

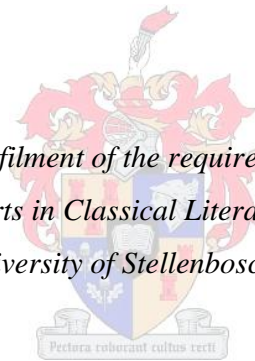
# *Secundum Naturam Vivere*

## **The Stoic *Telos* and Practical Guidance for the Attainment of a Happy Life in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales***

by

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## **Declaration**

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## Abstract

Stoic philosophy taught along with the other prominent philosophical schools of the Hellenistic Era (i.e. the Academics, the Peripatetics and the Epicureans) that the goal or final end (*telos*) of human existence is our well-being or happiness (*eudaimonia*). The Stoics provided various definitions of this *telos*, the most famous being “living in agreement with nature” (τὸ ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν) or “living according to nature” (*secundum naturam vivere*) and this goal essentially comes down to living according to perfect reason and virtue. The purpose of this study is to investigate how Seneca presents the Stoic doctrines regarding this topic in his *Epistulae Morales* (“Letters on Morality”) and to determine whether he managed to make the theoretical framework, proposed by the Stoics for the attainment of a happy life, more easily applicable in practice without compromising orthodox Stoic teachings. The orthodoxy of Seneca’s philosophy may be judged by comparison with the doctrines of the early Stoic teachers, which is why this study will first look at the traditional Stoic teachings concerning the definition of the *telos* as well as the theory behind the attainment thereof. Thereafter it will be investigated how true Seneca stayed to these traditional teachings and whether he managed to make the Stoic *telos* more realistically attainable by the practical advice he offers in his letters.

## Opsomming

Stoïsynse filosofie voer aan soos die ander prominente filosofiese skole van die Hellenistiese era (d.w.s. die Akademie, die Peripatetiese skool, en die Epikureërs) dat die einddoel (*telos*) van die mensdom welsyn of geluk (*eudaimonia*) is. Die Stoïsyne het verskillende definisies van die *telos* verskaf; die mees bekende is “om in ooreenkoms met die natuur te leef” (τὸ ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν) of “om volgens die natuur te leef” (*secundum naturam vivere*) en hierdie einddoel kom in wese daarop neer om volgens volmaakte rede of deug te leef. Die doel van hierdie studie is om te ondersoek hoe Seneca die Stoïsynse leerstellings oor hierdie onderwerp in sy *Epistulae Morales* (“Briewe oor Moraliteit”) behandel en om te bepaal of hy dit makliker gemaak het om die teoretiese raamwerk, wat deur die Stoïsyne vir die bereiking van ‘n gelukkige lewe voorgestel is, in die praktyk toe te pas sonder om die ortodokse Stoïsynse leerstellings te kompromitteer. Die ortodoksie van Seneca se filosofie kan beoordeel word deur dit met die leerstellings van die vroeë Stoïsyne te vergelyk. Hierdie studie begin dus met ‘n ondersoek na die tradisionele Stoïsynse leerstellings aangaande die definisie van die *telos*, sowel as die teorie oor die bereiking daarvan. Daarna word ondersoek hoe getrou Seneca was aan die tradisionele leerstellings en of hy deur die praktiese raad in sy briewe dit makliker gemaak het om die Stoïsynse *telos* te bereik.

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## Introduction

While through the advances of modern science many ancient philosophical theories in the fields of physics, mathematics and astronomy, for example, have been replaced by modern ones, the issues treated in ancient *ethics* concerned with the right conduct of living are timeless and without a doubt still of value to us today (Jordan 1990:152; Chalmers 2005:6; Curnow 2005:7). The ethical theories of all four prominent philosophical schools of the Hellenistic Era (323 – 31/30 BC), namely the Stoics, the Academics, the Peripatetics and the Epicureans, are *eudaimonist* in their structure (Cooper 1996:261; Striker 1996:170; Brennan 2005:35). In this view the goal or final end (*telos*) – also called the “highest good” (*summum bonum*) – of a person’s life is happiness (*eudaimonia*), and this was the starting point for each school in giving their accounts of the right conduct of living (Brennan 2005:117; cf. Hadot 1969:99). *Eudaimonia* is, as its etymology indicates, a “blessed” or “god-favoured” condition. The word *eudaimon* is not used in Greek the way “happy” is used in English, “to describe transient moods or satisfactions” (Long 1996:181). *Eudaimonia* is not a subjective feeling, but something objective, that others can recognise in a person (Sandbach 1989:41). It is a state of well-being and inner harmony and it was the purpose of Hellenistic ethics to determine the conditions under which such a state could be attained (Barnes 2001:365).

Stoic ethics was above all “meant to be lived” (Schofield 2003:253). However, it has often been criticized for its “impractical rigidity and pointless idealism” (Inwood 2005:95), since it requires people to live according to perfect reason and yet seems to offer little realistic hope that this goal can actually be achieved. Arguably in response to this criticism from rival schools, the representatives of the Middle Stoa, Panaetius and Posidonius, started to develop a more practically oriented ethical theory. However, they have often been accused of not staying true to original Stoic doctrines and of developing a second kind of morality, designed to make the idealistic Stoic *telos* (i.e. the happy life) more easily attainable by the ordinary man (Hadot 1969:71; Inwood 2005:100-1). The focus on the practical application of Stoic ethical doctrines is also evident in the writings of the Late Stoa, which include the works of Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius (Costa 1988:2; Colish 1990:12; Gill 2003:40). A large part of the surviving material from this period is in fact written in therapeutic mode and does not focus on the mere



preaching of doctrine. Marcus Aurelius' journals, for example, were written as a means of self-consolation; Seneca wrote to advise and console his friends and relatives, and Epictetus his pupils (Schofield 2003:253).

It has been suggested that the Middle Stoa's abatement of early ethical theory has also influenced the writers of the Late Stoa, such as Seneca, but as scholars like Smuts, Hadot and Inwood have shown, Seneca stayed true to all the fundamental teachings of the Stoic school (cf. Smuts 1948:22; Hadot 1969:83; Inwood 2005:3, 24). It should be clear that Seneca was not a philosopher who created or expounded specific philosophic theories; rather, he wrote within an already existing system with which he was, for the most part, in agreement. However, since he also collected some of his philosophical ideas from sources outside the Stoic system, scholars such as Motto have labelled him as eclectic "binding himself to the dogmas of no particular school" (Motto 1985:9). Although it is true that Seneca adopted some ideas from other philosophies, if these seemed useful to him, and is open to proposing some changes in traditional Stoicism, those changes never threaten the core of Stoic doctrines (Inwood 2005:24).

Given this background, it should be informative to see to what extent Seneca did in fact stay true to the fundamental ethical teachings of the early Stoa, and whether he nevertheless managed to make some contributions with regards to the practical application of an ethical theory that has been thought of as unnecessarily rigid and too idealistic to be put into practice. Since the core of all ancient philosophical schools' ethical theories was their account of the *telos* (or *summum bonum*), this will also be the focal point of this study of Stoic ethics in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* ("Letters on Morality"). In order to be able to judge Seneca's orthodoxy, one first needs to familiarize oneself with the traditional Stoic teachings on this issue. After discussing the Stoics' various definitions of the *telos* as well as the theoretical guidelines they proposed for the attainment of this *telos*, this study will take a look at how true Seneca stayed to these traditional teachings and finally investigate whether he managed to make the Stoic *telos* more realistically attainable by the practical advice he offers in his letters.

I have chosen the *Epistulae Morales* since they best illustrate the practicability of Seneca's philosophy (cf. Sorensen 1984:190). Moreover, on account of their conversational style and the

exceptionally modern ideas contained in them, these letters will be appealing and extremely valuable even to people living today (cf. Mans 1978:237-8; Motto 1985:3). The following study will start with a brief overview of the history of Stoicism to introduce the reader to the development and the main representatives of the Stoic school from the time of its foundation in c. 300 BC to the Roman Imperial Period (cf. **Chapter 1**).

**Chapter 2** will take a look at what exactly the Stoics believed the *telos* (i.e. happiness) consisted of. The Stoics are best known to have defined happiness as “to live in agreement with nature” (τὸ ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν), however, the different Stoic teachers all provided different formulations of the *telos*, and even amongst modern critics there is a disagreement regarding the original formulation of the *telos* and the correct interpretation thereof. The aim of this chapter is to explain how the various *telos*-definitions attributed to the Stoics are to be understood by taking a look at the Stoics’ idea of nature, that is both universal nature and our own human nature. Since few original texts are available to us of the older Stoic teachers, I draw on the information provided by Joannes Stobaeus, Diogenes Laertius and Cicero, as well as publications of modern scholars such as Brennan, Cooper, Gill, Inwood and Long, to name a few.

**Chapter 3** will discuss the ethical theory provided by the Stoics for the attainment of the *telos*. Stoic ethical theory is divided into three parts: the first one is concerned with the moral value of things, the second with impulses and emotions, and the third with actions (Hadot 1969:117). To sum up briefly the key ideas of each part, first, the theory of moral value states that only virtue is good, only vice is bad, everything else is considered indifferent. In the second part the Stoics argue that emotions (*pathē*) are impulses caused by a wrong value judgement, i.e. the judgement that a certain indifferent is either good or bad, and since emotions are, thus, entirely contradictory to reason the Stoics proposed that everyone should strive for *apatheia* (“freedom from emotions”)<sup>1</sup> (cf. Rist 1969: 26-7, 97; Sandbach 1989:3, 63; Sorabji 2000:7; Brennan 2003:263; Gill 2003:40).

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of *apatheia* (‘freedom from emotions’) does, however, not imply total impassivity and absence of all motivation. Rather, it entails the replacement of emotions (*pathē*) with other species of impulses, such as the so-called “good feelings” (*eupatheiai*), or “selection and rejection” (*eklogē, apeklōgē*).

The third part of Stoic ethical theory deals with appropriate actions (*kathēkonta*) and morally correct actions (*katorthōmata*) (cf. Gill 2003:41).

**Chapter 4** of this study will be a literary analysis of selected passages of Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*, illustrating how he presents the Stoic *telos* and some of the key elements of Stoic ethics discussed in the preceding chapters, as well as the practical advice he offers for anyone wishing to make progress towards attaining a happy life. Though the Stoics evidently presented in their ethical theory clear guidelines on how happiness could be attained, it seems that the standard they set was too idealistic to be reached in practice. In this final chapter I wish to show that Seneca made this unrealistic goal more accessible without compromising the fundamental doctrines of Stoic ethical theory. The objective of this thesis is ultimately to contribute towards the discussion of Stoic ethics in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*.

## Chapter 1: Historical Background

Stoicism is divided into three historical periods: the Old Stoa (from the foundation of the school by Zeno in c. 300 BC to the early second century BC), the Middle Stoa (second century BC) and the Late Stoa (the Roman Imperial Period) (cf. Colish 1990:7; Sedley 2003a:7). The basic teachings of the school were retained throughout all three periods, however, with slight changes in emphasis. The aim of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of the history and development of the Stoic school.

Stoicism was founded by **Zeno of Citium** (modern Larnaca), Cyprus, in about 300 BC. From his early twenties he had been fascinated by the philosophical traditions at Athens which had been the centre of cultural and philosophical activity in the ancient world particularly from the fourth and third centuries BC (Sedley 2003a:8-9). When Zeno first came to Athens in 312/11 BC, he began to study under various philosophers whose different theories all influenced him in founding his own philosophical school a number of years later. His teachers included the Cynic Crates, the Megarians Stilpo and Diodorus Cronus, and the Academics Xenocrates and Polemo (Hunt 1976:2; Marietta 1998:147; Gill 2006:84).

Though one runs the risk of making Stoicism appear like a mere creative synthesis of other people's thoughts when comparing it to the doctrines of other philosophical schools, a study of the development of Stoicism would be incomplete without discussing the influences the various teachers had on Zeno in creating his own philosophy. Zeno first studied under Crates, the head of the **Cynic school** at the time. Cynicism was founded by Diogenes, a follower of Antisthenes who had been a student of Socrates (Hunt 1976:3). The school has as its basis an extreme version of Socratic ethics (Gill 2006:84). The Cynics followed Socrates in despising physical pleasure and material goods and believing that virtue alone is sufficient for happiness, which is an idea that influenced the development of Zeno's theory on value, i.e. that only virtue is good, only vice is bad, and everything else is indifferent (Brennan 2005:23; Gill 2006:82-3). Moreover, Socrates defined four cardinal virtues: wisdom, justice, courage and temperance, which were all interlinked and whoever possesses one has all of them (Brennan 2005:24). Zeno also took from Socrates the idea that the best character-state is one of freedom from emotion (Gill 2006:83).

Zeno studied next with Stilpo and Diodorus Cronus of the **Megarian school**, also known as the eristic or dialectic school (Hunt 1976:9). The Megarians regarded Euclides as the source of their teachings, though no formal school was founded until after his death. He was a contemporary of Antisthenes and like him a pupil of Socrates (Hunt 1976:8). The Megarian ethical theory therefore roughly agreed with that of the Cynics (Protopapas-Marneli 2005:171). Stilpo's most celebrated doctrine was the "self-sufficiency of the wise" and the idea that nothing that happens to a man's body or possessions is either good or bad (Sedley 2003a:10; Gill 2006:84). One can see how this must have strengthened Zeno's theory on value, mentioned above, i.e. that the only real good is virtue, the only real bad is vice, and that conventional physical or material goods, for example health and wealth, are in fact indifferents (Gill 2006:84). Stilpo and Diodorus also influenced Zeno in the development of Stoic logic (Hunt 1976:10; Marietta 1998:147; Protopapas-Marneli 2005:171).

Finally, Zeno came into contact with the **Academic school** under the leadership of Xenocrates and later Polemo. Following the teachings of Plato, who too had been a pupil of Socrates, the Academics also maintained that a person's happiness lay in virtuous living. However, in contrast to the Cynics and the Megarians, they believed virtue alone is not sufficient and that there are also bodily and external goods to be pursued (Arnold 1911:63; Sedley 2003a:10; Gill 2006:84). Zeno did not fully adopt this view, but found a way to incorporate it into his own ethical theory: he upheld the teaching that bodily and external advantages like health and wealth are in fact indifferent to a person's happiness, but classified them as "preferred" objects naturally to be pursued. In Zeno's view we should thus pursue such advantages, but without caring about them as if their possession would improve our lives or add to our happiness (Sedley 2003a:10). One doctrine that Zeno incorporated more directly into his philosophy was Polemo's view that ethical development consisted of "living in agreement with nature" which came to be the standard formulation of the Stoic *telos* (Protopapas-Marneli 2005:172; Gill 2006:84). This will be discussed in the following chapters.

From Xenocrates, Zeno is said to have taken the tripartite division of philosophy into physics, logic and ethics. In this division each part is equally important (Protopapas-Marneli 2005:172). In dealing with the Cynics and the Megarians, Zeno had been mainly concerned with ethics and

logic, but hardly at all with the physical aspect of philosophy. Here the Academics also had something to offer. Elaborating on the doctrine of Anaxagoras, the Academics taught that the universe began with the working of mind upon unordered matter. Zeno, too, advocated that the universe consisted of two principles, the active, which he identified with reason, and the passive, which is inert matter (Arnold 1911:69; Sandbach 1989:72). It has also been suggested that the main Stoic physical doctrine was in fact taken from Aristotle, the founder of the Peripatetic school (Hunt 1976:2). Aristotle's chief interest lay in explaining nature. He presented the universe as a well-structured system with all its parts working together in harmony. In this regard it is reasonable to assume that the Peripatetics must have had some influence on Zeno's own interest in physical inquiry (Hunt 1976:15).

Around the turn of the century Zeno formed his own philosophical group; his followers were at first known as Zenonians but eventually they were called Stoics after the *Stoa Poikilē* ("painted porch", situated near the Agora in Athens) in which Zeno used to teach (Marietta 1998:148; Sedley 2003a:10-11; Sellars 2006:1, 5). There was no formal foundation of a school, and unlike the other three leading Hellenistic schools, the Academics, the Peripatetics, and the Epicureans, the Stoics had no common property or legal status (Sandbach 1989:22) but this did not prevent them from becoming the leading philosophical school of the Hellenistic Age (Sedley 2003a:11).

Zeno's pupils included Persaeus of Citium, Philonides of Thebes, Aratus of Soli, Sphaerus from the Bosphorus, Dionysius of Heraclea, Aristo of Chios and Cleanthes of Assos (Arnold 1911:79-84; Sellars 2006:6). Of these the last two proved to be the most significant. **Aristo** disregarded completely Zeno's doctrines on physics and logic, and only focused on ethics. However, regarding Zeno's ethical theory, Aristo did not support the idea that certain external or physical advantages, for example wealth or good health, although classified as morally indifferent, might be rated preferable to their opposites, for example poverty or ill health. In his own day Aristo's impact at Athens seemed to have been quite significant. Among his pupils were Apollophanes, a leading Stoic, and the celebrated scientist Eratosthenes. Later tradition, however, rather chose to stay true to Zeno and the concepts of "preferred" and "dispreferred" indifferents became standard items in Stoic ethics (Arnold 1911:82; Sedley 2003a:14; Sellars 2006:6).

**Cleanthes** (331-232 BC) remained closer to Zeno's teachings but he gave Stoicism a distinct religious orientation (Arnold 1911:85; Colish 1990:10; Marietta 1998:148). He is best known for his *Hymn to Zeus*, the earliest extended Stoic text to survive (Marietta 1998:148; Sellars 2006:7; cf. Thom 2005). After Zeno's death in 262 BC Cleanthes took over the leadership of the school (Marietta 1998:148; Barnes 2001:361; Sedley 2003a:8, 15). Towards the end of his life, many of Cleanthes' followers seem to have been drawn aside by the Academic Arcesilaus or the more independent teachings of Aristo. The continued existence of Stoicism seemed threatened but in this crisis it was saved by Cleanthes' successor Chrysippus of Soli (Arnold 1911:90-1).

**Chrysippus** of Soli (282 – 206 BC) succeeded Cleanthes as the head of the Stoic school in 232 BC (Arnold 1911:91; Marietta 1998:148; Sellars 2006:7). He is arguable the most important of the early Stoics since it is due to his efforts that the school continued to exist in the face of the attacks by sceptical Academic philosophers (such as Arcesilaus) and the increasing popularity of the rival school of Epicurus who preached that happiness is found in pleasure, not virtue. Chrysippus reaffirmed, but also modified, the ideas of his predecessors and devoted all his energy to systematizing Stoic doctrine which would become the basis for Stoic orthodoxy (Arnold 1911:91-93; Sedley 2003a:15; Sellars 2006:7-8).

In the years following Chrysippus' death, the two prominent Stoic figures were Diogenes of Seleucia, also known as Diogenes of Babylon, (c. 238 – 150 BC) and Antipater of Tarsus (c. 200 – 129 BC) (Arnold 1911:96; Sedley 2003a:8; Sellars 2006:8). **Diogenes** is especially noted for his contribution in the study of language and logic (Marietta 1998:149). In 155 BC he went on an embassy to Rome along with the heads of the two other chief philosophical schools in Athens, Critolaus representing the Peripatetics and Carneades the Academic school (Arnold 1911:100; Sellars 2006:8). This was an important event in the introduction of Stoicism (and other Greek philosophies) to the Roman world and thus paved the way for the more permanent influence of a later Stoic, Panaetius of Rhodes (c. 185 – 110 BC) (Arnold 1911:100; Sellars 2006:8).

**Antipater**, who succeeded Diogenes as head of the Stoic school, also played an important role in the history of Stoicism, but both seem to have been unequally matched against the Academic Carneades. In an effort to defend Stoic doctrine against Carneades' attacks, Antipater tried to

emphasize the common ground between Stoicism and Platonism, and began to compromise earlier Stoic teachings. The increasing eclecticism, with Stoics drawing on material from Platonism and other philosophical schools, is in fact the main characteristic that distinguishes the Middle Stoa, as this period began to be called, from the Old Stoa (Marietta 1998:149; Sedley 2003a:20; Sellars 2006:8-9). This deviation from orthodox Stoicism can also be observed in the teachings of Panaetius of Rhodes (c. 185 – 110 BC) and Posidonius of Apamea (c. 135 – 51 BC) who introduced significant changes to several Stoic doctrines (Colish 1990:10; Barnes 2001:362), also drawing upon non-Stoic sources (especially views of Plato and Aristotle) in expanding their theories (Sandbach 1989:15; Colish 1990:10; Sellars 2006:10-11).

**Panaetius**, who studied under the Stoics Diogenes and Antipater, became head of the Stoa in 128 BC (Sellars 2006:9). He is best known for “humanizing” Stoic ethics and focusing his attention on the average person rather than the ideal of the Stoic sage. He rejected the idea that virtue is sufficient for happiness and suggested that material goods are also required (Marietta 1998:149; Sellars 2006:9). In 146 BC Panaetius went to Rome where he came into contact with important thinkers and statesmen at the court of Scipio Africanus the younger. He stayed there for fifteen years and it is due to his efforts that Stoicism became a permanent influence in Rome among prominent figures of the late republican era (Arnold 1911:20, 101; Colish 1990:10-11).

**Posidonius** studied under Panaetius in Athens around 125 – 114 BC and eventually established himself in Rhodes (Colish 1990:12; Sellars 2006:10). In contrast to the more scientific Panaetius, Posidonius focuses more on the religious aspects of Stoicism (Arnold 1911:104; Marietta 1998:150). His most significant deviation from Stoic orthodoxy was in the field of psychology (Sellars 2006:10). He is most famous for disagreeing with Chrysippus’ analysis of emotions (*pathē*) and adopting a version of the tripartite psychology which Plato discusses in his *Timaeus* (Sedley 2003a:21), dividing the soul into the faculties of reason, emotion and desire (Sellars 2006:10). Posidonius also showed interest in the world in which an individual existed by his study of mathematics, geography, history, astronomy, meteorology, biology and anthropology (Colish 1990:12; Sellars 2006:10).



The years 88 – 86 BC mark a turning point in philosophical history: The Peripatetic philosopher, Athenion, and then an Epicurean, Aristion, briefly gained absolute power at Athens, and both decided to back Mithridates in his War against the Romans (Sedley 2003a:24). Athens was sacked by Sulla's army and subsequently lost its standing as the centre of the philosophical world (Sedley 2003a:24-5). Most philosophers left the city and it seems that philosophical schools lost their institutional importance, since there is little information on any successions of their school-heads after 86 BC (Sedley 2003a:25). The following years saw a decentralisation of philosophy in all the leading schools. Athens was no longer the metropolitan headquarters of philosophical activity; now small local philosophical groups, of which there had already been quite a few, flourished throughout the Greco-Roman world (Sedley 2003a:28). In the case of the Stoics the demise of the school in Athens might in fact already have occurred before this era of decentralization. It is uncertain whether the Stoa survived as a formal institution after the death of Panaetius in 110 BC. As already mentioned Posidonius did not succeed him as the head of the Athenian school but taught in Rhodes.

However, Stoicism continued to be an active philosophical force for at least the first two centuries AD and became strongly implanted in Greco-Roman culture and, to a certain extent, in political life (Gill 2003:33). As mentioned above, in Rome Stoicism had already achieved widespread influence from the first century BC onward. One of the most celebrated of all Roman Stoics at the time – and in the whole Roman history – was Marcus Cato but besides him few Romans of the late republic became Stoics; more people seem to have been drawn to the Antiocheans, New Academics, or even Epicureans (Sedley 2003a:30-1). However, around the time of transition from the Republican to the Imperial age Stoicism became increasingly influential in Rome. To upper-class Romans it presented ethical guidance for political involvement; to others who often had to suffer under certain emperors, Stoicism could also offer a theoretical basis for moral disapproval of the emperor and for principled disengagement or suicide (Gill 2003:34). Two Greek Stoics who were particularly influential at the start of the Imperial Era were Athenodorus and Arius Didymus who gained the trust of Augustus and were eventually employed as moral counsellors to the emperor (Sedley 2003a:31). Stoic philosophers were soon found not only at the imperial court but also in public lecture-rooms, and in the time of Tiberius' reign (14 – 37 AD) these lectures became increasingly popular (Arnold 1911:111).

One of the better known lecturers was Attallus, whose listeners included, amongst others, Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 BC – 65AD) (Arnold 1911:113).

**Seneca** is considered one of the most prominent figures of the so-called Late Stoa. This third and final stage of Stoicism is marked by an important shift from the Old and Middle Stoa in two ways: Firstly, none of the Roman Stoics was an official school-head. Secondly, they show a nearly exclusive interest in ethics (Colish 1990:12). However, they were not so much interested in the theoretical element of the study of ethics, but rather in the practical application of ethical principles to specific situations. Writers of the Late Stoa show a great deal of insight in applying Stoic ethics to meet their own personal needs and those of their immediate audience (Colish 1990:13). Seneca's written work, including the *Epistulae Morales*, addressed to his young friend Lucilius, and a series of philosophical Dialogues, is the largest collection of surviving texts for any Stoic and was thus a key source in shaping the image of Stoicism in later generations (Sellars 2006:12-13). It should be noted that Seneca was not primarily a philosopher, but a politician, best remembered for his role as tutor and personal advisor of Emperor Nero. His political career and personal life suffered a number of upsets owing to the caprices of members of the imperial court (particularly, the emperors Caligula, Claudius and Nero) and his philosophy is thus marked by a desire to find a remedy for the wounds which life had inflicted upon him and also his friends and relatives to whom he addressed his writings (Campbell 1969:8; Mans 1978:233; Motto 1985:9; Sandbach 1989:131, 150-1; Colish 1990:14; Lawless 1994:5). Among the topics he examined in his work were friendship, clemency, the right use of wealth and most notably suicide (Colish 1990:14).

Two younger contemporaries of Seneca were **Lucius Annaeus Cornutus** (c. 20 – 66 AD) and **Musonius Rufus** (born in c. 30 AD). Cornutus, who had presumably been Seneca's or his family's slave, began teaching philosophy and rhetoric in Rome at around 50 AD. Among his pupils were the poets Lucan (Seneca's nephew) and Persius (Arnold 1911:112; Sellars 2006:13). Musonius Rufus, an Etruscan of high social rank (Sellars 2006:14), made it his aim to restore the ethics of the Old Stoa. Two topics on which he especially focused were sexual equality and the dignity of manual labour (Colish 1990:19).

Another influential figure of the Roman Stoa was Musonius' pupil **Epictetus** (c. 50 – 130 AD), a highly educated slave who was later granted his freedom (Sellars 2006:15). He focused especially on the ethical and religious aspects of Stoicism and in his surviving texts, the *Discourses* and the *Manual*, he especially emphasises the virtue of self-control and independence from worldly fortune (Marietta 1998:150). For him the only thing of true value was moral liberty, which, he taught, every man is able to attain through the exercise of his reason and will (Colish 1990:20). Epictetus' strict moralism also attracted the interest of early church fathers, such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen, in the centuries that followed (Gill 2003:36).

The Roman Emperor **Marcus Aurelius** (121 – 180 AD) was the last of the major Roman Stoics. He was certainly no professional teacher of philosophy; his surviving work, titled *Meditations* (in English convention; the Greek title in fact translates as “To Himself”), rather seems to have been a means of self-consolation and examination of conscience and was probably not intended for other readers (Colish 1990:20-1; Sellars 2006:17).

## Chapter 2: Definition of the Stoic *telos*

The Stoics, along with the other prominent philosophical schools of the Hellenistic Era (i.e. the Academy, the Peripatetics and the Epicureans), believed that there is for each of us a goal or final end (*telos*) which was defined as “that for the sake of which everything is done in the appropriate way, while it is not done for the sake of anything else” ([τέλος ἐστὶν] οὗ ἕνεκα πάντα πράττεται καθηκόντως, αὐτὸ δὲ πράττεται οὐδενὸς ἕνεκα; Joannes Stobaeus (Stob.) *Anthologium* II.7.3b; cf. Gould 1970:161; Cooper 1996:261; Striker 1996:282; Sellars 2006:123). In other words, this final end is the natural goal of our existence and standard of reference for everything we do and desire, and, as all Hellenistic philosophies propose, what we all desire most is to live a happy life.

Given the basic assumption that there is a final end (*telos*) of human life, to be called happiness (*eudaimonia*) or living well, it was the task of the different philosophical schools, firstly, to define *what* this final end consists of and, secondly, to explain *how* it could be reached (Striker 1996:172; Long 2006:29). One might say that a philosophical school’s account of the *telos*, in fact, determined the whole of its ethical philosophy and contained the central doctrines that distinguished it from the other schools of the time (Brennan 2005:117). The Stoics provided various definitions of the *telos*, the most famous being “living in agreement with nature”. It is the aim of this chapter to look at *what* each of the definitions of the *telos* meant. Chapter 3 will then focus on *how* the Stoics thought it could be achieved.

One condition accepted by all Hellenistic philosophical schools is that the end should in some sense be “according to nature” (κατὰ φύσιν), i.e. it should be related to the nature of the living being whose *telos* it was said to be, as well as the nature of the universe (Striker 1996:283). In determining what the most natural end for humans would be, both the Stoics as well as their rival school, the Epicureans, began their enquiry into the human *telos* with an analysis of the earliest stage of human development. Epicurus, on the one hand argued that the only natural *telos* for humans is pleasure, since even the youngest children naturally pursue pleasure and try to avoid its opposite, pain. Hence a ‘happy life’ will be the most pleasant life (Striker 1996:284). For the Stoics, on the other hand, as will still be discussed below, happiness could only be found in a life

according to reason, the distinct characteristic both of universal and human nature. The details of this will still be discussed, but what is noteworthy at this point, is that by starting their deliberation of the human *telos* from the pre-cultural self, “Stoics and Epicureans give themselves the space to ask what we can and should make of ourselves if we let our basic human nature rather than conventional ideology take charge of our values and human development” (Long 2006:27). This suggests that an understanding of our true nature will help us in developing our inborn potential in ways much greater than cultural norms might do. The idea is, thus, that the attainment of genuine happiness is completely in our own hands and should not be sought in whatever society might dictate.

Following the Socratic-Cynic tradition, which formed the basis of many Stoic principles, the Stoics also had a second condition for happiness that needed to be incorporated in their definition of the *telos*, namely the concept of virtue (Frede 1999:71). They believed that the essence of happiness would be virtue, the essence of unhappiness vice (Long 1996:186), and the evidence available to us shows that “living in agreement with nature” was, in fact, equalled to “living according to virtue” (Cooper 1996:261; Brennan 2005:35). According to the Stoics, virtue is not something we are born with and in that sense have “by nature”, but they do believe that nature has equipped us in such a way that, if nothing went wrong in our natural development, we would become virtuous (Motto 1985:10; Frede 1999:71).

As has been pointed out in the introduction, the explanation of the Stoic *telos* is no easy task since the different Stoic teachers all used different formulations to define it, and secondly, even amongst modern critics there is a disagreement regarding the original formulation and the correct interpretation of the *telos*. Let us now take a look at the various definitions of the *telos* that have been preserved in Diogenes Laertius’ (D.L.) *Vitae philosophorum* VII.87-89 and Joannes Stobaeus’ (Stob.) *Anthologium* II.7.6a (cf. Sandbach 1989:53-55; Brennan 2005:135-6):

- (87.) Διόπερ πρῶτος ὁ Ζήνων ἐν τῷ Περὶ ἀνθρώπου φύσεως τέλος εἶπε τὸ ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν, ὅπερ ἐστὶ κατ’ ἀρετὴν ζῆν· ἄγει γὰρ πρὸς ταύτην ἡμᾶς ἡ φύσις. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Κλεάνθης ἐν τῷ Περὶ ἡδονῆς καὶ Ποσειδώνιος καὶ Ἑκάτων ἐν τοῖς Περὶ τελῶν. πάλιν δ’ ἴσον ἐστὶ τὸ κατ’ ἀρετὴν ζῆν τῷ κατ’ ἐμπειρίαν τῶν φύσει συμβαινόντων ζῆν, ὥς φησι Χρύσιππος ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ Περὶ τελῶν· μέρη γὰρ εἰσιν αἱ ἡμέτεραι φύσεις τῆς τοῦ ὅλου.

- (88.) διόπερ τέλος γίνεται τὸ ἀκολουθῶς τῇ φύσει ζῆν, ὅπερ ἐστὶ κατὰ τε τὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ κατὰ τὴν τῶν ὄλων, οὐδὲν ἐνεργοῦντας ὧν ἀπαγορεύειν εἴωθεν ὁ νόμος ὁ κοινός, ὅσπερ ἐστὶν ὁ ὀρθὸς λόγος, διὰ πάντων ἐρχόμενος, ὁ αὐτὸς ὧν τῷ Δί, καθηγεμόνι τούτῳ τῆς τῶν ὄντων διοικήσεως ὄντι· εἶναι δ' αὐτὸ τοῦτο τὴν τοῦ εὐδαίμονος ἀρετὴν καὶ εὐροίαν βίου, ὅταν πάντα πράττηται κατὰ τὴν συμφωνίαν τοῦ παρ' ἐκάστῳ δαίμονος πρὸς τὴν τοῦ τῶν ὄλων διοικητοῦ βούλησιν. ὁ μὲν οὖν Διογένης τέλος φησὶ ρητῶς τὸ εὐλογιστεῖν ἐν τῇ τῶν κατὰ φύσιν ἐκλογῇ. ...
- (89.) Φύσιν δὲ Χρύσιππος μὲν ἐξακούει, ἣ ἀκολουθῶς δεῖ ζῆν, τὴν τε κοινὴν καὶ ἰδίως τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην· ὁ δὲ Κλεάνθης τὴν κοινὴν μόνην ἐκδέχεται φύσιν, ἣ ἀκολουθεῖν δεῖ, οὐκέτι δὲ καὶ τὴν ἐπὶ μέρους. (D.L. VII.87-89 in Hicks 1925:194, 196)

Therefore, Zeno was the first to say, in [his treatise] *On the Nature of Man*, that the final end is “**to live in agreement with nature**”, which is the same as a “**to live according to virtue**”, for nature guides us towards virtue. And both Cleanthes in his treatise *On Pleasure*, and Posidonius, as well as Hecato in his work *On Ends* [defined the end] similarly. Furthermore, “to live according to virtue” is equivalent to “**to live according to the experience of the things that happen by nature**”, as Chrysippus says in the first book of [his treatise] *On Ends*; for our [own] natures are parts of the nature of the universe. Therefore, the end becomes “**to live following nature**”, that is, **following both one’s own [nature] and that of the universe**, doing none of the things which the common [or universal] law is accustomed to forbid, which is the right reason which pervades all things and which is the same as Zeus, who is the leader of the administration of all that exists. And this very thing is the virtue of the happy man and the ‘good flow’ of life, whenever all things are done according to the harmony of each [man’s individual] spirit with the will of the administrator of the universe. Diogenes then expressly says that the end is **to reason well by the selection of what is according to nature**. ... By ‘nature’, following which one ought to live, Chrysippus understands both common [or universal] nature and more particularly human [nature]; Cleanthes, on the other hand, takes common [or universal] nature alone as that which should be followed, and not the [nature] of the individual as well.<sup>2</sup>

Τὸ δὲ τέλος ὁ μὲν Ζήνων οὕτως ἀπέδωκε· ‘τὸ ὁμολογουμένως ζῆν’· τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶ καθ’ ἓνα λόγον καὶ σύμφωνον ζῆν, ὡς τῶν μαχομένων ζώντων κακοδαμονούντων. Οἱ δὲ μετὰ τοῦτον προσδιαρθροῦντες οὕτως ἐξέφερον ‘ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν’ ὑπολαβόντες ἔλαττον εἶναι κατηγορήμα τὸ ὑπὸ τοῦ Ζήνωνος ρηθέν. Κλεάνθης γὰρ πρῶτος διαδεξάμενος αὐτοῦ τὴν αἵρεσιν προσέθηκε ‘τῇ φύσει’ καὶ οὕτως ἀπέδωκε· ‘τέλος ἐστὶ τὸ ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν’. Ὅπερ ὁ Χρύσιππος σαφέστερον βουλόμενος ποιῆσαι, ἐξήνεγκε τὸν τρόπον τοῦτον· ‘ζῆν κατ’ ἐμπειρίαν τῶν φύσει συμβαινόντων’. Διογένης δέ· ‘εὐλογιστεῖν ἐν τῇ τῶν κατὰ φύσιν ἐκλογῇ καὶ ἀπεκλογῇ’. ... Ἀντίπατρος δέ· ‘ζῆν ἐκλεγόμενους μὲν τὰ κατὰ φύσιν, ἀπεκλεγόμενους δὲ τὰ παρὰ

<sup>2</sup> All translations provided in this thesis are my own, unless stated otherwise.

φύσιν διηγεκῶς'. Πολλάκις δὲ καὶ οὕτως ἀπεδίδου· 'πάν τὸ καθ' αὐτὸν ποιεῖν διηγεκῶς καὶ ἀπαρπάτως πρὸς τὸ τυγχάνειν τῶν προηγουμένων κατὰ φύσιν'. (Stob. II.7.6a in Wachsmuth and Hense 1884:75-6)

And Zeno, rendered the goal as follows: “**to live in agreement**” and this is **to live according to one harmonious reason**, as those living in conflict are unhappy. But his successors, on the other hand, adding more detail to it produced the following: “**to live in agreement with nature**”, since they believed that Zeno’s definition was lacking a predicate. For Cleanthes, his first successor as the head of the school, added “with nature” and rendered it as follows: “to live in agreement with nature”. Chrysippus, wanting to make this [even] clearer, produced this formulation: “**to live according to the experience of the things that happen by nature**”. And Diogenes [defined it as]: **to reason well by the selection and rejection of what is “according to nature”**. ... And Antipater: “**to live by continually selecting what is according to nature and rejecting what is contrary to nature**”. And often he would also render [it as follows]: “**to do everything concerning oneself continually and perpetually in order to attain the things that are preferable according to nature**”.

One complication which must be mentioned right away is that it seems to be uncertain whether the wording “to live in agreement *with nature*” (τὸ ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν) actually originated with Zeno. According to Diogenes Laertius, Zeno “was the first” to define the *telos* as “to live in agreement with nature”, but according to the quote by Stobaeus Zeno called it simply “to live in agreement” (τὸ ὁμολογουμένως ζῆν), and it was his successor Cleanthes who added “with nature” (τῇ φύσει), taking Zeno’s formula to be incomplete (Sandbach 1989:53; Striker 1996:223; Schofield 2003:242). It is noteworthy that no one in antiquity appears to have suggested that there was any real difference between Zeno and Cleanthes in their views of the end; this is an issue of debate amongst modern scholars (Sandbach 1989:54).

Some modern scholars suggest that the definitions “to live in agreement” and “to live in agreement with nature” were, in fact, synonymous (Smuts 1948:1; Reesor 1989:109; Brennan 2005:138). Brennan (2005:138) argues that “to live in agreement” was simply a “short-hand” that Zeno sometimes used instead of the full version which he proposed in his treatise “On the Nature of Man” (cf. D.L. VII.87). However, there are some modern critics who take Stobaeus’ text to be evidence that Zeno never used the full form “τὸ ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν”, but merely “τὸ ὁμολογουμένως ζῆν” which they render with “to live consistently” (Brennan 2005:139). If one takes this interpretation to be correct, one must assume either that Cleanthes



and Chrysippus fundamentally misunderstood their predecessor and introduced a completely new interest in nature, or that they felt that rational consistency and being in agreement with nature would come down to the same thing (Brennan 2005:139). According to Brennan (2005:140), such an interpretation seems unlikely to be true and is based on an incorrect translation of “τὸ ὁμολογουμένως ζῆν” as “to live consistently”; “the Greek word at issue always means “to agree” or “be in agreement””. If one then translates “τὸ ὁμολογουμένως ζῆν” correctly with “to live in agreement” the theory that this formula was simply a “short-hand” for the fuller version is all the more plausible since the phrase “to live in agreement” is clearly incomplete and needs a complement to make sense, and the obvious complement in this context would be “with nature” (Brennan 2005:138).

Striker (1996:223), on the other hand, sees the theory of grammatical incompleteness as unlikely to be correct, arguing that the words “ὁμολογουμένως ζῆν” can in fact stand without a complement, even if the phrase “may not be either very colloquial or very elegant Greek”, but it should not be regarded as meaning the same as “ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν” but rather something like “leading a consistent and coherent life” (Striker 1996:223). Striker claims that one does not need a reference to nature to make the formula intelligible and “neither of the two formulae seems logically to imply the other” (Striker 1996:223). She, nevertheless, agrees with other scholars that there was no serious disagreement between Zeno and his followers and that both formulae were probably meant to express the same doctrine (Striker 1996:223).

Another suggestion is that Zeno did, in fact, use both formulae himself; they were, however, not synonymous but the longer version was rather given to explain the shorter (Striker 1996:231; Schofield 2003:242). “Living consistently” characterises the behaviour which satisfies the conditions of a happy life, whereas “living consistently (or “in agreement”) with nature” is meant to explain how such consistent behaviour relates to the natural order and that it is agreement with this natural order that provides consistency in living (Striker 1996:231; Schofield 2003:242). “On this view of the matter, there is something like a non-accidental pun on “consistently”, and the two formulae do in a sense come down to the same thing: we shall live consistently (i.e. each with his or her own self) if and only if we live consistently with nature” (Schofield 2003:242).



Defining the happy life simply as “consistent” would be rather vague (Striker 1996:231) and, seeing that there is some evidence that shows Zeno himself used the full version “to live in agreement with nature”, there is no need to speculate whether there was a stage in Stoic ethical theory at which Zeno was ever satisfied with mere rational consistency (Brennan 2005:140). But whether one believes that the formula “to live in agreement with nature” originated with Zeno or with his successors, it seems plausible that, even if one rejects the idea that the longer version was identical in meaning with the shorter one, it was intended to make the shorter version more intelligible. The addition of “with nature” in the second formula provides a standard to which a rational creature can look in order to achieve a consistent life (Striker 1996:231). If we, then, assume either that the two versions were synonymous or that the fuller version is simply an attempt to explain the original formula, rather than an innovation in doctrine, then not too much depends on this question of attribution (Sellars 2006:125). As mentioned above, no one amongst ancient critics appeared to have made an issue of it or suggested that there was any disagreement between Zeno and his immediate followers in their views of the final end (Sandbach 1989:54).

Returning to the two passages quoted above, we can compile the following list of the various definitions of the *telos* provided by the Stoics:

- 1) to live according to virtue (κατ’ ἀρετὴν ζῆν)
- 2) to live according to one harmonious reason (καθ’ ἓνα λόγον καὶ σύμφωνον ζῆν)
- 3) Chrysippus: to live according to the experience of the things that happen by nature (κατ’ ἐμπειρίαν τῶν φύσει συμβαινόντων ζῆν)
- 4) to live following nature (τὸ ἀκολουθῶς τῇ φύσει ζῆν)
- 5) Diogenes: to reason well by the selection (and rejection) of what is according to nature (εὐλογιστεῖν ἐν τῇ τῶν κατὰ φύσιν ἐκλογῇ <καὶ ἀπεκλογῇ>)

- 6) Antipater: to live by continually selecting what is according to nature and rejecting what is contrary to nature (ζῆν ἐκλεγόμενους μὲν τὰ κατὰ φύσιν, ἀπεκλεγόμενους δὲ τὰ παρὰ φύσιν διηνεκῶς)
- 7) Antipater: to do everything concerning oneself continually and perpetually in order to attain the things that are ‘preferable’ according to nature (πᾶν τὸ καθ’ αὐτὸν ποιεῖν διηνεκῶς καὶ ἀπαραβάτως πρὸς τὸ τυγχάνειν τῶν προηγουμένων κατὰ φύσιν)

Regarding all the “nature-formulae” above, one further important aspect should be pointed out, namely, that by nature, the Stoics meant both one’s own individual human nature, as well as the nature of the universe (cf. κατὰ τε τὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ κατὰ τὴν τῶν ὅλων; D.L. VII.88), though there seems to have been a disagreement among the early Stoics. According to Diogenes Laertius (VII.89), Cleanthes took the nature in question here to refer to universal nature only. A life in agreement with universal nature according to Cleanthes meant a life in agreement with the reason that pervades and rules the universe, i.e. God or the will of God, and so he gave Zeno’s formula a distinct religious connotation (Smuts 1948:3; Gould 1970:164; Cooper 1996:273). However, it appears that there might not have been any real difference in theory and, as will be shown below, the distinction between human and universal nature can easily be reconciled. Now, before discussing the meaning of the various *telos*-formulations, it is imperative to find out first what the Stoics understood by nature, that is, both universal nature and our own human nature.

## 2.1 Universal Nature

Zeno advocated that the universe consisted of two principles, the passive principle which is the inert matter, and the active principle, which creates and rules the universe and which is the soul or reason (G: *logos*, L: *ratio*) of the universe, also often referred to as God, *pneuma*, fate, providence or simply nature (Arnold 1911:69; Smuts 1948:4; Snyman 1969:28; Sandbach 1989:72). When discussing the nature of the universe I will only be concerned with the active

principle. Let us now take a look at the various aspects of this Nature (hereafter, I will use this capitalised form to distinguish universal nature from human nature).

The Stoics saw the universe as a living being with a soul or reason in it (Cicero (Cic.) *De Natura Deorum* I.39; Snyman 1969:27) and Zeno argued further that this reason, which pervades the world, is possessed of divine power (*Zeno...rationem quondam per omnem naturam rerum pertinentem vi divina esse adfectam putat*; Cic. *De Nat. Deor.* I.36; Snyman 1969:28). Nature and reason (*logos*), in fact, often appear to be used as synonyms by Stoic writers (Long 1971:85) though technically the latter is rather a characteristic of the former (Graeser 1974:176). The word *logos* has many implications. The corresponding verb is *legein* “to say”, but *logos* is not only “language”, or “speech”, but also the rational explanation of something and its underlying purpose (Arnold 1911:163; Sandbach 1989:72). So, the active principle or God, who shapes the inert matter and creates the world and everything in it, does so with reason and purpose, which means that the world is not a random and haphazard construction (Sandbach 1989:72) but all events are predetermined or fated to occur (Brennan 2005:235; Gill 2006:197) – there is no coincidence (Snyman 1969:29) and everything works according to a specific predetermined plan.

Believing that the world and its events are all pre-determined according to a rational plan, the Stoics thus inferred the following to be the two main properties of Nature: Nature as fate or destiny on the one hand, and Nature as right-reasoning and provident on the other hand (Long 1971:91; Sandbach 1989:79). The idea of fate points to the certainty, necessity, inevitability and immutability of God’s plan; providence denotes the rationality, organization, order and purpose of the plan (Sandbach 1989:80; Bobzien 1998:48-9).

We will now take a look at what the Stoics themselves had to say about Nature, fate and providence. Zeno himself defined fate as a “power which moves matter...and it may equally well be called providence and nature” (δύναμιν κινητικὴν τῆς ὅλης..., ἥντινα μὴ διαφέρειν πρόνοιαν καὶ φύσιν καλεῖν; Aëtius, *De placitis reliquiae* I.27.5 in Arnold 1911:202; cf. Gould 1970:142).

From Chrysippus we have a whole list of various definitions of Nature and fate (preserved by Cicero and Stobaeus):

...ipsumque mundum **deum** dicit esse et eius **animi fusionem universam**, tum eius ipsius principatum, qui in mente et ratione versetur, communemque rerum naturam [universam] atque omnia continentem, tum **fatalem vim** et **necessitatem** rerum futurarum... (Cic. *De Nat. Deor.* I.39 in Rackham 1956:40, 42)

...he [Chrysippus] says that the world itself is a god, and a universal fusion of its soul, then that it is the ruling principle of itself, which pervades the mind and reason, and a common [universal] nature of things which holds everything together, then [also] that it is the power of fate and the necessity of future events...

Χρύσιππος **δύναμιν πνευματικὴν** τὴν οὐσίαν τῆς εἰμαρμένης, τάξει τοῦ παντὸς διοικητικὴν. [...] Εἰμαρμένη ἐστὶν ὁ τοῦ κόσμου λόγος, ἢ λόγος τῶν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ προνοία διοικουμένων· ἢ λόγος, **καθ' ὃν τὰ μὲν γεγονότα γέγονε, τὰ δὲ γινόμενα γίνεται, τὰ δὲ γενησόμενα γενήσεται**. Μεταλαμβάνει δ' ἀντὶ τοῦ λόγου τὴν ἀλήθειαν, τὴν αἰτίαν, τὴν φύσιν, τὴν ἀνάγκην, προστιθεὶς καὶ ἑτέρας ὀνομασίας, ὡς ἐπὶ τῆς αὐτῆς οὐσίας τασσομένης καθ' ἑτέρας καὶ ἑτέρας ἐπιβολάς. (Stob. I.5.15 in Bobzien 1998:48)

“Chrysippus [maintains that] the substance of fate is a **power of breath**, administering order of the all. [...] ‘Fate is the **Reason of the universe**’ or ‘the **Reason of the things in the universe administered by providence**’, or ‘the **Reason in accordance with which past events have happened, present events happen, and future events will happen**’; and instead of ‘Reason’ he uses ‘**truth**’, ‘**cause**’, ‘**nature**’, and ‘**necessity**’, and adds other terms which apply to the same substance from different perspectives.” (trans. Bobzien 1998:48)

Similar Stoic accounts of fate are found in a passage by Diogenes Laertius (*Vitae philosophorum* VII.149). Here it says that “all things happen according to fate” (καθ' εἰμαρμένην [...] τὰ πάντα γίνεσθαι) and further that, “fate is the causal chain of things that exist or the reason according to which the world is arranged” (ἔστι δ' εἰμαρμένη αἰτία τῶν ὄντων εἰρομένη ἢ λόγος καθ' ὃν ὁ κόσμος διεξάγεται; cf. Gould 1970:142-3; Bobzien 1998:48). This “causal chain” (αἰτία εἰρομένη) must be understood as a process in which for each fated event there are fated prior conditions that caused the particular event to occur. The Stoics, thus, appear to see the world as subject to a vast causal web from which nothing that happens is excluded (Gould 1970:143).

Most of the above speaks of the inevitability and necessity of Nature's predetermined plan which no living thing can escape. But it should be kept in mind that when Nature arranged the world

and everything in it, it did so with right reason and providence. Providential Nature aims to create a universe capable of enduring and endows it with beauty and excellence (Arnold 1911:204). According to Zeno, it is the function of divine Nature “to command what is right and to forbid the opposite” (*Zeno...naturalem legem divinam esse censet, eamque vim obtinere recta imperantem prohibentemque contraria*; Cic. *De Nat. Deor.* I.36). It is, thus, responsible for the good order of the world and for its “usefulness” to human beings (Sandbach 1989:80). Though this is difficult to believe if one considers the disasters and hardships suffered by individuals, the Stoics advocated that everything that happens is for the greater good of mankind, even if individuals must sometimes be sacrificed in order to save the community (Arnold 1911:205-6).

To sum up the main points explored above, for the Stoics the universe is a system in which all events are predetermined by fate and at the same time this system is controlled by a right-reasoning divine providence which ensures that the system is as good as possible for its human members (Sandbach 1989:35; Long 1996:1914). By accepting the theory of determinism one will see that there is an inevitable and immutable order of events and that everything that happens is part of a single predetermined plan. At the same time, by believing in the concept of a divine providence that cares for mankind, one is assured that this predetermined system is designed for everyone to have the best life possible (Long 1996:191). Living in agreement with universal Nature, thus, seems to imply resigning oneself completely to the world’s predetermined plan and accepting gladly whatever happens, while trusting that it is all for a greater good.

Here arises the question of how the idea of human free will and responsibility can be compatible with this theory of determinism, and this indeed provoked a great deal of controversy. The debate never stopped during the five hundred years of the Stoic school’s existence (Frede 2003:179). It is a complex problem and falls outside the main scope of this thesis, but it cannot be ignored altogether. However, before we can go on to discuss the debate regarding the compatibility of determinism with human accountability, one more aspect of Fate should be explored.

In several passages Fate is also referred to as *pneuma* (“spirit” or “breath”) or *dunamis pneumatikē* (“power of breath”; cf. Stob I.5.15 above) that permeates all things and shapes and

moves them (Sandbach 1989:73; Bobzien 1998:54; Frede 2003:185; Brennan 2005:235). The theory that all things are controlled by Fate does not imply that they are influenced from a distance or directed from on high by “strings of divine puppet-masters” (Brennan 2005:235); instead Fate as *pneuma* works from the inside of all things (Bobzien 1998:54). However, this *pneuma* is not present in everything in the same form. According to the Stoics, there is a “natural order” of all existing things (*scala naturae*) in the universe (Frede 2003:185), i.e. they saw the universe as a home of beings of various ranks, and among them, only man possesses the faculty of reason which is *pneuma* in its purest form (Arnold 1911:186; Long 1971:93; Frede 2003:185). Animals do not have reason, but they do have a soul (*psuchē*) which grants them perception, sensation and mobility (Arnold 1911:187; Long 1971:93; Frede 2003:185). In plants the *pneuma* manifests itself as what might be called “growth-power” or simply “nature” (*physis*) which allows them to grow and sustain themselves (Arnold 1911:188; Long 1971:93; Frede 2003:185). Lowest in the *scala naturae* are the lifeless objects like stones. In these the *pneuma* constitutes their inner “cohesion” (*hexis*), which keeps them together in their particular outward shape (Arnold 1911:189; Frede 2003:185).

No existing thing can have any of the higher degrees of *pneuma* without also having all the lower ones. So, stones possess cohesion, plants cohesion and “growth-power”, animals cohesion, “growth-power” and soul. Human beings possess all four properties (cohesion, “growth-power”, soul and reason), however, certain parts, such as the bones, the nails and the hair, have cohesion and “growth-power” only; in the eyes, nose and ears there is cohesion, “growth-power” and sensation, i.e. soul in the sense in which animals possess soul; it is in man’s intelligence only in which *pneuma* manifests itself as reason (Arnold 1911:190). Hence, the Stoics concluded that the final end for human beings must be expressible in terms of reason, and wholly in terms of reason (Long 1971:93) and so it seems self-explanatory how “to live in agreement with nature” could have come to mean the same as “to live according to reason”. It should now also be clear that there was no real discrepancy between universal and human nature, since the former manifests itself in the latter, and so living in agreement with universal Nature and one’s own human nature in fact comes down to the same thing.

Let us now briefly discuss the criticism received by the Stoics. As already mentioned, the doctrine of determinism provoked a great deal of controversy since the belief in an all-encompassing fate seems to leave humans with the only option of readily complying with its predetermined order and so appears to contradict completely the belief in human free will (Arnold 1911:200; Gould 1970:148; Frede 2003:179). Man's mind seems to be bound to an eternal series of causes (Gould 1970:148). Not only does this deprive us of our free will but also, if nothing we do is really "up to us", then we can, moreover, not justifiably be held responsible for any of our actions. In other words, we cannot rightfully be praised or blamed for anything we do (Brennan 2005:242, 244). Chrysippus tried to reconcile the doctrines of determinism and moral accountability, by explaining the starting point of actions drawing on some ideas of Stoic psychology. He proposes that human beings are not bound in their actions by necessity but rather respond to external stimuli in line with their nature as rational agents (Gill 2006:198). Chrysippus explains that one must distinguish between the external and internal cause of action, also called the "proximate cause" (*prokatartikē*, *proxima*) and "principal cause" (*proēgoumenē*, *antecedens* or *principalis*) (Arnold 1911:212; Gill 2006:198). The idea is that, before any action can take place humans must first "assent", i.e. respond rationally, to the presentation (G: *phantasia*, L: *visum*) of an external stimulus to their minds. This presentation is the "proximate cause". The principal cause lies within the nature of the agents themselves (Arnold 1911:212; Gill 2006:1998; Holowchak 2008:46).

Chrysippus illustrates this theory with an analogy of a rolling cylinder, which can be briefly summed up as follows: in order for a cylinder to roll down a slope, it needs an initial force (an "external stimulus") to start moving. This would be the proximate cause. However, what is responsible for the cylinder to continue rolling is its shape (its "nature") which allows it to respond to the external stimulus in this particular way (Arnold 1911:212; Gould 1970:149-50; Bobzien 1998:260; Holowchak 2008:47). The idea is that, as the cylinder rolls due to its nature when given a proximate cause, so do people assent or withhold assent in accordance with their own nature when given a proximate cause (Holowchak 2008:47).

It appears then that Chrysippus still holds that our actions are caused by fate through external stimuli, but it should be clear that these stimuli are not enough to *necessitate* action (Bobzien

1998:260; Holowchak 2008:46). In other words, these stimuli are certainly triggers for our actions, but they do not determine how we respond (Bobzien 1998:269; Brennan 2005:257). Assent is needed for any movement to take place and this assent is in our power. Hence, it should be clear that the Stoics' theory of determinism does not contradict with our free will. Moreover, how we respond to the external stimuli presented to our minds really depends on what kind of moral character we have, and on these grounds, one can then also justifiably be praised or blamed for one's actions (Arnold 1911:212; Brennan 2005:257).

Whether Chrysippus was really successful in showing that determinism is in fact compatible with human free will and moral accountability, is undecided. Over the last decades, the debate on the compatibility of these two Stoic doctrines has steadily increased in secondary literature, and "to this very day the question has not been settled to everyone's satisfaction" (Frede 2003:179).

## 2.2 Human Nature

The Stoics drew up their theory of any creature's *telos* from the consideration of its inborn nature (Brennan 2005:125). They proposed that the final end and optimal condition for any creature would be the perfection of its one distinctive attribute (Gould 1970:167; Inwood 2005:251). As has been mentioned above, what distinguishes human beings from all other creatures is the capacity of reason. Hence, we will achieve our final end, happiness, by perfecting our reason. This might be conceptually straightforward but less easy to put into practice (Inwood 2005:251-2). However, for now we are still only interested in explaining *what* the *telos* meant; *how* they thought it could be achieved, will be discussed in the next chapter.

The starting point for our discussion of the human *telos* will be the doctrine of *oikeiōsis*. This Greek term is usually left untranslated since there is no satisfying equivalent for it in English. Some unsuccessful candidates include "appropriation", "affinity", "orientation" and "familiarization" (Brennan 2005:154; Gill 2006:37; Sellars 2006:107) and we might as well keep the transliterated Greek as a technical term. It is derived from the word for a house or household, *oikos*; and the corresponding adjective, *oikeios*, would mean "having to do with one's household



/ family / kin”, or more broadly “that with which one feels some affinity or familiarity”, or simply “appropriate”, or “one’s own”, or “that which belongs” (Brink 1956:139; Sandbach 1989:32; Brennan 2005:154-5; Gill 2006:37). *Oikeiōsis* is thus, the “recognition and appreciation of something as belonging to one” (Striker 1996:281); or “knowing precisely what things are and what things are not one’s own” (Holowchak, 2008:38); or the “process of making a thing belong” (Sandbach 1989:32).

The central idea of the *oikeiōsis*-theory is that all animals – including humans – are naturally equipped to preserve themselves or their constitution (“personal *oikeiōsis*”), as well as other members of their species (“social *oikeiōsis*”) (Striker 1996:178; Gill 2006:26). In my discussion of the final end, I will only be concerned with the former. Personal *oikeiōsis* has two stages: the first stage is shared by all animals; the second, more advanced stage is limited to adult humans (Gill 2006:77). The Stoics argue that every animal from birth feels *oikeion* to itself, which means that it is given impulses towards preserving itself in the state in which it finds itself (Brink 1956:139; Brennan 2005:156; Sellars 2006:108). In the first stage of personal *oikeiōsis* animals, thus, instinctively pursue what is advantageous for them and avoid what is harmful; in the second, adult human, stage of personal *oikeiōsis* there is a clear shift from an instinctive pursuit of things that preserve one’s constitution (and avoidance of their opposites) to an increasingly rational and consistent selection of such things (and rejection of their opposites) (Gill 2006:77; cf. Long 1971:100; Cooper 1996:268). As mentioned above, one condition of the final end was that it should in a sense be “natural”, and so the reason that the Stoics appealed to this doctrine of *oikeiōsis* in their discussion of the final end, must have been to show that humans naturally develop towards a certain conception of this final end (Striker 1996:283, 286).

In giving their account of Stoic ethics both Diogenes Laertius (*Vitae Philosophorum* VII.85) and Cicero (*De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* III.16) start out with the doctrine of *oikeiōsis* (Cooper 1996:267; Striker 1996:224; Sellars 2006:107), though, as we shall see, they appeal to it for different purposes. Diogenes Laertius appeals to the doctrine of *oikeiōsis* to show the logical basis of the Stoics’ *telos*-theory, i.e. to explain why they held that living in agreement with nature should be the “natural” goal for human beings. Cicero, on the other hand, uses the

doctrine of *oikeiōsis* to discuss the natural process of human development and to explain how human beings evolve from impulse driven animals to beings directed by perfect reason.

Let us first take a look at the account given by Diogenes Laertius:

- (85.) Τὴν δὲ πρώτην ὁρμὴν φασὶ τὸ ζῶον ἴσχειν ἐπὶ τὸ τηρεῖν ἑαυτό, οἰκειούσης αὐτῷ τῆς φύσεως ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, καθά φησιν ὁ Χρύσιππος ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ Περὶ τελῶν, πρῶτον οἰκεῖον λέγων εἶναι παντὶ ζῴῳ τὴν αὐτοῦ σύστασιν καὶ τὴν ταύτης συνείδησιν· οὔτε γὰρ ἀλλοτριῶσαι εἰκὸς ἦν αὐτὸ <αὐτῷ> τὸ ζῶον, οὔτε ποιήσασαν αὐτό, μήτ' ἀλλοτριῶσαι μήτ' οἰκειῶσαι. ἀπολείπεται τοίνυν λέγειν συστησάμενην αὐτὸ οἰκειῶσαι πρὸς ἑαυτό· οὕτω γὰρ τὰ τε βλάπτοντα διωθεῖται καὶ τὰ οἰκεῖα προσίεται...
- (86.) ... οὐδέν τε, φασί, διήλλαξεν ἡ φύσις ἐπὶ τῶν φυτῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ζῴων, ὅτι χωρὶς ὁρμῆς καὶ αἰσθήσεως κάκεῖνα οἰκονομεῖ καὶ ἐφ' ἡμῶν τινα φυτοειδῶς γίνεται. ἐκ περιττοῦ δὲ τῆς ὁρμῆς τοῖς ζῴοις ἐπιγενομένης, ἣ συγχρώμενα πορεύεται πρὸς τὰ οἰκεῖα, τούτοις μὲν τὸ κατὰ φύσιν τῷ κατὰ τὴν ὁρμὴν διοικεῖσθαι· τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῖς λογικοῖς κατὰ τελειοτέραν προστασίαν δεδομένου, τὸ κατὰ λόγον ζῆν ὁρθῶς γίνεσθαι <τού> τοις κατὰ φύσιν· τεχνίτης γὰρ οὗτος ἐπιγίνεται τῆς ὁρμῆς.
- (87.) Διόπερ πρῶτος ὁ Ζήνων ἐν τῷ Περὶ ἀνθρώπου φύσεως τέλος εἶπε τὸ ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν, ὅπερ ἐστὶ κατ' ἀρετὴν ζῆν· ἄγει γὰρ πρὸς ταύτην ἡμᾶς ἡ φύσις... (D.L. VII.85-87 in Hicks 1925:192, 194)

They [the Stoics] say that an animal has as its first impulse self-preservation, because nature “appropriates” (οἰκειούσης)<sup>3</sup> it to itself from the beginning, as Chrysippus affirms in the first [book] of his [treatise] *On Ends*, saying that the first thing “which is appropriate” (οἰκεῖον)<sup>4</sup> to any animal is its own constitution, and its consciousness thereof. For it was not likely that nature would alienate an animal from itself, nor that nature would, after creating it, neither alienate [it from] nor “appropriate” [it to itself]. Hence, one may conclude that nature, when constituting the animal, it “appropriated” it to itself, for in this way the animal rejects the things that are harmful, and accepts the things that are “appropriate” (τὰ οἰκεῖα). ...

...Moreover, they say, nature made no difference between plants and animals, for it manages those too, (though) without impulse and sensation, and [even] some processes in ourselves take place in the same manner as in plants. But since for animals, impulse is added as well, by the use of which they seek what is “appropriate” [for them], it is “according to nature” for them to be directed according to impulse. But, since reason has been given to rational beings according to a more perfect leadership,

<sup>3</sup> As mentioned above, it is difficult to find a good English equivalent for this Greek word; also consider the translations “endears it to itself” (Hicks 1925:193; Long 1971:103), “makes it belong to itself”, or “makes it its own”.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. also “the first thing which is dear” (Long 1971:104); or “the first thing which every animal regards as its own”.

“to live according to reason” rightly becomes for them “according to nature”. For reason is added as the craftsman of impulse.

Therefore, Zeno was the first to say - in [his treatise] *On the Nature of Man* - that the (*telos*) is “to live in agreement with nature” which is the same as a “to live according to virtue”, for nature guides us towards virtue...

Diogenes Laertius’ argument can be summed up in the following points<sup>5</sup>:

- 1) The “first impulse” that every animal has been given by nature is self-preservation. This assumption is based on the fact that every animal instinctively rejects what is harmful and pursues what is “appropriate” (τὰ οἰκεῖα), i.e. helpful, to itself.  
*Therefore*, it is “according to nature” (κατὰ φύσιν) for animals to be directed by impulse.
- 2) “Rational beings” (τοῖς λογικοῖς), i.e. humans, have (in addition to this “first impulse”) been given reason, as the “craftsman of impulse”<sup>6</sup>.  
*Therefore*, it is “according to nature” (κατὰ φύσιν) for humans to live according to reason (τὸ κατὰ λόγον ζῆν).
- 3) “Therefore” (Διόπερ) the final end is “to live in agreement with nature” (τὸ ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν) which is the same as “to live according to virtue”. This “therefore” is rather abrupt and in order to understand Diogenes’ conclusion, one needs an argument to show why agreement with nature should be the final end of life for “rational beings” (Striker 1996:228). What seems to be implied in the argument, that Nature is “not likely” to create beings that would seek to harm or be indifferent to their constitution but rather makes all its creatures (be it plants, animals or humans) capable of maintaining their constitution, is that Nature is a right-reasoning and benevolent agency (which indeed is one of its properties as we have seen above) and evidently provides the best rational order

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed analysis of this extract the reader is referred to Long (1971:97-102) and Graeser (1974:180-185).

<sup>6</sup> Let it be noted that the emergence of reason does not amount to the emergence of a rational part of the soul, or refer to the training of a non-rational part of the soul (Frede 1999:74; Gill 2006:138). The Stoics decidedly rejected the Platonic or Aristotelian theory of a partition of the soul into rational and non-rational parts. “The Stoic view is that we are born with an irrational soul of the kind animals have, but that this soul as a whole in the case of human beings is transformed into, and thus replaced by, reason” (Frede 1999:74).

(Graeser 1974:182; Cooper 1996:272; Striker 1996:229), and *therefore*, rational creatures will want to organize their lives by living in conscious and rational agreement with such a nature and this, in turn, is achieved by living virtuously.

The central thought in this exposition of the ‘final end’ is the alignment of one’s own nature, the way universal Nature created it (Smuts 1948:5). In the course of our natural development we should come to see that reason is the thing that is ‘our own’ or ‘appropriate’ to ourselves (*oikeion*), and so it is our goal (*telos*) to maintain and perfect that reason by living virtuously (Brennan 2005:156). It appears to be the purpose of this account by Diogenes Laertius to show that a living being’s *telos* is determined by that being’s specific nature as well as universal Nature (having created the being in that specific way) that determines the final end of its life (Smuts 1948:5).

This account, thus, (more or less successfully) provides a logical explanation for *why* “living in agreement with nature” should be the final end for human beings but it does not offer an argument as to *how* a human being’s interest should shift at a certain stage in life from instinctive self-preservation to an exclusive interest in the rational order of Nature and living virtuously. Cicero seems to provide such an argument (as has been suggested above) in his account of human development in *Fin.* III.16-21 (Striker 1996:230; Gill 2006:145; Holowchak 2008:39).

In the following extract Cicero has his spokesman Cato explain the Stoic account of the human *telos* and like Diogenes Laertius he starts out with a discussion of the most basic instinct with which animals, including humans, are born – self-preservation (Cooper 1996:267):

“Placet his”, inquit, “quorum ratio mihi probatur, simul atque natum sit animal (hinc enim est ordiendum), ipsum sibi conciliari et commendari ad se conservandum et ad suum statum eaque, quae conservantia sunt eius status, diligenda, alienari autem ab interitu iisque rebus quae interitum videantur afferre...” (Cic. *Fin.* III.16 in Rackham 1961:232)

He said: It is agreed upon by those whose reasoning I adopt, that as soon as an animal is born (for that is where one must start from) is appropriated with itself and committed to preserving itself and to

value highly its own constitution and the things which preserve its constitution, but it is alienated from destruction and those things which appear to bring about destruction...

This is followed by an exposition of the ideal pattern of development for human beings which culminates in a life according to perfect reason and virtue (Gill 2006:130). In *Fin.* III.20 Cicero sums up the developmental process as follows:

[1] primum est officium (id enim appello καθήκον) **ut se conservet in naturae statu**, [2] deinceps **ut ea teneat quae secundum naturam sint, pellatque contraria**. qua inventa selectione et item reiectione [3] sequitur deinceps **cum officio selectio**, [4] deinde **ea perpetua**, [5] tum ad extremum **constans consentaneaue naturae**,... (Cic. *Fin.* III 20 in Rackham 1961:238)

[1] The first “appropriate act” (for this I call the Greek kathēkon) is **to preserve oneself in one’s natural constitution**; [2] the next is **to retain those things which are according to nature and to repel those contrary to it**; [and] when this principle of selection and also of rejection has been discovered, [3] there follows next in line **selection conditioned by “appropriate action”**<sup>7</sup>; [4] then such selection becomes a **permanent habit**. [5] And finally, it becomes **constant and in harmony with nature**, ...

From this passage one can identify the following five stages in human development (cf. Cooper 1996:269; Striker 1996:226, 289-290; Holowchak 2008:41-2):

- 1) Human beings, like other animals, begin their lives with a basic impulse to preserve themselves in their natural constitution.
- 2) This impulse prompts young children “to retain those things which are in accordance with nature and to repel those contrary to it”. In other words, they learn to select (i.e. pursue) and reject (i.e. avoid) what is helpful and harmful to their constitution, respectively.
- 3) As humans grow more mature they continue to perform such “selection” (and “rejection”) because they have come to realize that it is “appropriate” to do so (Cooper 1996:269). The

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. the alternative “choosing things in an appropriate way” (Striker 1996:289).

clear difference between this third stage and stage two, is that humans now no longer act on instinct but on reason (Cooper 1996:268).

- 4) Eventually this “appropriate” way of behaving, i.e. selecting what is in “accordance with nature” (and rejecting the opposite) becomes *perpetua*, a “permanent habit”.
- 5) In the final stage the habit of performing appropriate actions by selection and rejection should become “constant and in harmony with nature” (*constans consentaneaue naturae*) and this is what constitutes *homologia* (“agreement”) or *convenientia* (“conformity”), as Cicero calls it (*Fin.* III.21), the final end all human beings should strive for.

In *Fin.* III.21 Cicero goes on to explain that in this final stage human beings have come to see the “order and harmony” (*ordinem et ... concordiam*) of their reason-directed action of “selection and rejection”, and this becomes much more important than the objects for which they “originally felt an affection” (cf. *multo eam pluris aestimavit quam omnia illa, quae prima dilexerat*; Rackham 1961:238-9; cf. Cooper 1996:269; Striker 1996:226). This will lead people to conclude that the “primary natural things”, i.e. the things that they previously pursued believing them to be helpful or good for their constitution, are, in fact, completely indifferent and no longer desirable for their own sake. The only thing that is good in itself and worth to be pursued now is the “ordered and harmonious” performance of appropriate actions which constitutes virtuous conduct and virtue itself (*honeste facta ipsumque honestum*; Cic. *Fin.* III.21). The main difference between this final stage and the previous two stages is the fact that, previously, appropriate actions were performed for the sake of attaining these primary natural things (Cic. *Fin.* III.22), whereas appropriate actions that are “constant and in harmony with nature” – later Cicero calls them “correct actions” or “correctly performed actions” (Cic. *Fin.* III.24), κατορθώματα in Greek – are performed solely for their own sake (Gill 2006:130; Holochak 2008:43).

What appears to be needed is a change of one’s internal attitude towards the primary natural things. By exercising our “intelligence and reason” (*cognitione et ratione*; cf. Cic. *Fin.* III.21) we will eventually abandon some earlier ideas about what was valuable in life, and once we act

“with a fully developed capacity of reason” (Cooper 1996:272) we will come to live virtuously. The details of this development from selecting primary natural things for their sake to only seeing value in the virtuous action itself are obscure, but this will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

## 2.3 Summary

From all that has been stated above one can infer the following about the Stoic *telos*: Firstly, when the Stoics speak of “living in agreement with nature” (τὸ ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν) or “living following nature” (τὸ ἀκολούθως τῇ φύσει ζῆν), they refer to both universal Nature and human nature, since humans all have a part of the divine *pneuma* directing them (D.L. VII.87). It has been suggested above that “living in agreement with universal Nature” means resigning oneself completely to the world’s predetermined plan and accepting gladly whatever happens; we can trust to find happiness in this agreement with Nature, since we know that it has designed this plan (with right reason and purpose) for the benefit of all its creatures and, moreover, since resistance to this inevitable predetermined order seems futile and would only lead to unhappiness. Living in agreement with one’s own human nature, in turn, means perfecting the one attribute distinctive to our nature. This distinctive attribute of human nature is reason, which is, of course, a part of universal reason residing in us, and so it requires no further explanation how “living in agreement with nature” could have come to mean the same as “to live according to one harmonious reason” (καθ’ ἓνα λόγον καὶ σύμφωνον ζῆν).

It has been shown above that reason is something that emerges automatically over time (provided that all goes well in the course of our natural development) and replaces our initial animalistic impulses. This means that instead of pursuing “the things that accord with our nature” (τὰ κατὰ φύσιν; *ea quae sunt secundum naturam*) and avoiding their opposites on instinct, we now rationally decide to pursue and avoid certain things because it is *appropriate* to do so (cf. Cic. *Fin.* III.20). However, from Cicero’s account in *Fin.* III.20, it would seem that once reason has emerged it still allows for considerable further improvement or perfection. “It is at this point that we actively and deliberately have to involve ourselves to attain the perfect competence which



will guarantee our well-being” (Frede 1999:74). What “living according to reason” essentially means is “to live according to reason in its state of excellence” (Gould 1970:169) and so we must actively try to perfect our capacity of reason. Perfect reason will enable us to see what is truly good and bad and perform morally correct actions with unfailing consistency, which is what constitutes virtue and virtuous conduct.

Now it is also clear how the Stoics could have regarded the formula “to live in agreement with nature” to mean the same as “to live according to virtue”. Nature, in fact, “guides us towards virtue” as Diogenes Laertius puts it (D.L. VII.87; cf. Graeser 1974:183; Striker 1996:288), by giving us the capacity of reason, which, once it is perfected, enables us to know what is truly good and bad and what should and should not be done and this knowledge is the disposition of wisdom (G: *phronesis*, L: *prudentia*) the pre-eminent one of the four cardinal virtues. We regard it as pre-eminent since the other three justice (G: *dikaiosunē*, L: *iustitia*), courage (G: *andreia*, L: *fortitudo*) and temperance (G: *sōphrosunē*, L: *temperantia*) all depend on it: Justice is *wisdom* concerned with assigning and judging the correct use of things; courage is *wisdom* concerned with the correct judgement of the things to be endured; temperance is *wisdom* concerned with the moderate selection and acquisition of things (Arnold 1911:306-12; Gould 1970:170; Sandbach 1989:42; Colish 1990:43; Schofield 2003:243; Brennan 2005:144).

Let us now try to make sense of the rest of the *telos*-definitions that we have encountered. The assumption is that these additional formulas were not intended to replace the original “to live in agreement with nature”, but rather to explain it (Sandbach 1989:56). In order to understand Chrysippus’ formula “to live according to the experience of the things that happen by nature”, we have to ask what happens in the course of nature that we need to have experience of, if we want to live in agreement with nature. Before we can answer this question, we must also take into account the supporting remark “for our [own] natures are parts of the nature of the universe” (Cooper 1996:273; Schofield 2003:245). This implies that we must realize “that we are not isolated units but rather parts of a systematically integrated whole” (Sellars 2006:127), which should lead us to cultivate a new perspective on the world by which we see everything that happens from the viewpoint of Nature as a whole and not simply from our own limited viewpoint (Sellars 2006:126). If we now focus our attention on “the things that happen by Nature” at large,



we can make the following observation: One aspect of Nature – which has already been pointed out several times – is that it is benevolent, since it provides for each of its creatures (be it plants, animals, or humans) a well-structured constitution and the ability to maintain that constitution, which makes it possible for each of these creatures, under normal circumstances, to live a flourishing and good life. At the same time, however, we can also observe that Nature often deprives its creatures of the conditions in which they can flourish. In the case of human beings, for example, although good health is something which benevolent Nature wants for us, that same Nature also causes incurable diseases, famines or natural disasters (Cooper 1996:273). From this the Stoics conclude that, though Nature wants things to go well for its creatures, it will sometimes have to sacrifice individuals in order to preserve the world as a whole (Arnold 1911:205-6; Cooper 1996:273), and the “experience” and knowledge we gain from such an observation, will help us to accept gladly whatever comes our way and “not to think of anything that happens to us as any better or worse than anything else that we might imagine as having happened instead” (Cooper 1996:274).

There seems to be another aspect to Chrysippus’ formula. The “things that happen by nature” could also refer to the ways in which Nature has equipped each of its creatures with a distinctive attribute whose perfect development – as has been stated above – constitutes the excellent condition for that particular being. Ideally the creature will arrive naturally at its most excellent condition, but in the case of humans we are often hindered by external causes (Sellars 2006:126) such as our upbringing, social setting and cultural conventions. The idea is that an understanding (or “experience”) of what our distinctive attribute is and how we naturally ought to develop will help us in shaping and perfecting our inborn potentialities (Long 2006:27-8), and hence come to live in “agreement with nature” by living according to our perfectly developed reason. It would appear, then, that Chrysippus’ formula is still true to the original definition of the *telos*; he simply attempted to explain how “living in agreement with nature” is made possible by adding more detail to Zeno’s definition.

Diogenes of Babylon, too, did not make any fundamental change by defining the *telos* as “to reason well by the selection (and rejection) of what is according to nature” (Sandbach 1989:57). It would appear that with his formula he seeks to provide an account to justify the pursuit of the

primary natural things (or “things according to nature”; i.e. the things that humans previously pursued believing them to be helpful or good for their constitution), which – as we should know once our reason has been perfected – are completely indifferent and no longer desirable for their own sake, and to show how they can be rationally related to virtue and so be incorporated in the *telos*. “Somehow, it must be rational to pursue “indifferents”, even though they form no part of the good, and ... even though it is also a matter of indifference whether they are actually attained or not” (Brennan 2005:144). It seems plausible to relate the pursuit of indifferents to the agent’s *telos* of living virtuously by saying that a virtuous life consists in a life in which one exercises one’s perfect rationality and virtue in the pursuit of indifferents (cf. the discussion of Cic. *Fin.* III.21, 24). “It is exactly by choosing *wisely* and avoiding *bravely*, by selecting *temperately* and distributing *justly*, that a life which in some sense is taken up with and given over to indifferents can nevertheless at the same time be a life directed towards the end of virtue” (Brennan 2005:144). In this way then, Diogenes’ formula “to reason well by the selection (and rejection) of what is according to nature” can be regarded as equivalent to “living in agreement with nature”, as well as to “living according to virtue” (Brennan 2005:144).

The idea that human beings can find happiness simply by “reasoning well” in the selection of things without any regard for the things themselves, was open to objection and it would appear that Antipater’s modifications was designed to meet whatever criticism the Stoics might have received in this regard (Sandbach 1989:57). In his second formula, “to do everything concerning oneself continually and perpetually in order to attain the things that are ‘preferable’ according to nature”, Antipater introduced the acquisition of naturally preferable things to the end but still attributed no value to them with regards to one’s happiness (Sandbach 1989:57). “This formula, then, which by including the natural objectives recognises that they are essential for moral action, also establishes their relation to it; not their acquisition, but the attempt to acquire them constitutes morality” (Sandbach 1989:57-8).

Only with Panaetius and Posidonius, the main representatives of the Middle Stoa, are significant deviations from the Old Stoic teachings obvious, as they both allocated considerably more value to the “primary natural things” (Smuts 1948:10). Panaetius moreover placed greater emphasis on the individual human nature (Arnold 1911:283; Smuts 1948:12), and whereas the Old Stoic *telos*

called for a constant, unchanging internal attitude that would help us to live happily in a world where external circumstance are constantly changing, Panaetius proposes that one should rather learn to adapt oneself to exactly these ever-changing circumstances (Smuts 1948). The details regarding these discrepancies between the Old and Middle Stoa should not concern us further; as we shall see Seneca and other representatives of the Late Stoa appear to have turned back to the orthodox doctrines of the Old Stoa.

As a concluding thought we can say that the Stoics believed that humans are “constitutively capable of developing to the point of gaining complete happiness, through virtue and rational reflection, regardless of the specific character of their inborn nature, upbringing and social context” (Gill 2006:131). To sum up what has been discussed in this chapter, we can say that in order to live a happy life we ought to bring ourselves into complete agreement with nature by living virtuously and this will be achieved by living according to, i.e. perfecting, our one distinctive attribute, namely reason. Given these initial assumptions about the Stoic *telos*, the next chapter will proceed to discuss the developmental process one must undergo to achieve it.

### Chapter 3: Attainment of the Stoic *telos*

In the previous chapter it has been shown that for the Stoics happiness – the “final end” (*telos*) of human life – is attained by “living in agreement with nature” which essentially means “living virtuously”. In short, their position can be expressed as, “If we want to be happy, we must live virtuously”. We have looked at various definitions of this final end, but what seems to be most noteworthy about all of them is, that happiness is not a state of *being*, but rather a way of *living*. This means that happiness is a goal that must actively and constantly be achieved. In the discussion of Cic. *Fin.* III.21 above, it has been shown that “living in agreement with nature” consists of performing actions that are “constant and in harmony with nature” (*constans consentaneaue naturae*), that is, performing “correct actions” or “correctly performed actions”, or κατορθώματα in Greek (Cic. *Fin.* III.24). These are actions “according to virtue” (τὰ κατ’ ἀρετήν; Stob.II.7.8) and they are performed solely for their own sake and only the wise are capable of performing such actions, since the wise alone possess perfect reason which constitutes virtue.

The question that poses itself now is *how* someone who is not yet wise can come to perform such morally correct or virtuous actions and thus attain happiness. This chapter does not look at how the Stoics thought this goal could be achieved in practice, but merely discusses the *theory* behind the developmental process one must undergo in one’s mind in order to be able to live happily.

In order to determine how human beings can go from performing actions, directed by instinct (as is the case in the beginning stages of their lives) to performing morally correct actions directed by virtue, one needs to start by considering the Stoics’ theory of motivation. The theory states that every action is motivated by an impulse (G: *hormē*; L: *appetitus* or *impetus*) which arises in response to a presentation (G: *phantasia*; L: *visum*)<sup>8</sup> of something in the agent’s environment (Brennan 2003:260; Gill 2006:138). This overall pattern of motivation applies to both rational animals (adult humans) and non-rational animals (children and non-human animals) (Gill

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<sup>8</sup> Some scholars render *phantasia* with impression (eg. Brennan 2005:52; Gill 2006:139) but I prefer to follow the translation used by Hunt (1976:61) and Reesor (1989:49) – ‘presentation’. The term ‘impression’ (*typōsis*) is rather what Zeno called the *phantasia*’s *effect* on a persons’ soul (D.L. VII 50; cf. Hunt 1976:60-1).

2006:139). As has been shown in the discussion of D.L. VII.85-87 and Cic. *Fin.* III.16, every animal's first impulse is towards self-preservation, i.e. to pursue what is "*oikeion*" to its nature, and to avoid the opposite.

However, whereas children and non-human animals act instinctively upon receiving a presentation, in adult human beings (i.e. rational beings) the impulse to act does not occur without an additional mental operation: an act of assent (G: *sunkatathesis*; L: *adsensus*) to presentations, more accurately "impulsive presentations" (*phantasiai hormētikai*), i.e. presentations capable of moving an impulse (Stob. II.7.9; Reesor 1989:50; Sandbach 1989:60; Sorabji 2000:43; Brennan 2003:262,266; Cooper 2005:183 Gill 2006:139). This psychological phenomenon has already been touched on briefly in the discussion of Chrysippus' cylinder analogy in the previous chapter, but it will now be explored in further detail.

The Greek term for assent, is derived from the verb συγκατατίθημι which means to "go along with", "to vote for", "to agree with" or "to endorse" (Long 1999:577; Brennan 2005:51). In view of the Stoic theory of motivation, assenting to an impulsive presentation means evaluating its content and deciding what would be the appropriate way to react to it. Assent is thus made up of two judgements: one regarding the value of the content of a presentation, i.e. judge whether it is good or bad (or perhaps neither), the other regarding the necessary action to be taken (Sorabji 2000:2; Brennan 2003:266, 270; Gill 2006:79). Only if we assent to the impulsive presentation, the impulse to act is created. For example, if we are faced with some kind of danger, the impulse to flee from it is only created when we assent to the presentation of danger, i.e. judge (1) that something bad is imminent and (2) that it is appropriate to avoid it (Brennan 2003:262).

As has been discussed in the previous chapter regarding moral responsibility of individuals for their actions, whether one gives or withholds assent depends entirely on one's moral character and so the key difference between the virtuous actions (i.e. morally correct actions) performed by the wise and the vicious actions performed by the non-wise also lies in their assent to impulsive presentations (Brennan 2005:52; Gill 2006:198). The difference between the assent of the wise and the non-wise comes down to the following two aspects: (1) the character of the presentations they assent to, and (2) the way in which they assent to them.

Regarding the first aspect it must be noted that, presentations are considered either true or false depending on whether their content, i.e. whatever they propose to one's mind, is true or false (Brennan Reesor 1989:51; 2005:66). Additionally, the Stoics classified some of the true presentations as *kataleptic* (Hunt 1976:63; Reesor 1989:51; Brennan 2005:66). The word "kataleptic" was a Stoic invention (Brennan 2005:66); it is derived from the noun κατάληψις which means "comprehension", "cognition" or "grasp" (Arnold 1911:133; Hunt 1976:63; Long 1999:548; Pomeroy 1999:112). "Kataleptic" thus suggests connotations such as "comprehensive", "cognitive" or "graspable" (Hunt 1976:63; Brennan 2005:66). For a presentation to be not only true but kataleptically true it has to come with a sort of guarantee that its content is undoubtedly true (Boys-Stones 1998:317; Long 1999:577; Brennan 2005:68). The wise only assent to kataleptic presentations (Brennan 1996:324; Brennan 2005:176), while the non-wise assent to all kinds of presentations, false, true, and kataleptic since they lack the steadfast knowledge to distinguish between them.

Regarding the second aspect one needs to explore another facet of the act of assent. Since assent has the function of judging and evaluating presentations, the outcome of any act of assent is a cognitive state, e.g. an opinion (or belief; G: *doxa*; L: *opinio*) (Long 1999:580; Brennan 2003:263). So, to assent to a presentation means to have an opinion about the value of the presentation. This is also true for presentations that do not necessarily arouse an impulse, such as perceptive (*aisthētikai*), rational (*logikai*) and cognitive (*katalēptikai*) presentations (cf. Reesor 1989:50). In the case of impulsive presentations, assent comprises an additional opinion regarding the appropriate action that should be taken (cf. Stob. II.7.9). Opinion is only one type of cognitive state, one that results from what the Stoics refer to as "weak assent". In cases where strong assent is given, i.e. assent which is fully justified (because the presentation is kataleptically true), the cognitive state is a "genuine grasp" of the truth contained in the presentation, and this is knowledge (G: *epistēmē*; L: *scientia*) (Arnold 1911:133; Long 1999:578; Brennan 2003:263; Brennan 2005:89-90).

The difference between a weak assent and a strong assent has nothing to do with how weakly or strongly one is convinced of something. The Stoics were not concerned with how strongly and consistently one *does* uphold one's point of view, but rather how strongly and consistently one

*could* uphold it when confronted with various challenges (Brennan 2005:69). A weak assent is an assent that is immediately abandoned when we are, for example, shown that it contradicts another point of view we might hold, or when we are challenged by certain emotional or psychological pressures. A strong assent, on the other hand, is an assent that cannot be abandoned regardless of our circumstances or the challenges we face (Brennan 2005:69). Only the wise are capable of having a strong assent to presentations, for only the wise have a consistent and error-free world view that they can never hold contradicting beliefs or be tempted to abandon one belief for another (Brennan 2005:71). Thus, only the wise can have knowledge. The assent of a non-wise, on the other hand, regardless of whether it is given to a false, true or kataleptic presentation, will always be a weak assent (Brennan 2005:72), since the non-wise lack the consistent mental disposition of the wise for their assent to be stable and reliable, and so the non-wise will always only have mere opinions.

Opinions can be either true or false depending on whether the presentations one is assenting to are true or false (Brennan 2005:66). It should further be noted that, even when a non-wise person assents to a kataleptic presentation, the outcome is still opinion and not knowledge (Boys-Stones 1998:317; Brennan 2005:71). Since he might often also assent to non-kataleptic presentations and presentations that are actually contradictory to the given kataleptic presentation, he clearly lacks the criterion of discernment (i.e. knowledge) by which he can be sure that the presentation which he assents to is indeed kataleptic (Hunt 1976:65; Boys-Stones 1998:317).

So far it has been shown, that all actions stem from impulses. And all impulses in rational beings are cognitive states mediated by assent. The wise will only receive impulses from kataleptic presentations and all their impulses are episodes of knowledge, resulting from strong assent. The non-wise, on the other hand, fail to discern between false, true and kataleptic presentations; all their impulses are opinions which come from weak assent. From this brief overview of the Stoic theory of motivation, it can be concluded that in order to perform morally correct actions like the wise, one will need to have the correct sort of impulses, which depend on one's correct evaluation of impulsive presentations. Therefore, the starting point for anyone who wishes to live happily should be to seek to acquire *correct understanding of the true value of things*, i.e. of what is good and bad. Knowledge of the value of things will enable a person to judge the content

of impulsive presentations correctly which will produce the *correct sort of impulses* which will in turn lead to *correct actions*. With an eye on finding out how progress can be made towards virtuous conduct, the remainder of this chapter will now correspondingly go on to discuss in further detail the Stoics' theory of (1) value, (2) impulses, and (3) actions. The aim is ultimately to clarify the steps in the mental development one has to undergo in order to reach (or at least get closer) to the goal of living a happy life.

### 3.1 Theory of Value

One's greatest hindrance to living virtuously, i.e. performing virtuous or morally correct actions, is one's false beliefs about the value of the content of impulsive presentations. Anyone who wishes to live virtuously (or at least make progress towards this ideal), should start by abandoning such false beliefs and seeking to acquire correct understanding of the true value of things. Some of the concepts discussed below have already been touched on in the previous chapter, but this section will set out the Stoics' theory of value in closer detail.

The Stoics divided all things that exist into three value categories: things that are good, things that are bad, and things that are indifferent (Brennan 2005:119; Inwood 2005:101-2; Sellars 2006:110). This theory is preserved in Diogenes Laertius' *Vitae philosophorum* VII.101-2 and Joannes Stobaeus' *Anthologium* II.7.5a:

τῶν δ' ὄντων φασι τὰ μὲν ἀγαθὰ εἶναι, τὰ δὲ κακά, τὰ δ' οὐδέτερα. Ἀγαθὰ μὲν οὖν τάς τ' ἀρετάς, φρόνησιν, δικαιοσύνην, ἀνδρείαν, σωφροσύνην καὶ τὰ λοιπά· κακὰ δὲ τὰ ἐναντία, ἀφροσύνην, ἀδικίαν καὶ τὰ λοιπά. οὐδέτερα δὲ ὅσα μὴτ' ὠφελεῖ μῆτε βλάπτει, οἷον ζωὴ, υἱεία, ἡδονή, κάλλος, ἰσχύς, πλοῦτος, εὐδοξία, εὐγένεια· καὶ τὰ τούτοις ἐναντία, θάνατος, νόσος, πόνος, αἷσχος, ἀσθένεια, πενία, ἀδοξία, δυσγένεια καὶ τὰ παραπλήσια. (D.L. VII.101-2 in Hicks 1925:206,208)

Of the things that exist, they [the Stoics] say, that some are good, some are bad, and some are neither. Goods<sup>9</sup>, then, are the virtues, wisdom, justice, courage, temperance etc.; bads<sup>10</sup> are the opposites:

<sup>9</sup> Hereafter I will use the English term "goods" for the Greek ἀγαθὰ and the Latin *bona* (cf. Brennan 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Hereafter I will use the English term "bads" for the Greek κακά and the Latin *mala* (cf. Brennan 2005).



foolishness, injustice, etc. The things that are neither are all the things which neither benefit nor harm, such as life, health, pleasure, beauty, strength, wealth, good repute, noble birth and their opposites: death, sickness, pain, ugliness, weakness, poverty, ill-repute, low birth and the like.

τῶν δ' ὄντων τὰ μὲν ἀγαθὰ, τὰ δὲ κακὰ, τὰ δὲ ἀδιάφορα. Ἀγαθὰ μὲν τὰ τοιαῦτα· φρόνησιν, σωφροσύνην, δικαιοσύνην, ἀνδρείαν καὶ πᾶν ὃ ἐστὶν ἀρετὴ ἢ μετέχον ἀρετῆς· κακὰ δὲ τὰ τοιαῦτα· ἀφροσύνην, ἀκολασίαν, ἀδικίαν, δειλίαν καὶ πᾶν ὃ ἐστὶ κακία ἢ μετέχον κακίας· ἀδιάφορα δὲ τὰ τοιαῦτα· ζῶην θάνατον, δόξαν ἀδοξίαν, ἡδονὴν πόνον, πλοῦτον πενίαν, ὑγίειαν νόσον, καὶ τὰ τοῦτοις ὅμοια. (Stob. II.7.5a in Wachsmuth and Hense 1884:57-8)

Of the things that exist, some are good, some are bad, and some are indifferent. Goods are things such as these: wisdom, temperance, justice, courage and everything that is a virtue or participates in virtue; bads are things such as these: foolishness, intemperance, injustice, cowardice and everything that is a vice or participates in vice; indifferents<sup>11</sup> are things such as these: life, death; good repute, ill repute; pleasure, pain; wealth, poverty; health, sickness, and similar things.

From these nearly identical accounts one can assert that according to traditional Stoic teaching, only virtue and what participates in virtue is truly good; only vice and what participates in vice is bad. All other things, such as health, wealth, life, and good repute and their opposites, are indifferent (cf. Motto 1985:10; Sorabji 2000:169-70; Brennan 2003:263-4; Brennan 2005:27-8; Inwood 2005:101-2; Sellars 2006:110).

Diogenes Laertius explains further how the term 'indifferent' is to be understood:

Διχῶς δὲ λέγεσθαι ἀδιάφορα· ἅπαξ μὲν τὰ μήτε πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν μήτε πρὸς κακοδαιμονίαν συνεργοῦντα, ὡς ἔχει πλοῦτος, δόξα, ὑγίεια, ἰσχυς καὶ τὰ ὅμοια· ... ἄλλως δὲ λέγεται ἀδιάφορα τὰ μήθ' ὁρμῆς μήτ' ἀφορμῆς κινητικά, ὡς ἔχει τὸ ἀρτίας ἔχειν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς τρίχας ἢ περιττάς, ἢ ἐκτεῖναι τὸν δάκτυλον ἢ συστεῖλαι... (D.L. VII.104 in Hicks 1925:208, 210)

But [they also say that] indifferents are so called in two ways: In one way [the term refers to] the things which contribute neither to happiness nor to unhappiness, such as wealth, good repute, health, strength, and the like. ... In another way things are called indifferent which stimulate neither impulse

<sup>11</sup> Hereafter I will use the English term "indifferents" for the Greek ἀδιάφορα and the Latin *indifferentia* (cf. Brennan 2005).

nor repulsion, such as the fact that one has an odd or even number of hairs on one's head or whether one extends or draws back one's finger.

A similar account is provided by Stobaeus (II.7.7) who distinguishes between the “indifferents” that are simply neither good nor bad and the “absolute indifferents” (καθάπαξ ἀδιάφορα) – the “things which stimulate neither impulse nor repulsion” (τὰ μήθ' ὁρμῆς μήτ' ἀφορμῆς κινητικά). Both Diogenes Laertius and Stobaeus make it clear that the things which the Stoics term “indifferents” are indifferent in the former sense, i.e. they are neither good nor bad and as such do not contribute in any way to one's happiness; they are, however, capable of stirring an impulse and are thus not indifferent with regard to a person's action of selecting or rejecting them.

In order to discern which of the so-called ‘indifferents’ should be selected and which should be rejected, the Stoics had to allocate some sort of value to them, namely “selective value” (ἀξία ἐκλεκτική) (Stob. II.7.7; Sorabji 2000:170; Brennan 2003:264).

Diogenes Laertius provides the following account:

Τῶν ἀδιαφόρων τὰ μὲν λέγουσι προηγμένα, τὰ δὲ ἀποπροηγμένα· προηγμένα μὲν τὰ ἔχοντα ἀξίαν, ἀποπροηγμένα δὲ τὰ ἀπαξίαν ἔχοντα. (D.L. VII.105 in Hicks 1925:210)

Of the indifferents, they say that some are preferred, others dispreferred. The things that have value are preferred, the things that have disvalue are dispreferred.

Stobaeus attests a similar description:

Ἔτι δὲ τῶν ἀδιαφόρων τὰ μὲν πλείω ἀξίαν ἔχειν, τὰ δ' ἐλάττω· ... καὶ τὰ μὲν προηγμένα, τὰ δ' ἀποπροηγμένα, τὰ δ' οὐδετέρως ἔχοντα. Προηγμένα μὲν, ὅσα ἀδιάφορα ὄντα πολλὴν ἔχει ἀξίαν, ... ἀποπροηγμένα δέ, ὅσα πολλὴν ἔχει ἀπαξίαν ὁμοίως· (Stob. II.7.7b in Wachsmuth and Hense 1884:80)

And further, of the indifferents some have more **value**, others have less... And some are **preferred**, others **dispreferred**, and others are neither. Preferred are whichever indifferents have much value ... Likewise dispreferred are whichever have much disvalue.

Stobaeus also says that the preferred is an indifferent thing which we select (ἐκλεγόμεθα) and the opposite counts for the dispreferred (by implication they must be rejected) (Stob. II.7.7g).

Moreover, the Stoics held that “of the indifferents some are according to nature, others contrary to nature, and others are neither contrary to nature nor according to nature” (καὶ τὰ μὲν εἶναι κατὰ φύσιν, τὰ δὲ παρὰ φύσιν, τὰ δὲ οὔτε παρὰ φύσιν οὔτε κατὰ φύσιν; Stob. II.7.7a in Wachsmuth and Hense 1884:79). And further, all the things according to nature have value and all the things contrary to nature have disvalue (Stob. II.7.7f). The former are to be taken (ληπτὰ), the latter are not to be taken (ἄληπτα) (Stob. II.7.7e).

Cicero provides a more coherent summary of the Stoic theory of indifferents:

Cetera autem etsi nec bona nec mala essent, tamen alia secundum naturam dicebat, alia naturae esse contraria; his ipsis alia interiecta et media numerabat. Quae autem secundum naturam essent, ea sumenda et quadam aestimatione dignanda docebat, contraque contraria, neutra autem in mediis relinquebat. In quibus ponebat nihil omnino esse momenti, sed quae essent sumenda, ex iis alia pluris esse aestimanda, alia minoris: quae pluris ea praeposita appellabat, reiecta autem quae minoris. (Cic. *Academia* I.36-7 in Rackham 1956:444)

“All other things, he [Zeno] said, were neither good nor bad, but nevertheless some of them were in accordance with nature and others contrary to nature; also among these he counted another interposed or ‘intermediate’ class of things. He taught that things in accordance with nature were to be chosen and estimated as having a certain value, and their opposites the opposite, while things that were neither he left in the ‘intermediate’ class. These he declared to possess no motive force whatever, but among things to be chosen some were to be deemed of more value and others of less: the more valuable he termed ‘preferred’, the less valuable, ‘rejected’.” (Rackham 1956:445)

From the evidence above the Stoic doctrine on indifferents may be summed up as follows: The things classed as “indifferent” were subdivided into (1) “preferred indifferents” (G: *proēgmena*; L: *praeposita*, *promota*, *praecipua*, *producta* (Cic. *Fin.* III.52); Seneca also uses the term *commoda* (*Ep.* 74.17) – “advantages”), (2) “dispreferred indifferents” (G: *apoproēgmena*; L: *reiecta*, *remota*; or *incommoda* – “disadvantages”) and (3) “absolute indifferents” (*kathapax adiaphora*) (cf. Arnold 1911:290; Gould 1970:177; Motto 1985:10; Barney 2003:308; Brennan 2003:264; Brennan 2005:38; Inwood 2005:101-2; Sellars 2006:111).

The “preferred indifferents” then are things according to nature (τὰ κατὰ φύσιν; *ea quae secundum naturam*), i.e. they are the things that Nature (i.e. universal nature) has “programmed” us to pursue (Barney 2003:310). As has been shown in the previous chapter, all animals, including humans, are born with an instinctive orientation towards preserving their own constitution. Accordingly, we all have a natural instinct to prefer, for example, health over sickness (Barney 2003:310). Preferred indifferents, then, are those that contribute under normal circumstances to our general well-being (Sellars 2006:112). Though they are not good in the same way as virtue is good, they have positive value and should therefore be “selected” or “taken”. Examples of “preferred indifferents” are life, health, strength, wealth, good repute and the like (D.L. VII.106; cf. Stob. II.7.7b).

“Dispreferred indifferents” are things contrary to nature (τὰ παρὰ φύσιν; *ea quae contraria naturae*), i.e. things that Nature has programmed us to avoid as they are harmful to our well-being. They have negative value and should therefore be “rejected”. “Dispreferred indifferents” include death, sickness, weakness, poverty, ill repute and so on (D.L. VII.106; cf. Stob. II.7.7b).

“Absolute indifferents” have no value whatsoever as they have no power to arouse impulse and so do not move us to action. One example of an “absolute indifferent” cited above would be whether one has an odd or even number of hairs on one’s head (D.L. VII.104; cf. Stob II.7.7 and II.7.7c).

One might want to ask now why virtue alone should count as good, and things such as life and health as mere indifferents. Firstly, the Stoics held that things such as physical health and great wealth cannot be considered good since they can also be used badly (Gould 1970:178; Sellars 2006:111). To illustrate this argument, the Stoics provide the following analogy:

ὥς γὰρ ἴδιον θερμοῦ τὸ θερμαίνειν, οὐ τὸ ψύχειν, οὕτω καὶ ἀγαθοῦ τὸ ὠφελεῖν, οὐ τὸ βλάπτειν· οὐ μᾶλλον δ’ ὠφελεῖ ἢ βλάπτει ὁ πλοῦτος καὶ ἡ υἰγία· οὐκ ἄρ’ ἀγαθὸν οὔτε πλοῦτος οὔθ’ υἰγία. ἔτι τέ φασιν, ὅτι ἔστιν εἴ καὶ κακῶς χρῆσθαι, τοῦτ’ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀγαθόν· πλούτῳ δὲ καὶ υἰγίᾳ ἔστιν εἴ καὶ κακῶς χρῆσθαι· οὐκ ἄρ’ ἀγαθὸν πλοῦτος καὶ υἰγία. (D.L. VII.103 in Hicks 1925:208)

For as it is characteristic of heat to warm, not to cool, so it is also characteristic of the good to benefit and not to harm. But wealth and health do not benefit any more than they harm; therefore neither wealth nor health is a good. Further they say that that which can be used well and badly, is not a good. But wealth and health can be used well and badly; therefore wealth and health are not a good.

From this one can conclude that, the only thing that deserves to be called good is what reliably benefits us and will never be used for bad ends (Gould 1970:168; Barney 2003:309) and that is virtue.

Secondly, while it might be natural for us to pursue what is beneficial to our well-being, e.g. health and wealth, these things might not always be appropriate to pursue (Inwood 2005:102). Depending on the circumstances one might sometimes choose the dispreferred indifferent, even when the preferred one is available. At times it might be more rational to choose sickness over health, poverty over wealth, and in extreme cases death over life (Brennan 2005:40; Sellars 2006:108).

One might wonder how this relates to the preceding account of self-preservation. It would seem that for rational beings preservation of their rationality should become more important than the preservation of their physical existence (Sellars 2006:108). For example, if a wise person is threatened by a tyrant to be killed if he does not agree to do something that he knows to be wrong, then he – in order to preserve himself as a rational being – will refuse even if this may cost him his life (Sellars 2006:108-9). Suicide might in such circumstances be the only rational action. The Roman Stoics in particular were known for adhering to this doctrine, the most famous being Cato (Arnold 1911:388; Sellars 2006:109). Another example would be Seneca himself, who was forced to commit suicide by Nero (Sandbach 1989:131; Colish 1990:14; Sellars 2006:109). But even Zeno and Cleanthes reportedly took their own lives (D.L. VII.28, 176; cf. Sellars 2006:109). It should be clear that choosing a dispreferred over a preferred indifferent does not go against our natural impulse for survival; such an action is still a product of a desire for self-preservation, i.e. preservation of one's rationality. It follows that for rational beings the only thing that is genuinely good is not what preserves our physical constitution, but rather what preserves us as rational beings and that is virtue alone (Sellars 2006:109-110).

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly it must be remembered that depending on Nature's pre-determined plan one might not always be able to obtain everything that is beneficial to one's nature, but one could be forced to accept sickness or poverty. Seeing that all events in life are predetermined and completely out of one's control, the Stoics had to make true happiness independent of the possession of things such as health and wealth (Smuts 1948:2; Sellars 2006:111). The only thing that can guarantee us happiness is virtue (Gould 1970:169; Sellars 2006:111).

On account of this division of indifferents into "preferred" and "dispreferred", the Stoics were often accused of adopting the views of the Peripatetics. Aristotle advocated that apart from virtue, certain external or physical advantages, such as wealth or good health, are goods as well and essential requirements for a happy life (Gould 1970:178; Brennan 2005:142-3; Sellars 2006:112). One person who notoriously rejected these categories of "preferred" and "dispreferred" indifferents was Zeno's student Aristo. He maintained that there is no reason for preferring one indifferent above another, since everything besides virtue and vice was completely indifferent (D.L. VII.160; Cic. *Fin.* III.50; cf. Hadot 1969:75; Sandbach 1989:38; Barney 2003:310; Brennan 2005:142; Sellars 2006:113). Chrysippus criticized Aristo's position of complete indifference arguing that it would make virtue entirely meaningless (Arnold 1911:291; Hadot 1969:75; Sandbach 1989:38; Brennan 2005:142). In the previous chapter we have seen that virtuous conduct involves selecting and rejecting things wisely, justly, bravely and temperately. Diogenes of Babylon and Antipater even included the selection of the things "according to nature" (i.e. preferred indifferents) and rejection of their opposites into their formulations of the final end. However, if all things besides virtue and vice were equally indifferent, a virtuous person would have no rational grounds for pursuing the one and avoiding the other. Aristo's views were later considered unorthodox and heretical and most Stoics decided to side with Chrysippus and held that indifferents are indifferent with regards to one's happiness and unhappiness, but not with regards to rational action. In order to know what is rational to select and reject, the distinction between preferred and dispreferred indifferents is of utmost importance (Hadot 1969:75; Brennan 2005:142).

As has been proposed above, correct understanding of this theory of value will enable us to evaluate correctly the content of presentations, and this is the first step towards being able to perform morally correct actions like the wise and thereby attaining happiness. Above it has been pointed out that one of the differences between the virtuous (i.e. morally correct) actions of the wise and the vicious actions of the non-wise is the character of the impulsive presentations that they assent to. The non-wise often have the opinion that all ordinary things in life are either good or bad for them (cf. Brennan 2003:264; Cooper 2005:183); the presentations they thus generally assent to are false. The wise, on the other hand, only assent to kataleptic presentations, since they know that everything besides virtue and vice is indifferent and depending on the circumstances, things to be “preferred” or “dispreferred”, and by this they judge whether something is worth selecting or rejecting (cf. Cooper 2005:184). What appears to be needed towards progress towards virtuous conduct is a change of one’s inner attitude towards the things which one wrongly judges to be good and bad.

### 3.2 Theory of Impulses

To sum up what has already been established about impulses above, an impulse is a response to an impulsive presentation. In the case of rational beings, i.e. adult humans, this response is mediated by assent which involves (1) attributing *value* to the contents of the impulsive presentation and (2) determining an *appropriate way to react* to it. All the impulses of the wise are episodes of *knowledge* (which results from strong assent to kataleptic presentations); all the impulses of ordinary non-wise people are mere *opinions* (resulting from weak assent). An impulse can, thus, be generically defined as an

Opinion/knowledge that (1) something is good or bad or indifferent and that (2) it is appropriate to react to it.

The Stoics differentiate between three species of impulses: “emotions” or “passions” (G: *pathē*; L: *perturbationes, affectus*), “good feelings” (*eupatheiai*) and “selection and rejection” (*eklogē, apeklogē*) (Sorabji 2000:29-35; Brennan 2003:269-271). Each of these will be discussed in detail below.

### 3.2.1 Emotions

Impulses of ordinary non-wise people consist primarily in emotions (*pathē*) and most surviving accounts of Stoic impulses are concerned with this species of impulses (Brennan 2003:269). As a species of impulses emotions must be understood as cognitive states that eventuate in some kind of action. Hence, Stoic emotions do not include any feelings that do not lead to action (Brennan 2005:91). It should be clear that, like any impulse in a rational being, an emotion involves a conscious act of assent to an impulsive presentation, which means that they are completely in our power to control. The Stoics do acknowledge the existence of certain immediate *involuntary* physical or mental reactions that people sometimes have in response to presentations before they have had a chance to form a judgement about it, for example shuddering, growing pale or shedding of tears (Sorabji 2000:3, 68). These so-called “first movements” must not be confused with genuine emotions (Sellars 2006:116).<sup>12</sup>

According to the Stoics, there are four generic emotions, in terms of which all others can be classified. These four emotions are “desire” (G: *epithumia*; L: *libido*, *appetitus*, *cupiditas*, *ambitio*), “fear” (G: *phobos*; L: *metus*), “pleasure” (G: *hēdonē*; L: *laetitia*), and “distress” (G: *lupē*; L: *aegritudo*, *dolor*) (D.L. VII.110; Stob. II.7.10; Cic. *Tusculanae Disputationes* (*Tusc.*) IV.11; Galen *De Placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* (*PHP*) IV.2.1-4; cf. Arnold 1911:331; Gould 1970:185-6; Sandbach 1989:61; Sorabji 2000:29; Brennan 2003:269).

All other emotions are classified as sub-species of these four generic emotions. For example, anger, hatred, greed and erotic love are all sub-species of desire. Terror, panic, hesitancy, shame, mental agony and timidity fall under fear. Among the sub-species of pleasure are joy at others’ misfortunes, self-gratification and ostentation. Grief, pity, jealousy, envy, worry, regret and the like are classified under distress (Stob. II.7.10b; D.L. VII.111-114; Cic. *Tusc.* IV.16; cf. Sandbach 1989:61; Sorabji 2000:136; Brennan 2003:270).

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<sup>12</sup> A detailed discussion of first movements can be found in Seneca’s *De Ira* II.2-4 (Sorabji 2000:68-9; Sellars 2006:116).



How the Stoics defined the four species of emotion is preserved in the following two extracts by Stobaeus and Cicero:

Τὴν μὲν οὖν ἐπιθυμίαν λέγουσιν ὀρεξίν εἶναι ἀπειθῇ λόγῳ· αἴτιον δ' αὐτῆς τὸ δοξάζειν ἀγαθὸν ἐπιφέρεισθαι, οὗ παρόντος εὖ ἀπαλλάξομεν, τῆς δόξης αὐτῆς ἐχούσης τὸ ἀτάκτως κινητικὸν <πρόσφατον τοῦ ὄντως αὐτὸ ὀρεκτὸν εἶναι>. **Φόβον** δ' εἶναι ἑκκλίσιν ἀπειθῇ λόγῳ, αἴτιον δ' αὐτοῦ τὸ δοξάζειν κακὸν ἐπιφέρεισθαι, τῆς δόξης τὸ κινητικὸν [καὶ] πρόσφατον ἐχούσης τοῦ ὄντως αὐτὸ φευκτὸν εἶναι. **Λύπην** δ' εἶναι συστολὴν ψυχῆς ἀπειθῇ λόγῳ, αἴτιον δ' αὐτῆς τὸ δοξάζειν πρόσφατον κακὸν παρεῖναι, ἐφ' ᾧ καθήκει <συστελλέσθαι. **Ἡδονὴν** δ' εἶναι ἑπαρσιν ψυχῆς ἀπειθῇ λόγῳ, αἴτιον δ' αὐτῆς τὸ δοξάζειν πρόσφατον ἀγαθὸν παρεῖναι, ἐφ' ᾧ καθήκει> ἐπαίρεσθαι. (Stob. II.7.10b in Wachsmuth and Hense 1884:90)

So, they say that **desire** is a longing disobedient to reason, and the cause of it is having an opinion that something good is imminent, [and that] when it is present we will get along well, while the opinion itself has the undisciplined fresh stimulation that this very thing is really something to be longed for. And **fear** is avoidance disobedient to reason, and the cause of it is having an opinion that something bad is imminent, while the opinion has the fresh stimulation that this very thing is really something to be avoided. And **distress** is a contraction of the soul disobedient to reason, and the cause of it is having a fresh opinion that something bad is present, on account of which it is appropriate to be contracted. And **pleasure** is an elation of the soul disobedient to reason, and the cause of it is having a fresh opinion that something good is present, on account of which it is appropriate to be elated.

Est ergo **aegritudo** opinio recens mali praesentis, in quo demitti contrahique animo rectum esse videtur; **laetitia** opinio recens boni praesentis, in quo efferri rectum esse videtur; **metus** opinio impendentis mali, quod intolerabile esse videtur, **libido** opinio venturi boni, quod sit ex usu iam praesens esse atque adesse. (Cic. *Tusc.* IV.14 in King 1950:342)

Therefore, **distress** is a recently formed opinion of a present bad, in [the midst of] which it seems right to be downcast and contracted in the soul; **pleasure** is a recently formed opinion of a present good in [the midst of] which it seems right to be carried away; **fear** is an opinion of an impending bad which is seen as being unbearable; **desire** is an opinion of an approaching good, of the kind which would be of use now to be present and here.

In recognizing these four main species of emotions, the Stoics might have been influenced partly by Plato, who mentions this list of four emotions on several occasions (Plato *Laches* 191 D;

*Symposium* 207 E; *Phaedo* 83 B; *Republic* 429 C; 430 A; *Theaetetus* 156 B; cf. Sorabji 2000:136). But the Stoics also have a rationale of their own: From the definitions cited above, one can observe that the four generic emotions are made up of opposing pairs, one pertaining to value (good and bad) and time (present and future). One pair of emotions (desire and pleasure) is directed at apparent goods, the other (fear and distress) at apparent bads; one pair (pleasure and distress) is concerned with the present, the other (desire and fear) with the future (cf. Cic. *Tusc.* IV. 11; Sorabji 2000:29, 136; Brennan 2003:269; Brennan 2005:93-4; Sellars 2006:117).

If one takes a closer look at the extracts above, one will notice an obvious discrepancy between these two accounts: in Stobaeus the four emotions are defined as *being* certain reactions (contraction, elation, longing, or avoidance) that are *caused* by the opinion that a good or bad is present or approaching. A similar definition is preserved by Diogenes Laertius for one of the four emotions, namely pleasure which is said to be “irrational elation when something believed to be choiceworthy is present” ([Ἡδονὴ δὲ ἐστὶν] ἄλογος ἔπαρσις ἐφ’ αἰρετῷ δοκοῦντι ὑπάρχειν; D.L. VII.114; cf. Sorabji 2000:35). In Cicero’s account, on the other hand, it is said that the opinion is the emotion itself and it is in each case *followed* by a relevant reaction.

According to Galen, Zeno held that emotions were the reactions that occurred as a consequence of a judgement (*krisis*); Chrysippus later turned the cause (i.e. the judgement) into the emotion itself (Galen *PHP* IV.2.1-6, IV.3.1-2, V.1.4; Gould 1970:181-2; Sandbach 1989:64; Sorabji 2000:34-5; Gill 2006:247; Sellars 2006:115). Above it has already been established that judgement and evaluation of presentations are part of assenting, and the *outcome* of the act of assent is an opinion (or knowledge in the case where strong assent is given to kataleptic presentations). And Zeno himself is also recorded as having at times defined emotion as an opinion (*doxa*). Distress, for example, is said to be “fresh opinion that one is in the presence of a bad” (δόξαν γὰρ εἶναι πρόσφατον τοῦ κακὸν αὐτῷ παρεῖναι [φησι τὴν λύπην]; Galen *PHP* 4.7.2-3; cf. Sorabji 2000:35). Above we have also seen that impulse and action are inseparably linked: once a person has an impulse to act, the action will follow automatically. The fact that assent, impulse and action all follow directly and inevitably upon each other, might explain why emotions were sometimes defined as judgements (which are strictly speaking part of the assent

*preceding* the impulse), sometimes as opinions (which actually are the impulses), and sometimes as the affective reactions (which in actual fact *follow* upon the impulse).

It is uncertain whether the Stoics themselves really made an issue of the varying definitions; the differences seem to be mainly one of emphasis rather than doctrine (Gill 2006:248). Leaving this internal Stoic debate aside, what is relevant is that both Zeno and Chrysippus maintained that emotions involve mental assent which “forms the locus of the subject’s responsibility for his own emotions” (Gill 2006:248). This becomes important in their claim that emotions are something that everybody should be able to control. The controlling, or rather eradication, of emotions will still be elaborated on below.

For the sake of convenience and of conformity with what has been said about impulses above, the Stoic emotions may be defined as follows (cf. Sorabji 2000:30; Brennan 2005:93):

**Desire** is an opinion that (1) a future thing is good, and that (2) it is appropriate to long for it.

**Fear** is an opinion that (1) a future thing is bad, and that (2) it is appropriate to avoid it.

**Pleasure** is an opinion that (1) a present thing is good, and that (2) it is appropriate to be elated about it.

**Distress** is an opinion that (1) a present thing is bad, and that (2) it is appropriate to be downcast about it.

Emotions are, moreover, said to be “disobedient to reason” (cf. Stob. II.7.10b quoted above). Elsewhere Stobaeus provides the definition of an emotion as “an impulse which is excessive and disobedient to the choosing reason or an (irrational) movement of the soul contrary to nature’ ([Πάθος δ’ εἶναί φασιν] ὁρμὴν πλεονάζουσαν καὶ ἀπειθῆ τῷ αἰροῦντι λόγῳ ἢ κίνησιν ψυχῆς <ἄλογον> παρὰ φύσιν; Stob. II.7.10). Similar accounts are given by Diogenes Laertius and Cicero:

ἔστι δὲ αὐτὸ τὸ πάθος κατὰ Ζήνωνα ἢ ἄλογος καὶ παρὰ φύσιν ψυχῆς κίνησις ἢ ὁρμὴ πλεονάζουσα.  
(D.L. VII.110 in Hicks 1925:216)

And emotion itself is according to Zeno a movement of the soul which is irrational and contrary to nature or an excessive impulse.

Est igitur Zenonis haec definitio, ut perturbatio sit, quod πάθος ille dicit, a vera a recta ratione contra naturam animi commotio. Quidam brevius perturbationem esse appetitum vehementiorem, sed vehementiorem eum volunt esse, qui longius discesserit a naturae constantia. (Cic. *Tusc.* IV.11 in King 1950:338)

This then is Zeno's definition that an emotion, which he calls *pathos*, is a movement of the soul turned away from right reason and contrary to nature. Certain men say more briefly that emotion is a too violent impulse, but by too violent they mean one that has departed too far from the constancy of nature.

One thing that should be noted first is that when the Stoics define emotions as “irrational” or “disobedient to reason” they do not mean that they are caused by an irrational part of the soul, as was proposed by Posidonius (Galen *PHP* IV.3.3; V.1.5). He is known to have accepted Plato's partition of the soul into a rational (*logistikon*) and two irrational parts, the irascible (*thumoeides*) and the appetitive (*epithumētikon*) part (Sorabji 2000:95). However, as already ascertained in chapter two, it was general Stoic consent that the soul was unitary. They believed that human beings are born with an irrational soul which is in the course of their natural development as a whole transformed and replaced by reason (Frede 1999:74).

It must also be remembered that all impulses in rational beings are rational events, as they depend on assent of the mind to an impulsive presentation (Gill 2006:251). The word ‘irrational’ here does not mean that emotions occur without the involvement of one's reason, but rather that the assent that leads to emotion does not conform to normal rational choices (Pomeroy 1999:118). The most common sense in which emotions are irrational and contrary to our nature as rational beings is that they involve wrong value judgements; i.e. the objects contained in the presentations are judged to be good or bad when in most cases they are really indifferent (Gould 1970:182; Colish 1990:42; Gill 2003:41; Brennan 2003:264; Brennan 2005:96). In short, they are false opinions since they are products of assent to false presentations.

It is, of course, not entirely implausible that a non-wise person might, for example, have an emotion of desire for virtue, i.e. a true good. In other words, they might assent to a kataleptically true presentation that virtue is a future good and that it is appropriate to long for it. However, even if an emotion came from a true evaluative judgement (i.e. attributing goodness to something that is truly good), it would still be irrational since it involves assent that is weak and inconsistent (Brennan 2005:96). In other words, non-wise people might assent to kataleptic presentations, but they assent from a mindset that also often assents to things that are actually in contradiction with what they are assenting to right now (Brennan 2005:95). The fact that the opinions involved in emotions are said to be “fresh” (πρόσφατον; Stob. II.7.10b) or “recently formed” (*recens*; Cic. *Tusc.* IV.14) also points to their instability and fickleness. What is implied is that previously held opinions might easily be replaced by “fresh” new opinions if there is no rational control (Pomeroy 1999:119).

Emotions are thus irrational and contrary to nature, either because one is assenting to false presentations, or because one is assenting from a weak and unstable disposition (Brennan 2005:95). “Irrational” further implies that the opinions which make up the emotions are not those which someone with perfect reason would hold (Sandbach 1989:61; Gill 2006:252). So, since all ordinary emotions are based on faulty reasoning, they are bad states (or vices) of mind and should not be indulged in. Needless to say a perfectly wise person will never fall victim to this species of impulses. However, apparently in order to avoid the objection that human nature itself demands and indeed justifies certain emotional attachments to or aversions from objects in one’s environment, the Stoics proposed another species of impulses, which are called *eupatheiai* (“good feelings”) (Cooper 2005:176).

### 3.2.2 *Eupatheiai*

To recap again what has been established above, the crucial difference between the wise person’s and the ordinary person’s impulses lies in their assent to impulsive presentation: the wise will only assent to kataleptically true presentations and their assent is always strong. Instead of emotions, the wise will experience impulses which the Stoics call *eupatheiai*. Cicero renders this

term with *constantiae*, perhaps “steady states”, as opposed to “excessive impulse” of the emotions (Sandbach 1989:67). It is, however, possible that Cicero might have misread *eupatheia* as *eustatheia*, “stability”, as is suggested by Sandbach (1989:67).

There are three generic *eupatheiai*: “wish” (G: *boulēsis*; L: *voluntas*), “caution” (G: *eulabeia*; L: *cautio*) and “joy” (G: *khara*; L: *gaudium*) (D.L. VII.116; Cic. *Tusc.* IV.12-3; Arnold 1911:324; Sandbach 1989:67; Sorabji 2000:47; Brennan 2003:270; Brennan 2005:97; Cooper 2005:176; Sellars 2006:118). These are defined as follows:

καὶ τὴν μὲν **χαρὰν** ἐναντίαν φασὶν εἶναι τῇ ἡδονῇ, οὗσαν εὐλογον ἔπαρσιν· τὴν δ’ **εὐλάβειαν** τῷ φόβῳ, οὗσαν εὐλογον ἔκκλισιν. ... τῇ δ’ ἐπιθυμίᾳ ἐναντίαν φασὶν εἶναι τὴν **βούλησιν**, οὗσαν εὐλογον ὄρεξιν. (D.L. VII.116 in Hicks 1925:220)

And they say that **joy** is the opposite of pleasure, since it is rational elation; and **caution** is the opposite of fear, since it is rational avoidance. ... And they say that **wish** is the opposite of desire, since it is rational longing.

The word εὐλογος (translated with rational) here does not mean “rational” in the sense of conforming to everyday sensible behaviour, but rather something like “in accordance with perfect reason” that only the wise possess. It is meant to be understood as a direct opposite of “irrational” (ἄλογος) used in the definition of emotion. As has been proposed above, emotions are “irrational” in that they are products of weak assent to false presentations. Correspondingly then, *eupatheiai* must be products of strong assent to kataleptically true presentations.

By this logic, *eupatheiai* are impulses which consist in episodes of knowledge and come from the attribution of goodness to what is truly good (i.e. virtue) and badness to what is truly bad (i.e. vice) (Brennan 2003:270). In as much as joy, caution and wish are said to be direct opposites of the emotions pleasure, fear and desire one may accept the following parallel full definitions for the *eupatheiai* (cf. Brennan 2005:98):

**Wish** is the knowledge that (1) a future thing is good, and that (2) it is appropriate to long for it.

**Caution** is the knowledge that (1) a future thing is bad, and that (2) it is appropriate to avoid it.

**Joy** is the knowledge that (1) a present thing is good, and that (2) it is appropriate to be elated about it.

From these definitions, one can see that the basic reasoning pattern of an *eupatheia* is similar to that of an emotion. It involves assent to an impulsive presentation judging (1) that its content is either good or bad and (2) that it is therefore appropriate to react accordingly (Gill 2006:225). However, while the objects of ordinary emotions are usually indifferent things wrongly judged to be either good or bad, *eupatheiai* take as their object only true “goods” or true “bads” (Cooper 2005:179; Gill 2006:225). The main object of wise people’s *eupatheia* “wish” is their future virtue and virtuous acts. Similarly, the wise experience a feeling of “caution” towards future vice and vicious actions. Thirdly, the wise may feel “joy” at their own or others’ present virtuous state and actions (Brennan 2003:270; Brennan 2005:98; Cooper 2005:179-180).

So, though free from emotions (*pathē*), the wise are still capable of having a rich emotional life (Cooper 2005:177). To three of the four generic *pathē* there are also three corresponding *eupatheiai*: The corresponding *eupatheia* of desire is wish, alongside fear there is caution and the opposite of pleasure is joy (Sandbach 1989:67; Brennan 2003:270; Cooper 2005:180, 187; Sorabji 2000:48). Unsurprisingly, there is no fourth *eupatheia* that stands as a counterpart to pain, since a wise person, being morally perfected, will never have vice present to himself at which he might feel downcast (Sandbach 1989:67; Sorabji 2000:49; Brennan 2003:270; Brennan 2005:98; Cooper 2005:180, 187; Sellars 2006:119).

But since *eupatheiai* only take as their objects true goods and bads, the Stoics needed to acknowledge a third species of impulses that motivates wise people to take action concerning indifferent things, without wrongly judging them to be good or bad. Moreover, if *eupatheiai* were the only alternative to emotions, then there would be no hope for the non-wise (who cannot have *eupatheiai*) ever to be able to act without being motivated by the sort of irrational opinion that the Stoics condemn (Brennan 2005:96).

So, the Stoics proposed another species of impulses that does not come from wrongly judging indifferents as goods or bads (i.e. emotion) or judging the good as good and the bad as bad (i.e. *eupatheia*), but one that involves correctly judging preferred indifferents as preferred indifferents and dispreferred indifferents as dispreferred indifferents (Sorabji 2000:53).

### 3.2.3 Selection and Rejection

The third type of impulse is one that involves the attribution of value or disvalue to indifferent objects. As has been established above, preferred indifferents are things worth selecting, dispreferred indifferents are things worth rejecting. The impulse that involves judging a preferred indifferent as a preferred indifferent and thus as appropriate to pursue or long for is called “selection” (*eklogē*); the impulse that involves judging a dispreferred indifferent as a dispreferred indifferent and thus as appropriate to avoid is called “rejection”<sup>13</sup> (*apeklogē*) (D.L. VII.104-5; Stob. II.7.7g; Sorabji 2000:53; Brennan 2005:99).

This third species of impulses may be experienced by both the wise and the non-wise (Sorabji 2000:185), provided that the non-wise have come to understand that all things besides virtue and vice are indifferent. Since the non-wise are incapable of having true knowledge, ‘selections’ and ‘rejections’ will still be mere opinions and not episodes of knowledge (Brennan 2005:99-100).

Following the same pattern as in the definitions of the emotions and *eupatheiai*, selection and rejection may be defined as follows (cf. Brennan 2005:99):

**Selection** is an opinion/knowledge that (1) a future thing is a preferred indifferent and that (2) it is appropriate to select it (i.e. pursue it).

**Rejection** is an opinion/knowledge that (1) a future thing is a dispreferred indifferent and that (2) it is appropriate to reject it (i.e. avoid it).

These impulses are like emotions directed at indifferents, but they do not involve attribution of goodness or badness but mere ‘selective value’ to the objects that are presented (Brennan 2005:99). The impulse of ‘selection’ corresponds to the emotion ‘desire’ and ‘rejection’ to the emotion ‘fear’. Since this third class of impulses only relates to selective value (i.e. value that matters only for selecting or rejecting indifferents, which are considered as being either beneficial or harmful to have in the *future*) and so is exclusively future-oriented, there are no impulses in this group corresponding to ‘pleasure’ and ‘distress’ (emotions directed at *present*

<sup>13</sup> Scholars also use the term “disselection” for *apeklogē* (cf. Sorabji 2000:53; Brennan 2005:99).



things). The assessment that an indifferent – be it preferred or dispreferred – is *present*, would lead to no impulse at all. The ‘appropriate reaction’ to a present indifferent is simply to feel indifferent about it (Brennan 2003:271; Brennan 2005:101). Any other response to an indifferent being present would grossly overestimate its value (Cooper 2005:195).

Recognizing such “intermediate” species of impulses is important for two reasons: Firstly, it gives the wise (who has abandoned all emotions) motivation to perform intentional action with regards to indifferents without becoming irrational (Brennan 2005:97). Secondly, the fact that there is another alternative to emotions other than *eupatheiai* is also important for people who want to make progress towards a more virtuous life. These “intermediate” impulses thus offer a means to a gradual movement from a state where one is only driven by ordinary *pathē* to a state of moral perfection (Cooper 2005:199). As the non-wise obtain the understanding that nothing in life (besides virtue and vice) is good or bad but indifferent, they, though not yet virtuous, will be able to move away from acting on impulse of ordinary emotions and rather experience the impulses of “selection” and “disselection” which will enable them to do what is appropriate. What exactly the Stoics understood by appropriate behaviour will be discussed in 3.3 below.

### 3.2.4 Apatheia

The Stoics held that emotions are the greatest obstacle to one’s attainment of happiness, and so the eradication of emotions became, especially among the later Stoics, a central theme in their discussions on the attainment of happiness (Sandbach 1989:63). As is the case with all impulses, emotions involve two judgements: one regarding the value of the content of a presentation, i.e. judge whether it is good or bad, the other regarding the necessary action to be taken. The judgements involved in emotions are completely voluntary, but the problem with most people is that they assent automatically to whatever is presented to them (Sorabji 2000:3).

The first step to eradicating emotions is to understand that the judgements that constitute the emotions are false (Gould 1970:186). In order to rid oneself of an emotion one needs to ask the

following questions: whether there really is good or bad at hand, and whether a specific reaction is really appropriate (Sorabji 2000:160).

Progress towards virtuous conduct comes largely through the replacement of emotions with selections and rejections (Brennan 2005:100). This means desire must be replaced with the impulse of selection, fear with the impulse of rejection. As has been shown above, there are no impulses that one should have instead of pleasure and distress. These should be replaced with genuine indifference.

It is easy to see that humans would be happier without emotions of fear and distress. Anyone would want to do without such unpleasant emotions. But what the Stoics proposed was freedom from *all* emotions (*apatheia*). There are a number of reasons why this is the case.

Firstly, it is, according to the Stoics, just as wrong to assent to a presentation that something is good as it is to assent to the presentation that something is bad when in reality both are indifferent. They, in fact, argued that pleasant and unpleasant emotions go hand in hand (Sorabji 2000:182). If, for example, we *desire* something which we deem to be good but fail to obtain it, we will be overcome by the emotion of *distress*. If we feel *pleasure* because we are in the presence of something believed to be good, we are immediately exposed to negative emotions of *fear* that it might be taken away, or *distress* when it *is* taken away (Sorabji 2000:182; Sellars 2006:118). It should, therefore, be clear that placing too high a value on indifferent things, which is characteristic of emotions, would only bring discomfort and interfere with one's peace of mind.

Secondly, the Stoics believed emotions to be diseases of the soul analogous to diseases of the body (Arnold 1911:332; Gould 1970:186; Sellars 2006:117). As such they are things that we not only *can* control but really something that we *should* control. Already before the time of the Stoics, there was a debate amongst philosophers on whether emotions should be eradicated (*apatheia*) or only moderated (*metriopatheia*) (Rist 1969:26-7; Sandbach 1989:63; Sorabji 2000:7, 194). The main supporters of the moderation of emotions were the Peripatetics (Sandbach 1989:63; Sorabji 2000:194). However, if *pathē* are viewed as diseases of the mind, it

is easy to see how the Stoics advocated their complete eradication. It would be nonsensical to argue that a disease should merely be moderated if it is, in fact, possible to get rid of the disease altogether (Rist 1969:26-7).

Another reason for eradicating emotions is that they are “irrational” and contrary to our nature as rational beings (Gould 1970:186; Graeser 1974:151; Sorabji 2000:181; Sellars 2006:118). As has been shown above, this means that they are based on wrong value judgements that indifferent things are good or bad. Seeing that they clearly result from faulty reasoning, they should play no role in the life of anyone who wishes to be a properly functioning rational being (Sellars 2006:117).

Lastly, since they are based on an incorrect understanding of what is good and bad, they will lead to incorrect (i.e. vicious) actions, i.e. the exact opposite of morally correct actions directed by virtue which is the ideal that anyone who wishes to live happily is meant to strive towards (Arnold 1911:332).

The Stoics’ support of *apatheia* was unsurprisingly met with some objections. One objection was that the eradication of all emotion would also remove all motivation (Sorabji 2000:185). However, the fear that *apatheia* will lead to a state of total impassivity is unjustified. As explained above, the main idea behind *apatheia* is not merely to rid oneself of emotion but also to replace them with the impulses “selection” and “rejection”. It is, thus, possible, for example, to abandon the false opinion that one’s health is something good, without losing all motivation to maintain it. *Apatheia* does, therefore, not bring with it total impassivity and absence of all motivation (Sorabji 2000:186; Brennan 2003:272).

Another objection comes from the view point of modern psychiatry, which raises the concern that emotions may be wrongly suppressed (Sorabji 2000:185). People might try to convince themselves that they have not suffered anything bad when they have, without understanding the deeper cause of their emotion, and this may lead to additional emotional difficulties (Sorabji 2000:185). However, if understood correctly, it should be clear that the Stoics do not propose to *suppress* emotions, but to *remove* them entirely by correcting one’s wrong beliefs about what is

good and bad and understanding the real situation (Sorabji 2000:185; Brennan 2003:272). In other words, instead of wrongly believing things to be good and bad, one must learn to understand that they are indifferent (and depending on the circumstance either to be preferred or dispreferred), and behave accordingly.

A third objection is that without emotions a person would hardly be human (Sorabji 2000:189). However, eradication of emotions does not mean to eradicate all forms of feelings altogether. It simply means to remove any false species of impulses. As has been shown above, the wise, who are completely free from emotions, will still be able to have a rich emotional life and feel attachment to other people and normal human concerns (Cooper 2005:186).

At the end of this section we know what the three Stoic species of impulses are: emotions, *eupatheiai*, and “selections” and “rejections”. Emotions are false opinions and take as their objects indifferents which are falsely judged to be goods and bads. *Eupatheiai* are episodes of knowledge and are directed at only true goods and bads (i.e. virtue and vice). Selections are either correct opinions in the non-wise or knowledge in the wise, and these are directed at indifferents which are correctly judged to be preferred or dispreferred. Closely parallel to the Stoic classification of impulses and their objects of choice, is the classification of actions which will be focused on in the next section. Emotions, since they are false, lead to false, i.e. vicious, actions; *eupatheiai*, since they are rooted in knowledge and only the wise can have them, naturally result in virtuous (i.e. morally correct) actions; selections and rejections lead to what the Stoics called “appropriate actions”. In the case of a wise person’s selections which constitute knowledge not mere opinion, the result will again be virtuous actions or – put differently – “perfectly appropriate actions” or “morally correct actions”. To sum up this section, it may help to see a chart that shows the relation between the three species of impulses, the agents affected by them, their epistemological categories, their objects of choice and the actions they result in:

	EMOTIONS	EUPATHEIAI	SELECTIONS & REJECTIONS	
agents	non-wise	wise	non-wise	wise
epistemology	opinion	knowledge	opinion	knowledge
objects	indifferents	goods & bads	indifferents	
actions	vicious	virtuous	appropriate	perfectly appropriate

### 3.3 Theory of Actions

The Stoics held that all actions of a wise person are virtuous (Stob. II.7.5b; cf. Cooper 2005:184); a virtuous action, in short, is one whose impulse consists in knowledge which comes from a strong assent to a kataleptic impulsive presentation (Brennan 2005:172). The actions of a non-wise person are all vicious (Sandbach 1989:47); a vicious action is one whose impulse involves opinion, which results from weak assent (Brennan 2005:172). There is, however, an “intermediate” class of actions called “appropriate actions” (G: *kathēkonta*; L: *officia*), also often translated with “befitting actions”, “proper functions” or “daily duties” (Arnold 1911:302; Brennan 2005:169). These will be focused on first.

An appropriate action is defined as one that, once it has been done, admits of a reasonable defence (D.L. VII.107; Stob. II.7.8; cf.: Sandbach 1989:46; Brennan 1996:318; Brennan 2005:43, 170; Inwood 2005:102-3; Gill 2006:130). This does not necessarily mean that the person who performed an appropriate action has to be able to defend it rationally, as appears from the fact that even animals and plants can behave appropriately (Sandbach 1989:46-7).

Cicero explains exactly what an appropriate action consists in:

Ex quo intellegitur quoniam se ipsi omnes natura diligant, tam insipientem quam sapientem sumpturum quae secundum naturam sint reiecturumque contraria. Ita est quoddam commune officium sapientis et insipientis; ex quo efficitur versari in iis quae media dicamus. (Cic. *Fin.* III.59 in Rackham 1961:278)

From this it is understood that, since all love themselves by nature, the non-wise just as much as the wise will take the things which are according to nature and reject the contrary. So, an “appropriate action” is something common to the wise and the non-wise; from this it is proven that “appropriate action” deals with the things we call “intermediate”.

According to this extract, appropriate action consist in taking what is “according to Nature” and rejecting what is “contrary to Nature”. To put it another way, one could say that for rational beings appropriate action results from the selection of preferred indifferents and rejection of

dispreferred indifferents. The doctrine of “appropriate actions” is, thus, closely related to the third species of impulses and the doctrine of preferred and dispreferred indifferents, here called “intermediate things” (*media*) (cf. Stob. II.7.8; Arnold 1911:302; Inwood 2005:102-3; Sellars 2006:120).

In the previous section, we have seen that both the wise and the non-wise are capable of experiencing the impulses called “selection” and “rejection”. This means that they are also both equally capable of performing appropriate actions (Barnes 2001:367), as is also pointed out by Cicero. From the extract above it should, moreover, be clear that appropriate actions even extend to children, unreasoning animals and plants (Arnold 1911:302), since – as has been shown in chapter two – they too are given the impulse to take what is “according to Nature” and reject what is “contrary to Nature” (D.L. VII.85-86; Cic. *Fin.* III.16).

In the discussion of the doctrine of *oikeiōsis* in the previous chapter, it was said that the most fundamental action appropriate to all living things is to preserve oneself in one’s natural constitution, by pursuing what is advantageous, i.e. “the things that accord with nature” (*ea quae secundum naturam*), sometimes also called “primary natural things” (*prima naturae*), and avoiding what is harmful (Cic. *Fin.* III.20; cf. Hadot 1969:73; Gill 2006:130; Sellars 2006:120). This “first appropriate action” (*primum officium*; Cic. *Fin.* III.20) is performed instinctively without any deliberation or involvement of reason (Hadot 1969:73).

As human beings become adult, appropriate behaviour lies in pursuing the primary natural things and avoiding their opposites *rationally*, that is selecting and rejecting them in a well thought-out and deliberate way (Cic. *Fin.* III.20; cf. Hadot 1969:74; Long 1971:100; Cooper 1996:268; Gill 2006:77, 130). As has been shown above, someone who acts on the impulses of selection and rejection understands correctly that the things he pursues and avoids are not good and bad respectively, but preferred and dispreferred indifferents. However, the performance of appropriate actions of this sort does not yet constitute virtuous conduct (Gill 2006:131).

An additional requirement is that the appropriate actions are performed from a correct mental disposition, that has attained the sort of perfection necessary for unshakable consistency, and that

is virtue (Hadot 1969:74; Frede 1999:79; Sellars 2006:121). In other words, the appropriate actions must be performed in a way that expresses the state of mind of a perfectly virtuous or wise person (Gill 2006:131).

Once selection is performed from a correct mental disposition, i.e. from the disposition of virtue, one's actions become perfectly appropriate actions, which are also morally correct actions (cf. Gill 2003:41; Brennan 2005:171; Sellars 2006:121; Holowchak 2008:43):

Τῶν δὲ καθηκόντων τὰ μὲν εἶναι φασι τέλεια, ἃ δὲ καὶ κατορθώματα λέγεσθαι. Κατορθώματα δ' εἶναι τὰ κατ' ἀρετὴν ἐνεργήματα, οἷον τὸ φρονεῖν, τὸ δικαιοπραγεῖν. (Stob. II.7.8 in Wachsmuth and Hense 1884:85-6)

And of appropriate actions, they say that some are perfect; these are also called correct actions. And correct actions are actions according to virtue, such as to be wise, or to act righteously.

In other words, “an appropriate action that has been perfected is a correct action” (τὸ δὲ καθῆκον τελειωθὲν κατόρθωμα γίνεσθαι; Stob. II.7.8a). These can only be performed by those who possess virtue, i.e. the wise (Arnold 1911:305; Gill 2003:41; Brennan 2005:171; Sellars 2006:121; Holowchak 2008:43-4). In order to distinguish these perfectly appropriate actions from ordinary appropriate actions performed by the non-wise, the latter are sometimes referred to as “middle” or “intermediate” appropriate actions (G: *mesa kathēkonta*; L: *media officia*) (Hadot 1969:74; Brennan 2005:171; Sellars 2006:121). What distinguishes perfectly appropriate actions from ordinary “intermediate” appropriate actions is that the former are performed solely for their own sake (Gill 2006:130; Holowchak 2008:43). This means that, no matter what the wise get as an outcome of their actions, they feel a sense of indifference (Brennan 2005:38-9); the only thing that matters to them is the “order and harmony” (*ordinem et...concordiam*; Cic. *Fin.* III.21) of their reason-directed actions.

According to Chrysippus appropriate actions of a non-wise man are in fact still vicious because they are not directed by perfect reason (Sandbach 1989:48; Brennan 2005:171). Since the mental disposition of the non-wise lacks the consistency and stability of the wise, it is still capable of error (Brennan 2005:171-2; Cooper 2005:196; Gill 2006:254). Even if an appropriate action is

outwardly completely the same as a perfectly appropriate action, the appropriate action of a non-wise person is done from a mental disposition that, in different circumstances, would have assented to a false presentation and so would have produced an inappropriate action (Brennan 2005:171-2). The wise on the other hand, whose disposition to assent is completely stable and reliable no matter what circumstance they are in, will never assent to anything non-kataleptic (Brennan 2005:176-7). The wise, performing perfectly appropriate actions, are not necessarily thinking different thoughts from the non-wise vicious agent, but they differ in the way they assent (Brennan 2005:176). The wise assent *strongly* which means that the selections and rejections that motivate perfectly appropriate actions constitute knowledge, while in the case of the non-wise who assent *weakly* they are mere opinions.

Even if one performs absolutely all of the appropriate actions, one's life will not yet be happy. However, happiness will come once one attains knowledge and one's appropriate actions acquire firmness and stability (Brennan 2005:176).

### 3.4 Summary

We started out by saying that, according to the Stoics, the only way to living happily is by performing morally correct actions that are directed by virtue. Virtue, as we know, is not something we are born with but something that may be obtained by cultivating and perfecting our reason. This entails, first of all, changing our opinions about the value of things and acquiring a notion of what is truly good and bad. As we have seen, according to the Stoics only virtue and what participates in virtue is truly good; only vice and what participates in vice is bad; all other things are indifferent (and these might be either preferred or dispreferred or absolutely indifferent).

Correct understanding of the value of things will be followed by a radical change in our motivation. There are, according to the Stoics, three species of impulses that motivate human beings to action, namely emotion, *eupatheiai* and selections and rejections. Emotions lead to vicious actions and should therefore be completely eradicated. Instead, our actions should be



motivated by *eupatheiai* (concerning true goods and bads) and selections and rejections (concerning indifferents).

However, having the correct opinions about the true value of things is not yet enough for virtuous conduct. What is needed is steadfast, irrefutable knowledge, as opinions are based on weak assent and therefore lack the stability and constancy needed to perform morally correct actions even in difficult circumstances.

Happiness as defined by the Stoics seems like a rather unrealistic ideal and it is uncertain whether the Stoics themselves actually believed that it could ever really be attained in practice. The next chapter will take a look at how Seneca presents the Stoic *telos* in his *Epistulae Morales*, as well as the practical advice he gives on how it might actually be attained.

## Chapter 4: The Stoic *telos* in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*

Thus far I have discussed what the Stoic happy life consists of and how it may *in theory* be attained. In short, happiness consists of a life in agreement with nature (both universal and human nature), which in essence comes down to living virtuously. This is achieved by developing and perfecting our reason and living according to it (cf. Chapter 2). The first step in this development is to acquire the correct knowledge of the value of things, which will enable us to eradicate our emotions and have correct impulses instead, and consequently perform morally correct actions and live virtuously (cf. Chapter 3).

What remains to be determined now, is how the Stoic happy life can be attained *in practice*. As has been proposed, Seneca in his *Epistulae Morales* has managed to make the Stoic *telos* more realistically attainable by providing helpful practical advice. But before we begin, it must first be determined whether Seneca's teachings regarding the Stoic happy life fit into the traditional views of the school (as outlined in Ch. 2 and 3). This chapter will thus start with a brief introduction to Seneca and the *Epistulae Morales* (section 4.1), which will be followed by an investigation of the orthodoxy of Seneca's teachings (sections 4.2 and 4.3), while the final section (4.4) will take a look at some of the practical advice Seneca has to offer for anyone wishing to make progress towards a virtuous and happy life.

### 4.1 Background

Seneca is the first Stoic of whom there is a considerable amount of remaining literary works; his corpus is, in fact, the largest collection of surviving texts for any Stoic (Sellars 2006:12). He wrote several other *dialogi* and essays on philosophical topics, including *De Ira* ("On Anger"), *De Clementia* ("On Clemency"), *De Brevitate Vitae* ("On the Shortness of Life"), *De Vita Beata* ("On the Happy Life"). Seneca also composed three consolatory works: *De Consolatione ad Marciam* ("On Consolation to Marcia"), *De Consolatione ad Polybium* ("On Consolation to Polybius"), and *De Consolatione ad Helviam* ("On Consolation to Helvia"). Furthermore, there are three short works addressed to Serenus, a friend whom Seneca converted from Epicureanism:

*De Constantia Sapientis* ("On the Constancy of the Wise Man"), *De tranquillitate animi* ("On Peace of Mind") and *De Otio* ("On Leisure") (Campbell 1969:20; Sandbach 1989:152-3; Lawless 1994:6; Sellars 2006:13). After retiring from politics, Seneca spent the last two years of his life travelling about southern Italy, composing the *Quaestiones Naturales* ("Questions about Nature"), the *Epistulae Morales* ("Letters on Morality") and most likely during that time as well *De Providentia* ("On Providence"), all three works dedicated to his young friend Lucilius (Campbell 1969:12-3; Lawless 1994:5; Gummere 2006:xi).<sup>14</sup>

Seneca's philosophical writings were for the most part inspired by his own situations and needs and those of the people around him. "He had acquired a deep understanding of human ignorance, misery, and sorrow, and he was eager to furnish harassed contemporary man with some remedy for his mental weakness and vacillations" (Motto 1985:9). Mans (1978:233) argues, "in answer to problems that emerged in the lives of his friends and relatives Seneca endeavoured to give practical guidance which aimed at the moulding and development of the entire human being".

That Seneca had a personal passion for enlightening others and assisting them in their moral progress is also evident in his *Epistulae Morales* (e.g.: Ep. 6.4; 8.2-3; 29.1-9; 121.4; cf. Motto 1973:189). In this collection of 124 letters he offers ethical guidance to his young friend Lucilius. On several occasions, Seneca expresses his delight in Lucilius' progress and is also not shy to take credit for it. "You are my handiwork" (*meum opus es*<sup>15</sup>) he says to him in Ep. 34.2. Seneca moreover believed that the teachings contained in his writings may be of assistance to future generations (Ep. 8.2-3; cf. 8.6; 21.5; Mans 1978:192).

The informal and conversational style of Seneca's letters creates the atmosphere of a personal interaction (Mans 1978:192). It is as if Seneca invites the reader to an informal and comfortable conversation (Mans 1978:192). In Ep. 75.1 Seneca says himself that he wants his letters to be

<sup>14</sup> Seneca also produced a number of tragedies, which were probably never intended to be performed on stage but rather to be read to a small audience (Campbell 1969:20). However, they have proved highly influential on later literature. He also composed a satire on the deification of the Emperor Claudius, entitled *Apocolocyntosis* ("Pumpkinification") (Sellars 2006:13). Seneca was also planning to write a work on moral philosophy which was to cover the whole of Stoic ethics (Ep. 106.2; 108.1; 109.17; cf. Hadot 1969:55; Motto 1973:189).

<sup>15</sup> All Latin quotations of Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* are taken from Gummere 1925, 1970 and 2006; the English translations provided are my own.

like a personal conversation<sup>16</sup> (Ep. 75.1; cf. Ep. 67.2). Cooper (2004:312) suggests that “it is only through writing of that inspirational sort that any author has any chance at all of actually affecting the way people live their life”. The informal letter as medium of communication also made it possible for Seneca to reach via Lucilius the general population and the personal and intimate nature of his admonition and advice and the exceptionally modern ideas contained in the letters make them extremely valuable even to this day (Mans 1978:237-8).

Seneca has often been accused of eclecticism with the implication that his writings may not even be a reliable source for information about orthodox Stoicism (Hadot 1969:82-3; Inwood 2005:23; Sellars 2006:12-3). However, a thorough investigation of Seneca's work will show that he remained true to all fundamental teachings of the Stoic school (Hadot 1969:83; Cooper 2004:309), although he also reserves the right to his own opinion (Hadot 1969:82-3). Seneca's approach is open, but not eclectic (Inwood 2005:24).

Seneca's orthodoxy may be judged by comparison to the early Stoics. “What it means to be a Stoic is determined in large measure by a thinker's relation to Chrysippus, Cleanthes, and Zeno; in the normal way of treating the development of Stoic thought, these three philosophers constitute a benchmark to use in measuring the ‘Stoicness’ of other thinkers” (Inwood 2005:24). Seneca accepts the traditional views of Zeno and Chrysippus when the facts themselves permit him to do so, but he does not believe in following an inflexible rule in order to abide by their teachings and certainly assumes no obligation to do so (Inwood 2005:25).

Non enim me cuiquam emancipavi, nullius nomen fero; multum magnorum virorum iudicio credo, aliquid et meo vindico. (Ep. 45.4)

For I have sold myself to no one; I bear no one's name; I have much trust in the judgement of great men; but I also claim something for my own.

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<sup>16</sup> “As my conversation would be if we were sitting or walking together, spontaneous and easy, so I want my letters to be, which contain nothing that is forced or artificial”; *Qualis sermo meus esset si una sederemus aut ambularemus, inlaboratus et facilis, tales esse epistulas meas volo, quae nihil habent accersitum nec fictum*. (Ep. 75.1)

Seneca's letters and other philosophical works show clearly that he had a complete and accurate understanding of Stoic physical theory, epistemology, as well as Stoic ethics – his constant primary concern (Cooper 2004:309). At the same time, however, he had a strong inclination to think for himself and shows considerable interest in the views of schools other than his own, such as Platonism, Aristotelianism, and even Epicureanism (Inwood 2005:2, 16).

Seneca's main intent was not to produce new developments in philosophy, but to advocate the Stoic view of life in a way that would also appeal to the layman (Ross 1974:117). He wanted to offer others a way to freedom and peace of mind and assist them in overcoming difficult circumstances (Rozelaar 1976:405). What was more important to him than transmitting the teachings of a specific school with scientific precision was the practical value of his teaching (Rozelaar 1976:405).

[I]llud admoneo, auditionem philosophorum lectionemque ad propositum beatæ vitæ trahendam, non ut verba prisca aut ficta captemus et translationes inprobas figurasque dicendi, sed ut profutura praecepta et magnificas voces et animosas quæ mox in rem transferantur. Sic ista ediscamus ut quæ fuerint verba sint opera. (Ep. 108.35)

I advise you this, listening to philosophers and reading should be for the purpose of leading a happy life, not so that we may capture archaic or made up words and bad metaphors and figures of speech, but useful precepts and noble and spirited utterances, which will at once be turned into action. We should learn them in such a way that words may become deeds.

In short, the purpose of studying philosophy was, for Seneca, that the knowledge gained from it could be applied and would lead us towards the attainment of a happy life.

## 4.2 Definition of the *telos* in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*

The final goal (G: *telos*; L: *finis*) – or highest good (*summum bonum*), as Seneca calls it more frequently – is a topic of primary interest for Seneca, since it is our notion of the highest good that determines the way we lead our lives (Ep. 71.2; Mans 1978:91).

Seneca also warns, that people that do not know which direction they are heading, will just be dragged along by their circumstances like objects floating around in a river (Ep. 23.8; cf. 13.6; 20.4; Smuts 1948:21). A life without fixed purpose is inconstant (*vita sine proposito vaga est*; Ep. 95.46; cf. Smuts 1948:21; Mans 1978:92; Inwood 2005:120). Elsewhere, he writes, “if one does not know which harbour one is making for, no wind is favourable” (*ignoranti quem portum petat nullus suus ventus est*; Ep. 71.3).

For this reason all people should have an idea of their purpose in life and set up a guideline according to which all their efforts and actions can be regulated (Ep. 20.3; 71.2; 95.45). Seneca therefore advises Lucilius: “Take hold of a single rule, once and for all, by which you may live, and regulate your whole life according to it” (*unam semel, ad quam vivas, regulam prende et ad hanc omnem vitam tuam exaequa*; Ep. 20.3; cf. Rubin 1901:69; Smuts 1948:21; Hadot 1969:137).

It was a common belief among all philosophical schools of the Hellenistic era that the one thing that all people universally strive for is to live a happy life. Consequently, happiness came to be regarded as the final goal and highest good of human existence. That Seneca too pursues the happy life (*vita beata*) as final goal is affirmed by the rhetorical question, “Surely you have no doubt that the happy life is the highest good?” (*numquid dubitas, quin beata vita summum bonum sit?*; Ep. 85.20; cf. Smuts 1948:22; Mans 1978:96).

The problem is, as Seneca points out, that people seek happiness in the wrong things:

Quid est ergo in quo erratur, cum omnes beatam vitam optent? quod instrumenta eius pro ipsa habent et illam dum petunt fugiunt. (Ep. 44.7)

Seeing that all people wish for a happy life, what is it then, where they go wrong? It is that they consider the means for happiness as happiness itself and while they are seeking it, they are [actually] fleeing from it.

The masses strive for happiness but have no idea what could make them happy, and once they achieve whatever goal they strive after, they usually find it void, of little value or even bad

(Ep.118.7; Smuts 1948: 21). But, as Seneca (along with most other Stoics) points out, authentic happiness depends essentially on one's state of mind (Long 2006:364-5) and not on "gifts of fortune" (Ep. 23.3, 7; 72.7; 76.30-31; 92.16).

Seneca provides various definitions of the happy life in the *Epistulae Morales*. To the question, "What is the happy life?" (*Quid est beata vita?*), he answers: "freedom from care and continuous tranquillity" (*securitas et perpetua tranquillitas*; Ep. 92.3; cf. Hadot 1969:126; Mans 1978:96). According to Seneca you are happy, "if you are never sad, [if] no hope harasses your mind with expectation of the future, [and] if your soul is day and night on an even and consistent path, and upright and pleased with itself" (*si numquam maestus es, nulla spes animum tuum futuri exspectatione sollicitat, si per dies noctesque par et aequalis animi tenor erecti et placentis sibi est*; Ep.59.14).

Anybody, says Seneca, who takes Nature as his teacher will be able to attain this sort of happiness (Ep. 45.9; cf. Rubin 1901:37). For "all things are easy and straight-forward for those who follow her; but for those who rebel against her, life is exactly like that of people who row against the current" (*illam sequentibus omnia facilia, expedita sunt, contra illam nitentibus non alia vita est quam contra aquam remigantibus*; Ep. 122.19). Seneca, then says in truly Stoic spirit, that the highest good that one can possess is "to conduct oneself according to nature's will" (*ex naturae voluntate se gerere*; Ep. 66.39; cf. Rubin 1901:71; Setaioli 2007:356). In Ep. 5.4 he also clearly identifies himself with the Stoic school when he says, "Our purpose, as you know, is 'Live according to Nature'." (*nempe propositum nostrum est secundum naturam vivere*; Ep. 5.4; cf. Smuts 1948:23; Lawless 1994:6).

Seneca's other definitions of the "happy life" (*vita beata*) and the "highest good" (*summum bonum*) also link up with the orthodox Stoic doctrines outlined in the previous chapters. According to Seneca, the happy life and highest good is reached by developing and perfecting one's reason (*ratio*) (cf. Ep. 41.8; 76.10, 16; 92.2-3; 124.24) and attaining virtue (*virtus*) (cf. Ep. 66.7; 76.16; 85.1, 17-21; 92.24; 95.35), wisdom (*sapientia*) (cf. 16.1; 20.5; 89.4-5; 90.27-28; 93.8), and 'knowledge of things' (*rerum scientia*) (cf. Ep. 31.6). This knowledge comprises the "knowledge of things divine and human" (*scientia divinorum humanorumque*) (cf. Ep. 74.29;

110.8) and the knowledge of moral value/“knowledge of good and bad” (*scientia bonorum ac malorum*) (Ep. 88.28), i.e. knowledge that virtue is the only good, and vice the only bad (Ep. 31.5; 74.1; 94.8; 95.35).

With regards to the attainment of happiness, Seneca also places particular emphasis on the role of studying philosophy, since philosophy is the only art by which we may come to know good and bad<sup>17</sup> (Ep. 88.28). Philosophy is also defined as the “love of wisdom and striving after it” (*sapientiae amor et adfectatio*; Ep. 89.4), “the study of virtue” (*studium virtutis*; Ep. 89.5), “the study of correcting the mind” (*studium corrigendae mentis*; Ep. 89.5) and “the search for right reason” (*adpetitio rectae rationis*; Ep. 89.5). Seneca therefore advises Lucilius:

Ad hanc te confer si vis salvus esse, si securus, si beatus, denique si vis esse, quod est maximum, liber; hoc contingere aliter non potest. (Ep. 37.3)

To her [i.e. philosophy] you must betake yourself, if you wish to be healthy, safe, happy, in short, if you wish to be – and this is most important – free; it is not possible to reach this [end] in another way.

The importance of studying philosophy will be discussed later. First we shall take a closer look at some of Seneca's definitions of happiness just mentioned and compare these to other Stoic accounts regarding the *telos* of human existence.

When Seneca speaks of living according to nature, he refers to both universal nature and man's own individual nature. He uses *secundum naturam vivere* (Ep. 5.4) as well as *secundum naturam suam vivere* (Ep. 41.9; cf. Smuts 1948:23) but, as has been explained in Chapter 2, both come down to the same thing, since human nature is a part of universal Nature.

Seneca uses various names to refer to universal Nature. In Ep. 65.2 he explains that according to the Stoics, the universe is made up of an active and a passive principle. The passive principle is inert “matter” (*materiam*) which “lies motionless, as substance which is prepared for any purpose, but which will remain inactive if no one moves it” (*materia iacet iners, res ad omnia*

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<sup>17</sup> “But there is no other art which inquires about things good and bad”; *nihil autem ulla ars alia de bonis ac malis quaerit*. (Ep. 88.28)



*parata, cessatura, si nemo moveat*; Ep. 65.2); the active principle is “cause” (*causa*) or “reason” (*ratio*) which “shapes the matter and turns it into whatever it wants to, and brings forth various products from it” ([*causa autem, id est ratio,*] *materiam format et quocumque vult versat, ex illa varia opera producit*; Ep. 65.2). It is primarily the latter that we are concerned with when discussing universal nature. Seneca also uses “God” (*deus*) or “gods”, “fate” (*fatum*), “chance” (*casus*), “providence” (*providentia*), “Jupiter” or “father” (*parens*) to refer to the active principle that governs the universe and predetermines all events (Ep. 9.16; 16.4-5; 65.12; 107.8-10; 110.10; cf. Smuts 1948:23-44; Motto 1973:45-8, 92; Setaioli 2007:338, 347, 364). He also calls this inevitable and unalterable course of events the “law of the universe” (*lex universi*; Ep.71.16) to which every creature, including man, is bound.

In chapter 2 it was shown that part of what the Stoics meant by living according to (or “in agreement with”) universal Nature, is realizing that there is a predetermined inevitable order of events and accepting willingly whatever happens. Seneca too stresses the importance of a willing acceptance of one's fate in several of his letters (cf. Ep. 54.7; 61.2-3; 76.23; 107.7-9). In Ep. 61.2-3, for example, he advises:

Da operam ne quid umquam invitus facias. ... Itaque sic animum componamus, ut quicquid res exiget, id velimus et in primis ut finem nostri sine tristitia cogitemus.

See to it that you do not ever do anything unwillingly. ... Therefore, let us adjust our minds in such a way that we may [actually] wish for that which our situation demands of us and first and foremost, that we may think about our end without sadness.

Since we cannot change the inevitable predetermined order of things, resistance to it would in any event be futile (Ep. 107.7, 9). But moreover, Seneca says we should not merely uncomplainingly endure our fate but actually accept it *gladly* and with a positive will (cf. *non patiens tantum sed etiam volens*; Ep. 96.12; cf. Smuts 1948:24).

We are able to do this, since we know that Nature has designed whatever happens for the benefit of all its creatures (Ep.74.20; 107.10; cf. Smuts 1948:24). On a more personal level nature is in this regard also referred to as God, who acts as creator, ruler and maintainer of the universe,

whose will man is obligated to follow, whether he wants to or not (Ep. 107.9; cf. Smuts 1948:23-4). Since Seneca draws a close connection between the terms “nature” and “god” (Ep. 107.9), the expression “agreeing with nature” (*naturae consentire*) means for him the same as “obeying God” (*deum comitari*) (Ep. 107.9). In this way the goal of life can also be expressed in a religious sense as obedience to God’s will. Instead of God Seneca also uses “gods” or “Jupiter” (Ep. 107.10) (Smuts 1948:24). Whatever name Seneca gives to universal nature, he clearly agrees with his Stoic predecessors that living according to universal nature in essence comes down to acknowledging the predetermined order of events and accepting one’s fate willingly and gladly.

With regards to living according to one’s own human nature, Seneca also clearly propounds traditional Stoic teachings. As has been discussed in the preceding chapters, living according to one’s own nature means developing the distinctive attribute which is peculiar to one’s nature. In humans, this attribute is reason. Reason is what sets us apart from other animals (Ep. 86.8; 113.17; 121.14, 21, 23; 124.1; 124.8). Seneca thus clearly follows the traditional Stoic teaching when he says in Ep. 76.8-9 (cf. Rubin 1901:58, 66, 71; Setaioli 2007:364):

Id in quoque optimum esse debet, cui nascitur, quo censetur. | In homine optimum quid est? Ratio; hac antecedit animalia, deos sequitur. Ratio ergo perfecta proprium bonum est, cetera illi cum animalibus satisque communia sunt.

In each thing that, for which it was born and by which it is judged, should be best. | What is best in man? Reason; by it he surpasses the animals, and follows the gods. Therefore, perfect reason is our peculiar good, all other things he shares with animals and plants.

Similarly, Seneca writes in Ep. 41.8 (cf. Rubin 1901:71; Mans 1978:97; Goolam 2007:367):

Lauda in illo, quod nec eripi potest nec dari, quod proprium hominis est. Quaeris quid sit? Animus et ratio in animo perfecta. Rationale enim animal est homo. Consummatur itaque bonum eius, si id implevit, cui nascitur.

Praise the quality in him which can neither be snatched nor given away, [and] which is peculiar to man. You ask what this is? It is the mind, and reason perfected in the mind. For man is a rational animal. Therefore, his good is attained, if he has fulfilled that for which he was born.

In short, our highest good and final goal is attained by the perfection of our distinctive attribute – reason. Elsewhere, Seneca puts it more explicitly, “In this alone the happy life is located, that reason is perfected in us” (*in hoc uno positam esse beatam vitam, ut in nobis ratio perfecta sit*; Ep. 92.2; cf. 76.16; 124.24).

Moreover, Seneca says, that our reason is in fact a portion of the divine spirit (*divinus spiritus*; cf. G: *pneuma*) set in our human bodies (Ep. 66.12 cf. 92.1; Setaioli 2007:363; Holowchak 2008:114). However, we do not possess reason from birth (Ep. 121.1, 4; 124.9), but it only develops gradually as we mature. According to the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiōsis*, this development will occur naturally, since Nature has equipped all creatures with a natural impulse to appropriate themselves to their constitution (cf. section 2.2). Seneca discusses this doctrine in detail in Letter 121 (cf. Smuts 1948:27 ff.; Gill 2006:43 ff.; Trapp 2007:110 ff.). The emergence of reason in human beings was evidentially a controversial topic, and “Seneca structures his account around a series of objections from an unidentified interlocutor” (Trapp 2007:111). One of the main points of contention appears to have been centred around the question on how children, who do not yet possess reason, can appropriate themselves to a rational constitution<sup>18</sup> (Ep. 121.14).

Seneca answers this question by drawing a distinction not found in other Stoic sources between “appropriation to ourselves, as living a single, continuous life, and to our constitution at a given time (infancy, childhood, and so on)” (Gill 2006:44).

Unicuique aetati sua constitutio est, alia infanti, alia puero, alia seni; omnes ei constitutioni conciliantur in qua sunt. ... Ergo infans ei constitutioni suae conciliatur, quae tunc infanti est, non quae futura iuveni est. (Ep. 121.15-16)

Every age has its own constitution, one for the infant, another for the boy, and another for the old man; all of them are appropriated to the constitution in which they are. ... Therefore, an infant is appropriated to his constitution which at that time belongs to the infant, and not the constitution which will belong to him as a young man.

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<sup>18</sup> “Therefore, how can an infant be appropriated to a rational constitution, when he is not yet rational?”; *Quomodo ergo infans conciliari constitutioni rationali potest, cum rationalis nondum sit?* (Ep. 121.14)

A child's first appropriation will simply be with his natural constitution as animal (Smuts 1948:27). But as he matures, he will keep on appropriating himself to his own nature; the arrival of reason will bring with it a changed sense of "what belongs" to his constitution (Smuts 1948:27; Trapp 2007:110). "This culminates in the realization that what is most fully appropriate and most fully belongs to one as a human being is the perfection of rational virtue" (Trapp 2007:110).

Reason, then, once it has been perfected, fulfils man's happiness (Ep. 76.10; cf. Hadot 1969:101; Setaioli 2007:363-4). Perfect reason may be attained by acquiring a stable and unalterable knowledge of good and bad<sup>19</sup> (Ep. 88.28; Mans 1978:99). This knowledge of good and bad is the disposition of wisdom (cf. 2.3 above); moreover, reason in its state of perfection is what constitutes virtue (Ep. 66. 32; 76.16). For Seneca the concepts "living according to nature" (*secundum naturam vivere*), "perfect reason" (*ratio perfecta*), "virtue" (*virtus*), "wisdom" (*sapientia*), and "the knowledge of good and bad" (*scientia bonorum ac malorum*) are thus all more or less identical which is why he uses these concepts interchangeably in his definitions of the *summum bonum* of human existence and regards them as essential requirements for anyone wishing to live a happy life (Hadot 1969:101).

Additionally, Seneca explains, if a man manages to perfect his reason and thus attain virtue, he will become like God (Ep. 31.8; 92.29; cf. Motto 1985:12; Setaioli 2007:333, 364). The ideal Stoic sage is actually in one aspect superior to God, since God is by nature free from fear and exempt from enduring hardships, while a wise man has to overcome these things by his own efforts<sup>20</sup> (Ep.53.11; cf. Motto 1985:12; Setaioli 2007: 364; Holowchak 2008:63). Unsurprisingly this bold view on Stoic virtue as portrayed by Seneca did not go without criticism. St. Augustine, writing a couple of centuries later in his *De Civitate Dei*, condemns the notion that man can surpass God as false and arrogant (*Civ. Dei* 19.4; Setaioli 2007:367).

<sup>19</sup>"The mind is perfected by [only] one thing, the unalterable knowledge of good and bad"; *una re consummatur animus, scientia bonorum ac malorum inmutabili*. (Ep. 88.28)

<sup>20</sup>"There is something by which the wise man surpasses God: he does not fear by nature's good deed, the wise man by his own"; *est aliquid, quo sapiens antecedit deum: ille naturae beneficio non timet, suo sapiens*. (Ep. 53.11)

From this brief overview, it is clear that in his various definitions of the happy life as the *summum bonum* of human existence, Seneca is in this regard entirely in line with the fundamental Stoic teachings that have been set out in Chapter 2, although he also occasionally adds some of his own interpretations.

### 4.3 Attainment of the Stoic *telos* in Seneca

Seneca's requirements for a happy life listed above are living according to nature, perfecting one's reason, attaining virtue, wisdom and knowledge of all things. The most important first step for reaching this goal and living a fully satisfactory human life is, according to Seneca, the study of philosophy (Ep. 16.1; 37.4; 108.35; cf. Hadot 1969:108; Motto 1985:12; Inwood 2005:5).

Animum format et fabricat, vitam disponit, actiones regit, agenda et omittenda demonstrat, sedet ad gubernaculum et per ancipitia fluctuantium derigit cursum. Sine hac nemo intrepide potest vivere, nemo secure. (Ep. 16.3)

She [philosophy] shapes and constructs the soul, orders [our] life, directs [our] actions, shows [us] what should be done and what should be omitted, she sits at the helm and directs [our] course amidst the unpredictable waves. Without her no one can live fearlessly or securely.

There are three divisions of philosophy, says Seneca, ethics, physics and logic<sup>21</sup> (Ep. 89.9). With regards to the attainment of happiness, the focus is primarily on ethics, the part of philosophy which "directs the soul" (*componit animum*; 89.9). Seneca explains further that the moral part of philosophy, i.e. ethics, is also divided into three parts:

Quam in tria rursus dividi placuit, ut prima esset **inspectio** suum cuique distribuens et aestimans quanto quidque dignum sit, maxime utilis. Quid enim est tam necessarium quam pretia rebus inponere? Secunda **de impetu, de actionibus** tertia. Primum enim est ut quanti quidque sit iudices, secundum, ut impetum ad illa capias ordinatum temperatumque, tertium ut inter impetum tuum actionemque conveniat, ut in omnibus istis tibi ipse consentias. (Ep. 89.14; cf. Rubin 1901:2; Hadot 1969:117)

<sup>21</sup> "The greatest authors, as well as the largest number of authors, said that there are three parts of philosophy: a moral, a natural, and a rational [part]"; *philosophiae tres partes esse dixerunt et maximi et plurimi auctores: moralem, naturalem, rationale*. (Ep. 89.9)

It was agreed that this should again be divided into three parts. The first part is the **theory** which distributes to each thing what belongs to it and estimates how much each thing is worth – this is the most useful. For what is as essential as putting a value on things? – The second part concerns **impulse**, the third part **actions**. For firstly, you must judge what something is worth, secondly, you must receive an ordered and controlled impulse towards it, and thirdly, so that there is consistency between your impulse and your action, you must agree with yourself in all those things.

Seneca here uses the terms *inspectio*, *de impetus* and *de actionibus* as equivalent to the Greek terms *theōrētikē*, *hormētikē* and *praktikē* (Gummere 1970:386). In short, then, Stoic ethics are subdivided into (1) the theory of value, (2) the theory of impulses, and (3) the theory of actions. The following section will take a look at how these three divisions of ethical doctrine are treated in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* and whether his teachings also correspond to orthodox Stoic doctrine.

#### 4.3.1 Theory of Value

There is hardly a letter by Seneca which does not deal with the Stoic doctrine on the value of things (Hadot 1969:117-8). In conformity with traditional Stoic teaching, Seneca explains that “all things are either good or bad or indifferent” (*omnia aut mala sint aut bona aut indifferentia*; Ep.117.9).

Good is, in the first place, the knowledge of things (*rerum scientia*; Ep.31.6); the opposite (*rerum imperitia*) is bad (cf. Mans 1978:149). This knowledge of things is what comprises virtue<sup>22</sup> (Ep. 95.56; cf. Rubin 1901:31). In agreement with the standard Stoic account, Seneca states that the only true good is virtue (*virtus*), and the only bad is vice (*turpitude*) (Ep. 71.32; 74.6; 76.19; 82.14; 94.8; 95.35; 98.9). Seneca also defines the good as that which is honourable (*honestum*). He calls the honourable both the highest good (*summum bonum*) as well as the only good (*unum bonum*) (Ep. 71.4; cf. 71.19; 74.1, 10; 76.16; 85.17; 87.25; 90.35; cf. Rozelaar 1976:427).

<sup>22</sup> “[V]irtue is the knowledge of both other things and of itself”; *virtus et aliorum scientia est et sui*. (Ep. 95.56)

However, Seneca unnecessarily seems to overcomplicate the Stoic teaching by actually drawing a distinction between the good and the honourable (Ep. 118.10-12; 120.3; cf. Rubin 1901:59):

Quid ergo inter duo interest? Honestum est perfectum bonum, quo beata vita completur, cuius contactu alia quoque bona fiunt. | Quod dico, talest: sunt quaedam neque bona neque mala, tamquam militia, legatio, iurisdictio. Haec cum honeste administrata sunt, bona esse incipiunt et ex dubio in bonum transeunt. Bonum societate honesti fit, honestum per se bonum est. Bonum ex honesto fluit, honestum ex se est. Quod bonum est malum esse potuit; quod honestum est, nisi bonum esse non potuit. (Ep. 118.10-11)

What is the difference between the two? The honourable is perfect good, by which the happy life is fulfilled, and other things may also become good by being in contact with it. | What I am saying is the following: certain things are neither good nor bad, such as warfare, diplomatic service, or administration of justice. When these things have been managed honourably, they begin to be good and move over from the indifferent to the good. The good comes from association with the honourable, the honourable is good in itself. The good flows from the honourable, the honourable from itself. What is good might have been bad; what is honourable, could not be anything but good.

The key difference then between the good and the honourable is that the honourable can make indifferents good by association (Ep. 82.12) and when actions that are in themselves indifferent are honourably conducted the actions become good (Ep. 92.11).

As indifferent Seneca classifies all things that are neither good nor bad (Ep. 82.10), things such as wealth, health, strength, beauty, titles, as well as, death, exile, ill-health, pain (Ep. 82.14; 94.8; 109.12). These are indifferent with regards to our happiness (Ep. 66.46; 71.33; 92.16) but they do have some “selective value” and, if given a choice, one would certainly choose health and strength (Ep. 92.13) and, by implication, reject their opposites (Rozelaar 1976:447; Holowchak 2008:33). As discussed in Chapter 3, these indifferents the Stoics classified as either “preferred” or “dispreferred”; Seneca uses the terms “advantages” (*commoda*) and “disadvantages” (*incommoda*) (Ep. 74.17; 92.16).

### 4.3.2 Theory of Impulses

In chapter 3 it was explained that before any action can take place, we need to receive an impulse to act; an impulse in rational beings involves assent to an external impulsive presentation. Seneca writes on this point:

Omne rationale animal nihil agit, nisi primum specie alicuius rei irritatum est, deinde impetum cepit, deinde adsensio confirmavit hunc impetum. (Ep. 113.18)

No rational animal does anything, unless it was first stirred by the appearance [cf. G: *phantasia*] of some object, then received an impulse and then assent confirmed this impulse.

The Stoics distinguish between three species of impulses: “emotions” or “passions” (G: *pathē*; L: *perturbationes, affectus*), “good feelings” (*eupatheiai*) and “selection and rejection” (*eklogē, apeklogē*). Seneca does not provide such a systematic classification of the Stoic impulses but there are numerous passages in his letters which clearly show that he stays true to traditional Stoic doctrine. One species of impulses that he devoted particular attention to are the four generic emotions: **desire** (G: *epithumia*; L: *libido, appetitus, cupiditas, ambitio*) (Ep. 15.9; 16.9; 71.37; 85.11; 98.6 115.16; 118.6-7), **fear** (G: *phobos*; L: *metus*) (Ep. 14.3; 30.17; 58.23; 66.16; 71.37; 74.5; 85.11, 28; 98.6; 117.31; 120.18), **pleasure** (G: *hēdonē*; L: *laetitia*) (Ep. 23.6; 51.8; 59.15; 83.27; 92.10; 104.34), and **distress** (G: *lupē*; L: *aegritudo, dolor*) (Ep. 63.12; 78.13; 85.11; 99.1 ff.).

The problem with **desire**, Seneca explains, is that those desires that exceed Nature's demand are limitless and can never be satisfied (Ep. 16.9). They spring from false opinion, and “the false”, explains Seneca, “has no limit” (*nullus enim terminus falso est*; Ep. 16.9; cf. 118.7). The best example of limitless ambition and desire for power (*ambitio*) in antiquity is Alexander the Great. Even after gaining control of the vast Persian Empire, he found no satisfaction with his conquest but continued on a senseless and brutal campaign into India and only stopped once his troops eventually had enough and threatened mutiny (Holowchak 2008:172). Seneca writes of Alexander's ambition turned madness in Ep. 94.62-3. In his eyes Alexander, although he



conquered much of the known world, was a poor and pathetic figure due to his insatiable desires (Holowchak 2008:173).

Elsewhere Seneca writes, desire is never backward-looking (Ep. 73.3), which means that people, after having satisfied one desire, usually do not look at what they have gained but only seek new and greater satisfaction (Holowchak 2008:173). In Ep. 118.6 he says:

Cui enim adsecuto satis fuit, quod optanti nimium videbatur? ... Tu ista credis excelsa quia longe ab illis iaces; ei vero qui ad illa pervenit, humilia sunt.

For who was ever satisfied after having attained that which seemed great beyond measure while he was [still] seeking it? ... You believe those things to be lofty because you are situated far away from them; but they are lowly for him who has reached them.

People who only think of things yet to be obtained, quickly forget about the good things they have already received. The worst aspect of desire is therefore its ungratefulness<sup>23</sup> (Ep. 73.2; cf. 99.5).

**Fear** is the emotion that Seneca focuses on most in his letters. There are many things which people are afraid of: illness, poverty, violence, and natural disasters such as earthquakes (Ep. 14.3; 117.31). Fear may also be a consequence of one's own sins (Ep. 105.7-8; cf. 97.13-16). But it is the fear of death which Seneca treats most extensively in his letters (Ep. 4; 13; 24; 30.17; 58.23; 120.18). Again and again he assures Lucilius that death is nothing to be feared (Ep. 4.3; 24.13; 36.12; 94.7; 120.18), since it is in fact simply a state of non-existence comparable to the condition we were in before we were born (Ep. 54.4-5; Holowchak 2008:146). He does however concede that fear of death is something natural since we are all born with a natural impulse towards self-love and self-preservation (Ep. 36.8; 82.15; cf. Rubin 1901:66; Rozelaar 1976:447; Holowchak 2008:146). Seneca's views on the fear of death will still be discussed in more detail in Section 4.4.7 below.

<sup>23</sup> "But whoever thinks about what is to be received, has forgotten about what has [already] been received; desire has not greater evil than that it is ungrateful"; *Quisquis autem de accipiendo cogitat, oblitus accepti est; nec ullum habet malum cupiditas maius, quam quod ingrata est.* (Ep. 73.2)

Regarding the emotion of **pleasure**, Seneca shows a particularly negative attitude: In Ep. 92.10 he writes that “pleasure ... destroys [the soul] and softens all its strength” (*voluptas ... dissolvit et omne robur emollit*). Elsewhere he says “the things that are called pleasures, become punishments when they go beyond limitation” (*quae voluptates vocantur, ubi transcenderunt modum, poenas esse*; Ep. 83.27). The consequences of excessive pleasure are always pain and sorrow (Ep. 23.6; 51.8; 121.4).

Of the pleasures that people tend to overindulge in particularly, Seneca lists excessive wealth, drunkenness and over-eating. “The acquisition of riches”, he says quoting Epicurus, “has been for many people, not an end, but [merely] a change of troubles” (*Multis parasse divitias non finis miserarum fuit, sed mutatio*; Ep. 17.11; cf. Rubin 1901:63; Holowchak 2008:160). Elsewhere, Seneca states that no one can ever find true contentment in prosperity, since people usually prefer what they have failed to gain<sup>24</sup> (Ep. 115.17; cf. Holowchak 2008:160).

Similarly he writes of the unpleasant consequences of drunkenness. It “pays for a single hour of hilarious madness by a sickness of many days” (*quae unius horae hilarem insaniam longi temporis taedio pensat*; Ep. 59.15). By binge-drinking, over-eating and leading an inactive life-style, people actually voluntarily choose to shorten their life-expectancy (Ep. 122.3-4). He paints a rather grim picture when he writes of people who sleep away most of the day and live solely for the pleasures of the night:

Licet in vino unguentoque tenebras suas exigant, licet epulis ... totum perversae vigiliae tempus educant, non convivantur, sed iusta sibi faciunt. (Ep. 122.3)

Although they pass their hours of darkness in wine and perfume, and spend the whole time of their unnatural waking hours on sumptuous meals ... they are not feasting, but conducting their own funeral rites.

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<sup>24</sup> “For there is no one whom his good fortune can satisfy, even if it comes right away. People complain about both their plans and their advances and they always prefer what is left behind”; *nemo enim est, cui felicitas sua, etiam si cursu venit, satis faciat. Queruntur et de consiliis et de processibus suis maluntque semper quae reliquerunt*. (Ep. 115.17)

Elsewhere, he writes: “Drunkenness both incites and reveals every vice, and removes the sense of shame that hinders evil undertakings” (*omne vitium ebrietas et incendit et detegit, obstantem malis conatibus verecundiam removet*; Ep. 83.19). Drunkenness will therefore make virtuous action difficult, and abstaining from alcohol, or at least refraining from habitual and heavy consumption, is an essential feature of living a virtuous life (Holowchak 2008:167). A gluttonous lifestyle in general goes completely against virtue, since virtue requires moderation (Holowchak 2008:169).

**Grief** Seneca discusses in his letters mostly with reference to the loss of a friend. According to the traditional Stoic doctrine, grief, like all other emotions, must not be indulged in. Seneca, however, says that it is acceptable for someone who has just lost a loved one to be upset. He does not disregard the orthodox teachings regarding grief entirely; he merely displays a more humane view and understands that there is no use in telling someone who is upset that he should not be (Ep. 63.1). Someone who has just suffered a personal loss should be allowed to grieve for a little while until he has worked off the first shock (Ep. 99.1). In letter 63, in which Seneca consoles Lucilius for the death of his friend Flaccus, he shows sympathy for Lucilius’ emotion, telling him that it is acceptable to cry, as long as he does not do it in excess. “You may weep, but you must not wail” (*lacrimandum est, non plorandum*; Ep. 63.1). Seneca admits (Ep. 63.14) that he himself was once overcome by grief for the death of his friend Annaeus Serenus (to whom he dedicated three of his philosophical essays).

At the same time, however, he stresses that, when allowing ourselves to be sad, we should set a time limit to our mourning period, since it is in any event impossible to keep doing it forever. Moreover he says, “but the most shameful remedy for grief, in the case of a reasonable man, is to grow tired of grieving” (*turpissimum autem est in homine prudente remedium maeroris lassitudo maerendi*; Ep. 63.12). Rather than waiting for the sadness to go away, we should be the ones abandoning it – and that as soon as possible<sup>25</sup> (Ep. 63.12).

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<sup>25</sup> “I prefer it that you abandon grief, than that you are abandoned by it, and stop doing it [i.e. stop grieving] as soon as possible”; *malo relinquo dolorem quam ab illo relinquaris, et quam primum id facere desiste*. (Ep. 63.12)

What Seneca recommends for overcoming the loss of a loved one, is to find a new friend to replace the one lost (Ep. 63.12; cf. Holowchak 2008:145). Besides, one may also still derive pleasure from recollecting a lost friend<sup>26</sup> (Ep. 63.4; cf. 63.7; 99.5, 19, 23).

All emotions, says Seneca, prevent a person from performing “appropriate deeds” (*probanda*; Ep. 94.32) and it is from emotions that vice originates (Ep. 85.10). Emotions actually cause a state of disease in the mind<sup>27</sup> (Ep. 75.12 cf. Ep. 116.1; Rozelaar 1976:111-2).

Emotions, moreover, enslave humans (Ep. 39.6; 47.17; 66.16; 110.10; 124.3). Therefore, one essential step in setting one's soul free and attaining happiness is to gain control over one's emotions (Holowchak 2008:63), or in fact, eliminate them completely (Ep. 85.9-10). Seneca discusses the Stoic doctrine of *apatheia* (“freedom from emotions”, *impatientia* in Latin; cf. Ep. 9.2) at length in Letter 116. Here he also mentions the ongoing debate between the Stoics who advocated a complete eradication of the emotions and the Peripatetics who proposed a mere moderation of the emotions (Ep. 116.1; cf. 85.4). Since emotions are analogous to diseases, Seneca agrees fully with the Stoics that it would be nonsensical to merely moderate the disease instead of removing it altogether:

Utrum satius sit modicos habere adfectus an nullos, saepe quaesitum est. Nostri illos expellunt, Peripatetici temperant. Ego non video, quomodo salubris esse aut utilis possit ulla mediocritas morbi.  
(Ep. 116.1)

It has often been asked whether it is better to have moderate emotions or none at all. We [i.e. the Stoics] reject them, the Peripatetics moderate them. I, for my part, do not see how any moderate state of disease could be either healthy or useful.

Seneca also agrees with the Stoics that emotions are essentially false opinions about what is good or bad (Ep. 13.4; 66.31-32; 78.13; 104.9-10; 118.6-7) and that one can get rid of them by putting

<sup>26</sup>“Let us see to it that the recollection of those, who have been lost, is pleasant to us”; *Id agamus, ut iucunda nobis amissorum fiat recordatio*. (Ep. 63.4)

<sup>27</sup>“Emotions are objectionable movements of the soul, sudden and agitated, which by occurring frequently and being disregarded have produced a disease”; *adfectus sunt motus animi inprobabiles, subiti et concitati, qui frequentes neglectique fecere morbum*. (Ep. 75.12)

oneself under the control of reason (Ep. 37.4; cf. 85.9) and coming to know the true value of things. A person's fear, for example, may be settled by the knowledge that that which one initially believed to be something bad, is not truly bad (Ep. 85.25; cf. Holowchak 2008:151). Seneca concedes that the eradication of emotions is no easy task, as they are in some sense natural (Ep. 116.3). However, our biggest obstacle in ridding ourselves of emotions, says Seneca, is not our inability but our lack of will-power<sup>28</sup> (Ep. 116.8; cf. Mans 1978:198; Rozelaar 1976:440).

Yet, there are certain aspects of emotions, says Seneca, which cannot be eliminated and even the wise cannot avoid them. These are the involuntary physical responses that accompany emotions, such as blushing, sweating, trembling in the knees, the chattering of teeth, contracting of one's eyebrows, becoming dizzy when standing on a high peak, or fainting at the sight of a freshly inflicted wound (Ep. 11.1-7; 57.3-5; 71.29; cf. Rubin 1901:26; Hadot 1969:132-3; Holowchak 2008:130). However, as discussed above (3.2.1), these are only the "first movements" of emotions and not emotions proper. Seneca explains the reason why these first movements cannot be subdued by reason, is that they occur outside rational activity and are purely physical sensations<sup>29</sup> (Ep. 71.29; cf. Hadot 1969:132-3).

As has been examined in the previous chapter, orthodox Stoicism, in disallowing all emotions, still leaves humans to be legitimately motivated by one or both of two other species of impulse: (if a wise man) by the *eupatheiai*, wish (G: *boulēsis*; L: *voluntas*), caution (G: *eulabeia*; L: *cautio*) and joy (G: *khara*; L: *gaudium*); and/or (for anyone) by the unemotional reactions of selection and rejection (cf. Trapp 2007:79). Seneca does not clearly identify these two other species of impulses but he does point out that there are alternatives to the undesirable emotions, desire, fear and pleasure.

In Letter 116.1, he explains that, even if we eradicate the emotion of desire, we may still pursue the selfsame things that we used to pursue, but instead of desiring (*cupere*) them, we should wish

<sup>28</sup> "Not wanting is the [real] reason, not being able to is alleged in excuse"; *nolle in causa est, non posse praetenditur*. (Ep. 116.8)

<sup>29</sup> "For all these are sensations of the body"; *hi enim omnes corporis sensus sunt*. (Ep. 71.29)

for (*velle*) them. The difference between the two is that the element of vice has been removed (Ep. 116.1).

The appropriate impulse towards things that people most commonly fear, says Seneca, is caution (*cautio*). In Ep. 85.25-6 he explains, that someone, who knows that nothing except vice (*turpitude*) is truly bad, will not fear the things that ordinary people fear, but simply avoid them; “caution is proper for him, but fear is not” (*cautio illum decet, timor non decet*; Ep. 85.26).

As an alternative to pleasure (*voluptas*), which is a vice (Ep. 59.1), we should experience joy. Unlike pleasure which eventually results in pain and sorrow, joy never stops and never changes into its opposite<sup>30</sup> (Ep. 59.2). The joy that results from the attainment of virtue and wisdom is unbreakable, everlasting and peace-giving (Ep. 27.3; 59.16). This sort of joy is independent of external things and springs wholly from within oneself (Ep. 72.4; 98.1).

For grief, Seneca, like his Stoic predecessors, offers no rational alternative impulse.

### 4.3.3 Theory of Actions

According to traditional Stoic teachings, all actions stem from impulses which arise in response to our evaluation of a presentation in our environment. Hence, all actions depend on our consideration of what is good and bad. Accordingly, Seneca writes in Ep. 76.18:

Omnes actiones totius vitae honesti ac turpis respectu temperantur; ad haec faciendi et non faciendi ratio derigitur.

All actions of life as a whole are controlled by our view of what is honourable and what is wicked; according to these [two] things, reason is directed at doing or not doing something.

We will live a harmonious and happy life when our actions are in line with our impulses and our impulses in line with the true value of the objects.

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<sup>30</sup> “But joy is bound together by the fact that it neither stops, nor is turned into the opposite”; *gaudio autem iunctum est non desinere nec in contrarium verti*. (Ep. 59.2)

Tunc ergo vita concors sibi est, ubi actio non destituit impetum, impetus ex dignitate rei cuiusque concipitur, proinde remissus vel acrior, prout illa digna est peti. (Ep. 89.15)

Therefore, life is in harmony with itself, when an action has not departed from impulse and when the impulse is conceived from the value of a certain object, which is then either relaxed or more violent, according to the objects being worthy to be sought.

In order to achieve consistency in one's actions and live virtuously, one must therefore have a firm and correct knowledge of the true value of things. Hence, as has been shown above, Seneca makes this knowledge an essential requirement for the attainment of a happy life (cf. section 4.2) (Ep. 31.5; 74.1; 94.8; 95.35). The acquisition of this knowledge is, however, just the starting point. Once one has learnt the principles that lead to happiness, one needs to internalize them, and finally, put them into practice (Hadot 1969:104-5). We internalize principles, says Seneca, by studying them repeatedly (Ep. 16.1; cf. section 4.4.1 below) and then strengthening our learning through action (Ep. 94.47). There is hardly a letter in which Seneca does not emphasize the importance of the practical application of ethical doctrine (e.g. Ep. 20.1; 75.7; 82.8; 89.23; 94.47; 95.10; 108.35; 117.33) which will be discussed in further detail below (section 4.4).

When it comes to our actions, it is also important that they are in agreement with our words (Ep. 34.4; cf. 20.1-2; 82.8).

[F]acere docet philosophia, non dicere, et hoc exigit, ut ad legem suam quisque vivat, ne orationi vita dissentiat, ut ipsa intra se vita unius sit omnium actionum sine dissensione coloris. (Ep. 20.2)

Philosophy teaches us to act, not to speak; it demands of every one that he live according to his own rule, that his life does not disagree with his words, and that his inner life is of one colour and does not disagree with any of his actions.

Since consistency between words and deeds is the best proof of wisdom, a constant wavering between pretending to strive after virtue and performing vicious actions is a proof of lack of wisdom<sup>31</sup> (Ep. 120.20; cf. Holowchak 2008:77).

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<sup>31</sup> "The greatest proof of an evil mind is wavering and a continuous movement between feigning of virtues and love for vices"; *maximum indicium est malae mentis fluctuatio et inter simulationem virtutum amoremque vitiorum adsidua iactatio*. (Ep. 120.20)

Lastly, in everything we do we must have the final goal of the highest good in front of our eyes to which all our actions are to be referred (Ep. 95.45; cf. Inwood 2005:120).

Proponamus oportet finem summi boni, ad quem nitamur, ad quem omne factum nostrum dictumque respiciat; veluti navigantibus ad aliquod sidus derigendus est cursus. (Ep. 95. 15)

We must set the goal of the highest good before us, towards which we may strive, and to which everything we do and say may be referred; as for example, sailors must direct their course according to a certain star.

“Overall, Seneca states, progress toward virtue requires practice through appropriate acts” (Holowchak, 2008:57). However, if one acts in the right way without knowing that it is right, the rightness of the act is unstable (Ep. 95.39) and does not lead to virtuous conduct (Hadot 1969:104; Inwood 2005:119).

#### 4.4 Seneca's Practical Advice

Above it has been proven that Seneca, for the most part, adheres to the traditional Stoic teachings regarding the definition and attainment of happiness. As has been stressed throughout this study, happiness is not attained merely by entrusting knowledge to one's memory, but it lies solely in the practical application of the acquired knowledge (Ep. 75.7). Theory without living it out practically is useless says Seneca (Mans 1978:89). Thus he says in Ep. 94.47: “You must both learn and strengthen what you have learned by doing it” (*et discas oportet et quod didicisti agendo confirmes*). This final section will take a look at some practical guidelines, Seneca provides for the application of ethical doctrine in real life.

“Stoic ethics is often criticized for its impractical rigidity and pointless idealism” (Inwood 2005:95). And Seneca writes himself:

Hoc enim turpissimum est, quod nobis obici solet, verba nos philosophiae, non opera tractare. (Ep. 24.15)



For this is the most shameful thing of which we are often accused – that we [only] deal with the words of philosophy not with the deeds.

It is not entirely certain whether Seneca believed that the Stoic ideal happy life is actually attainable in practice, but he clearly believed that all human beings possess “seeds of virtue” (Ep. 75.6; 94.29; 108.8; 120.4) and are thus all equipped to develop their reason to a state of excellence. As has been suggested above, the aim of his *Epistulae Morales* and other philosophical writings was to provide practical guidance that would help others to come closer to achieving this goal. What follows, is a discussion of some practical recommendations which Seneca provides in his letters.

#### 4.4.1 Continuously Engage in Philosophy

As pointed out above, Seneca saw the study of philosophy as essential for anyone with an aspiration to attain happiness and live a fully satisfactory human life (cf. section 4.3). Studying philosophy means to be well since “without it the mind is sickly” (*sine hoc aeger est animus*; Ep. 15.1). And Seneca maintains that “nobody can live a happy, or even bearable life, without the study of wisdom” (*neminem posse beate vivere, ne tolerabiliter quidem sine sapientiae studio*; Ep. 16.1; cf. 37.4).

Seneca therefore encourages Lucilius: “Dedicate yourself completely to it [philosophy]” (*illi te totum dedica*; Ep. 53.8). The study of philosophy should by no means be postponed until you have leisure (Ep. 72.3; cf. Mans 1978:125). It is something that should be studied on a regular basis<sup>32</sup> (Ep. 53.9; cf. Mans 1978:44).

But what is the purpose of continuously studying what we already know? As was explained in Chapter 3, only the wise are capable of firm and consistent knowledge; people still on their way to perfection, however, need to be reminded continuously of the principles they have just learnt until their beliefs become internalized. In order to strengthen and fortify what we have learnt, we

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<sup>32</sup> “It is not a thing that should be attended to in one’s spare time, but it is something habitual”; *non est res subsiciva, ordinaria est*. (Ep. 53.9)

must study it continuously until that which is only a good intention becomes good settled knowledge<sup>33</sup> (Ep. 16.1). For example, we might *believe* death to be an indifferent, but if this teaching is not rooted in our innermost being, we will most likely still fear it as if it were something bad. The wise, on the other hand, *knows* that death is an indifferent and will therefore never fear it. One way to strengthen one's belief and transform it into firm, consistent knowledge is to rehearse the thought that death is indifferent *every day* (Ep. 4.5).

In short, to learn to live virtuously and attain happiness, Seneca's first recommendation is that one should dedicate oneself *daily* to the study of philosophy (Motto 1985:12). The study of philosophy should involve both learning the principles outlined above as well as applying them in one's daily life.

#### 4.4.2 Self-scrutiny and Willingness to Change

Another requirement for the attainment of happiness and moral improvement is the ability to recognize and acknowledge one's faults and a willingness to change and better oneself. Seneca already treated the theme of self-reflection in *De Brevitate Vitae* (written between 48 and 55), and he also describes the relationship between self-knowledge and self-management in *De Tranquillitate Animi* (Inwood 2005:144). A more extensive account of self-examination and self-shaping appears in Seneca's *De Ira* (Edwards 1997:28; Inwood 2005:144-5).

In Ep. 28.9 Seneca introduces this idea of self-scrutiny by quoting a saying of Epicurus, "The beginning of salvation is the recognition of sin" (*Initium est salutis notitia peccati*), and he goes on to explain, "for he who does not know that he has sinned does not want to be corrected; it is necessary that you catch yourself doing wrong before you can free yourself from faults" (*Nam qui peccare se nescit, corrigi non vult; deprehendas te oportet, antequam emendes*; Ep. 28.9; cf. Hadot 1969:162-3; Mans 1978:211). Seneca, thus, advises Lucilius, "Therefore, as much as you can, convict yourself and interrogate yourself, [and] perform the roles first of the accuser, then of

<sup>33</sup> "You must persevere and add strength by constant study, until what is a good intention becomes a good understanding"; *perseverandum est et adsiduo studio robur addendum, donec bona mens sit quod bona voluntas est*. (Ep. 16.1)

the judge, and lastly of the intercessor” (*ideo quantum potes, te ipse coargue, inquire in te; accusatoris primum partibus fungere, deinde iudicis, novissime deprecatoris*; Ep. 28.10; cf. Hadot 1969:162-3; Edwards 1997:29). Here, he tells Lucilius to imagine the procedures of the Roman law-court “providing a model through which his self-scrutiny may be dramatized” (Edwards 1997:29).

Seneca is convinced that one of the main obstacles to our self-improvement and our attainment of virtue is that we are too readily satisfied with ourselves (Ep. 59.11):

Illud praecipue inpedit, quod cito nobis placemus; ... Optimos nos esse, sapientissimos adfirmantibus adsentimur, cum sciamus illos saepe multa mentiri; ... sequitur itaque ut ideo mutari nolumus quia nos optimos esse credidimus.

What hinders us especially is that we are too quickly satisfied with ourselves; ... we agree with those who proclaim us to be the best and wisest, although we know that they are often lying a great deal; ... therefore, it follows that the reason we do not want to be changed, is that we believe ourselves to be the best.

Moreover, instead of admitting our faults, we tend to deny them and deceive ourselves, not realizing that the problems that afflict us are not external but within ourselves (Ep. 50.4; cf. Mans 1978:211). The more one is caught up in one's own faults, the less one is able to perceive them (Ep. 53.7-8).

Seneca, therefore, recommends that one should make self-examination a habitual daily activity: “I will immediately observe myself, and what is most useful, I will review my day” (*Observabo me protinus et, quod est utilissimum, diem meum recognoscam*; Ep. 83.2; cf. Edwards 1997:28).

Recognition and acknowledgement of our faults should thus be our starting point for moral progress, but this is not yet enough if we do not also have the will to change. Seneca writes to Lucilius in Ep. 80.4 that in order to become good, one needs to *want* to become good (*Quid tibi opus est ut sis bonus? Velle*; cf. Rozelaar 1976:440; Mans 1978:198). After all, says Seneca, the real reason that keeps people from improving is not their *inability* but their *unwillingness* to give

up their faults<sup>34</sup> (Ep. 116.8; cf. Rozelaar 1976:440; Mans 1978:198). Accordingly, Seneca makes (along with the practice of self-scrutiny) a positive will and readiness for self-reformation a basic requirement for moral progress and the attainment of a happy life (Ep. 34.3; 71.6; cf. Rubin 1901:73; Smuts 1948:31; Rozelaar 1976:440; Inwood 2005:138).

#### 4.4.3 Choose a Moral Advisor

Even if we are dedicated to the daily study and revision of philosophical doctrine, and even if we have trained ourselves to recognize our faults and have the will to rid ourselves of them, we will struggle to completely cure ourselves without a helping hand. Seneca believes that no one is strong enough to emerge from foolishness by himself; someone must lend him a hand and lead him out<sup>35</sup> (Ep. 52.2; cf. Motto 1985:11). That is why it is so useful to have an adviser by one's side in the form of a close friend (Inwood 2005:106). The favourable impact that the company of good men can have on our characters should not be underestimated (Ep. 94.40-1; cf. 71.1, 22.1-2; Inwood 2005:119).

Nulla res magis animis honesta induit dubiosque et in pravum inclinabiles revocat ad rectum quam bonorum virorum conversatio. Paulatim enim descendit in pectora, et vim praeceptorum obtinet frequenter aspici, frequenter audiri. Occursus mehercules ipse sapientium iuvat, et est aliquid quod ex magno viro vel tacente proficias. (Ep. 94.40)

There is nothing that better adorns people's minds with honourable things and brings back on the right path those who are in doubt and prone to immorality, than associating with good men. For frequently seeing and frequently hearing them, gradually sinks into the heart and obtains the power of instructions. In fact, merely meeting wise men is of help, and can derive some benefit from a great man even if he is silent.

Seneca frequently emphasizes the importance of seeking guidance from an appropriate moral advisor (Hadot 1969:130, 164; Edwards 1997:30):

<sup>34</sup> "Not wanting is the [real] reason, not being able to is alleged in excuse"; *nolle in causa est, non posse praetenditur*. (Ep. 116.8)

<sup>35</sup> "No one is strong enough by himself, to emerge; it is necessary that someone else offers him a hand, someone else must lead him out [or educate him]"; *Nemo per se satis valet ut emergat; oportet manum aliquis porrigat, aliquis educat*. (Ep. 52.2)

Sit ergo aliquis custos et aurem subinde pervellat abigatque rumores et reclamet populis laudantibus. Erras enim si existimas nobiscum vitia nasci: supervenerunt, ingesta sunt. Itaque monitionibus crebris opiniones quae nos circumsonant repellantur. (Ep. 94.55)

Therefore, let someone be your guardian and let him pluck your ear from time to time and drive out rumours and protest against popular interests. For you are mistaken, if you assume that our faults are born with us: they came afterwards, they were heaped upon us. Therefore, let the opinions, which resound around us, be repelled by frequent admonitions.

Besides receiving regular admonition, we should also learn from our moral advisor by imitating his examples. Therefore, when choosing a moral advisor, one must be careful not to look for someone who is merely a clever speaker or debater, but someone who also practices what he preaches, someone who may teach us by the way he leads his life (Ep. 52.8; cf. 11.10; 98.17; Hadot 1969:164; Mans 1978:88; Holowchak 2008:223). Seneca particularly praises his own teacher Fabianus for leading his life in complete agreement with his teachings (Ep. 40.12; 100.11), something which inspired many young men to follow his example (Ep. 100.12; cf. Hadot 1969: 164).

Seneca illustrates the usefulness of a personal advisor and role model by comparing moral reformation with the education of a primary school child. When a child first learns how to write, the teacher would guide his hand, later he gives him examples to copy on his own. In the same way, the reformation of our minds takes place (Ep. 94.51; cf. Mans 1978:87-88, 161):

Pueri ad praescriptum discunt. Digiti illorum tenentur et aliena manu per litterarum simulacra ducuntur, deinde imitari iubentur proposita et ad illa reformare chirographum. Sic animus noster, dum eruditur ad praescriptum, iuvatur. (Ep. 94.51)

Boys study according to instruction. Their fingers are held and guided by another hand through the pattern of the letters; then, they are told to imitate a model and mould their handwriting according to it. Similarly, our mind is helped when it is taught according to instruction.

Seneca's recommendation to seek guidance from an older, more experienced person is not a new concept but goes back to an ancient Roman tradition (Mans 1978:159-161). In ancient Roman education, boys would acquire practical skills by observing and imitating the example portrayed

by their fathers. Later, at the age of sixteen, in preparation for a career in public life, they would devote themselves to a well-respected and experienced politician or influential public figure (Hadot 1969:167; Mans 1978:159).

The most effective way to learn from a moral advisor, says Seneca, is through personal interaction and living with him (Ep. 6.5; cf. Hadot 1969:164; Mans 1978:88; Inwood 1005:119), since “there are certain things which can only be pointed out by someone who is present” (*Quaedam non nisi a praesente monstrantur*; Ep. 22.1).

If, however, one's circumstances make the association with good men impossible, Seneca suggests one can also find assistance from great men of the past, men such as Cato, Scipio, or Laelius (Ep. 52.7-8; cf. 11.10; 25.6; Mans 1978:160; Edwards 1997:30).

Elige eum, cuius tibi placuit et vita et oratio et ipse animus ante se ferens vultus; illum tibi semper ostende vel custodem vel exemplum. Opus est, inquam, aliquo, ad quem mores nostri se ipsi exigant. (Ep. 11.10)

Choose someone, whose life, speech and face, which lets you see his soul, please you; always show him to yourself, either as guardian or as example. For we indeed need someone according to whom our character may adjust itself.

In short, the benefit derived from having an experienced person as our moral advisor and role model is that we may learn from him by his guidance and by imitating his way of life. A second benefit, as will be shown below (4.4.4), is that he may also serve as witness of our actions. His mere presence will deter us from sinning. In Ep. 11.9, Seneca argues that “a large part of our sins is eliminated, if a witness stands near us when we are about to commit a sin” (*magna pars peccatorum tollitur, si peccaturis testis assistit*).

#### 4.4.4 Live Like Someone Is Watching You

Seneca explicitly warns Lucilius against the dangers of solitude for an unreformed person. After all “solitude persuades us to all kinds of evil” (*omnia nobis mala solitudo persuadet*; Ep. 25.5). Therefore, Seneca – actually quoting a saying by Epicurus on this point – advises Lucilius the following:

Aliquis vir bonus nobis diligendus est ac semper ante oculos habendus, ut sic tamquam illo spectante vivamus et omnia tamquam illo vidente faciamus. (Ep 11.8; cf. 25.5-6)

We must choose a good man and always have him before our eyes, so that we may live as if he were watching us and that we do all things as if he could see them.

Even if we are not in the company of our moral advisor (be it a contemporary, whom we know personally, or a great philosopher from the past), the mere thought that he might observe our actions should deter us from sinning.

Elsewhere Seneca suggests that Lucilius should imagine Seneca himself as present and scrutinizing his behaviour: “Live just as if I were sure to hear about what you are doing, or rather, as if I were sure to *see* it” (*Sic vive, tamquam quid facias auditurus sim, immo tamquam visurus*; Ep. 32.1; cf. Hadot 1969:174; Edwards 1997:30).

In Ep. 25.5 Seneca says that it is enough, if we live as if anyone at all were able to observe our actions. We should be able to live, as it were, with our doors wide open at all times (Ep. 43.4; 83.1; Arnold 1911:366; Holowchak 2008:101).

In Ep. 83.1 Seneca takes the concept even further by saying that we should live as if there were someone who could not only observe our actions but even look into our innermost being. He then adds a religious aspect to this idea when he states that there is in fact someone who can do so – God. For “nothing is shut off from God. He is present in our souls and he comes between the midst of our thoughts” (*nihil deo clusum est. interest animis nostris et cogitationibus mediis intervenit*; Ep. 83.1).

#### 4.4.5 Protect Yourself From Bad Influences

Another recommendation that Seneca provides for one's moral improvement is to protect oneself from bad influences. Seneca warns Lucilius to avoid crowds especially (Ep. 7.1; cf. 32.2). If we associate with large crowds too many vices might become attractive to us:

Inimica est multorum conversatio; nemo non aliquod nobis vitium aut commendat aut imprimit aut nescientibus allinit. Utique quo maior est populus cui miscemur, hoc periculi plus est (Ep. 7.2).

Associating with a crowd is dangerous; there is no one who does not make some vice appealing to us or stamp or smear it on us without us even realizing it. Obviously the larger the crowd with which we mingle, the greater the danger.

Crowds, warns Seneca, are especially dangerous for young people, since they are still very impressionable and easily side with the majority<sup>36</sup> (Ep. 7.6). We should therefore seek to associate with people that will make us a better person and people whom we ourselves might be able to improve (Ep 7.8), for one can also learn while teaching others<sup>37</sup> (Ep. 7.8).

One danger in trying to reform others is that one might be corrupted by those whom one wants to help (Ep. 29.4; Hadot 1969:171). When attempting to help others, one must make sure to protect oneself and not allow oneself to be dragged down to their level (Holowchak, 2008:98). And in any event, says Seneca, it is futile to try to help others, if they do not want to be helped (Ep.29.1; 108.4; cf. Hadot 1969:171).

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<sup>36</sup> "A mind that is young and does not hold fast enough to what is right, must be withdrawn from the people; it easily crosses over to the many"; *Subducendus populo est tener animus et parum tenax recti; facile transitur ad plures.* (Ep. 7.6)

<sup>37</sup> "People learn, while they teach"; *homines, dum docent, discunt.* (Ep. 7.8)



#### 4.4.6 Embrace the Simple Life

“To have enduring happiness, one must renounce all false goods and embrace virtue, and that is impossible to do if one’s mind is continually distracted by the thought of possessing anything other than oneself. Hence, an apprentice will strive to live simply” (Holowchak 2008:161).

There are several benefits that come with a simpler lifestyle. For one, you will have more free time to devote yourself to the study and practice of philosophy (Ep. 17.5-7). Philosophy, according to Seneca, should be our number one priority in life (Ep. 17.5). However, if we spend all our time and energy on satisfying our desires and on acquiring superfluous things that actually exceed our natural needs, the study and practice of philosophy always tends to come second (Ep. 17.5). Seneca actually goes as far as saying that we should even be prepared to endure hunger in order to pursue philosophy<sup>38</sup> (Ep. 17.6).

Another benefit of embracing a simpler life-style and occasionally even living in poverty is that one will be prepared for actual poverty (should one ever find oneself in that situation) and also stop fearing it (Ep. 18.5, 7; 20.12-3; 119.10; 123.13). Seneca therefore recommends the following:

Interponas aliquot dies, quibus contentus minimo ac vilissimo cibo, dura atque horrida veste dicas tibi:  
“Hoc est quod timebatur?” (Ep. 18.5)

Set aside some days, during which you will be content with very little of the plainest food, and a hard and rough garment, and ask yourself: “Is this what I feared?”

When we have learned to adapt our lifestyle according to what nature demands, we will never feel poverty, nor be afraid of it: “but he, who appropriates himself to what Nature demands, is not only without sensation of poverty, but [also] without fear [thereof]”; (cf. *at hic, qui se ad id, quod exigit natura, composuit, non tantum extra sensum est paupertatis, sed extra metum*; Ep. 119.10).

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<sup>38</sup> “Those hastening towards this, must even endure hunger”; *Toleranda est enim ad hoc properantibus vel fames*. (Ep. 17.6)

Lastly, practicing simple living will teach us to be satisfied with what we have and help us control our unbound desires (Ep. 69.2-4; 78.11; 123.13). Seneca illustrates this with the following analogy:

Quemadmodum ei, qui amorem exuere conatur, evitanda est omnis admonitio dilecti corporis, nihil enim facilius quam amor recrudescit, ita qui deponere vult desideria rerum omnium, quarum cupiditate flagravat, et oculos et aures ab iis, quae reliquit, avertat. (Ep 69.3)

In the same way as he who tries to put off love, must avoid every reminder of the beloved person – for nothing grows again as easily as love – so he, who wishes to lay down his wants of all the things for which he burned with desire, must turn away both eyes and ears from the things which he abandoned.

Seneca is especially opposed to excessive wealth and regards it as the source of all evil (Ep. 17.11; 110.14-15; cf. Rubin 1901:63). He therefore advises:

In primis autem respuendae voluptates; enervant et effeminant et multum petunt, multum autem a fortuna petendum est. Deinde spernendae opes: auctoramenta sunt servitutem. Aurum et argentum et quidquid aliud felices domos onerat, relinquatur; non potest gratis constare libertas. Hanc si magno aestimas, omnia parvo aestimanda sunt. (Ep. 104.34)

But first of all we must reject pleasures; they weaken us, make us womanish and make great demands, and we in turn must then make great demands of fortune. Secondly, we must scorn wealth: it is the wages of slavery. Gold and silver and whatever else adorns our prosperous houses, must be abandoned; freedom cannot cost us nothing. If you value it highly, you must value all other things little.

Seneca does not go as far as saying that, in order to live a happy life one must confine oneself to a life of poverty. Conveniences need not be spurned entirely as they certainly have some positive value, but they should not be sought as if our happiness depends on them (Ep. 110.18; Holowchak 2008:161). It is simply a matter of training yourself to know when one has had one's fill (Holowchak 2008:161), and to know what is necessary (*necessarium*) and what is superfluous (*supervacuum*). "The things that are necessary will meet you everywhere; the things that are superfluous must constantly be searched for and with your whole mind" (*Necessaria tibi ubique occurrent; supervacua et semper et toto animo quaerenda sunt*; Ep. 110.11).

Seneca thus advises that instead of following convention and the lifestyle of our peers, we must learn to measure all things according to the demands of nature (Ep. 119.13; cf. 16.7; 25.4; 94.68; 123.6). What embracing a simpler lifestyle essentially means, Seneca sums up as follows:

Hanc ergo sanam ac salubrem formam vitae tenete, ut corpori tantum indulgeatis quantum bonae valetudini satis est. Durius tractandum est, ne animo male pareat. Cibus famem sedet, potio sitim exstinguat, vestis arceat frigus, domus munimentum sit adversus infesta corporis. (Ep. 8.5)

Therefore, hold on to this sound and wholesome plan of life, that you indulge the body only as much as is needed for good health. It needs to be treated rather harshly, so that it is not maliciously disobedient to your mind. Let food settle your hunger and let drink quench your thirst, let your clothing keep out the cold, and let your house be a defence against physical discomfort.

Seneca has often been charged with hypocrisy on the grounds of the apparent incongruity between his high moral standards and his own vast wealth (Lawless 1994:5; Sellars 2006:12-3). Towards the end of his life, however, after he retired from his political career, he gave up a large part of his wealth and returned many of the gifts he had received from Nero (Lawless 1994:5). And also, in spite of his vast wealth, he always endeavoured to lead a moderate life, something he had learnt from his teacher Attalus (Ep. 108.14). In Ep. 108.15-16 we read about his moderation when it came to eating and drinking. He, for example, did not eat mushrooms or oysters, or other things that were considered delicacies. Seneca also avoided luxuries such as perfumes or going to public baths (Ep. 108.16).

On the other hand, Seneca is also not afraid to admit his own shortcomings when it came to embracing a more modest lifestyle. In Ep. 87.4-5, for example, he describes travelling in a modest cart, one of many attempts to train himself to be content with a humble and simpler way of living, but he admits that he feels embarrassed to be seen by his peers (Edwards 1997:31).

#### **4.4.7 Anticipate Misfortune**

In times when things seem to be going well, a sudden advent of misfortune or merely the fear thereof poses a constant threat to our peace of mind and momentary feeling of contentment. In

order to prepare oneself for a sudden and unexpected turn of events and overcome fear of the future, Seneca recommends that one should practice anticipating all sorts of misfortunes (Ep. 24.2; 91.4; 98.7; 99.32; 107.4; Hadot 1969:60-1, 126-7; Sorabji 2000:235; Holowchak 2008:219).

This practice goes back to the Pre-Socratic philosophers, most famously to Anaxagoras, but also possibly to Antiphon and the Pythagoreans (Sorabji 2000:235). Anticipating misfortunes involves not only imagining that they *might* eventually happen but preparing oneself that they most certainly *will* happen (Ep. 99.32; Hadot 1969:61). Nothing should be unexpected to us:

Ideo nihil nobis improvisum esse debet. In omnia praemittendus animus cogitandumque non quidquid solet, sed quicquid potest fieri. (Ep. 91.4)

Therefore, nothing should be unexpected by us. The mind must be sent towards all things in advance and think on not whatever usually happens, but on whatever can happen.

Elsewhere, Seneca says that we should “foresee whatever can be foreseen by planning. Observe and avoid, whatever is harmful, long before it happens” (*Quidquid consilio prospici potest, prospice. Quodcumque laesurum est, multo ante quam accidat, speculare et averte*; Ep. 98.7; cf. 107.4).

One benefit of anticipating misfortune is thus that we are fortified and better prepared for when it comes (Sorabji 2000:278). But, what is more, it will also help us overcome our fear of misfortune. In Ep. 24 Seneca advises Lucilius, who is worried about the outcome of a lawsuit (cf. Hadot 1969:126-7):

si vis omnem sollicitudinem exuere, quicquid vereris ne eveniat, eventurum utique propone, et quodcumque est illud malum, tecum ipse metire ac timorem tuum taxa; intelleges profecto aut non magnum aut non longum esse, quod metuis. (Ep. 24.2)

If you want to cast off all worry, suppose that whatever you fear might happen, will most certainly happen and whatever that evil may be, measure it within yourself and estimate your fear; you will without question realize that what you fear is neither great, nor long-lasting.

Instead of suppressing our fear of future misfortune, Seneca thus recommends, we should make our worries concrete, asking ourselves what is the worst thing that could possibly happen and whether it is really worth fearing.

What seems to have been of particular interest to Seneca is the anticipation of death and overcoming one's fear thereof (Hadot 1969:129; Motto 1985:12). Seneca's preoccupation with death probably stems from the fact that he himself suffered from ill health throughout his life (Ep. 54.1-3, 6; 61.1; 65.1; 67.2; 78.1-4; 104.1) and that death was constantly on his mind (Ep. 49.9-10; 54.7; 61.4; 93.6; cf. Motto 1973:187).

Since death is the one aspect of human condition that is inescapable (Ep. 93.12; cf. 78.6), people should be prepared to meet it at any time (Ep. 26.7; cf. 4.9; 12.6; 30.16-7; 49.11; 63.15; 74.3; 93.1-2; 99.22; 101.1, 6-7):

Incertum est, quo loco te mors expectet; itaque tu illam omni loco expecta. (Ep. 26.7)

It is uncertain in which place death awaits you; therefore, *you* be ready to expect it in every place.

In several of his letters Seneca assures Lucilius that death is no evil (Ep. 30.6; 75.17; 82.9-16), that it is nothing to be feared (Ep. 4.3; 24.13; 36.12; 94.7; 120.18; cf. Rubin 1901:66) and that it is even foolish to fear it (Ep. 24.18; cf. Holowchak 2008:147). Death, says Seneca, is merely a state of non-existence exactly like the state we were in before we were born (Ep. 54.4-5) and, moreover, death is, in fact, something that happens every day (Ep. 1.2; 58.23; 120.18).

As mentioned above (section 4.3.2), Seneca concedes that it is most natural to fear death, since we are all born with a love for our own existence and self-preservation (Ep. 82.15; cf. Rozelaar 1976:447). Therefore, although we should know that death is something indifferent, it is not something that can easily be ignored (Ep. 36.8; 82.16; Rubin 1901:66; Hadot 1969:129; Holowchak 2008:146). Hence, "the soul must be hardened by great practice, so that it may endure its [i.e. death's] sight and approach" (*magna exercitatione durandus est animus, ut conspectum eius accessumque patiatur*; Ep. 82.16).

Again and again Seneca stresses the importance of thinking upon death (Ep. 26.8-10; 30.18; 70.17; 82.8; 101.7-8). In Ep. 30.18, he writes: “You, however, must always think on death so that you may never fear it” (*Tu tamen mortem ut numquam timeas, semper cogita.*).

Moreover, in Ep. 69.6, Seneca urges Lucilius to not only meditate on death but, if circumstances demand it, actually *invite* it (cf. Ep. 70.4). Seneca views the possibility of suicide as the ultimate pathway to freedom (Ep. 12.10; 26.10; 51.9; 70.14, 16; 77.14-5; cf. Rubin 1901:89-90; Motto 1985:12; Sorabji 2000:214; Holowchak 2008:87).

The Stoic view on suicide is generally a controversial issue but Seneca explains that a good life does not depend on how long we live, but on how correctly or virtuously we live (Ep. 49.10; 93.2; 101.15). A wise man will thus live as long as he *ought to*, not as long as he *can* (Ep. 70.4; cf. 65.22; Holowchak 2008:147). However, Seneca stresses that only those oppressed by severe circumstances – e.g. lack of bare necessities of life (Ep. 17.9), extreme weakness in old age (Ep. 30.2; 58.35) or if one suffers from an incurable disease (Ep. 58.36; 98.16) – can rightfully resort to ending their lives (Motto 1985:12; cf. Motto 1973:207). Sometimes, however, even if there are justified reasons for committing suicide, one should refrain from it, if the needs of one's friends or relatives require one to carry on living. In Ep. 78.2 Seneca describes how he himself had often entertained the thought of ending his life, but decided against it, for the sake of his father who might not have been able to bear the loss.

Circumstances that are in no way considered justifiable motives for suicide are fear of death (Ep. 24.23; 70.8), lust for death (Ep. 24.23) or mere boredom with life (Ep. 24.22, 24, 26) and people who commit suicide to escape the common ills of life or physical pain, are morally corrupt and weak; death under such circumstances is defeat<sup>39</sup> (Ep. 58.36; Motto 1973:207; Motto 1985:12; Holowchak 2008:149).

The general sentiment on suicide is, thus, that it is a sensible option, when the opportunities for living virtuously are severely diminished or quashed (Holowchak 2008:149) and refusing to take

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<sup>39</sup> “To die in such a way is to be defeated”; *sic mori vinci est.* (Ep.58.36)

one's life under such circumstances is in fact, according to Seneca, a sign of weakness of character and cowardice (Ep. 117.22-4; Rubin 1901:90).

#### 4.4.8 Live in the Now

[N]os et venturo torquemur et praeterito. Multa bona nostra nobis nocent, timoris enim tormentum memoria reducit, providentia anticipat. Nemo tantum praesentibus miser est. (Ep. 5.9)

We torture ourselves over what is to come as well as what has passed. Many of our goods harm us, for memory brings back the torture of fear, foresight anticipates it. No one is unhappy only by present events.

Seneca believes that much of our unhappiness is caused by spending too much time worrying about the future or holding on to past suffering, instead of living in the now. While Seneca recommends the anticipation of future misfortune for the sake of being better prepared for it when it happens (cf. section 4.4.7), he also warns Lucilius not to ruin the present by being unhappy already before the actual crisis comes (Ep. 13.5, 10; Ep. 24.1):

Quid enim necesse est mala accersere, satis cito patienda cum venerint, praesumere, ac praesens tempus futuri metu perdere? Est sine dubio stultum, quia quandoque sis futurus miser, esse iam miserum. (Ep. 24.1)

After all, why is it necessary to summon troubles which must be endured soon enough when they arrive, or to anticipate [them] and spoil the present time through fear of the future? It is without doubt foolish to be unhappy now because you might be unhappy sometime in the future.

The same applies to the recollection of past sufferings. There is no point in being unhappy, just because once you were unhappy<sup>40</sup> (Ep. 78.14).

Circumcidenda ergo duo sunt, et futuri timor et veteris incommodi memoria; hoc ad me iam non pertinent, illud nondum. (Ep. 78.14)

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<sup>40</sup> “What help is it to draw back past sufferings and be unhappy, because you [once] were?”; *Quid iuvat praeteritos dolores retractare et miserum esse, quia fueris?* (Ep. 78.14)

Therefore, two things must be removed: both the fear of future troubles, and the recollection of old troubles; the one is no longer relevant to me, the other not yet.

Closely coupled with fear of the future is hope of receiving something good from that direction; both are caused by the fact that we do not adapt ourselves to the present (Ep. 5.8). Just as we are not to fear the future, we are also not to pin our hopes on it and should in general avoid long-term planning, as the future is guaranteed to no one (Ep. 5.7; 101.10; Sorabji 2000:235; Holowchak 2008:183). Seneca, therefore recommends that we should focus all our energies on the present (Ep. 1.2) and live each day as if it were our last (Ep. 101.10; cf. Sorabji 2000:235).

The fleetingness of time is a theme already addressed in the very first letter and one to which Seneca repeatedly returns (Long 2006:371). As Seneca approaches the end of his life, he appears to be particularly preoccupied with this topic. Seneca says, time is the only thing that is truly ours (Ep. 1.3). We should therefore live in the now, make the best use of the time we have been given and not waste it by concerning ourselves too much with the future, or allowing ourselves to be tortured by the recollection of past suffering.

## 4.5 Summary

In this chapter it has been shown that Seneca stayed for the most part true to the core of traditional Stoic doctrines regarding the definition as well as the attainment of the *telos*. In his *Epistulae Morales* he explains that happiness, which is the final end (*telos*) and highest good (*summum bonum*) for all mankind, can be found in living according to nature which comes down to developing one's reason to a point of perfection and it is the same as living according to virtue. For the attainment of this goal Seneca especially advises the study and practice of philosophy, especially ethics, since it teaches people the correct conduct of living. The Stoics divided ethics into three sections, one dealing with the value of things, the second with impulses, and the third with actions. Seneca's treatment of these three sections (though it lacks some detail) also corresponds to the orthodox Stoic account.



The final section of this chapter is a discussion of some requirements and recommendations Seneca presents in his letters on how this theoretical knowledge might be applied in practice. According to him, what is essential to anyone wanting to attain a happy life is the continuous engagement in philosophy and the ability to recognize one's faults and a willingness to change them. Seneca also recommends that one must find a moral advisor that can act as a guardian and role model. Next he says, one must live like someone is watching at all times, and also protect oneself from bad influences. Another advice Seneca offers is that one should embrace a simple life-style and at times even practice poverty in order to have more time to study philosophy, and so that one may be better prepared for actual poverty and also eliminate one's fear thereof. Another recommendation Seneca gives for the elimination of the fear of future misfortunes is to anticipate the worst. And lastly, he encourages his reader to live in the present and not waste any time by letting oneself being upset by the recollection of past sufferings or the fear of future sufferings.

This is by no means a complete list of the advice Seneca has to offer in the *Epistulae Morales*, but merely a collection of some significant recurring themes found throughout these letters. The informal and conversational style of his admonitions is an effective way to transfer knowledge and to inspire his reader to apply these in real life. Moreover, the timelessness of the issues he addresses makes Seneca's letters extremely valuable even to this day.

## Conclusion

This study investigated how Seneca presents the Stoic *telos* (i.e. happiness) and the requirements to attain it in his *Epistulae Morales* and sought to show that he managed to make this *telos*, which is often accused of being too rigid and idealistic to be attained in practice, more accessible without compromising orthodox Stoic teachings. Although there is already a large amount of secondary literature available on Seneca's treatment of Stoic ethics as well as the *Epistulae Morales*, there has not yet been such a structured investigation of the Stoic *telos* in Seneca's letters and the advice he offers with a view on getting closer to living a happy life. The objective of this study is then to contribute towards the existing collection of literature regarding Stoic ethics in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*.

Before proceeding to the analysis of Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* in Chapter 4, I provided a brief historical overview of the Stoic school as a whole (Chapter 1) and then took a closer look at the traditional Stoic teachings regarding the definition of the *telos* (Chapter 2) and the theoretical framework the Stoics drew up for the attainment thereof (Chapter 3).

From insight gained by the research presented in these chapters, I was able to judge the orthodoxy of Seneca's own presentation of the Stoic *telos* and ethical theory in his *Epistulae Morales*. The detailed analysis of Seneca's letters in the last section allowed me to come to the conclusion that he in essence stayed true to the fundamental Stoic doctrines regarding the definition as well as the attainment of the *telos*. It has also been argued that Seneca's main intent was not to expound specific philosophical doctrines, but to present the Stoic view of life in a way that would also appeal to ordinary people. And so, what was most important to him was that the knowledge gained from studying philosophy could be applied in practice and would help people to get closer to living a happy life. The final section of the chapter discusses some of the practical advice Seneca has to offer and it is argued that by the informal and conversational style of his admonitions he successfully managed to make Stoic philosophy more personal and humane and inspire his reader to want to apply his advice in real life.

Due to the universality and modernity of the issues addressed in these letters, the findings that have been made in this thesis, especially with regards to the practical advice Seneca offers (cf. Chapter 4), should be valuable to anyone living today. It is as though Seneca himself was already aware of the timelessness of his ideas and was confident to gain immortal fame, when he said, “I will find favour among later generations” (*habebo apud posteros gratiam*; Ep. 21.5; cf. 79.17).

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