Ethics of Moral Luck

A Modern Perspective on Aristotle and Epictetus

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I hereby declare and assure that I, Mauritz Kleyn have drafted this thesis independently, that no other sources and/or means other than those mentioned have been used and that the passages of which the text content or meaning originates in other works - including electronic media - have been identified and the sources clearly stated.[1]

Signed by Mauritz Kleyn: _____~Maurit Kleyn~_____, on 21 October 2020 in Nijmegen

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[1] The picture of the painting on the cover is called: *Soldiers Gambling with Dice* and is painted by Pieter Janz Quast (Kren and Marx 1996).

Précis

Who we are is largely a matter of luck since we cannot influence our genetic predispositions, who our parents are, and where and with whom we will grow up. These factors, however, do have a tremendous influence on who we are and how we behave. Therefore, luck is of great influence on our character. This raises the question to what extent is a virtuous character a matter of moral luck? The current study aims to answer this question, using the works of Aristotle, Epictetus and recent findings from the field of evolutionary psychology.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Moral luck

Bernard Williams introduced the term moral luck. This term refers to the case when an agent receives moral praise or blame for an action, even though the agent was not (fully) responsible for the action or the consequences of the action (Williams 1983). The problem with moral luck is that two persons can act in more or less the same way, but the consequences of their actions can be very different. Think for instance about two persons (A and B) who go out in public (both meet the same amount of people) even though this is strongly discouraged by the government, as their country is in a state of crisis due to the spread of a highly contagious virus.

Person A goes out anyway and returns home without being contaminated and therefore does not contaminate other people. Person B goes outside as well but gets contaminated, and back home contaminates a few of his family members who become severely ill. The actions of person A and B were not different, but the consequences of their actions differ greatly. The consequences of their actions depend highly on external factors which were not under their control. Even when we take this under consideration, person B will probably receive more moral blame than person A, but this is strictly speaking not fair since both their actions were the same (Wit 1997) and both should receive the same amount of moral blame.

The described situation above exemplifies a form of moral luck which Thomas Nagel would call (1) resultant or consequential moral luck. This case of moral luck concerns the consequences of certain behaviour. In the above-mentioned example, the consequences of the behaviour of person B are much worse than those of person A, even though their behaviour was the same (Nelkin 2019). Nagel also introduces (2) circumstantial moral luck. In this case the surroundings of a person are not under control. He exemplifies this by stating that if a German man would have moved from Germany in the 1930s, he most likely would not have ended up sympathising with the Nazi ideology and have become a soldier in its army. If he had moved, he could not be morally blamed, whereas in the case in which he stayed and grew sympathy for the Nazis, he can be blamed morally (Russell 2013, 38). Thirdly, Nagel introduces (3) constitutive luck. This luck considers someone's personality or character. Who we are is largely a matter of luck since we cannot influence our genetic predispositions, who our parents are, and where and with whom we will grow up. These factors, however, do have a tremendous influence on who we are and how we behave. Therefore, luck is of great influence on who we are (Nelkin 2019). Lastly, he introduces (4) causal luck. Essentially, this is the classic problem of free will, which is that we do not have free will because everything is determined by antecedent

circumstances. Following from this, we are not free and we do not have moral responsibility (Nelkin 2019).

Taking the above into account and following the works of Williams and Nagel on moral luck, we can state that people are only responsible for their actions if they control the circumstances. Therefore, we can say that moral luck describes the conflict between luck and responsibility (Linn 2017, 14–16). This problem is known as Nagel's paradox (Hiller 2016). The origins of the word luck (*tuchê*) that I am referring to here can be traced back to ancient Greece. There the word was used to refer to chance, like something is the product of mere chance (Lüthy and Palmerino 2016, 18). Many things fall outside of our control and are therefore the product of chance or *tuchê*.

1.2 Character

As we have seen in the example of constitutive luck, provided by Nagel (Nelkin 2019), this is also the case for our character, since character also falls outside of our control. If, however, character is highly dependent on moral luck, it is impossible to hold someone responsible for crimes. Then it is simply the case that someone has bad luck (*tuchê*) for having a bad character and vice versa for someone with a good character. However, this is not in line with our desire and custom to hold people accountable for their behaviour, resulting from their character. This raises the following problem: character is formed by all kinds of factors that are beyond our control, yet we are held responsible for our actions. That is a contradiction and I will examine this problem on the basis of the following research question: to what extent is a virtuous character a matter of moral luck?

In order to unravel this problem and answer the research question, I will look at Aristotelian ethics and Stoic ethics, with a primary focus on the works of Epictetus. These ethical systems are interesting because character formation is an important theme in Aristotelian and Stoic ethics, and both want to control luck (*tuchê*). They aim to do this by regarding happiness or 'living the good life' not as being dependent on external circumstances, but mainly on an excellent or virtuous character.

In the case of Aristotle, however, this statement should be nuanced. Aristotle does claim that external goods also play a role in having a happy life (Aristotle 2009, 1099a, 31–1099b, 5), whereas for the Stoic Epictetus, only an excellent (virtuous) character is of value. The implication of Aristotle's position is that the issue of moral luck plays at an additional level, for how morally lucky will one have to be to acquire the external goods deemed necessary for a happy life? As mentioned before, however, in this thesis I will focus on the question of moral

luck with respect to the quality of character necessary for a happy life: to what extent is having such a character the outcome of moral luck? Before we continue with the line of research, it is important to properly explain the term 'happiness'.

When Aristotle (384 – 322 BC) and Epictetus (c. 50 – 135 AD) speak about happiness, they refer to living the good life. In ancient Greece, this is referred to with the term *eudaimonia* (*εὐδαιμονία*). Etymologically speaking, the word *eudaimonia* is a combination of the words "*eu*", which translates as good and "*daimon*", which translates as spirit. Therefore, the word refers to something like having a good spirit, or 'favored by the gods' and is often translated as welfare or happiness (Cleemput 2006). But what does Aristotle mean by that?

It is clear that Aristotle relates happiness to displaying an excellent character in behaviour and feelings: doing the right thing in any situation (Aristotle 2009, 1106b20-25).[2] He devotes the first nine books of the Ethica Nicomachea to explaining what he means by an excellent character and what the excellences, or virtues, of character are. In book 10, however, Aristotle introduces contemplation (*theôria*) as the highest excellence. This tension in Aristotle's views has resulted in different interpretations. On the one hand we see intellectualists who claim that *eudaimonia* is best characterized by contemplation and nothing else (Cleemput 2006, 127; Depew 1993, 127). On the other hand, we see inclusivists who claim that theoretical contemplation must be accompanied by the so-called character virtues. Only then, a person can reach *eudaimonia* (Cleemput 2006, 127; Depew 1993, 127–28). In any case, to me it is clear that excellence of character plays a major role in Aristotle's conception of *eudaimonia*. In order to have a happy life one has to *do* something.

By making character pivotal for *eudaimonia*, Aristotle and the Stoics diminished the role of luck (*tuchê*). According to Aristotle and Epictetus, one forms a good character on the basis of reason. However, as we have seen in the work of Nagel, character also depends on constitutive moral luck. Therefore, unwittingly, the theories of Aristotle and Epictetus might still be exposed to the influence of moral luck.

The previous might give rise to the idea that Aristotle and Epictetus explicitly speak about moral luck. This is however not the case. Williams and Nagel introduced this topic in the eighties of the twentieth century. Therefore, the investigation of the topic will be aimed at descriptions which approach the concept of moral luck. These descriptions can be found in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and his *Politics* and in Epictetus' *Encheiridion* and his *Discourses*. In this order, these topics will be discussed in the first and second chapter. After

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[2] Unless otherwise stated, all translations of the *Nicomachean Ethics* are from (Aristotle 2009).

these historical investigations, a leap towards the present will be made. In the third chapter, I will investigate whether the findings of Aristotle and Epictetus are supported by contemporary scientific findings, especially from the fields of evolutionary and social psychology.[3] Finally, the study will draw a conclusion to what extent a virtuous character is a matter of moral luck, based on the findings from the works of Aristotle and Epictetus, and on the perspectives of contemporary psychology.

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[3] When I refer to psychology in this study, I specifically refer to evolutionary and social psychology. The field of psychology is of course much wider than this. However, the findings, most relevant for the current study come from these two sub-fields.

2. Explanation of character formation from Aristotelian ethics

2.1 How to achieve a virtuous character, according to Aristotle

As we have seen in the introduction, according to Aristotle, one forms a good or virtuous character on the basis of reason. To gain a better understanding of this idea, we have to further investigate what Aristotle means by a virtuous character. For this, we have to turn to his *Nicomachean Ethics*. The main aim of this book is to investigate the human good, since this is the topic of ethics. Here, the concept of *eudaimonia* is important because:

> Verbally there is very general agreement; for both the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that happiness is the highest of all goods. (Aristotle 2009, 1095a15-20)

What happiness is, however, is not clear. One could propose a life full of sensual pleasures, political achievement, intellectual contemplation or being wealthy. The first three remain to be contenders after Aristotle swiftly points out that being wealthy is not a highest good in itself, because money is only used to get to things; therefore, money is only a means, not an end (Aristotle 2009, 7 1096a6-7). The first two proponents do not stay on much longer either, since living a life to merely satisfy sensual pleasures is not worthy of men,[4] and political achievement is also too superficial because this is mainly based on honour which one can easily receive or loose. Therefore, honour depends on others, whereas happiness does not. Happiness is not easily received or taken away (Aristotle 2009, 1095b5-30) and is always a goal for itself. Aristotle states it clearly in the following manner:

> Now such a thing happiness, above all else, is held to be; for this we choose always for itself and never for the sake of something else, but honour, pleasure, reason, and every virtue we choose indeed for themselves (for if nothing resulted from them we should still choose each of them), but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, judging that through them we shall be happy. (Aristotle 2009, 1097b8-10)

Therefore, happiness is the end goal in life and, according to Aristotle, this can be achieved through intellectual contemplation and character virtues. This brings us a little closer to

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[4] For Aristotle, reason is a purely human endeavour, a more nuanced perspective will be given in chapter 3 of this study.

understanding how a virtuous character can be formed. As is well-known, Aristotle has argued that happiness has to do with intellectual contemplation, and it belongs to oneself (Cleemput 2006, 128–29; Moran 2018). Aristotle continues by arguing that happiness must be an activity. This can best be understood by using Aristotle's function argument. In this argument he states that man has a peculiar function, something that sets man aside from other lifeforms. The idea is that every lifeform has its own specific function and Aristotle tries to find the specific human function (Kraut 1979, 467; Scaltsas 2019, 45; Whiting 1988, 33). He states that many species share characteristics like the need for nutrition, growing, perceiving and moving around, but there is one thing only humans have (Aristotle 2009, 1097b5-30):

> What than can this be? Life seems to belong even to plants, but we are seeking what is peculiar to man. Let us exclude therefore, the life of nutrition and growth. Next there would be a live of perception, but *it* also seems to be shared by the horse, the ox and every animal. There remains, then, an active life of the element that has reason; of this, one part has it in the sense of being obedient to reason, the other in the sense of possessing reason and exercising thought. (Aristotle 2009, 1097b30-1098a5)

According to Aristotle, it is reason which sets men apart from the other lifeforms; therefore, this is where we must find the human function. Function refers to the idea that every living organism has a peculiar 'job' or function. He argues this because much of his work was also oriented toward the natural sciences, including biology. In these works, he found that every living organism has its own function (Brown 2009, xi; Kenny 2006, Volume 1:60–61; M. D. Walker 2018, 21). Since it is reason which distinguishes the human kind, the function of men must be found in their ability to use reason (Aristotle 2009, 1098a5-30; M. D. Walker 2018, 21; Whiting 1988, 33–35).

2.2 Function argument

The next step in his arguing about virtuous character formation is to bring together the function, being rational, with virtue. Every being has a function, and it should perform it to the best of its ability. Man's function is to think. What does it mean if you practice this as best you can? How do you develop optimally as a person? Where is the excellence? In fact, in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle gives two answers, and as we have seen in the introduction,[5] there is a tension

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[5] See page seven.

between these two approaches. The first approach is known as the intellectualist approach and according to this interpretation, human excellence lies in good character (Cleemput 2006, 127; Depew 1993, 127). The first nine books of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* support this interpretation.

In book X.7, however, Aristotle states that we can only become happy if we behave like reasonable animals. Only then do we distinguish ourselves from the other animals and fulfill our function as humans (Cleemput 2006, 128). So, *eudaimonia* arises from contemplation, or philosophical wisdom (Aristotle 2009, 1177a10-30). The strange thing is that Aristotle only says this in Book X, while in Book I-IX he explains that practical wisdom is the most important, and in these chapters he teaches us how practical wisdom can be gained (Kraut 2018).

Thus, among modern Aristotle scholars, there are two groups. One group follows Aristotle's tenth book and comes with an intellectualistic explanation: the ultimate human virtue stems from a purely intellectualistic existence (Cleemput 2006, 127; Depew 1993, 127). The other group argues that pure contemplation must go hand in hand with pragmatic wisdom. This second group is known as the inclusivists, who argue that moral virtues are essential to a happy life (Cleemput 2006, 127; Depew 1993, 127). After all, man is a political being (Aristotle 2012b, 1253; Linn 2017, 8; Mulgan 1974, 438) and for that reason man must cultivate moral virtues in order to live a happy political life. This can only be achieved within a just and lawful political society (Aristotle 2012b, I.2, 1253a32-34).

Moral virtues are then cultivated only when a person has practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is thus crucial for cultivating moral virtues and thus for the attainment of *eudaimonia*, and it is achieved through habit and practice (Aristotle 2009, 1103b30-35). To understand this, we have to look into the translation of the Greek word for virtue, *areté,* which means excellence of any kind (Aristotle 2012a, 1389a33-35; Brown 2009, xii). Think for example of a guitar player: her function is to play the guitar, and if she is good at it, she is a good or virtuous guitar player (Whiting 1988, 33). In this line of reasoning, we can also investigate what it means to have a virtuous character and how one can reach happiness.

Among other things, Aristotle explains this in the part about *division of the soul, and resultant division of virtue into intellectual and moral* of the *Nicomachean ethics* (Aristotle 2009, 1102a5-35). Here he states that happiness is a state of soul in accordance with perfect virtue. With soul, Aristotle refers to 'life', 'that a being is alive' and not to the concept of 'the soul' as might come to mind from religious tradition (Brown 2009, xiii). He distinguishes two parts of the soul: one part is rational and the other part is irrational (Aristotle 2009, 1102b5-35). The first part consists fully of reason whereas the part of the soul which is irrational is aimed at

fulfilling appetites (Linn 2017, 64). Herein it is, however, still responsive to reason, since reason urges people towards the best options available, but it is not aimed at reason itself (Aristotle 2009, 1102b–3).

2.3 Moral virtues

To gain a better understanding of this division, for now, we will focus on the character, or moral virtues. The moral virtues are the excellent habits of the soul and are thus aimed at fulfilling appetites. Here the role of rationality becomes clear, because it is through rationality that man can be virtuous. After all, if a person were simply to pursue every lust, that person would not behave according to the function of man, that is, behave according to reason. In that case, that person would not strive for excellence of any sort, would not be virtuous and therefore would not be a good person.

According to Aristotle, a good person is someone who uses reason in the most effective manner. As we have seen in the previous paragraph, this can mean that someone must be fully aimed at living a contemplating life or that someone lives a life in which the cultivation of pragmatic wisdom is central (Cleemput 2006, 127; Depew 1993, 127). Since Aristotle is not here anymore, we can never clear his contradictions and we will never learn his true intentions. However, what we can do, is follow his footsteps and use as much of his knowledge as possible.

In any case, we know that according to Aristotle, reason is important in order to reach *eudaimonia*. There are many indicators which show us that Aristotle was not blind for the pragmatic part of life (Whitaker 2014). This might indicate that a virtuous human uses reason in any situation and is through the use of reason capable of doing what is right, over and over again. Being a virtuous human is therefore something that one becomes by doing it repeatedly and something that one does repeatedly. Excellence then, is not an act but a habit (Durant 2012, 87). It is only through the development of the skill to use reason in the most effective way, that one can reach eudemonia.

But what does it mean to precisely do what is right? It would not be virtuous of a person to fully engage in the persuasion of lust. However, it would also not be virtuous if this person shut himself off from any persuasion of lust. This ascetic attitude would not do justice to the functionality of humans, because we have seen earlier that humans, like other species, also need nutrition, must grow and reproduce, perceive and move around. These matters also belong to the function of man and must be performed in order to live as a good person. The foregoing brings us to one of the most famous ideas of Aristotle, namely the doctrine of the golden mean.

This is the idea that a person should do things just right, not too much and not too little. Aristotle himself describes it like this:

> For in everything it is no easy task to find the middle, e.g. to find the middle of a circle is not for everyone but for him who knows; so, too, anyone can get angry -that is easy- or give or spend money; but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, that is not for everyone, nor is it easy; wherefore goodness is both rare and laudable and noble. (Aristotle 2009, 1109, 25–30)

The doctrine of the golden mean shows us that one should choose the middle of two things, not too much and not too little. This requires practical wisdom and virtues. Important in the practice of the golden mean is reflection. One should be able to reflect on one's actions so one can enjoy the pleasures of life in the appropriate measure. The appropriate measure can be achieved in virtue. Think for instance about an all-you-can-eat restaurant. A person in this restaurant could eat all he wants, but he also could just eat what he needs. This person can react to this in three ways. Firstly, he can exactly eat what he wants and needs, with reflection but without any feeling of conflict. Secondly, he can also eat, but measure it precisely; in this example, he is continent or self-controlled, but not virtuous. Thirdly, he can simply eat all that his bodily sensations tell him to eat; in this example, he completely lacks self-control and he can be deemed incontinent (Brown 2009, xv). Acting according to the appropriate measure is virtuous, but acts which involve excess or deficiencies can be called vices (Aristotle 2009, 1106a2-6)

The previous example clarifies that having a virtuous character is something one has to practice, and this does not happen overnight; one has to act in order to gain moral virtue or excellence of character. In order to understand this properly, we have to distinguish virtues from passions. Aristotle explains it in the following manner:

> Now neither the virtues nor the vices are *passions*, because we are not called good or bad on the ground of our passions, but we are so called on the ground of our virtues and our vices, and because we are neither praised nor blamed for our passions (for the man who feels fear or anger is not praised, nor is the man who simply feels anger blamed, but the man who feels it in a certain way), but for our virtues and our vices we *are* praised or blamed. (Aristotle 2009, 1105b29-35)

In this, virtues and vices differ from capacities, which we have by nature; therefore, they cannot be deemed good or bad (Aristotle 2009, 1106a7). So, we have capacities by nature, but we are not made good or bad by nature. Since virtues are neither passions nor capacities, they must be states of character (Aristotle 2009, 1106a12). This must be the case, because virtues are shaped by practice, as we have seen before, and practicing behaviour makes it part of who we are, of our character. Now that we have gained a better understanding of the moral virtues, we shall focus on the virtues of the intellect.

An important concept with regard to the virtues of the intellect is *phronèsis*, a Greek word translated as practical wisdom (Linn 2017, 70–71). There are multiple virtues of the intellect. To properly understand these, Aristotle divides the intellectual virtues into theoretical and practical virtues. The theoretical virtues can be divided in scientific knowledge and intuitive reason (Aristotle 2009, 1141a5-35). The practical virtues can be divided into art, which refers to the knowledge how to make things, and 'doing', which is only aimed at the 'doing' and not at anything beyond it (Aristotle 2009, 1141a5-35). The intellectual virtue which corresponds to 'doing' is *Phronèsis*. It is however always in connection with the moral virtues. We could see *phronèsis* as a kind of bridge between the intellectual and the moral virtues (Linn 2017, 71). Following this, a virtuous character, or happiness, can only be achieved by the use of reason.

<center>2.4 How does Aristotle explain moral luck?</center>

As we have seen, happiness, or *eudaimonia*, in its most perfect form, can only be achieved through reason and contemplation, but the secondary form of happiness can be achieved in practice (Keyt 1978, 1) and the definition of happiness is that it is a virtuous activity of soul, of a certain kind (Aristotle 2009, 1099b1-5). However, the question remains how much *tuchê* one needs to gain a good character. Are we in control of perfecting our character, or is that also a matter of luck, like being well born, good looks and wealth? Therefore, it is important to investigate the nature of virtues:

> For this reason, also the question is asked, whether happiness is to be acquired by learning or by habituation or some other sort of training or comes in virtue of some divine providence or again by chance. Now if there is any gift of the gods to men, it is reasonable that happiness should be god-given, and most surely god-given of all human things inasmuch as it is the best. But this question would perhaps be more appropriate to another inquiry; happiness seems, however, even if it is not god-sent but comes as a result of virtue and some process of learning or training, to be among the most godlike

things; for that which is the prize and end of virtue seems to be the best thing in the world, and something godlike and blessed. It will also on this view be very generally shared; for all who are not maimed as regards their potentiality for virtue may win it by a certain kind of study and care. But if it is better to be happy thus than by chance, it is reasonable that the facts should be so, since everything that depends on the action of nature is by nature as good as it can be, and similarly everything that depends on art or any rational cause, and especially if it depends on the best of all causes. To entrust to chance what is greatest and most noble would be a very defective arrangement. (Aristotle 2009, 1099b, 7–25)

It is however not that simple for Aristotle. For the most part, happiness might depend on human action, as we have seen before, but this is not the entire picture (Strzyżyński 2017, 121), as he clarifies in the following passage:

evidently, as we said, it (*happiness*)[6] needs the external goods as well; for it is impossible, or not easy, to do noble acts without the proper equipment. In many actions we use friends and riches and political power as instruments; and there are some things the lack of which takes the lustre from happiness, as good birth, goodly children, beauty; for the man who is very ugly in appearance or ill-born or solitary and childless is not very likely to be happy, and perhaps a man would be still less likely if he had thoroughly bad children or friends or had lost good children or friends by death. As we said, then, happiness seems to need this sort of prosperity in addition. (Aristotle 2009, 1099a, 31–1099b, 5)

In the words of Aristotle, happiness cannot be achieved by everybody. He is actually quite distinctive in pointing out who can reach *eudaimonia*, as we have seen in the previous passage. Another clue can be found when he states that young boys cannot be happy yet, since they are not yet capable of such acts (Aristotle 2009, 1099b5-35). And another indication can be found in the fact that his philosophical teachings were aimed at well-brought-up men (Brown 2009, xiii). So, according to Aristotle, in order to achieve *eudaimonia* and a virtuous character, you have to be a fairly rich, free[7], beautiful and well-brought-up man (Dekkers, Uerz, and Wils 2005, 487). In the eyes of Aristotle, happiness is only there for the lucky few.

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[6] My clarification.
[7] Free, because slavery was a large part of Aristotle's world.

So, a virtuous character is developed through reason and continuous practice of the good. For Aristotle, however, the ability to develop a virtuous character also depends on certain external goods, such as friendship, wealth and a good upbringing (Aristotle 2009, 1101a5-35) which depend on luck (Aristotle 2009, 1099b1-5). Besides that, the ability to be reasonable also depends on luck, since this banks on one's rational capacities, which are formed on the basis of one's genetic predisposition (Posthuma et al. 2002). This shows that multiple factors which we need to reach *eudaimonia* lie outside of our control, as we have seen in the case of constitutive luck. Even so, Aristotle claims that our ability and responsibility to reach *eudaimonia* is not under the influence of luck (Aristotle 2009, 1099b5-30).

Here we seem to have stumbled upon a contradiction in the work of Aristotle. The problem Aristotle has faced is that he believes it is our own responsibility to develop *eudaimonia*. However, this is only possible if we are lucky enough that our circumstances make it possible to take this responsibility. In Aristotle's philosophy, therefore, only a few people can develop *eudaimonia*, as according to his philosophy one also needs external goods to build up a virtuous character. In the next chapter we will see a different approach to building a virtuous character.

3. Explanation of character formation from Epictetus' ethics

3.1 Who was Epictetus?

In the previous chapter, we saw that according to Aristotle, acquiring a virtuous character is highly dependent on rationality. In addition, someone must also be lucky. You must have at least been born a man in a relatively wealthy family. This makes the probability of developing a virtuous character very small. However, the philosophy of the Stoics offer hope here, because of two reasons.

First of all, Stoic philosophy is a philosophy for everyone. It is famously represented by the emperor Marcus Aurelius, but also by slaves. A great example of a Stoic philosopher born as a slave is Epictetus. An inscription in Pisidia, in modern day Turkey, speaks of him with great respect. The inscription states the following: 'The stranger, Epictetus was born of a slave girl as a mother, an eagle among men, a spirit renowned for his wisdom. What am I supposed to say about him? He was divine. Everyone prays that such a man will be born again from a slave girl, for the benefit and joy of the people.' Besides being an inspirational person, he is also known for his contributions as a moral philosopher[8] (Kenny 2006, Volume 1:89). This brings us to the second reason why Stoic philosophy gives hope to make the virtuous character available for everyone, namely that his moral terminology largely corresponds with Aristotle's.

In general, the stoic philosophy is aimed at three topics: logic, ethics, and physics. Zeno, the founder of the Stoic school, said that logic is like the bones of the stoic philosophy, ethics the flesh and physics the soul (Kenny 2006, Volume 1:80). As you may expect from the previous, in this study, the main focus will be on the 'flesh' or the ethics of Epictetus' work. His moral philosophy can be read in two works. The smaller of the two is called *Enchiridion* (Epictetus 1983) and is a kind of small handbook in which the most important topics of his philosophy are briefly presented. The larger of the two books is the *Discourses*, which is where most of Epictetus' Stoic philosophy can be found (Epictetus 2011, 14).

3.2 How to achieve a virtuous character according to Epictetus

In his *Discourses* he explains how one can achieve a virtuous character. In his teachings on how one can become virtuous we find the first similarity with the Aristotle's virtue ethics. Although, concerning the work of Aristotle there is discussion on how to interpret his ethics, since it can be seen as a form of ethics which is purely based on contemplation (Aristotle 2009, 1077a5-

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[8] Besides Epictetus, both Seneca and Marcus Aurelius are also famous Stoic philosophers who are especially known for their contributions to moral philosophy (Kenny 2006, Volume 1:89)

35), but it can also be seen as a form of ethics in which practical wisdom is the most important goal (Keyt 1978, 1). In the works of Epictetus there is no room for such doubt. His ethics are fully intertwined with everyday life and from the beginning, students are taught how to deeply internalize the principles of Stoicism (Hadot 2010, 210–15). The new teachings should become part of one's character and that means that old characteristics must make place for new ones, the entire belief, motivational and pragmatic system of a person must be reorganized (Hadot 2010, 210–15).

This requires students to perform spiritual practices. These are, for example, listening, reading and research practices, comparable to contemporary philosophy students (Hadot 1995, 81–82). In addition to these intellectual exercises, students were also subjected to fasting and other forms of physical exercise. The point here is that students receive therapy in which they learn to deal with their passions (Hadot 1995, 83, 86, 94–95). It's about students learning to change their perceptions of the world. The students should cultivate an objective mind so that they learn to see that certain things are *sub specie aeternitatis*[9] (Hadot 1995, 95–1010). The idea is that these exercises appeal to the whole person, both the psychological and physical aspects of a human being (Hadot 1995, 85).

3.3 Eudaimonia

The main aim of his Stoic philosophy shows the second similarity with Aristotle: one has to strive for *eudaimonia*, or to live like a philosopher, to be a lover of wisdom.[10] The way to *eudaimonia* is through reason, which means to live virtuously and in correspondence with nature (Epictetus 2011, 42; Ketih. H. Seddon 2020). Here the reference to the idea of *sub specie aeternitatis* (Hadot 1995, 95–1010) is relevant again because Epictetus teaches people to live up to their nature. According to the Stoic philosophers, the character of a person is already part of someone, it only needs to be cultivated properly (Long 2004, 27).

This becomes clear through the words of Chrysippus[11] when he gives us the following analogy: the disposition of one's character greatly influences the way in which people act. It is like a cylinder. In order to move, the cylinder needs an external push, but when it moves, it can only move according to its internal form, c.q. rolling. Therefore, the movement of the cylinder

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[9] *Sub specie aeternitatis* refers it the Latin phrase for 'under the aspect of eternity.' It refers to the idea of objective truth, taking into account the entire picture (Landau 2011).

[10] As is well known, the word philosophy comes from the Greek words *philo*, which means something like 'love for' and *sophia*, which means wisdom.

[11] Chrysippus of Soli c. 279 – c. 206 BC) was a Greek philosopher and his work contributed greatly to the success of Stoic philosophy during the Hellenistic period (Kirby 2020; Laertius 2018, 207).

depends on both the external push, as the internal characteristics (cylinder shaped) (Sellars 2006, 35–36). We can use this image to gain a better understanding of the human character. Since the Stoic philosophers are determinists (Long 2004, 22; Sellars 2006, 103), we can say that who we are is already determined by nature, it is internal to a person, as is the form of the cylinder. In that way, living up to one's nature means to learn what this is and to accept it. In order to do this, it is important to realise that we are rational animals (Long 2004, 22)

Because people are rational animals, it is possible for them to do what is best under certain circumstances, following the optimal possibilities of reasoning (Long 2004, 22; Sellars 2006, 127). It is only through this, that one can reach *eudaimonia*, since eudaimonia can only be reached in accepting the things that happen as part of a cosmic plan (Long 2004, 22). This is the case, because it is impossible, according to Stoic philosophy, to influence things which are not under our control. To understand this, we have to delve deeper into his work and learn about how one lives in correspondence with nature.

3.4 Living in correspondence with nature

According to Epictetus, we should only focus on that which we can actually influence, which falls within our reach. This is our ability to handle impressions correctly (Epictetus 2011, 42). That is the only thing we can influence, all other things are given from nature and we cannot influence them, so we should not try to. This becomes clear in the following quote:

> What do we have to do with the wind? When will the west wind blow again? When it suits him, or Aeolus. For it is not you who have appointed God as ruler of the winds, but Aeolus. What follows from that? We must do what is in our power as best we can, and deal with the conditions as they are. And what are those conditions like? The way God wants them. (Epictetus 2011, 43)

It becomes clear that according to Stoic ethics, one should live according to nature, and as we have seen before, this comes through living rationally.

To live rationally means to be perfectly aware of what falls within your power. It entails two things. First of all, one has to live according to one's rational nature. The more a person does this, the less she/he will suffer from emotional disturbances. If a person lives up to her/his rational nature by analysing judgements and making sure that impressions are interpreted well, she/he will live a more independent and happy life (Sellars 2006, 127). Secondly, living up to one's rationality entails to understand that nature is a whole, that within nature, everything is

connected. As a Stoic, one should realize that we are not isolated units, but everything in the cosmos is connected as a systematic whole (Sellars 2006, 127).

As stated before, a person should be able to correctly interpret impressions (*phantasiai*). These impressions can come from our surrounding world or from within (Sellars 2006, 65). An example of something that comes from the world which surrounds us is rain. We can judge whether it rains or not, with a simple yes or no. When an impression comes from within, we can, for instance, think of our judgement of how we feel about the rain (I don't like it when it rains) (Epictetus 2011, 36). This example immediately makes clear how we, according to Epictetus, correctly interpret impressions. To confirm that it rains when it rains, is a good interpretation of the impression that it rains. This is the case because it is only a conformation or denial of a proposition (Sellars 2006, 65).

To think that I do not like it that it's raining is not a good interpretation of the impression that it rains, because a Sophos (Stoic wise person) should not judge something which is not in its power (Long 2004, 133). It simply does not matter if it rains or not and a Sophos should not be concerned with this because it is not in her/his power to change it. To understand this, is to use one's ability to reason. Only through reason can one achieve eudaimonia.

Therefore, a person should always aim to live according to her/his own judgement. One should never rely on money, a reputation or a high social status, but always on one's views on what is and what is not in our power (Epictetus 2011, 254). Only when a person truly accepts her/his fate and is not a slave of emotions and passions she/he is truly free, only then, one has reached *eudaimonia* (Long 2004, 110). Here we see a difference with Aristotelian virtue ethics, because for Aristotle, a person needs to rely on money, a reputation or a social status in order to reach *eudaimonia*. It becomes clear that it might not be easy to become a virtuous person through Stoic philosophy, but with practice and hard work, it is achievable for every rational human being.

3.5 Freedom

Rationality can also lead to freedom, which becomes clear in the following statement:

> Take a look at how we use the term 'freedom' in relation to animals. They confine tame lions in a cage and raise them, feed them, and some even walk around with them. Who will claim that the lion is free? The easier his life is, the more he is a slave? Which lion would like to be one of those lions if he has the ability to perceive and reason? (Epictetus 2011, 257)

Epictetus seems to claim that in order to be free, one has to perceive the world as it is, and one has to accept life as it comes, one has to want life as it comes (Long 2004, 27). Think for instance of a slave who works hard and becomes a free man. But when he is free, he needs to feed himself and works horrible jobs to achieve this. This however does not stop him from trying and he even goes campaigning three times,[12] because he thinks this will make him truly free. After years of hard work, he finally achieves his goal.

> And when he finally puts the crown on his work and becomes a senator, then he is a slave when he enters the meeting, then his slavery is of the most beautiful and splendid kind. (Epictetus 2011, 257–58)

It might seem that the slave who became senator now has everything, but if this is all he has, he still lacks the most important part. He lacks *apatheia* (which translates as freedom of emotions (Ketih. H. Seddon 2020, 111)) and *eudaimonia*. What does it mean to be free of emotions, and how can one achieve it?

Being free of emotions means that one is not moved by either positive or negative impulses (Long 2004, 115). Think for instance of the slave who became senator. When he was a slave, he had to endure horrible times. Then he worked hard to become free, and he even worked harder to become a senator, but only by becoming a powerful senator he did not gain freedom, Epictetus would say. His social status would not matter according to Epictetus, the only thing which determines his freedom is if he can live in *apatheia*. Only when he is not moved or touched by emotions, he can be free, and according to Epictetus (Long 2004, 115; Sellars 2006, 118), this can be reached by slaves as well as by senators, or even emperors. Epictetus asks the following question: when did someone sleep better, at the time when he was a slave or at the time when he became senator (Epictetus 2011, 258)? The answer is that it does not matter if one is a slave or a senator. The only way to have proper rest is when one lives in *apatheia* (Long 2004, 115).

According to Epictetus we have to realise that freedom is living the way we want, but we must realise that this does not depend on all kinds of things that are outside of us, such as wealth, power or beauty. We may be able to get those things with us at birth, but we could also be less fortunate and not receive them at birth. According to Epictetus, this does not matter,

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[12] Going on at least three campaigns as *eques* (knight) was a condition for someone to be voted into the senate (Epictetus 2011, 433).

because these things are not going to give us peace of mind or *eudaimonia* anyway. We achieve *eudaimonia* by finding peace ourselves, by accepting life as it is; to be more precise, by wanting to live life as it comes. Rain or shine, that which comes on your path is what you should want. Only then can a person can be truly free and live in *eudaimonia* (Epictetus 2011, 259). It takes hard work to achieve this.

3.6 Character

In a sense, we have to heal ourselves. Epictetus compares the Stoic school as being a kind of hospital where people can come to find healing for their aching soul (Epictetus 2011, 235; Long 2004, 52). The aching soul is the product of our incapability to perceive nature as it is. Through the Stoic teachings, we can learn to form our character in such a way that we are always capable to react in a proper way to events in our life. So, as we saw earlier, the more exterior characteristics of our lives, like wealth and beauty, do not matter, and here we see that it also does not matter which kind of characteristics we are born with. The only thing that matters is how we learn to deal with events in our lives, and that is completely up to us.

In order to achieve this, we have to keep our moral character well maintained (Epictetus 2011, 50, 102).

> What pays off is the effort he makes to banish from his own life the sorrow that leads to wailing and self-pity for misfortunes and setbacks. (Epictetus 2011, 51)

One's moral character always belongs only to oneself and therefore, it is only in oneself where we can find what is good and what it evil (Long 2004, 27). No one is master of the moral choice of another, and only that moral choice is right and wrong. So, no one is able to deliver me good things or involve me in evil, I am the only one who has the power to do so (Epictetus 2011, 309; Sellars 2006, 110–11).

According to Epictetus, we can keep our character well maintained by managing our emotions. Emotions can be seen as irrational and therefore as going against our nature. This is why emotions are interfering with the goal to reach *apatheia* and *eudaimonia* (Long 2004, 115; Sellars 2006, 118). In contrast with Aristotle, for whom it is important to rely on our internal feelings and emotions to determine what is right or wrong (Brickhouse 1991; Irwin 1988), according to Epictetus we have to become clear of emotions. For Epictetus, both pleasant and negative emotions are irrelevant (Long 2004, 29), and instead of trying to manipulate the

material world that we experience through our human embodiment, we should strive to become indifferent to the results of events beyond our control, as he here says:

> Free is the one who lives the way he wants, who can be forced to nothing, who cannot be hindered in anything, who is insensitive to violent pressure, whose impulses are not frustrated, who achieves what he strives for, who does not end up in what he wants to avoid. (Epictetus 2011, 255)

The question however is whether this is even possible for a human being. It is of course a great goal, but is it actually achievable? We can find a first criticism of this idea in the work of Nietzsche. In his *Gay science*, he states that the Stoics work hard all their lives to learn how to hide behind "hard, hedgehog skin" (Nietzsche 1974, 245). This may prevent them from suffering, but it also makes them unable to have fun, and that cannot be the life of a strong mind, can it? On this argument, Epictetus' point of view can be defended through the following statement:

> Then what are you asking me? "Should death or life be considered preferable?" Then I answer: life. "Pain or pleasure?" I answer: Pleasure. "But if I don't agree to play a part in the tragedy, I will lose my head." You will play that part, but I won't play one. (Epictetus 2011, 45–46)

In this short exchange, Epictetus expresses a key principle of Stoic philosophy. The key is not to become a slave, at any price. If you have the choice to enjoy life, then enjoy it, but if the price, to enjoy life, is to become a slave, then a Stoic sage would not pay this price. The sage would stay true to his principles at any cost, even death, like Socrates did. It is as Socrates states, that it is not living that matters, it is living well that matters (Plato 2017, 48b; Sellars 2006, 109).

Multiple Stoics have practiced this belief, think for instance of Cato, Seneca, Zeno and Cleanthes (Sellars 2006, 109). All these men have taken their own life because they would not yield their Stoic beliefs. It is however in this rigid *praxis* where a problem arises within the Stoic philosophy. In order to understand this, we have to turn to one of the basic principles of Stoicism, as stated by Chrysippus:

An animal's first impulse, say the Stoics, is to self-preservation, because Nature from the outset endears it (*oikeiousēs*) to itself, as Chrysippus affirms in the first book of his work *On Ends*; his own words are, "The dearest thing (*prōton oikeion*) to every animal is its own .constitution and its consciousness thereof ." (Laertius 2018, 7.85)

In this basic principle it becomes clear that, according to the early Stoics, nothing matters more than our own existence. This is the case because we are animals, and this is the case for every animal (Sellars 2006, 107). Following this basic principle, it is paradoxical for humans to defend and to execute suicide (Sellars 2006, 109).

In order to resolve this paradox, Epictetus would clearly explain that we as humans are animals and therefore aimed at self-preservation. There is however an important addition, we are 'rational' animals and it is through our rationality that we are able to overcome our basic need for survival. In that sense, being able to freely choose suicide, because that is the only way to keep true to oneself, is acceptable for a Stoic sage.

3.7 Epictetus and moral luck

In Stoic ethics, the only general remark we can make about good and evil is that living virtuously is good and that not doing so comes from vices (Epictetus 2011, 129). Epictetus states that it is not that difficult to claim what is good and what is not. It is quite intuitive. All of us prefer to be wealthy, healthy and to have friends and family, and the opposites of these things are not preferred (K. Seddon 2006, 11; Sellars 2006, 6). Epictetus does not say that it is wrong to prefer good things, it is however wrong to whine and wail over misfortune, because the happening of unfortunate events is not in our control (Sellars 2006, 112). We should understand that *prohairesis* only depends on that which is *eph' hêmin*, in our power, and in correspondence with nature (Epictetus 2011, 88; K. Seddon 2006, 38–39). *Prohairesis* refers to our faculty of choice (Long 2004, 28; Sellars 2006, 114). According to Stoic ethics, this is the only thing we can actually control (Sellars 2006, 114) and therefore, it is the only thing we should try to develop. We should be focussed on strengthening our *prohairesis*, since this is the only thing in which virtue can be found (Sellars 2006, 114).

According to Epictetus, how we react to events, fortunate or unfortunate, depends solely on our *prohairesis* and therefore, our character only depends on us and how we form it through reason (Long 2004, 28–29) and has nothing to do with how we are born into this world.

Two elements are combined at birth: a body that we have in common with animals, and reason and intelligence, which connect us to the gods. (Epictetus 2011, 48)

Recent findings in evolutionary biology and psychology however suggest that who we are and how we react is actually highly dependent on genetic predispositions. These findings suggest that our ability to use reason highly depends on our genetic make-up and might not be up to us. In that sense, our genetic predispositions might obstruct our ability to be free, as Nagel suggested with his concept of constitutive luck (Nelkin 2019). So, we see that in Epictetus' Stoic teachings, more people can achieve eudaimonia than according to Aristotle. According to Epictetus, to live in eudaimonia does not depend on things like wealth, beauty or social status. The only thing that matters is the ability to properly interpret impressions and not to be affected by things which are out of our control, which can only be achieved through reason.

So, we can distinguish a line in which according to Aristotle, we need both external goods and a sound character to achieve eudaimonia. Then we have a line in the Stoic philosophy, in which you only need a good character and rationality to reach eudaimonia. That is an improvement upon the Aristotelian virtue ethics, because it increases the accessibility of *eudaimonia*. However, a sound character still depends on rationality. So, both Aristotle and Epictetus state that a sound character, and therefore good and bad e.g. morality, depends on rationality, which implies that morality is a development that has evolved with man. In the next chapter we will turn to social psychology and evolutionary biology to see if that is right.

4. Social psychology and evolutionary biology

4.1 We versus they

In both Aristotle and Epictetus, we have seen that rationality is the most important factor in developing a just moral character. Everything that is rational knows how to behave through practice. This is a nice thought, but it also raises a problem. In this form of ethics, animals and people who are unable or less able to use rationality are excluded. Which, in turn, enables people who have a high degree of rationality to create a hierarchy between groups that are rational and not rational. Between those who are able to "go with nature" and "those who cannot follow their nature".

The question is whether this is the right strategy. I don't think so, because this hierarchical system can contribute to a 'we versus they' way of thinking. We, who are rational and they, who are not rational. We also see this in the philosophy of Aristotle and Epictetus. With Aristotle, it is only rich, handsome, men who can reach *eudaimonia*. In the Stoic philosophy of Epictetus, there is less discrimination; Stoicism is known for having followers from across the spectrum of humanity, from slaves to emperors, but it is still only possible for rational beings to reach *eudaimonia*.[13] The only criterion the Stoic philosophy sets is that people must be rational. In this last chapter we will investigate whether it is possible to offer an alternative to this point of view in which rationality plays a central role in reaching *eudaimonia*. We have to investigate the role of moral luck for our character formation and its implications about our responsibility. For this we will focus on findings from evolutionary biology and social psychology.

4.2 Social psychology

The scientific field of social psychology studies how and to what extent the behaviour of people is influenced by external factors. One of the classic works in this field is *Thinking fast and slow*, written by Daniel Kahneman. This work is based on years of research he conducted together with Amos Tversky. In *Thinking fast and slow*, he shows extensively that in many cases man does not act rationally. For example, in a study, people have to choose between stockings, and most people choose stockings that are on the right side of a table. When asked about the reason

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[13] In principle, this can be anyone, regardless of intelligence level. Man is by definition the rational animal. However, there always remains a group of people who are unable to follow their "rational nature". It may well be that the possibility of meeting someone who can teach you how to follow your "rational nature" depends largely on luck.

for this, they come up with something on the spot. Things like "it looks like it is of better quality" or "these are thicker". In fact, the stockings were exactly the same (Kahneman 2011). This finding implies that human rationality is not that important in everyday life.

A critic can argue that this still does not contradict the work of Aristotle and Epictetus because according to them, one has to interpret impressions correctly. A person who is not aware of his or her irrationality does not do this and simply needs to sharpen his or her moral character even further. But this criticism, too, can be refuted. For this we need to look at the term *ataraxia*. As we have seen, *ataraxia* means that a person can remain calm and not be touched emotionally. Aristotle and Epictetus taught us that this is achieved through rationality. However, when a person's rationality is maladaptive, rationality can lead to rumination, and rumination can be seen as a poorly executed form of emotion regulation (Lyubomirsky et al. 2015, 15). This often leads to stress and anxiety (Michl et al. 2013).

Stress and anxiety are common problems in contemporary society (Canals et al. 2019; Ritchie and Roser 2018). These problems arise from uncertainty for the future and this uncertainty is rumoured (Lyubomirsky et al. 2015). "I am stressed because I am unsure about my future", I ask myself questions such as "can I find a good job" or "can I take care of my family". These questions can only be answered afterwards, so until then, I live in uncertainty. This uncertainty is stressful.

The same kind of reasoning applies to anxiety. Most anxiety is well-founded, but there is also a psychopathological form of anxiety. This is characterised by an irrational fear of all kinds of things and circumstances (APA 2013). The most famous form of therapy for this psychopathology is cognitive behavioural therapy (Hofmann and Otto 2017). In this therapy, people learn that their fear is irrational, and hopefully, it will reduce anxiety. We could see this form of therapy in the light of the ethics of Aristotle and Epictetus. If you only approach things rationally, you will be fine. In this case, however, it means that someone has to learn to place less value on his or her cognitions. The same goes for dealing with stress.

In these forms of therapy, people are encouraged to have more confidence in the course of things. That's why mindfulness, for example, is so popular (Armstrong and Rimes 2016). People are taught to perceive their thoughts, but to judge or judge them less or not. Thoughts may exist, but we must learn to place less value on them. This approach has many similarities with the notion of *ataraxia* used by Epictetus. So, we see here that when man places too much value on cognitions that arise from the capacity to be rational, he must unlearn it. Therefore, it is actually the rationality that causes people to get into trouble. Someone should attach less value to rationality. Only that leads to *ataraxia* and ultimately to *eudaimonia*.

When we consult nature, we see that man is the only species that suffers from forms of psychopathology, such as stress and fear. If it is true what Aristotle and Epictetus say, that man is the rational animal, that rationality is what distinguishes man from all animals, then this seems to be an indication that psychopathology stems from rationality. So, rationality turns out to be not only a strength, but also a weakness. It even turns out that it is sometimes better to be less rational to counter psychopathology and that rationality does not play such a big role in everyday life. Sometimes, it seems to be better if rationality is to be turned off, as it were, or to at least be adjusted. However, that is not the case for our morality. Our sense of good and bad never sleeps. We may not always act upon it, but generally speaking, humans are always able to be morally sensitive, that is, to sense and judge moral issues (Nejadsarvari et al. 2015, 21).

4.3 Evolutionary biology

We can see morality as a system in which good and evil are considered. Intuitively, good and evil are inextricably linked to humanity, thus also to rationality, as we have seen in the works of Aristotle and Epictetus. After all, it is rationality that distinguishes humans from other animals. However, it remains to be seen whether this reasoning is a true representation of reality. To investigate this, we will turn to the insights from modern evolutionary biology.

Morality seems to be related to social behaviour. After all, good or bad is often judged relative to another person. Lying is unfair to another person, and stealing is taking something wrongfully from another. For now, it is enough to realise that morality has an important social factor. Besides being called a rational animal by both Aristotle and Epictetus, man is also called a social animal.

There are many indications that man, through social activities such as language, has developed into the moral being we know today. Important for this is the theory that man has developed language and language through gossip. Gossiping has enabled early humans to establish trust and collaboration. Gossip has made it possible to make clear to each other who can and cannot be trusted within a community. This also led to people living in groups of about 150 people. That is still seen as the number of people manageable for one person to relate to. We also regularly see this number in government forms (Dunbar 2011).[14]

So complex social behaviour has led people to learn who they can and cannot trust. In a sense, we could say that here, we see Aristotle's movement, that both external and internal factors are needed to develop morality. In the archaic societies, there were those who, by nature,

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[14] Like in the Dutch House of Representatives, the *Tweede kamer*.

proved to be more reliable than others. This was not as important before, and for other animals, because people lived more individually then. However, when social contact and life in groups became so important, it also became more important to have qualities that are socially desirable. Those who were honest, courageous and kind by nature were more likely to survive than the others, because this was the behaviour desired within the group. Here it is important to note that morally desirable behaviour was already naturally present.

Findings in evolutionary biology and psychology show that, although human social behaviour is complex, it is also present in elemental forms in other social animals. For example, Frans de Waal has found that Capuchin monkeys can recognise fairness and dishonesty (Brosnan and de Waal 2003) and that chimpanzees mourn when a loved one has died (Goldsborough et al. 2020). These findings show us that emotions and elementary forms of morality can be found in other animals as well.

Following this, we can conclude that the work of Aristotle and Epictetus is very interesting, but it is not a complete representation of reality. They both ascribe great value to rationality as being indispensable for morality. However, rationality is a later addition in morality. Morality seems to originate much earlier in the emotions. To better understand this, we must focus on the so-called pillars of morality. These are reciprocity and empathy. Reciprocity is characterised by honesty and empathy is characterised by compassion (Vlerick 2017, 231)

According to Rowlands (2012), we need to focus precisely on those emotions in order to understand the origin of morality. He argues that the instinctive feeling of sympathy, of "natural" moral concern ensures that morality exists in all animals. It is therefore not rational considerations in humans, but moral "sensibilities" that make us act morally, a conclusion that David Hume was one of the first and few to dare to draw (Cohon 2018). It is therefore time to leave that old human image that our morality is rooted in rationality behind us, as our morality is rooted more in our emotions than in our intellect (Rowlands 2012).

4.4 Social psychology, evolutionary biology, moral luck and responsibility

Biology and social psychology agree that our character and therefore also the quality of our character is largely determined by luck, *tuchê* (that which is beyond our influence). However, we are still held responsible for our actions, and according to Nagel's theory of constitutive luck, this is not justified. According to this idea, people should only be held responsible for the things that they actually influence. There are many indications that our morality is based on

things beyond our control. Following this, Nagel would be right, and we could not be held responsible for our actions.

In his 1979 "Moral Happiness" paper, Nagel argues that this creates a paradox about our moral responsibility. The main idea here is the condition of control (hereinafter CC). So, (CC) agent S is morally responsible for action A only if A is under S's control (Hiller 2016, 6). Therefore, a person is only responsible for what is within her influence, which also means that someone is not responsible for something that is outside her influence. This is where the paradox arises, because we have seen that human behaviour always has many factors that cannot be influenced.

> A person can be morally responsible only for what he does; but what he does results from a great deal that he does not do; therefore, he is not morally responsible for what he is and is not responsible for what he does. (Nagel 1979, 34)

In the existing literature, there are two proven strategies to solve the paradox. On the one hand is the strategy of denying the existence of moral luck so that the CC can be defended. This vision was mainly elaborated by Michael Zimmerman (Zimmerman 2002). On the other side is the strategy of fully embracing moral luck while denying the CC. This strategy was mainly developed by Margaret Walker (1991). We will first focus on Zimmerman's work.

Zimmerman

Zimmerman wants to demonstrate that someone cannot escape her responsibility through luck (*tuchê*) and that luck cannot add anything to someone's responsibility (Zimmerman 2002, 575) His idea is that happiness can influence the range of a person's responsibility, but not the extent to which someone is responsible (Hiller 2016, 11). A person is, therefore, as long as it concerns the matters that fall within her influence, simply responsible for her actions.

Walker

Walker elaborates the other strategy of fully accepting moral luck. Then it is possible to say that Nagel's paradox only arises when we assume that CC is an indispensable part of the way we understand responsibility in everyday life. However, according to Walker, we should realise that CC is not part of our everyday understanding of responsibility. She argues that there is a world we can never fully grasp, such as Kant's noumenal world (Hiller 2016, 23), but there is also a world we can understand, the world of our everyday existence. Then she argues that the

concept of CC takes place outside our everyday existence; in fact, according to her, competent moral agents understand that they are in a world where many things are beyond the reach of the individual (M. U. Walker 1991, 19). So as soon as we realise that the CC is not part of the everyday conception of responsibility, the paradox disappears.

Hiller

In addition to the above two strategies to solve Nagel's paradox, Fernando Rudy Hiller has also developed a strategy. He wants to ignore the discussion about whether we should deny moral luck so that CC can be defended or vice versa. His strategy consists of first of all determining what causes the paradox. According to him, the paradox arises only on the basis of an extremely demanding view of the "nature" of moral judgments. When we take a more realistic view, the paradox disappears:

> This is why the consistent application of the constitutive requirement of moral judgment— the CC—seems to undermine moral judgment itself: the latter demands something that cannot be secured, namely, an agent with total control over everything that has an impact on his actions. (Hiller 2016, 16)

He argues that Nagel makes a mistake when he assumes that it is necessary for an individual to have, by nature, complete control over her responsibility. He states that when we hold people accountable for their actions, we do not see in practice whether someone had complete control over a situation. Instead, we look at whether someone had the opportunity to prevent the wrong from happening. In short, whether someone had the opportunity to act differently. In that case, it is not necessary for someone to have full control over a situation, someone just needs to have the ability to prevent the wrong from happening (Hiller 2016, 20). So,

> Moral judgment of a person is judgment not of what happens to him, but of him.
> (Nagel 1979, 36)

Hiller therefore asks whether the individual is able to do the right thing for the right reasons. Does he have a fair chance to avoid misconduct? When these become the questions, Nagel's paradox is resolved (Hiller 2016, 29). The difference between the questions Nagel asks and Hiller asks is that Nagel's questions are based on the idea that a person can have complete autonomy over existence. The question is whether that is possible. Probably not, because for that, a human would have to be a fully autonomous acting being, and evolutionary biology

teaches us that this is not the case. Much of what man does depends on a variety of factors beyond his control.

What is a welcome addition to the discussion is that Hiller does not have an absolutist approach, like Nagel. Rather, he comes up with a pragmatic solution, which is reflected in science and offers opportunities for people to be held responsible. His idea is reflected in science because it focuses on the issues that are beyond the influence of people. So, it matters a lot where someone grows up and with what possibilities.

If someone grows up with the idea that survival is the main goal, much more is "allowed" than if someone grows up with the idea that one must live according to certain social standards ("I have to complete a university degree because that is what my environment requires of me" or something similar). Both ideals provide opportunities for action and imply all kinds of behaviour. If someone necessarily wants to obtain a university degree, this involves a certain set of rules of conduct. In this case, I am not talking about strictly prescribed rules; I am referring to implicit matters. Someone will have to study to get enough points and a thesis will have to be written. This is also accompanied by a certain social world in which that person finds herself. This world will largely be characterised by people with ideals that match. This also applies to the person whose goal is to survive. Survival involves a different set of implicit rules. These rules are somewhat more archaic in nature; the person will have to eat and create a safe environment for himself. How this happens is not necessarily important, it may well be at the expense of (the well-being or possessions) of others.

We tend to attribute less developed morality to the second person, because that person does not live by the rules of society. What we forget, however, is that this person may not be part of society at all. After all, someone has to have quite a bit to be part of a society like the first person is (especially money). If a person does not have that, due to bad luck, that person may not have a fair chance of avoiding misconduct. It may even be that the person is unable to do the right thing for the right reasons. That can be quite a position of luxury. The second person therefore has no lesser morality; morality is formed by another purpose.

The question is whether we can say if it is right or wrong. To say that it is wrong seems to be an arbitrary judgement, based on the idea of most votes. Not that I do not value utilitarian ideas. However, when it comes to right or wrong, we should not fully adhere to the principle of most votes (for example, the actions of Nazi Germany were legitimate, based on a popular vote). Everyone should discover for themselves what is right and wrong, and only then can someone determine whether it is possible to do the right thing for the right reasons, and only then can someone judge for themselves whether they have (had) a fair chance to prevent

misconduct. It is precisely here where the value of Aristotelian virtue ethics and the ethics of the Stoics is emphasised. Both theories clearly show what the purpose in life is: that is *eudaimonia*. However, it is up to the individual to know when this has been achieved and, therefore, up to the individual to achieve it in life.

To judge whether something is morally right, we should not look at arbitrarily formulated rules (such as laws). Not that I am against it, but it does not teach us about right and wrong. In order to learn something about this, we have to turn to nature. It is in nature that we see how Capuchin monkeys can recognise fairness and dishonesty (Brosnan and de Waal 2003) and that chimpanzees mourn when a loved one has died (Goldsborough et al. 2020). And it is also in evolutionary biology where we get to know the two pillars of morality: reciprocity and empathy (Vlerick 2017, 231). Therefore, we need to focus on nature to understand morality.

It makes sense to reverse our thinking, as Rowlands suggests. It is not in rationality where we find morality. It is rationality that can elaborate basic but generally applicable morality into complex rules of conduct and legal laws that shape our society (Rowlands 2012). However, we see too often that these arbitrary rules are crumbling or transformed. What we do not see, however, is that empathy and reciprocity disappear, not even in harsh times, such as in World War I when German and French soldiers were sharing chocolate and sang Christmas carols together on Christmas Eve while they were killing each other in trenches hours before. Even in hard times, we do not see morality disappear. It is only when morality is transformed into complex laws and regulations that the rational, calculating component takes precedence. Aristotle also seems to have observed this when he elevates rationality to the highest good. This is also the case with Epictetus, who states that it is only through rationality that we are not misled by emotions.

Both philosophers are right, of course, when they say that man should not simply be guided by the first, best impulse that often stems from the simple urge for pleasure. What they both do not take into account, however, is that emotions are an unmistakable part of man. They prescribe a way of life that is almost non-human, while morality is pre-eminently the product of human sociality; think back to Dunbar's theory about gossip.

In addition, they make morality unattainable in yet another way. They argue that it takes a lot of luck. At least with Aristotle one must be a rich, freeman, a citizen of Athens and, moreover, be able to think rationally about everything. It is only by the ratio that *eudaimonia* can be achieved. This is also reflected in Epictetus. Although most other matters outside the influence of individuals have disappeared for him, rationality remains as important as ever. So important, in fact, that it is placed directly opposite to emotions. Emotions show us a distorted

view of reality and it is up to us, through rationality, to see reality as it is, which means that we must accept what happens without being carried away by it.

Conclusion

Biology and social psychology agree that our character and therefore also the quality of our character is largely determined by luck (*tuchê*). However, we are still held accountable for our actions. That seems to be a contradiction, but it is not. If we look a little closer, we have learnt that man is a rational animal, we see this in both Aristotle and Epictetus. With them, we see that people have a lot of emotions, but they are often misinterpreted. Man interprets emotions well by means of rationality. So, when man is held responsible, it is done on the basis of the idea that man can use his rationality. If this is not or less the case, someone is also not held responsible or to a lesser extent, as is also reflected in our legal system. Think for instance about cases in which the defence pleads for "diminished capacity".

What is interesting to see is that we can see a line of reasoning in which the range of who can have a virtuous character is getting wider. With Aristotle, we see that they are only rich, free men. Epictetus extends this range, including slaves and actually anyone (who is rational) can become virtuous. However, the most recent findings from biology and psychology show that animals also have character traits that indicate rudimentary moral actions. In this line you can see a levelling thought, there is increasing equality. Following this line opens doors for the future, for a more equal society that transcends species.

The other line of reasoning that is visible is that rationality is becoming increasingly important, so important that it is an inclusion or exclusion criterion. We first saw this with Aristotle. According to him, only wealthy citizens of Athens were able to reach the highest echelons of rationality. That is a very limited group and today we would call this discrimination based on sex (and perhaps even more forms of discrimination). This gets better with the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, because his philosophy makes a virtuous character available to everyone, since Stoic philosophy is known as the form of philosophy practiced by both slaves and emperors. However, we do see again that rationality is an exclusion criterion here. The only condition for being a Stoic is that you are able to think rationally.

The latest insights that have been investigated in this thesis are from biology and psychology. These insights qualify the "exalted" position of rationality. Moral behaviour has its origin in genetic evolution and is therefore completely beyond the reach of individual actors or people. It is easy to say that moral behaviour depends on things that are beyond our reach, so people are not responsible. However, if we would endorse this line of thought completely, we would make a mistake, as we have seen through the work of Hiller. The fact is that we have rationality. What we can learn from this is simply that we humans are able to use rationality. However, this possibility also gives us the responsibility to use rationality.

In a sense, rationality frees us from blind evolutionary genetics. Rationality thus increases our autonomy and with it, it also increases our responsibility to use rationality. It would be nice if rationality is used to continue the levelling line. Not only would it be beautiful, it is our responsibility. The above shows that the degree to which a virtuous character depends on the amount of rationality is available. Of course, there are many factors that limit our freedom, from genetics to where we are born and the people we grow up with. However, rationality is independent of these matters and actually allows us to be freer. The degree of a virtuous character therefore depends on the degree of rationality that is available and used.

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