The Concept of Moral Conscience in Ancient Greek Philosophy

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The question concerning the existence of moral conscience cannot be examined thoroughly in a brief article. Only manifestations of this significant problem can be presented. According to ancient philosophers, the problem of moral conscience concerns human existence. Namely, we are

our moral conscience. However, the logical question emerges: what is moral conscience? Does it exist by itself or is it a synthesis of mental phenomena, cognitive definitions and unconscious qualities? The only thing we can state with certainty is that the matter of moral conscience is associated with the problems regarding the existence of the soul and ethics.

The term *syneidesis* (συνείδησις) derives from the verb *synoida* (Lat. conscio, conscientia), a compound word of the verb *oida* (eidenai) which means *immediate knowledge* as opposed to acquiring knowledge through reasoning (*noein*). The term *syneidesis* is not found in ancient Greek philosophers. What we find is the verb *synoida*. From the analysis that follows it arises that the existence of moral conscience in ancient Greek philosophy concerns the inner potentiality and awareness of man to distinguish good from evil. Moral conscience (Fr. *conscience morale*, Ger. *Gewissen*, Gr. *syneidese*) is defined as a phenomenon or as immediate motion, logical meaning, critical ability, action, composite cognitive function, and self-awareness. Conscience has a psychological and an ethical meaning. Moral conscience is the complement of psychological consciousness and is regarded as a distinction among human actions.

II. Moral conscience in Homer and Hesiod

The question of moral conscience in both Homer and Hesiod is connected with the questions of the divine, of the soul and of fate. Homer in his epic poems portrays the everlasting battle between good and evil, namely the morally opposite definitions of life; through them emerges the need for the existence of a divine principle, which may distinguish good from evil: that is moral conscience. Moral conscience in Homer is presented as the fear of avoiding the

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8 Madinier, 14-23 (on empirical ethics).
11 Proclus, *Platonic Theology* I5; see DK 1 B 1-23; Cf. *Orphicorum Fragmenta*, ed. Otto
wrath of the eternal gods,\textsuperscript{12} as the distinction and performance of good action, and has the triptych Hubris – Nemesis – Erinyes as a point of reference. Homer, without being a fatalist, respects fate, which does not guide man’s will, but only motivates it.\textsuperscript{13}

In Hesiod, moral conscience is personified and appears as the daughter of Erebus and Nyx.\textsuperscript{14} She involves herself in earthly matters,\textsuperscript{15} nevertheless has divine quality, since the gods of the pre-Hellenic religious sense were many and earthly. Moral conscience is directly associated with respect, order, modesty and punishment, since at the pre-ethical stage there is not an established ethical system.\textsuperscript{16} According to Hesiod moral conscience is related to the Erinyes,\textsuperscript{17} who are connected with divine punishment against human hybris.\textsuperscript{18} Hesiod gives a metaphysical sense\textsuperscript{19} to the meaning of moral conscience which motivates human action.\textsuperscript{20}

III. The pre-Socratic examination of moral conscience

According to K. Popper, the philosophical investigations of the pre-Socratics were gnoseological and cosmological.\textsuperscript{21} Objections to the aforementioned position were advanced, supporting the existence of ethical teachings in pre-Socratic philosophy. Our research has pointed out that according to pre-Socratic philosophers there are traces of teachings concerning moral conscience in the Pythagoreans and in Heraclitus. The first literary use of syneidesis is found only in Democritus and Chrysippus,\textsuperscript{22} who do not use the

\begin{itemize}
  \item Ferdinand Georg Kern (Berlin: Weidmann, 1922).
  \item Homer, Odyssey, 22, 39.
  \item Ibid., 1, 32-34.
  \item Hesiod, Theogony, 223; Károly Kerényi, Die Mythologie der Griechen (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1997), 22.
  \item Walter F. Otto, Die Götter Griechenlands (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1970), 22-58.
  \item Hesiod, Works and Days, 198.
  \item Hesiod, Theogony, 185.
  \item Egon Friedell, Kulturgeschichte Griechenlands (München: C. H. Beck, 1972), 40-61.
  \item Diogenis Laertius, Vitae Philosophorum, 7:85.
\end{itemize}
term with a moral meaning,23 while the theory concerning moral conscience is largely found in Sophists, especially in Gorgias.24

The cardinal principle of the pre-Socratic philosophers’ thought concerning moral conscience does not diverge from their monism-pantheism doctrine: “everything is full of gods,”25 in that it gives a divine origin to moral conscience. According to W. Jaeger, the moral conscience doctrine of the pre-Socratics originates from their teachings concerning the infinitude of being.26 To wit, the range of human moralities is as wide as being is infinite. Jaeger highlights the existence of individual morality, proclaims the contemporary theory of the death of morality and rejects the concept of social morality, which does not exist.

The Pythagoreans focus on the concepts of man’s self-awareness, purification, and intellectual completion through numbers27 and the likeness to the divine or daimonion.28 Morality is a determining factor for the soul; since everything that gets to be done in the present life forms the fate of the soul after the death of the body. The theory regarding Pythagorean ethics cannot be conceived independently of action. In addition, morality should be

25 DK 11 A 22: “ὦίθη πάντα πλήρη θεῶν εἶναι.”
27 The Byzantine scholar MichaeI Psellos sheds light on the ethical arithmetic of Pythagoreans, i.e. the theory that relates numbers to virtue. Consistent with the theory of numbers that govern all creation, the Pythagoreans believed that the forces of the soul were connected to numbers. In the words of Psellos, in *The Excerpts from Iamblichus’ On Pythagoreanism V-VII* [in Dominic J. O’Meara, *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, and New York: Claredon Press, 1989), 218-227, esp. 225]: “If the form of virtue is defined by a measure and perfect life, mean and perfect numbers fit natural virtue, superabundant and deficient numbers fit excesses and deficiencies in relation to virtue. And one must assign the opposites of what we give to virtue to vice: lack of measure and of harmony, the differentiating, the unequal, unlimited, and such-like… And each virtue fits a number… And courage as manliness relates too odd number, but as constancy it relates to square… Fitting temperance, cause of symmetry, is 9 which is multiplied from the triad, for if all square numbers produce equality, those produced from odd numbers are the best for producing equality, and of these these first is the square from the triad, 9, which comes from two perfect numbers, the 3 and 6, according to the first perfect number, the 3, perfected completely and as a whole.” See also William Keith Chambers Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. I: *The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 317. Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* 1825-6: *Greek Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Robert F. Brown (Oxford: Claredon Press, 2006), 47: “but, because he reduces virtue to number, he consequently fails to arrive at a proper theory about it.”
considered as reason and consistency, instead of a set of rules or practices aimed at bringing social and economic benefits. Moral conscience concerns the distinction between good and evil through self-awareness control\textsuperscript{29} and study.

Heraclitus in his philosophical doctrine stresses the continuous variability of beings,\textsuperscript{30} the harmony of opposition,\textsuperscript{31} the cause of synthesis, introspection,\textsuperscript{32} and pantheism.\textsuperscript{33} He conceives moral conscience as the gnoseo-ontological condition of thought, reason and being. Reason is innate in man, however this doesn’t entail that man uses his reason. For example, one is not born evil, yet one may become evil only if he prevents himself from submitting to the power of his reason. However, if he submits to his reason, which according to nature exists concealed in his inner being\textsuperscript{34} settling the differences, he identifies with the harmony of divine reason and becomes blissful. This is the interpretation of the Heraclitan saying “the moral conscience in man is the cause of his bliss.”\textsuperscript{35} When moral conscience is animated by reason, it is governed by the highest principle of distinction between good and evil action:

Heraclitus indeed – and the Stoics agree with this – links our own reason with the divine reason, which rules and settles the worldly matters. Thanks to the unbreakable sequence, our own reason is aware of the logically supposed and with the help of senses it announces the future to the loved souls.\textsuperscript{36}

Therefore, moral conscience to Heraclitus constitutes man’s inerrability to distinguish good action from non-good.

Our reference to the pre-Socratic teachings concerning moral conscience will be completed with Democritus, who alone mentions the term \textit{syneidesis}.


\textsuperscript{30} DK 22 A 6: “πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει.”

\textsuperscript{31} Aristotle, \textit{Physics}, 203b7.

\textsuperscript{32} DK 22 B 101: “ἐδιζησάμην ἐμεωτότν.”

\textsuperscript{33} DK 22 B 10: “ἐκ πάντων ἐν καὶ εὖ ἐνὸς πάντα;” DK 22 B 50: “ἐν πάντα εἶναι.”

\textsuperscript{34} DK 22 B 123: “φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ.”

\textsuperscript{35} DK 22 B 119: “ἡθὸς ἀνθρώπῳ δαίμων.”

\textsuperscript{36} DK 22 A 20: CHALCID. c. 251 p. 284, 10 Wrob. [wahrsch. aus dem Timaios comm. des Poseidonios.] H. vero consentientibus Stoicis rationem nostram cum divina ratione conecit regente ac moderante mundana: propter inseparrabile comitatum consciam decreti rationabiliis factam quiescentibus animis ope sensuum futura denuntiari. ex quo fieri, ut adpareant imaginés ignotorum locorum simulacraque hominum tam viventium quam mortuorum. idemque adserit divinationis usum et praemoneri meritos instruendibus divinis potestatibus.
Although Democritus, accepting gods and God, is unclear on the question on the existence of the divine, he conceives man as a microcosm and as blissful in the safety of the city. Democritus gives the definition of moral conscience:

Some people, ignorant of the dissolution of man’s mortal nature, however aware of their evil actions in life, suffer fears and disturbances in their lives, while inventing false myths concerning their time after death.

According to Democritus, moral conscience is linked with the matter of knowledge and concerns the self-consciousness of a negative action or situation. Moral conscience is the cognitive perception of action and concerns the awareness that an action is good or evil. Distinguishing good from evil action requires self-awareness. However, the existence of the presupposition does not bring about the achievement of the desired outcome or vice-versa; for example, although obeying the laws of the city is presupposed for the individual and social welfare, nevertheless it is not accomplished. For Democritus, obeying the laws is imposed by the feeling of shame and the individual moral conscience, especially guilty conscience, which concerns both the individual and social morality. The inner being and leading a commensurate life ensure individual happiness and harmonic social coexistence.
The Sophists are considered to be the main introducers of the theory of instinct or otherwise stated “theory of self-preservation;” its main concern is to define good on the basis not of arbitrary metaphysical hypotheses, but of natural inclinations essentially defining human behaviour. Good and Evil are not to be understood metaphysically but rather express respectively desire or aversion. According to Sophists, ethics, within the context of social life, should be viewed in connection to the natural inclination to serve and promote personal interest and, therefore, anything promoting this inclination is considered good.

Sophists, therefore, concluded towards a morality that was formed situationally, contextually; in this sense, they trusted far more the expression of individuality to determine what was to be deemed useful and beneficial than some general and invariable rules. They place the existence of moral conscience within these roving of personal interest and the personal imposition or otherwise stated the theory of self-preservation. They stress that the socio-ethical rules change from one time to another and from one society to another; according to Gorgias, they are instituted not according to nature but according to position and that the interest of the powerful prevails. With Protagoras we go from natural instinct to conventional morality. Protagoras’ moral relativism does not bring about the lifting of moral conscience and of the value of moral rules, to which we all must adhere. What impresses with the teachings of moral conscience, especially that of Democritus and the Sophists, is the fact that their theories begin to reveal in an undetectable way the distinction between good and evil, or the consciousness of action.

(You can provide the list of sources here.)
– although Socrates is the one who introduced explicitly the notion of the conscious awareness of one’s actions, and corresponding consideration of good vs. evil on an individual level, as contrasted with the previous mores of tradition and custom defining these as handed down.  

From what has been stated so far, moral conscience according to pre-Socratics is innate in man and appears to be “carrying out its mission,” when it is animated by reason, mind and being. This reason is common and divine and, when it is allowed to be the judge and distributor of morality, man becomes blissful.

IV. The meaning of moral conscience according to Plato

Fate would have it that Socrates, after transferring his philosophical thought from things to man, started searching for the carrier of moral existence in man, introducing a consciously moral internalism. Although he does not mention the term moral conscience explicitly, however moral conscience to him appears to be an innate property of man, an inner voice, which is called daimon or divine.

Plato who does not mention the term conscience, except for the verb synoida with various meanings, (perception – consensus – assent – clear knowledge – acceptance), gave to moral conscience a transcendent expression. Plato, the philosopher of ‘beyond essence’ – a saying concerning the quantitative transcendence of the divine in relation to human weights and measures and the qualitative distinction between material and immaterial – is not released from his utopian orientation; in The Republic he presents moral conscience as the divine part of man’s soul, which is animated by the

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47 For a thorough study on this subject, see William Keith Chambers Guthrie, Socrates (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 97-104; Aristotle, Metaphysics, 987b1-4; 1078b17.


49 Guthrie, Socrates, 130-142.


51 Plato, Apology, 21b, 31c-d, 40a-b.

52 In Plato’s Laws (742b), Phaedrus (92d), Protagoras (348b) and Sophist (232c) the ‘synoida’ has the meaning of awareness, while in Theaetetus (206a), in Apology (21-34 b) and in Res Publica (607d) has the meaning of consciousness.

53 Plato, Timaeus, 28c: “τὸν μὲν οὖν ποιητήν καὶ πατέρα τοῦδε τοῦ παντός εὑρέθην τε ἔργον καὶ εὑρόντα εἰς πάντας ἀδύνατον λέγειν.”

54 Plato, Res Publica, 509b.

55 Plato, Res Publica, 531c.
hypostatic properties of the divine: goodness\textsuperscript{56} and simplicity.\textsuperscript{57} So in what way is the moral conscience doctrine related to man’s inner being? Since Plato considers the body as the cover and tomb of the soul,\textsuperscript{58} he sanctions sinner man, who is not deceived by his senses\textsuperscript{59} and passions, which “contribute to the distortion of rational soul from its cohabitation with the body.”\textsuperscript{60} Innate reason resides in inner man, that is the one who lives an inner life.\textsuperscript{61} The result of reason’s function, namely of man’s adherence to the wisdom of the rational part of the soul’s prudence, is the right and prudent function of moral conscience and the right distinction between good and evil. Moral action concerns the next stage, namely it is acquired and requires moral conscience.

We believe that the greatest contribution Plato to the matter of moral conscience is its connection with the matter of moral freedom and freedom of will.\textsuperscript{62} The Socratic saying “οὐδεὶς ἐκῶν κακός,”\textsuperscript{63} i.e. no man is voluntarily evil, introduced the matter of freedom of will to philosophy and linked it directly to the matter of the theory of knowledge\textsuperscript{64} and ethics. According to Socrates, since every wrongdoing is the result of a wrong judgment, the offender is not the victim of weak will, but of his mental insufficiency. However, the following question emerges: since no man is voluntarily evil, therefore he is not free, how do we interpret the existence of moral conscience? What is the importance of distinguishing between good and evil, namely having moral conscience, when one is not free to choose between the good and evil, which he has previously distinguished? More importantly, what is the benefit of the existence of moral conscience, which logically precedes will, when action is adventitiously heteronomous? That is to say, how is man not voluntarily evil, as Plato argues, when he has a moral conscience? Plato’s antinomic view,\textsuperscript{65} which presents Socrates as determinist (man is free, knowledge is a virtue, and therefore evil action is involuntary, because man is ignorant and therefore he is not voluntarily evil), raises questions concerning the existence of moral conscience.

\textsuperscript{56} Plato, Res Publica, 379a seq.
\textsuperscript{57} Plato, Res Publica, 382e: “ὦ ἄρα ὁ θεός ἀπλοῦν καὶ ἀληθῆς ἐν τε ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ.”
\textsuperscript{58} Plato, Alciviades, 1, 130c: “ψυχή ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος.” Plato, Cratylus, 400c; Phaedrus, 82e; Marcus Aurelius, Meditationes, 4:41; Porfyry, On the life of Plotinus, 1.
\textsuperscript{59} Plato, Res Publica, 382a.
\textsuperscript{60} Karl Bormann, Platon (Freiburg, and München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2003), 188.
\textsuperscript{61} Plato, Res Publica, 492e.
\textsuperscript{62} Plato stresses the matter of freedom of will in many dialogues: Timaeus, 86e, Menon, 77b, Sophist, 228c, Res Publica, 382a, 413a.
\textsuperscript{63} Guthrie, Socrates, 179-196.
\textsuperscript{65} Plato, Timaeus, 44c, Phaedon, 80e, Res Publica, 485a.
conscience, given that freedom of will presupposes moral conscience. Plato appears to be answering the aforementioned antinomy in 379 c-d of *The Republic* and in the passages cited, the rendering of which is summarised by the phrase: “man is to be blamed, God is blameless.”

What we must stress is that the investigation regarding moral conscience in Platonic works is an ambitious and difficult task. There cannot biasing assumption concerning moral conscience. In the Platonic works everything is separated and categorised according to the parts of the soul (rational – spirited – desiring) and the virtues (prudence and wisdom – bravery – temperance). In social existentialism the moral conscience of the kings differs from the one of the guards. Conclusively, in Plato, we have aspects of the matter of moral conscience; moral conscience seems to be related to immediate knowledge, moral liberty and freedom of will, although the Platonic doctrine concerning the divine likeness of the soul, does not prove moral liberty; instead, it introduces moral determinism, namely lack of moral freedom, since anything that is going to happen is in advance hetero-determined and hetero-defined to happen as it will happen.

V. The meaning of moral conscience according to Aristotle

Aristotle does not use the term *syneidesis* either, except for the verb *synoida* with various meanings (knowledge – awareness – prudence). He replaces the

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67 Plato, *Timaeus*, 86e, *Menon*, 77b, *Sophist*, 228c, *Res Publica*, 382a, 413a. Plato puts forth the notion that man has full knowledge of his actions, i.e. consciousness, and the intellectual capacity to foresee their ramifications, but seems to have been hazy on the connection between moral responsibility and bad acts. Plato aligns the Good with knowledge and the Bad with ignorance, but somewhat overlooks the complexities inherent in the latter state, whereby an agent can truthfully skirt responsibility for an evil act, thus attaining absolution and disrupting the equilibrium of justice.

68 Aristotle was opposed to the view held by Socrates and Plato that man’s sins are unintentional. He believed that *proairesis* dictates that man is conscious of an act; it is deliberate, otherwise there would not exist free will. Individual actions are therefore the domain of the actor, and beget other events, whether good or bad (*Magna Moralia*, 1187b11). Virtue is an *exis* (*habit*) which is freely chosen by the individual (*Nicomachean Ethics* 2, 1107a). Aristotle does not believe that man has the capacity to dictate fate, and therefore cannot produce Good or Evil, Just or Unjust activity (*Magna Moralia*, 1187a7-8). Moreover, he contradicts Socrates’ argument that, given the choice, no one would deliberately desire to be unjust (*Magna Moralia*, 1187a9-14. It becomes clear that those who are evil are not of their own free will and those who are good are not of their own free will. In other words, nature makes man good and ignorance makes him bad. The human will is annulled by natural necessity and, therefore, we should not blame those who do not decide voluntarily. As Ricot put it, such a perception would invalidate the meaning of punishment, since imprisonment would make no sense, as it would turn criminal offense into negligence; see Jacques Ricot, *Peut-on tout pardonner?* (Nantes: Pleins Feux, 1999), 12-18.
term *syneidesis* with the synonym terms: *reason, knowledge*,\(^{69}\) *perception, theory, mind*,\(^{70}\) *intellect, prudent life, awareness, prudence*,\(^{71}\) and *practical wisdom*. According to the Stageirian philosopher the meaning of moral conscience is related to moral virtue and legal philosophy. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* he presents the concepts of theory, *proairesis*, i.e. freedom of will, which are inseparably linked with moral conscience. Moral conscience is inner speech, the management of the passions by the soul,\(^ {73}\) dianoetic virtue and common law which is connected, according to the Stageirian philosopher, with knowledge and habit. In this way moral conscience brings about a firm distinction between good and non-good action and permanent habit. Aristotle – and this is where his originality lies – sets knowledge and habit completely apart from moral action. The purpose of Aristotelian ethics is bliss. Practical wisdom, prudence, reason and intellect are associated with moral conscience. Aristotelian morality stresses the positive manifestation of the human soul;\(^ {74}\) moral conscience is required and connected with the performance of either moral action – however not with innaction – or non-good action. According to Aristotle’s ethics a moral person takes a position and, as Ingemar Düring stresses, uses the right measure\(^ {75}\) as a criterion for his actions for the accomplishment of philosophical cohabitation.\(^ {76}\) But when? When he is aware and therefore, he makes choices voluntarily.\(^ {77}\) It is only then that his free will is governed by morality,\(^ {78}\) which is why Aristotle promotes the concept of consistency.

Aristotle relates moral conscience with free will. Nevertheless, the causes of moral determinism are a) Aristotelian entelechy, which promotes the predetermined purpose and rejects moral freedom and man’s *proairesis* as the causes of his self-determination; b) the Aristotelian *akrasia*,\(^ {79}\) which states the weakness of will, namely to not do good while knowing good and to not refuse evil.

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\(^{69}\) Aristotle, *De anima*, 410b3.


\(^{73}\) Aristotle, *De anima*, 411a24-b17.


\(^{76}\) Ibid., 490-568.

\(^{77}\) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1109b.


VI. The meaning of moral conscience according to Stoic philosophy

The Hellenistic period⁸⁰ is a transition point of social, religious and philosophical transformation.⁸¹ The Stoics, in a climate of socio-political terror-mongering, reintroduce a morality which descends from a revival of ourselves and from the rationalisation of our moral conscience.⁸² But what is moral conscience? Conscience⁸³ is a term introduced by Stoics; it represented the opinion to be shaped upon morality, inherent in one’s actions, and the ability to distinguish between good and evil. In Stoic philosophy,⁸⁴ especially in Cicero,⁸⁵ moral conscience is an inherent, innate and connective principle, raising the common natural law, which is also innate in man. The awakening of moral conscience is optional and becomes obligatory only with the spark of reason. According to Seneca,⁸⁶ the term conscience means the knowledge of beings or otherwise stated the knowledge of the motivation of our actions, as well as the knowledge of ourselves.⁸⁷ The Stoa accepts the existence of moral conscience as ada biter, mediator or as an evaluating distributor of the good and evil motivation of actions. In addition, it separates conscience, as well as action, into good and evil, therefore moral action, which follows moral conscience, does not fall into fatalism or destiny, but is a product of free will.

The stoic meaning of moral conscience is governed by a moral determinism⁸⁸ and is based on the pantheistic, moral and natural system of

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⁸⁵ Cicero, *De natura deorum*, 2:16.


⁸⁷ Ibid., 8:3-5.

the Stoics. According to the Stoics, God, nature,\textsuperscript{89} and moral law coexist and are connected.\textsuperscript{90} Since God,\textsuperscript{91} nature and moral law are interlinked: “God participates through nature in all terrestrial things,”\textsuperscript{92} conscience, which is of divine origin through the relation of reason with the divine,\textsuperscript{93} is innate in man. Moral conscience is part of the divine, which exists in the world and therefore within man and adheres to natural law. So the following question is raised: when does moral conscience according to the Stoics distinguish correctly between good and evil? This happens when man aims at a life according to reason, freed from passion\textsuperscript{94} and at a life according to nature, in which case the ideal type of Stoic philosopher is introduced. Who is the Stoic philosopher according to the Stoics? It is he who converts biological time\textsuperscript{95} to psychological,\textsuperscript{96} does not submit to the causality of chance,\textsuperscript{97} sets aside the servitude of providence and abandons the material predetermination of fate\textsuperscript{98} and destiny. In addition, he is not assimilated with the irrational omnipotence of passions,\textsuperscript{99} the occurrence of which generates the unending desire of repeating their fulfilment.\textsuperscript{100}

The Stoics base right morality\textsuperscript{101} on living in accordance with nature, which is defined as the rational art of living and which does not contravene natural laws.\textsuperscript{102} Man himself through the practices of his life becomes a moral being. When his actions have reason as a rule, man is governed by harmony

\textsuperscript{89} Seneca, \textit{Epistulae morales}, 120:4.


\textsuperscript{92} Cicero, \textit{De natura deorum}, 2:28.


\textsuperscript{95} Seneca, \textit{De brevitatae vitae}, 8:1.


\textsuperscript{97} SVF, 1:449.


\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 60:2-4.

\textsuperscript{100} SVF , 3: 459.


and apathy. It is after all a general admission of Stoa, that happiness of the soul\textsuperscript{103} results from the right distinction of our moral conscience and our apathetic self.\textsuperscript{104} Equally important is the admission placing the bliss of the soul,\textsuperscript{105} which is connected with the performance of the morally right,\textsuperscript{106} higher on the evaluative scale against material bliss. The body is subject to material bliss, namely the material laws of fate,\textsuperscript{107} while the immaterial soul and spirit motivate man’s life without submitting to causalities.

According to the Stoics, who are advocates of Pantheism, namely of the coexistence of the world of man and God, apathy constitutes moral practice, which must constitute the conscious choice of moral conscience. Man is his moral conscience and is fortunate or unfortunate\textsuperscript{108} because he freely and consciously chooses the way of living he consistently leads.\textsuperscript{109} Personal morality\textsuperscript{110} according to the Stoics, must result from a rationalised moral conscience, which has a universality as the Universal Totality. The prevention of moral deviations is not subject to metaphysical designing but constitutes mental processing in the process of the distinction between good and evil. This is the formative role of moral conscience according to the Stoics: to lift the excuse that we cannot set apart good from evil or just from unjust. The stoic theory of moral conscience casts deficit and moral deficiency out from moral inaction. Man, according to Mates, cannot invoke unawareness and introduce moral loose ends and different opinions as a result of his moral dilemmas, for moral conscience constitutes the infallible judge of an action.\textsuperscript{111}

The problem of moral conscience according to the Stoics does not have the same solution. Marcus Aurelius summarises it under the concept of apathy\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{103} SVF, 3:136; Seneca, \textit{Epistulae morales}, 8:5, 30:14.
\textsuperscript{105} Seneca, \textit{De vita beata}, 2:2.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 8:1-2.
\textsuperscript{108} SVF, 3:52, 18.
\textsuperscript{109} SVF, 2:295, 31.
\textsuperscript{111} Mates, 65-80.
\textsuperscript{112} Marcus Aurelius, \textit{Meditationes}, 8:48.
that is the rationalised action of the ruling mind, the dominating reason and the independence from passions, which create a real shield for man’s freedom leading him to the deceiving phenomenality. Due to misguided lifestyle choices,\textsuperscript{113} his lack of peace widens,\textsuperscript{114} his freedom becomes undermined and the negotiating power of his self-sufficiency is weakened. So what is the role of moral conscience? As we have mentioned previously the Stoics separated conscience, as well as action, into good and evil. The role of bad conscience is to weaken reason\textsuperscript{115} and cause guilt and feelings of terror from the erroneous distinction concerning an action. Conversely, good conscience brings about undisturbed inner peace, calm, rationalised composure and self-confidence. To wit, for Sambursky and Forschner,\textsuperscript{116} good conscience drives man to incline towards living according to nature, while, for Frede and Mates, towards living according to reason.\textsuperscript{117} The deficient supremacy and dominance of good conscience over bad, according to More, leads to the decline of reason, dangerously jeopardising man’s inner freedom by bringing moral subsidence upon him; it also causes severe reduction of man’s inner strength, inner discord and deficient self-examination, engraining in him the dubious state of confusion, fear, doubt and unsolvable dilemmas.\textsuperscript{118}

Seneca embraces moral conscience\textsuperscript{119} as the crucial carrier of personal bliss and gives it a moral meaning.\textsuperscript{120} Marcus Aurelius insists that there is a moral conscience which generates the self-knowledge of ‘dig within,’\textsuperscript{121} whereas Seneca relates moral conscience with ‘man’s inner bliss.’\textsuperscript{122}


\textsuperscript{114} Ludwig Edelstein, \textit{The Meaning of Stoicism} (Ohio: Oberlin College, 1966), 85-94.


\textsuperscript{117} Michael Frede, \textit{Die stoische Logik} (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 24-68.


\textsuperscript{121} Marcus Aurelius, \textit{Meditationes}, 7:59.

To sum up, moral conscience, which according to the Stoics has a moral meaning, introduces the ideal type of the Stoic philosopher, who is governed by the Stoic way of living, which dictates a reassuring handling of life problems. The Stoic way of living demands a life animated by an activating moral conscience, free of passions, ruled by reason and governed by universality and altruistic virtue. The Stoic philosopher abandons material life and corporatist logic, restores the unity of his inner reason with the divine and natural reason and in that way he changes into blissful. The Stoic philosopher is not governed by communicational man oeuvres, does not evoke negative circumstances in his moral action, but simply reactivates his inner reason, restructures his morality in each circumstance, is not discouraged by the misfortunes of his life and has moral supervision of himself, having his reason – with whom he converses continuously – as his guide and starting point. The comparative advantage of the Stoic theory of moral conscience, concerns its reference to some inner agreement man has to make with himself. It does not concern an external agreement with foreign factors, but a repatriation to his inner self. The dynamic of the Stoic theory is flexible, it does not impede freedom of will nor does it function in a contradictory manner; also, it does not harm, but offers shielding from the moral dangers of the submission to dogmatism, oppressive practices and obsessions. Stoic philosophy does not create communicational man oeuvres and is not a nun solvable mystery. It does not feed the subjugation to dated ethics, or bind anyone, or envisage utopias and refuse deviations; it is a surplus value which is not given, but only acquired.

References


