longer troubling.

The concern with this strategy is that it is not clear that it works for all possible cases. I do think that this line of defence works well with cases such as the death of the zebra where the distressing event can easily be viewed as an essential part of a harmonious and good organic unity. It will be objected however that not all distressing and morally bankrupt events can be plausibly situated within such harmonious and good organic unities. One may ask; what about senseless evils? Are there not many senseless evils, predominantly those committed by human beings, which are not constitutive of any greater whole? What of cases such as the fate of Job? What greater whole can be appreciated when a man loses all his wealth, all his children and all his friends? What about a case in which someone’s children are deliberately murdered in cold blood? What organic unity is this a part of? Many would claim I am sure that there is no greater unity which can or should temper our moral outrage to these types of evils. They are not constitutive of a greater whole which is good. Many would claim that the only appropriate response when such evils befall one is despair and moral outrage.

¹⁵¹ Hadot (1995: 82-83)

¹⁵² It could in fact be argued that this is in fact precisely the aim of the Stoic strategy. The Stoic strategy can be viewed as an ideological tool designed to help the philosopher see past evils to appreciate the greater reality in which the evils are subsumed.

The question which arises then is whether there is always a good organic unity that can justify a joyous response. One could of course respond here by arguing that the whole, i.e. the cosmos, is overall good, i.e. it is a good organic unity which can justify a joyous response to any evil. By doing so we would guarantee that evils are always subsumed within a good organic unity insofar as they are subsumed within the cosmos, which is good. My concern with this is the probable impossibility of providing a philosophically convincing argument to substantiate this claim. This is made all the more pointed by the fact that the distanced perspective is an idealized standpoint. The best we as philosophers can hope for is in all probability *philosophia* which is the standpoint in which the agent “gazes upwards” towards a more unified and holistic understanding. Comprehensive understanding of, and acquaintance with the whole, i.e. the cosmos, is in all likelihood well beyond any of us. It is thus difficult to understand how we can decide upon the question as to whether the whole is good without actually seeing that it is for ourselves.

I am pessimistic about the possibility of showing, in any philosophically convincing manner, that there is always a naturally describable organic unity to justify a joyous response. What I am however convinced about is that it is fact not necessary for me to do so. My first reason for thinking this is that we do not in fact require anything that is recognisable as an organic unity for the type of double seeing of the distanced perspective to be possible. We see this illustrated by Socrates’ in Plato’s *Phaedo*. In this dialogue Socrates wonders at the peculiar intermingling of pain and pleasure that arises once his shackles are removed [60b1-c5]. When wondering Socrates treats the event as an opportunity for contemplation and thereby inserts distance between himself and the content of the experience. He thereby comes to an awareness of both the pleasure and the pain as coexisting simultaneously within the same event which liberates him from being torn being pleasure and pain. It is not entirely clear that Socrates is in fact aware of some organic unity within which the pain is subsumed. What Socrates is aware of is the unification of the opposites in the experience, the pleasant with the painful. Essentially he has risen to the epistemological standpoint which unifies the good and the bad in his experience, he is able to recognise the fundamental duality present in the event. His epistemological standpoint in a sense creates unity where there is no naturally describable organic unity. This then is an instance of double seeing of the sort we are proposing is characteristic of the distanced perspective but where the double seeing is not dependent upon the presence of some naturally describable organic unity.

One may ask however - is there always good such that one can unify the good with the bad to produce a whole worthy of a joyous response? Why not think that there sometimes is no good present in an event or why not feel that the bad outweighs the good? If this were the case then a unification of the sort illustrated by Socrates would not produce something worthy of a joyous response. It would seem then that we have to provide philosophical proof for the claim that, even though the virtuous agent recognizes that an evil, with no apparent good in sight, has occurred, even affecting something dear to him, it is rational for the virtuous agent to not despair over it or respond to it with a negative emotional response. As it turns out however I do not think that it is actually necessary for me to do so. I feel that it is plausible to believe that it is required of the sage that he manifest courage in the face of such events and thereby resist the urge to be reduced to despair and rather find some means of affirming his own existence. We see precisely this expressed by Paul Tillich in his discussion of Stoic courage:

Courage as the universal and essential self-affirmation of one's being is an ontological concept. The courage to be is the ethical act in which man affirms his own being in spite of those elements of his existence which conflict with his essential self-affirmation. ...The affirmation of one's essential being in spite of desires and anxieties creates joy. Lucillus is exhorted by Seneca to make it his business "to learn how to feel joy." It is not the joy of fulfilled desires to which he refers, for real joy is a "severe matter"; it is the happiness of a soul which is "lifted above every circumstance." Joy accompanies the self-affirmation of our essential being in spite of the inhibitions coming from the accidental elements in us. Joy is the emotional expression of the courageous Yes to one's own true being. ...In the ontological act of the self- affirmation of one's essential being courage and joy coincide.¹⁵³

Given this I feel we have sufficient reason to believe that, no matter the nature of the event, the virtuous agent can rationally be at ease with the event and greet it with tranquil joy. This is the case even if it would appear to us that the event is wholly bad, such as in the fate of Priam or Job. And whilst we do not have irrefutable proof that this is always possible, the burden of proof in fact lies with my opponents to show that it isn't.

¹⁵³ Tillich (2000; 3, 14-15)

In order to sketch out this defence I would like to return to a consideration of the philosopher, of one who is striving for wisdom. The purpose of doing this is that what we see in the striving philosopher gives us reason to think that as one approaches the ideal of the sage one should be immune to misfortune. This is because being so immune seems to be part of what striving to act in the best of manners involves. I remind the reader that the thing that above all characterises the philosopher is his love of virtue. The sage and the philosopher are similar in this regard. Both value virtue but only the sage has actually attained it. The point I want to stress is that the philosopher is as much striving to behave virtuously as he is striving to attain to wisdom; he is thus fundamentally concerned with acting in the best of manners. This is simply because every virtue is to be analysed as a kind of wisdom.

The key point we should extract from the above is that the love of virtue involves a striving to always act in the best of manners. What is clear then is that the philosopher is fundamentally committed to virtuous action and acting in the best of manners in any given situation. It seems safe to assume that the sage is someone who always succeeds in acting in the best of manners. It would be unbecoming of the sage to act in any other manner because he is a fundamentally good being. We can therefore get a sense of the validity of the sage's response in the striving of the philosopher.

So we see that the philosopher always tries to act in the best of manners and the sage is someone who always succeeds in acting in the best of manners. This is no different in cases of severe misfortune. In cases of severe misfortune, as in any other case, the philosopher will strive to act in the best of manners and the sage will succeed in doing so. Now of course, the best manner in which one can act is the manner which is most conducive to virtue, and bringing about the good of the whole. What we should recognise however is that there is something contradictory here if we are to assert that the best manner in which one can act should involve breaking down in the face of severe misfortune, to be reduced to a state of compromised happiness. To maintain this it seems we are asked both the philosopher and the sage to behave in a contradictory manner, on the one hand to do what is best and on the other hand to breakdown in the face of misfortune. Surely it makes more sense to assert that the sage is unique insofar as he does not breakdown in the face of even the most severe misfortune. This is because the sage is one who always acts in the best of manners and

breaking down is to fail to act in the best of manners, it is to fail to remain composed in the face of adversity.

We see this validated by what we expect from the philosopher. It seems entirely reasonable to believe that we, as non-sages, should endeavour towards this steadfastness in the face of adversity. We surely do think highly of those who are able to maintain their composure and tranquillity in testing times. We respect those who are able to rise above their own misfortune and find blessing in circumstances which we may find unbearable. That we may fail to achieve this excellence in response in cases of severe misfortune may perhaps be understandable. It can still reasonably be thought to constitute a failing in our virtue, though perhaps an understandable failing. Striving to attain to the sort of equanimity we see in the sage is an endeavour many of us deem to be consistent with the pursuit of virtue and becoming good. It is for precisely this reason that I am of the view that the burden of proof lies with my opponent on this matter.

If we are to accept that it would be unbecoming of a sage to breakdown in the face of misfortune, it seems that we are *prima facie* committed to the rationality of the distanced perspective even in instances in which we, as non-sages, see only bad. It seems then that the failing is not in the rationality of the sage's response. Rather the failing is in our incapacity to see past the bad to recognise the good. It is entirely reasonable to suppose that the sage is aware of the good, even if this good consists solely in the goodness of his own response, in instances where others see only bad and hence is able to maintain his equanimity and tranquillity in the face of even the greatest of misfortunes. Once again, the burden of proof lies with my opponent to show that this is not the case, either by showing that the perfectly virtuous agent is not someone who always acts in the best of manners or by providing a philosophical proof that many events do not have any good available for the virtuous agent to become aware of. It is not entirely clear how either of these can be achieved.

Conclusion

My objective in this paper has been relatively modest. I aimed to defend the sufficiency thesis by way of articulating an understanding of the core Stoic virtue that entails the sufficiency thesis thereby rendering it plausible. Again the sufficiency thesis is the view that virtue, as a good, is sufficient for happiness where the happiness of the virtuous agent is immune to misfortune. As I noted in the introduction, the substantial challenge faced by the sufficiency thesis is the problem of external goods. In order to lend some theoretical substance to the intuition that sits behind the problem of external goods I offered an Aristotelian type account of virtue which left room for external goods. The space was created for external goods by postulating that the desire for external goods is in accordance with virtue. We saw then that, provided an account of virtue acknowledges that desire for external goods is in accordance with virtue, there will be the conceptual space to acknowledge them as necessary for happiness. They are good for us insofar as they are good for that part of ourselves which rightly desires them, i.e. desires them in accordance with virtue, where the good of this part of the soul is thought to form part of happiness.

Given that the space is created for external goods by validating the legitimacy of the desire for external goods by way of postulating a part of the soul that rightly desires them, the obvious response to the problem of external goods is to show that the desire for them is inconsistent with virtue, or at least inconsistent with the virtue that constitutes happiness. In order to show this we explored the Stoic account of virtue which countenances a purifying one-self of any desire for external goods. We see in the Stoic attitude towards indifferents a form of detachment which constitutes an ease with all outcomes.

It did acknowledge that there are aspects of Stoic ethics which clash with the contemporary world-view. One is seen in the fact that the Stoic understanding of the virtuous agent is completely alien to our modern way of thinking. This is in no way helped by the fact that it is seen to rely upon the doctrine of divine providence, which is no doubt a metaphysical doctrine which will have few contemporary supporters. In order to render the sufficiency thesis more plausible I endeavoured to show that these clashes can be overcome, in the first instance by showing that the insights behind the Stoic description of the virtuous agent can be related to concepts we are more familiar with and in the second instance showing that the

core of Stoic ethics does not require the metaphysical doctrine of divine providence in any conceptually necessary sense.

In essence I feel I achieved this by arguing that the Stoic definition of virtue has both existential and metaphysical components. The notion of connectedness has to do with, at least, the sage's ease with all outcomes. This state of connectedness is a state of virtue. But this means that there is room to distinguish the conception of virtue, at least logically, from its metaphysical presuppositions. I argued that the state of connectedness involves the capacity to become detached from indifferents, that is, see them as indifferent and hence as irrelevant for our happiness. Virtue then involves the capacity to occupy a "distanced perspective" which renders the happiness of the virtuous agent immune to even the greatest of misfortunes.

I argued that this distanced perspective is to be understood as a psychological stance which involves a suspension of the practical standpoint in which our diverse desires for things such as health, wealth, friendship, etc. govern our experience and engagement with the world. The distanced perspective is a perspective from which our engagement with and experience of the world is not defined by these diverse desires we may be subject to, it is in essence a transcendence of a sort, a transcendence of the desires for external goods. The distanced perspective is to be understood as the psychological standpoint of contemplation where the capacity to adopt this psychological standpoint in any situation is a component of virtue. Since this psychological standpoint allows the one who adopts it to view indifferents as indifferent, it renders the agent's happiness immune to misfortune and in need of no other goods beyond virtue. It is constitutive of an ease with all outcomes and a tranquil and stable joy that is free from the requirement for any and all goods other than virtue. In essence virtue is incompatible with the desire for external goods insofar as wisdom raises one to a position in which external goods are seen to be trivial. This existential position constitutes an ease with all outcomes and hence constitutes happiness.

I furthermore considered and responded to the objection which I find most pressing. This objection comes in the form of the concern that occupying the distanced perspective involves a certain form of misrepresentation of the world. The distanced perspective involves a mutation of one's experience of events such that one is at ease with what would otherwise be horrifying events. This is the manner in which virtue insulates the virtuous agent from the

requirement for external goods and renders his happiness immune to the possibility of misfortune. The concern which arises is that the distanced perspective involves a certain disconnection from the world which is a world in which bad things happen.

I responded to this objection by arguing that the distanced perspective is compatible with appreciative experience of evil events. I argued for this by first showing that the distanced perspective is compatible with taking a higher perspective on the evils such that they lose their bite as it were. I argued that we are prima facie committed to this insofar as we are committed to the idea that the sage is someone who always acts in the best of manners which is seemingly incompatible with asking the sage to breakdown and despair in the face of even the greatest of misfortunes but rather to retain his composure and ease with all outcomes.

There are numerous questions that have been left unanswered and possible objections that have not been considered and responded to. One such objection that is worth just noting here is the concern that the understanding of wisdom articulated in this paper is incompatible with love. One may object that the person so described is not a person who will be able to love. I did not have the space to consider and respond to this objection. I however do feel that it is an objection that can be responded to. I in fact feel that it can be argued that the sage is one who illustrates love in its most transcendent form. If we are to think of love as a form of identification¹⁵⁴ with the beloved then the sage does indeed seem to illustrate an immense and unrestricted love. We see in the universality of the thought present in the cosmic consciousness of the sage an identification of sorts. More precisely we see an identification with the cosmos. It seems plausible then that we can describe the cosmic consciousness of the sage as a love of the whole, namely a love which has no bounds and has transcended the love of particulars. This objection and its response clearly needs much greater and more thorough treatment than I can give it here so I must leave it for another project.

Another question of significant interest is the question of whether a person who possesses wisdom in the sense developed in this paper is able to act. As noted in chapter 3 if such a person is to act it will be from some motivation other than desire. This then would be a form of action that differs from our ordinary understanding of what it means to act. I am the view that the action of such a person is a form of autotelic activity. Like the objection just noted

¹⁵⁴ Love as it is described by Frankfurt (2001)

however I do not have the space to consider this question but must instead postpone it for another project.

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