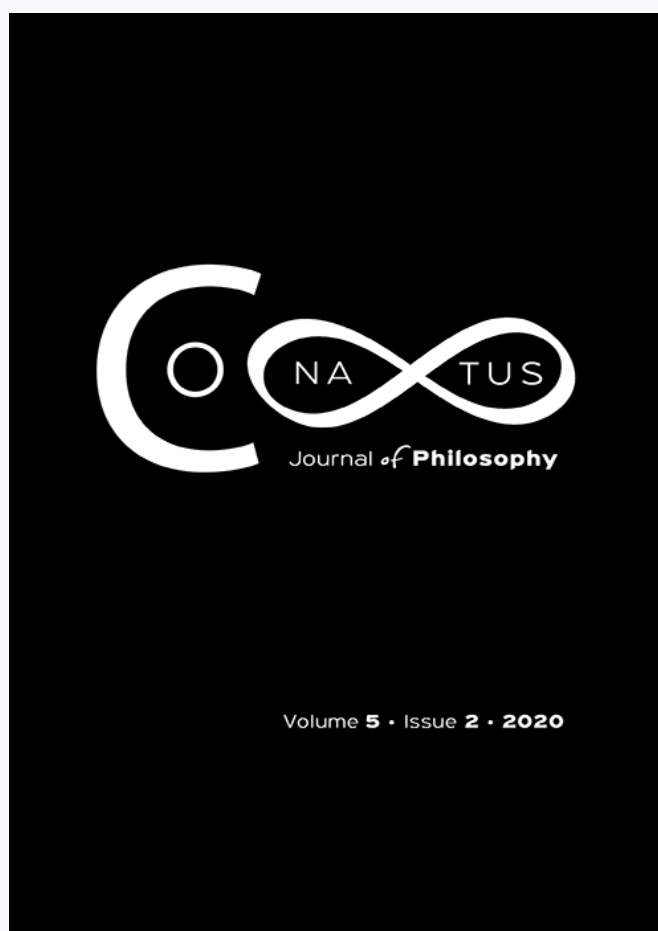


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### The Concept of Moral Conscience in Ancient Greek Philosophy

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# The Concept of Moral Conscience in Ancient Greek Philosophy

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## Abstract

*The concept of consciousness in ancient Greek philosophy, concerns the internal autonomy and philosophical freedom from the condemnation of ignorance of both the foreign and the domestic world. The ancient Greek philosophers pointed out the value of the dialectic with the inner self to the problem of moral conscience and handed us a legacy of values and the primacy of reason. The article examines the concept of moral consciousness in ancient Greek philosophy. The purpose of the article is to investigate the moral question related to whether moral concepts have a subjective or an objective basis. In addition, the article demonstrates the unaffected by time significance of the concept of moral consciousness, as well as its connection with the reality of moral concepts, moral propositions, moral judgments, moral man, moral law, moral idealism, moral naturalism and moral relativism. Moral consciousness is the mirror of our self-knowledge.*

**Keywords:** conscience; consciousness; human; animals; fear; existence; self-awareness; soul; ethics; action; God; rights

## I. A conceptual study

The question concerning the existence of moral conscience<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Dupont, "Syneidesis: Aux origines de la notion chrétienne de conscience morale," *Studia Hellenistica* 5 (1948): 119-153; James Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religions and Ethics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1926).

our moral conscience.<sup>2</sup> 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,<sup>3</sup> logical meaning, critical ability, action,<sup>4</sup> composite cognitive function,<sup>5</sup> and self-awareness.<sup>6</sup> Conscience has a psychological<sup>7</sup> and an ethical meaning.<sup>8</sup> Moral conscience is the complement of psychological consciousness<sup>9</sup> and is regarded as a distinction among human actions.<sup>10</sup>

## 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.<sup>11</sup> Moral conscience in Homer is presented as the fear of avoiding the

<sup>2</sup> Heinrich Fries, "Gewissen," in *Handbuch der Theologischen Grundbegriffe* I, 519-528 (München: Kösel Verlag, 1966).

<sup>3</sup> Paul Foulquié, *Dictionnaire de la langue philosophique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969), 124-125.

<sup>4</sup> Régis Jolivet, *Traité de philosophie*, vol. IV (Lyon, and Paris: Em. Vitte, 1959), 190-195.

<sup>5</sup> Gabriel Madinier, *La conscience morale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), 3-9.

<sup>6</sup> Régis Jolivet, *Vocabulaire de philosophie* (Lyon, and Paris: Em. Vitte, 1962), 43.

<sup>7</sup> Jolivet, *Traité*, 668-670.

<sup>8</sup> Madinier, 14-23 (on empirical ethics).

<sup>9</sup> Maurice Pradines, *Traité de Psychologie générale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1946), 6-31; René Le Senne, *Introduction à la philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), 265-281; Henri Delacroix, *Les grandes formes de la vie mentale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), 10-55; Madinier, 38-41.

<sup>10</sup> Ferdinand Alquié, *Leçons de philosophie* II (Paris: H. Didier, 1965), 194-289.

<sup>11</sup> Proclus, *Platonic Theology* I5; see DK 1 B 1-23; Cf. *Orphicorum Fragmenta*, ed. Otto

wrath of the eternal gods,<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>

In Hesiod, moral conscience is personified and appears as the daughter of Erebus and Nyx.<sup>14</sup> She involves herself in earthly matters,<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> According to Hesiod moral conscience is related to the Erinyes,<sup>17</sup> who are connected with divine punishment against human hybris.<sup>18</sup> Hesiod gives a metaphysical sense<sup>19</sup> to the meaning of moral conscience which motivates human action.<sup>20</sup>

### III. The pre-Socratic examination of moral conscience

According to K. Popper, the philosophical investigations of the pre-Socratics were gnoseological and cosmological.<sup>21</sup> 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,<sup>22</sup> who do not use the

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Ferdinand Georg Kern (Berlin: Weidmann, 1922).

<sup>12</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, 22, 39.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 32-34.

<sup>14</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 223; Károly Kerényi, *Die Mythologie der Griechen* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1997), 22.

<sup>15</sup> Walter F. Otto, *Die Götter Griechenlands* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1970), 22-58.

<sup>16</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 198.

<sup>17</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 185.

<sup>18</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mythe et religion en Grèce ancienne* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1990); Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); R. Buxton, *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 45-78.

<sup>19</sup> Egon Friedell, *Kulturgeschichte Griechenlands* (München: C. H. Beck, 1972), 40-61.

<sup>20</sup> Martin P. Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), 105-133.

<sup>21</sup> Karl Popper, *The World of Parmenides: Essays on the Presocratic Enlightenment* (London, and New York: Routledge, 1998), 7-8.

<sup>22</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum*, 7:85.

term with a moral meaning,<sup>23</sup> while the theory concerning moral conscience is largely found in Sophists, especially in Gorgias.<sup>24</sup>

The cardinal principle of the pre-Socratic philosophers' thought concerning moral conscience does not diverge from their monism-panteism doctrine: "everything is full of gods,"<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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 numbers<sup>27</sup> and the likeness to the divine or *daimonion*.<sup>28</sup> 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

<sup>23</sup> Don E. Marietta, "Conscience in Greek Stoicism," *Numen* 17, no. 3 (1970): 178.

<sup>24</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, 482e-486d. For a detailed analysis, see Alfred Edward Taylor, *Plato: The Man and His Work* (London: Methuen, 1960), 103-129, esp. 115-118.

<sup>25</sup> DK 11 A 22: "ὡιήθη πάντα πλήρη θεῶν εἶναι."

<sup>26</sup> DK 12 B1: "ἀρχὴ... τῶν ὄντων τὸ ἄπειρον." Cf. DK 12 B 3; Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), 24-59.

<sup>27</sup> The Byzantine scholar Michael 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: Clarendon 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 to 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 the 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: Clarendon Press, 2006), 47: "but, because he reduces virtue to number, he consequently fails to arrive at a proper theory about it."

<sup>28</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 987a11-28; Diogenes Laertius, 8:48; Peter Gorman, *Pythagoras: A Life* (London, and Boston: Routledge, and Kegan Paul, 1979), 24-56.

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<sup>29</sup> and study.

Heraclitus in his philosophical doctrine stresses the continuous variability of beings,<sup>30</sup> the harmony of opposition,<sup>31</sup> the cause of synthesis, introspection,<sup>32</sup> and pantheism.<sup>33</sup> 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<sup>34</sup> 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."<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup>

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 *syneidesis*.

<sup>29</sup> Pythagoras, *Golden Verses*, 40-42: "Μὴ δ' ὕπνον μαλακοῖσιν ἐπ' ὄμμασι προσδέξασθαι, πρὶν τῶν ἡμερινῶν ἔργων τρεῖς ἕκαστον ἐπελθεῖν· πῇ παρέβην; τί δ' ἔρεξα; τί μοι δέον οὐκ ἐτελέεσθη;" See Johan C. Thom, *The Pythagorean Golden Verses: With Introduction and Commentary* (Leiden, New York, and Köln: Brill, 1994), 75-77, 101-229.

<sup>30</sup> DK 22 A 6: "πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει."

<sup>31</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, 203b7.

<sup>32</sup> DK 22 B 101: "ἐδιζήσάμην ἐμεωυτόν."

<sup>33</sup> DK 22 B 10: "ἐκ πάντων ἓν καὶ ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντα;" DK 22 B 50: "ἓν πάντα εἶναι."

<sup>34</sup> DK 22 B 123: "φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ."

<sup>35</sup> DK 22 B 119: "ἦθος ἀνθρώπῳ δαίμων."

<sup>36</sup> 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 conectit regente ac moderante mundana: propter inseparabilem comitatum consciam decreti rationabilis factam quiescentibus animis ope sensuum futura denuntiare. ex quo fieri, ut adpareant imagines ignotorum locorum simulacraque hominum tam viventium quam mortuorum. idemque adserit divinationis usum et praemoneri meritis instruentibus divinis potestatibus.*

Although Democritus, accepting gods<sup>37</sup> and God,<sup>38</sup> is unclear on the question on the existence of the divine, he conceives man as a microcosm<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup>

According to Democritus, moral conscience is linked with the matter of knowledge and concerns the self-consciousness of a negative action or situation.<sup>41</sup> 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<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Aetius, 4:10, 4; B 175, B 234.

<sup>38</sup> Aetius, 1:7, 16: "Δημόκριτος νοῦν τὸν θεόν, ἐν πυρὶ σφαιροειδεῖ."

<sup>39</sup> DK 68 B 34: "μικρῶι κόσμῳ." Paul Cartledge, Ray Monk, and Frederic Raphael, *Democritus: Democritus and Atomistic Politics* (London: Phoenix, 1998).

<sup>40</sup> DK 68 B 297: "ἔνιοι θνητῆς φύσεως διάλυσιν οὐκ εἰδότες ἄνθρωποι, συνειδήσει δὲ τῆς ἐν τῷ βίῳ κατοπραγμοσύνης, τὸν τῆς βιοτῆς χρόνον ἐν ταραχαῖς καὶ φόβοις ταλαιπωρεῦσιν, ψεῦδεα περὶ τοῦ μετὰ τὴν τελευταίαν μυθοπλαστεύοντες χρόνου."

<sup>41</sup> DK 68 B 19.

<sup>42</sup> Gerhard Jean Daniel Aalders, "The Political Faith of Democritus," *Mnemosyne* 4, no. 3 (1950): 302-313; Ioannis R. Paneris, *Die Staatsphilosophie Demokrits im Hinblick auf die Lehre der älteren Sophisten* (PhD diss., University of Wien, 1977); Reimar Müller, "Die Stellung Demokrits in der antiken Sozialphilosophie," in *Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress on Democritus*, ed. Linos G. Benakis, 423-434 (Xanthi: Bouloukos, 1984); John F. Procopé, "Democritus on Politics and the Care of the Soul," *Classical Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (1989): 307-331.

<sup>43</sup> Ioannis Kalogerakos, "Demokrits Auffassung vom Bürger," in *The Notion of Citizenship in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, ed. Evangelos Moutsopoulos, and Maria Protopapas-Marneli (Athens: Academy of Athens, 2009), 74-101; Ioannis Kalogerakos, *Seele und Unsterblichkeit. Untersuchungen zur Vorsokratik bis Empedokles* (Stuttgart, and Leipzig: De Gruyter, 1996); Christopher Charles Whiston Taylor, *The Atomists Leucippus and Democritus. Fragments. A text and Translation with a Commentary*

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,<sup>44</sup> they are instituted not according to nature but according to position and that the interest of the powerful prevails. With Protagoras<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup> 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

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(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Rudolf Löbl, *Demokrit Texte zu seiner Philosophie. Ausgewählt, übersetzt, kommentiert und interpretiert* (Amsterdam, and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, 1989); William Keith Chambers Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. II: *The Presocratic Tradition from Parmenides to Democritus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 382-507; Horst Steckel, “Demokritos,” in *Pauly-Wissowa Real-Enzyklopaedie des classischen Altertums*, Suppl. XII, 192-223 (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Buchhandlung, 1970); Wolfgang Röd, *Die Philosophie der Antike 1: Von Thales bis Demokrit* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1988), 192-211, 251-255; Geoffrey S. Kirk, John E. Raven, und Malcolm Schofield, *Die vorsokratischen Philosophen. Einführung, Texte und Kommentare* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1994), 439-472; Christof Rapp, *Vorsokratiker* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1997), 208-238; Christopher Charles Whiston Taylor, “The Atomists,” *Routledge History of Philosophy*, vol. I: *From the Beginning to Plato*, ed. C. C. W. Taylor, 220-243 (London, and New York: Routledge, 1997); Christopher Charles Whiston Taylor, “Die Atomisten,” in *Handbuch frühe griechische Philosophie, Von Thales bis zu den Sophisten*, ed. Antony A. Long (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2001), 165-186; Jaap Mansfeld, *Die Vorsokratiker II: Zenon, Empedokles, Anaxagoras, Leukipp, Demokrit* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986); Fritz Jürss, Reinmar Müller, und Ernst G. Schmidt, *Griechische Atomisten. Texte und Kommentare zum materialistischen Denken der Antike* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1988).

<sup>44</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, 483d.

<sup>45</sup> Plato, *Protagoras*, 323c.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 326c-d.



– 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.<sup>47</sup>

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,<sup>48</sup> after transferring his philosophical thought from things to man, started searching for the carrier of moral existence in man, introducing a consciously<sup>49</sup> moral internalism.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup>

Plato who does not mention the term conscience, except for the verb *synoida* with various meanings,<sup>52</sup> (perception – consensus – assent – clear knowledge – acceptance), gave to moral conscience a transcendent expression.<sup>53</sup> Plato, the philosopher of ‘beyond essence’<sup>54</sup> – 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,<sup>55</sup> which is animated by the

<sup>47</sup> 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.

<sup>48</sup> Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 91-98.

<sup>49</sup> Guthrie, *Socrates*, 130-142.

<sup>50</sup> Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (London: Blackwell, 1985), 179-181.

<sup>51</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 21b, 31c-d, 40a-b.

<sup>52</sup> 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.

<sup>53</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 28c: “τὸν μὲν οὖν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦδε τοῦ παντὸς εὐρεῖν τε ἔργον καὶ εὐρόντα εἰς πάντα ἀδύνατον λέγειν.”

<sup>54</sup> Plato, *Res Publica*, 509b.

<sup>55</sup> Plato, *Res Publica*, 531c.

hypostatic properties of the divine: goodness<sup>56</sup> and simplicity.<sup>57</sup> 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,<sup>58</sup> he sanctions sinner man, who is not deceived by his senses<sup>59</sup> and passions, which "contribute to the distortion of rational soul from its cohabitation with the body."<sup>60</sup> Innate reason resides in inner man, that is the one who lives an inner life.<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup> The Socratic saying "οὐδεὶς ἐκὼν κακός,"<sup>63</sup> 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<sup>64</sup> 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 heteronymous? That is to say, how is man not voluntarily evil, as Plato argues, when he has a moral conscience? Plato's antinomic view,<sup>65</sup> 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

<sup>56</sup> Plato, *Res Publica*, 379a seq.

<sup>57</sup> Plato, *Res Publica*, 382e: "ἄρα ὁ θεὸς ἀπλοῦν καὶ ἀληθὲς ἐν τε ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ."

<sup>58</sup> Plato, *Alciviades*, 1, 130c: "ψυχὴ ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος." Plato, *Cratylus*, 400c; *Phaedrus*, 82e; Marcus Aurelius, *Meditationes*, 4:41; Porphyry, *On the life of Plotinus*, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Plato, *Res Publica*, 382a.

<sup>60</sup> Karl Bormann, *Platon* (Freiburg, and München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2003), 188.

<sup>61</sup> Plato, *Res Publica*, 492e.

<sup>62</sup> Plato stresses the matter of freedom of will in many dialogues: *Timaeus*, 86e, *Menon*, 77b, *Sophist*, 228c, *Res Publica*, 382a, 413a.

<sup>63</sup> Guthrie, *Socrates*, 179-196.

<sup>64</sup> Gregory Vlastos, *Platonic Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 204-217.

<sup>65</sup> 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.”<sup>66</sup>

What we must stress is that the investigation regarding moral conscience in Platonic works is an ambitious and difficult task. There cannot be a 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,<sup>67</sup> 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.<sup>68</sup>

## 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

<sup>66</sup> Plato, *Res Publica*, 347d, 505d, 617e, 619b, *Laws*, 719d, 916b, *Phaedrus*, 230e, 249a, *Protagoras*, 356e, *Philebus*, 33a, *Apology*, 37b.

<sup>67</sup> 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.

<sup>68</sup> 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*,<sup>69</sup> *perception*, *theory*, *mind*,<sup>70</sup> *intellect*, *prudent life*, *awareness*,<sup>71</sup> *prudence*,<sup>72</sup> 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,<sup>73</sup> 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;<sup>74</sup> moral conscience is required and connected with the performance of either moral action – however not with inaction – or non-good action. According to Aristotle's ethics a moral person takes a position and, as Ingemar Düring stresses, uses the right measure<sup>75</sup> as a criterion for his actions for the accomplishment of philosophical cohabitation.<sup>76</sup> But when? When he is aware and therefore, he makes choices voluntarily.<sup>77</sup> It is only then that his free will is governed by morality,<sup>78</sup> 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*,<sup>79</sup> which states the weakness of will, namely to not do good while knowing good and to not refuse evil.

<sup>69</sup> Aristotle, *De anima*, 410b3.

<sup>70</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1143a9, 16. Cf. William David Ross, *Aristotle* (London, and New York: Routledge, 1995), 207-211, 229-233.

<sup>71</sup> Aristotle, *Great Ethics*, 1192a26.

<sup>72</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1143a.

<sup>73</sup> Aristotle, *De anima*, 411a24-b17.

<sup>74</sup> René Gauthier, *La morale d'Aristote* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), 88-98.

<sup>75</sup> Ingemar Düring, *Aristotele*, trans. Pierluigi Donini (Milan: Murcia, 1976), 167-169, 289-292.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 490-568.

<sup>77</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1109b.

<sup>78</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 1281a11-1284b34; Plato, *Statesman*, 284 b-c.

<sup>79</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1102b, and *Ethics Eudemia*, 1224a.

## VI. The meaning of moral conscience according to Stoic philosophy

The Hellenistic period<sup>80</sup> is a transition point of social, religious and philosophical transformation.<sup>81</sup> 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.<sup>82</sup> But what is moral conscience? Conscience<sup>83</sup> 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,<sup>84</sup> especially in Cicero,<sup>85</sup> 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,<sup>86</sup> 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.<sup>87</sup> The Stoa accepts the existence of moral conscience as a 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 determinism<sup>88</sup> and is based on the pantheistic, moral and natural system of

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<sup>80</sup> Julia Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 1992); E. P. Arthur, "The Stoic Analysis of the Mind's Reactions to Presentations," *Hermes* 3 (1983): 69-78; Benson Mates, *Stoic Logic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 67-98; cf. John Michael Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 256-272. Anthony A. Long, *Stoic Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 190-205.

<sup>81</sup> Anthony A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 2-3.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Mika Ojakangas, "Arendt, Socrates, and the Ethics of Conscience," *COLLeGIUM: Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 8 (2010): 67-85.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Johannes Stelzenberger, *Syneidesis, Conscientia, Gewissen: Studie zum Bedeutungswandel eines moral theologischen Begriffes* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1963); Don E. Marietta, *Introduction to Ancient Philosophy* (London, and New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1998).

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Richard Reitzenstein, *Die hellenistischen Mysterien religionen nach ihren Grundgedanken und Wirkungen* (Leipzig, and Berlin: Teubner, 1927), 80-105.

<sup>85</sup> Cicero, *De natura deorum*, 2:16.

<sup>86</sup> Seneca, *Epistulae morales*, 8:1-2.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:3-5.

<sup>88</sup> Anthony A. Long, "Freedom and Determinism in the Stoic Theory of Human Action," in *Problems in Stoicism*, ed. A. A. Long (London: The Athlone Press, 1971), 174-193.

the Stoics. According to the Stoics, God, nature,<sup>89</sup> and moral law coexist and are connected.<sup>90</sup> Since God,<sup>91</sup> nature and moral law are interlinked: “God participates through nature in all terrestrial things,”<sup>92</sup> conscience, which is of divine origin through the relation of reason with the divine,<sup>93</sup> 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<sup>94</sup> 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<sup>95</sup> to psychological,<sup>96</sup> does not submit to the causality of chance,<sup>97</sup> sets aside the servitude of providence and abandons the material predetermination of fate<sup>98</sup> and destiny. In addition, he is not assimilated with the irrational omnipotence of passions,<sup>99</sup> the occurrence of which generates the unending desire of repeating their fulfilment.<sup>100</sup>

The Stoics base right morality<sup>101</sup> on living in accordance with nature, which is defined as the rational art of living and which does not contravene natural laws.<sup>102</sup> 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

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<sup>89</sup> Seneca, *Epistulae morales*, 120:4.

<sup>90</sup> Eleni Kalokairinou, “The Cosmological Assumptions of Stoic Ethics,” *Diotima* 24 (1996): 139-143.

<sup>91</sup> Seneca, *Epistulae morales*, 9:1-2.

<sup>92</sup> Cicero, *De natura deorum*, 2:28.

<sup>93</sup> Seneca, *Epistulae morales*, 65:1-2.

<sup>94</sup> Hans von Arnim, *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903-1924), 1:205 [henceforth: SVF].

<sup>95</sup> Seneca, *De brevitate vitae*, 8:1.

<sup>96</sup> Seneca, *Epistulae morales*, 1:3, 49:9.

<sup>97</sup> SVF, 1:449.

<sup>98</sup> Seneca, *Epistulae morales*, 12:6-9.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 60:2-4.

<sup>100</sup> SVF, 3: 459.

<sup>101</sup> Katerina Ierodiakonou, “The Stoic Division of Philosophy,” *Phronesis* 38, no. 1 (1993): 57-74.

<sup>102</sup> Lutz Bloos, *Probleme der Stoischen Physik* (Hamburg: Buske Verlag, 1973); cf. Brad Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1985); David E. Hahm, *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1977); Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 189; Ernst Grumach, *Physis und Agathon in der alten Stoa* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1932).

and apathy. It is after all a general admission of Stoa, that happiness of the soul<sup>103</sup> results from the right distinction of our moral conscience and our apathetic self.<sup>104</sup> Equally important is the admission placing the bliss of the soul,<sup>105</sup> which is connected with the performance of the morally right,<sup>106</sup> higher on the evaluative scale against material bliss. The body is subject to material bliss, namely the material laws of fate,<sup>107</sup> 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<sup>108</sup> because he freely and consciously chooses the way of living he consistently leads.<sup>109</sup> Personal morality<sup>110</sup> 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.<sup>111</sup>

The problem of moral conscience according to the Stoics does not have the same solution. Marcus Aurelius summarises it under the concept of apathy<sup>112</sup>

<sup>103</sup> SVF, 3:136; Seneca, *Epistulae morales*, 8:5, 30:14.

<sup>104</sup> Jerry Willmert Stannard, *The Psychology of the Passions in the Old Stoa* (Illinois: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1958); Arthur W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960); Roswitha Alpers-Gölz, *Der Begriff Skopos in der Stoa und seine Vorgeschichte* (New York: Olms Hildesheim, 1976), 54-73; Julia Annas, *Truth and Knowledge, in Doubt and Dogmatism* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1980); Samuel Sambursky, *Physics of the Stoics* (London: Routledge, and Kegan Paul, 1959).

<sup>105</sup> Seneca, *De vita beata*, 2:2.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 8:1-2.

<sup>107</sup> Seneca, *Epistulae morales*, 14:1-2.

<sup>108</sup> SVF, 3:52, 18.

<sup>109</sup> SVF, 2:295, 31.

<sup>110</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *Meditationes*, 1:14, 15. Cf. Stannard; Ludwig Stein, *Die Psychologie der Stoa*, vols 1-2 (Berlin: Verlag von S. Calvary, 1939); Gerard Watson, *The Stoic Theory of Knowledge* (Belfast: Queen's University, 1966).

<sup>111</sup> Mates, 65-80.

<sup>112</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *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,<sup>113</sup> his lack of peace widens,<sup>114</sup> 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<sup>115</sup> 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,<sup>116</sup> good conscience drives man to incline towards living according to nature, while, for Frede and Mates, towards living according to reason.<sup>117</sup> 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.<sup>118</sup>

Seneca embraces moral conscience<sup>119</sup> as the crucial carrier of personal bliss and gives it a moral meaning.<sup>120</sup> Marcus Aurelius insists that there is a moral conscience which generates the self-knowledge of 'dig within,'<sup>121</sup> whereas Seneca relates moral conscience with 'man's inner bliss.'<sup>122</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 199-208; cf. Arthur, 69-78.

<sup>114</sup> Ludwig Edelstein, *The Meaning of Stoicism* (Ohio: Oberlin College, 1966), 85-94.

<sup>115</sup> Seneca, *Epistulae morales*, 92:27, 37:4.

<sup>116</sup> Maximilian Forschner, *Die stoische Ethik* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 65-88.

<sup>117</sup> Michael Frede, *Die stoische Logik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 24-68.

<sup>118</sup> Paul Elmer More, *Hellenistic Philosophies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1923), 86-98; Joseph Moreau, "Ariston et le stoïcisme," *Revue des Etudes Anciennes* 50 (1948): 27-48. Especially for the meaning of duty, see Gerhard Nebel, "Der Begriff des Kathekon in der alten Stoa," *Hermes* 70 (1935): 439-460; Robert Joseph Rabel, *Theories of the Emotions in the Old Stoa* (PhD diss., Michigan University, 1975); Margaret E. Reesor, *The Political Theory of the Old and the Middle Stoa* (New York: J. J. Augustin, 1951). Cf. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditationes*, 5:28.

<sup>119</sup> Seneca, *Epistulae morales*, 120:1-3, 85:32.

<sup>120</sup> Marietta, "Conscience," 176. Cf. Adolf Dyroff, *Die Ethik der alten Stoa* (Berlin: Verlag von S. Calvary, 1897), 47-69.

<sup>121</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *Meditationes*, 7:59.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Adolf Bonhoeffer, "Zur stoischen Psychologie," *Philologus* 54 (1895), 403-429; Victor Brochard, "Sur la logique des Stoiciens," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 5 (1892): 449-468; Jacques Brunschwig, ed., *Les Stoiciens et leur logique* (Paris: Vrin, 1978); Anthony Kenny, *Will, Freedom and Power* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975); Michael Lapidge, "A Problem in Stoic



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.<sup>123</sup> The Stoic philosopher abandons material life and corporatist logic, restores the unity of his inner reason with the divine and natural reason<sup>124</sup> 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.

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<sup>123</sup> Katerina Ierodiakonou, "Introduction. The Study of Stoicism: Its Decline and Revival," in *Topics in Stoic Philosophy*, ed. K. Ierodiakonou, 1-22 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

<sup>124</sup> Marietta, "Conscience," 176-187.

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