Stoicism Emotions and Good Life

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1. Introduction

One of the most influential philosophical schools that originate from the Hellenistic period of philosophy is Stoicism. Ever since it was founded by Zeno of Citium, the Stoic school was focused on three areas of research, logic, ethics, and physics (Gill 2003, p. 36). Although the Stoics contributed to all three scientific fields, they are probably best known for their ethical teachings. The Stoic ethics was developed as a theory that was meant to have a practical use in everyday life and it consists of many elements, a few of which remain controversial to this day. In this paper I will present the two components of the Stoic theory which I consider to be the most problematic, that is, their account on human emotions and sociability. The Stoics believed that the possession of reason is an essential characteristic of human beings which helps us to understand what is good and what is bad for us, as well as being a guide to our behavior (Graver 2002, p. xix). Furthermore, given the emphasis the Stoics put on our rationality, they claimed that the human nature itself is purely rational and that it is our innate need to organize our lives and belief systems into a coherent, hierarchical structure that would resemble the perfect, infallible structure of the whole universe that was created by Zeus (Graver 2002, p. xx). According to the Stoics, such well-organized belief system needs to be based upon a proper understanding of values, which includes differentiating between the things that are under our control and those that are not. Once we learn that the only thing we can control is our mind, we should also realize that nothing from the external world can hurt us, because it does not matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, but how we perceive them. Obtaining this knowledge, the Stoics claimed, is what we need to become virtuous, and to be virtuous means to be leading a good life because virtue is the only true, intrinsic good, while everything else, including health, wealth, life, death, and even other people has no effect on our happiness (Graver 2002, pp. xxi-xxii). Furthermore, as the Stoics believed human nature lies within our reason, they insisted that emotions must be completely removed from our lives because emotions represent false beliefs that could corrupt our rationally organized belief system which we need to achieve happiness.

Because the Stoic ethics is a complex theory that, within its scope, embraces the Stoic views on emotions and relationships, throughout this paper I will introduce the most important notions that will shape the overall understanding of human life and behavior as presented by the later Roman Stoics: Epictetus, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius. My main goal is to show that people are not purely rational creatures that can live without profound emotional experiences. I will argue that it is in

human nature to establish emotional relationships with others who can indeed have an effect on our happiness. Even though we are rational creatures, I believe that being reasonable does not exclude being emotional, and that we help, protect and care about our loved ones not because we have established a perfect belief system but because we have genuine feelings for them and their well-being. As an example of a situation in which people exhibit that both reason and emotions are in fact essential parts of who we are, I have chosen the current COVID-19 pandemic. I will show that the people we care about, as well as the external circumstances, can influence our lives to the point we can no longer consider it good, despite our efforts to rely on reason. We are not as untouchable and infallible as the Stoics believed us to be, which is why I will offer the ethics of care as an alternative to Stoicism. The ethics of care is a philosophical theory that does not demand changing who we are but instead teaches us how to accept our imperfectly rational selves. During the time of a global pandemic, I believe it is the ethics of care that can provide a better explanation of motivations behind people's behavior and the reasons why all of us decided to adapt to a drastically different way of living. At the end of this thesis I will briefly summarize the claims made in the following chapters, concluding that the ethics of care is a more suitable approach to understanding human nature, especially in a global crisis, than the one offered by the Stoic ethics.

2. The Stoic ethics

One of the most prominent questions philosophers tackled during the Hellenistic period was how to achieve *eudaimonia* or happiness. The notion of *eudaimonia* is what lies at the basis of the Stoic ethics for they believed it was the ultimate goal of human life. A person who wants to reach that goal should strive toward being self-sufficient, attending only to the matters that can affect one's soul. In order to learn which things can bring us harm and which ones are good for our souls, Stoics claimed that all we need is virtue:

> Virtue is a consistent character, choice worthy for its own sake and not from fear or hope or anything external. Happiness consists in virtue since virtue is a soul which has been fashioned to achieve consistency in the whole life. (Diogenes Laertius 7.89 in Long and Sedley 1987: 61A)

Virtue, understood as a capability to distinguish between what is good and what is bad is the only thing that has intrinsic value, i.e., is good in itself. Thus, it follows that a person who possesses virtue does not need anything else to lead a good life and achieve *eudaimonia*. But, obtaining virtue is not easy because it requires a person to be a completely rational agent who, once they become virtuous, does not possess just one or two virtues but all of them at the same time (Graver 2002, p. 12). Stoics argued that the tendency towards virtuous life is in human nature, and that explains their claim that leading a good life means to "live according to nature" (Graver 2002, p. 12).

The notion of nature in the Stoic ethics can be interpreted in two different ways. As stated above, the nature of human beings lies in their possession of reason. Our ability of reasoning is what differentiates us from other non-human animals that are guided solely by their immanent instincts and urges. That ability, according to Stoics, also enables us to become intertwined with a more powerful nature, which is that of a whole universe (Epictetus, *Discourses* I.6.12-22). Therefore, to "live according to nature" means not only relying on our ability to reason but implies being a part of the universe as well. As Stoics believed in Zeus, they considered the universe to be infallibly constituted by his will. This further implies that everything that happens has its place in a complicated net of events which is under the government of Zeus' providential powers, hence making it impossible for anything to happen without a reason (Stephens, n.d.). Consequently, Stoics thought that all occurrences in the world were pre-determined by a higher force, making people subject to fate that corresponds to the rational order of the universe.

However, the Stoics did not think that the realization that human life is governed by another nature that is not just our own should turn us into passive observers of fate's doings. As rational agents we are supposed to comprehend that virtue is worth pursuing for itself and, being in accordance with our and cosmic nature, it should lead us to happiness (Rabbås *et al.* 2015, under "How Feasible Is the Stoic Conception of *Eudaimonia*?"). Nonetheless, this realization on its own is not enough for a truly fulfilled life since the Stoic ethics is a layered theory consisting of many important elements. One of those elements is the stance they take towards external objects and values people tend to ascribe to the things that surround them. This topic will be further discussed in the following subsection.

2.1. What do the Stoics say about values?

When it comes to values, we can say that a thing has either an intrinsic or an instrumental value. We have established that the Stoics held the view that virtue is the only thing intrinsically valuable and good which now raises the question of what their position was towards everything else people usually consider to be valuable on its own. For example, money, social status, or health are all generally taken to contribute to our happiness. The Stoics however disagree with such an opinion and say that those things do not influence our well-being in any way because they do not possess moral value. According to the Stoics, something is morally and intrinsically valuable only if it always has good consequences, which is the requirement that only virtue fulfils, since having, for example, too much money or power can corrupt us if we misuse them. Hence, things without moral value are neither good nor bad and are referred to as "indifferents" because obtaining or losing them does not make a difference to someone who is virtuous (Epictetus, *Discourses* II.19.13-19). Yet there is a distinction between those indifferents that should be chosen and those that should be avoided. The former ones include things which are to be "preferred" on the basis of them being in accordance with the nature – for example, one should prefer good health over illness (Stephens 2007, p. 2). The latter ones, on the other hand, are considered to be in opposition to nature and should thus be "dispreferred" – for example, poverty, death, sickness, bad reputation and similar would all fall into this category (Stephens 2007, p. 2). What is now left are the things that the Stoics believed are genuinely bad and which they called "vice". Specifically, "vice" is everything that could taint our ability to reason, such as cowardice, injustice, or immoderacy.

However, this general explanation of how the Stoics proposed we should ascribe values is not yet complete. Now we must turn our attention to the way in which all these things relate to our lives

and affect our actions. The crucial distinction to be made here is between that what is "up to us" and that which is not under our control, i.e., between our internal states and external objects (Stephens 2007, under "Internals VS. externals"). Simply put, the only thing we have complete control over is ourselves. What we say, think and do is guided by reason which is essentially our own, while everything else lies out of the scope of our influence. What also depends on us is how we choose to interpret sense-impressions that are produced within our minds when our sensory organs are stimulated by the outside world. This interpretation consists of two parts which are the impression itself and the assent we give, or refuse to give, to that same impression (Algra *et al.* 2008, p. 301). If we rely on our reason only, as we should according to the Stoics, then we will know which impressions to give our assent to, and which ones to discard. Once again, it all comes down to choosing the things that go along with our rational nature. Those are the things that are good for us, and we can refer to them as "internals".

On the other hand, external objects or "externals" belong to the category of previously mentioned indifferents. They are everything that is not our own or subject to our will. As we have seen, the Stoics do prefer some things over others, such as health, wealth, or reputation but will not say that they are intrinsically good. On the contrary, externals are morally invaluable and worth only instrumentally in a sense that they can make our lives easier but are not necessary constituents of *eudaimonia*. Because they do not have any effect on our happiness, the Stoics believed that whatever happens to the things we cannot have influence on should not bring us misery or distress. This claim becomes problematic when we take into consideration how many things are not under our control, but we still deeply care about them as it is the case with, for instance, our family, friends, job, education or even death. This issue is closely related to the Stoic conception of emotions or passions which I will present in the next subsection.

2.2. Stoics on emotions

Humans are emotional creatures. We feel love, pain, excitement, envy, sadness, and a whole range of different emotions on daily basis. Intuitively, we probably would not say that there is something wrong with us when we want to express our feelings, yet the Stoics would not agree with such an opinion. They claimed that people tend to misjudge the indifferents which then leads them to think that they can be either good or bad. If a person thinks that, for example, getting a promotion at work is good for them and being fired is bad, they have formed a false belief since externals like job or money only have an instrumental value (Brennan 2003, p. 264). When people form these

false beliefs, they will be guided by them through life and act upon them, wanting the things they consider to be good, and running away from those they think are bad. According to the Stoics, this behavior is contrary to our rational nature and once we fail to make rational judgments, we are going to be seduced by false beliefs which they named emotions or passions (Long and Sedley, 1987 65A, D, G).

The Stoic ethic tells us that each of our acts is preceded by an impulse which we need to assent to since they also participate in the formation of beliefs (Brennan 2003, pp. 265-266). Emotions are also impulses, but, as false beliefs, they are not welcome in the Stoic life. Their categorization of emotions is based on the attributes of goodness and badness, and whether we ascribe them to something in the present or in the future, resulting in the set of four fundamental emotions Nussbaum (1996, p. 386) distinguishes as:

> (1) judgment that what is presently at hand is good: called delight (*hedoni*); (2) judgment that something still in the future is good or valuable: called longing or appetition (*epithumia*); (3) judgment that what is presently at hand is bad: called distress (*lupi*); and (4) judgment that what is still in the future is bad: called fear *(phobos*).

All other emotions can then be placed under an appropriate category among these four, depending on which one is the most suitable. For an example, excitement or looking forward to something would be instances of longing. For someone who is trying to implement Stoic philosophy in their life, feeling any of these emotions would be unacceptable. Having in mind that the Stoics did not think there is any other governing faculty besides reason, we can conclude that false beliefs, or rather emotions, are produced due to "the malfunctioning" of our cognitive apparatus. To avoid such outcomes, the Stoics devotedly advocated for a complete annihilation of emotions.

What this further implies then is that we somehow corrupt our nature every time we feel devastated after a loss of a loved one or feel scared in a death threatening situation. We can also recall the Stoic account on externals as indifferents that do not have an intrinsic value and add that, consequently, everyone we know and love should be perceived in that way. This raises an important question about the impact other people have on our happiness which I shall discuss in more detail in the forthcoming chapters, offering for now only an introduction to this topic by analyzing the following passage from Epictetus' *The Discourses* III.24.84-89:

> when you are delighted with anything, be delighted as with a thing which is not one of those which cannot be taken away, but as with something of such a kind, as an earthen pot is, or a glass cup, that, when it has been broken, you may remember what it was and may not be troubled. So in this matter also: if you kiss your own child, or your brother or friend, never give full license to the appearance, and allow not your pleasure to go as far as it chooses; but check it, and curb it as those who stand behind men in their triumphs and remind them that they are mortal. Do you also remind yourself in like manner, that he whom you love is mortal, and that what you love is nothing of your own: it has been given to you for the present, not that it should not be taken from you, nor has it been given to you for all time, but as a fig is given to you or a bunch of grapes at the appointed season of the year. But if you wish for these things in winter, you are a fool. So if you wish for your son or friend when it is not allowed to you, you must know that you are wishing for a fig in winter.

This passage can be found in many philosophical works on Stoicism because it is a great example of how austere the Stoic ethics is with its glorification of reason and underestimation of quality of life which is filled with emotions or passions. It seems to me that the most problematic part of Epictetus' reasoning here is that we should compare our loved ones to such trivial things like figs and grapes. However, in my opinion, there is a way to look at this comparison differently. Naturally, a human being needs food to survive and function properly (it is not necessarily even a "preferred" good since we instinctively look for something to eat when we are hungry, feeling weak and sickly if our nutrition is poor). Figs and grapes are food which makes them something we cannot live without, at least not for a long period of time. Following that logic, Epictetus' comparison of people to fruit might be contradictory to the point he was trying to make if we interpret it from this angle because it would lead to a conclusion that we cannot live without the love and affection of those who are closest to us. Furthermore, not having figs or grapes in winter is not nearly as painful as losing a child or a friend, for we know the fruits will grow again when it is their season, but our loved ones cannot return to us once they are gone.

Epictetus' devotion to the Stoic philosophy is what led him to believe that reminding oneself of people's mortality should help us overcome powerful emotions and instead listen to reason (Stephens 2007, p. 102). Indeed, the Stoics believed that their philosophy had a therapeutic purpose, and the aim of that therapy was to eliminate all passions from one's life. Even though all of us, from the moment we are born, have, experience and express emotions, the Stoics did not accept they are innate to us and wanted to remove them not only from our behavior but from the

core of our being as well (Nussbaum 1996, p. 389). They often used the so-called "medical analogy" which compares medical science as a remedy for the body to philosophy as a remedy for the mind since they believed the mind infected with passions was sick and needed to be cured (Graver 2002, p. 74). To cure the mind, one would need to follow certain steps, one of which was already mentioned, and that is accepting that passions are nothing but false beliefs. The second step would be to realize that our actions should never be based upon passions but solely depend on the sense of duty and virtue. To illustrate this with an example we could imagine a person whose close friend has passed away and they are now attending that friend's funeral. If that person were a Stoic, paying their last respects would not be out of love or the need to share their grief with the friend's family but because it would be an appropriate and rational thing to do. Going further, the following step is closely related to the former one since its focus is on the devastating consequences of feeling strong, uncontrollable emotions. Just like they believed that a virtuous person possesses all virtues, the Stoics believed that a non-virtuous person is inclined to be subject to all emotions. Even if someone is feeling happy and exuberated, they will still suffer from the sickness of the mind since one emotion leads to another, causing a person to find themselves in a chaotic state (Nussbaum 1996, pp. 391-393).

The Stoic position on emotions, as presented above, does indeed have many important aspects which we can now briefly recall and summarize. Namely, the Stoic therapy aims at convincing a person that they alone are enough to achieve happiness. Nothing that is not under our control will be able to hurt us once we rid ourselves of passions that are mistakenly directed towards externals which are unreliable and unpredictable, hence being intrinsically and morally invaluable. This further implies that if one does not accept the Stoics' view on values, they will not necessarily accept what the Stoics say about passions (Nussbaum 1996, p. 395). When I commented on the passage from Epictetus' *The Discourses*, my main idea was to highlight the important role other people have in contributing to our well-being. Even though they fall into the category of externals, treating the lives of those who we love as something indifferent seems inhuman and unrealistic. Bernard Williams expresses a similar view when he writes (Williams 1997, cited in Rabbås *et al.* 2015):

> If the chilling ritual of reminding oneself, when embracing one's loved ones, that they are mortal beings is somehow supposed to cheer one up, this can only be because there is a conception at hand, which one would supposedly accept if one were introduced to it, that loved ones are, as mortal

> creatures, not ultimately valuable to the wise person. We can scarcely find such an outlook either intelligible or tolerable.

Obviously, this part of the Stoic theory is problematic, and it is reasonable to ask why did they go through such trouble to make their philosophy helpful for others when others are merely indifferent externals? I believe the answer lies within their theory of appropriation which leads to their pursuit of an ideal Stoic life. This topic will be further discussed below.

2.3. How do the Stoics explain relationships with other people?

So far, we have established that reason is crucial for the Stoic who wants to lead a virtuous and good life. In the subsection 2.1. I have mentioned that becoming a virtuous person is not easy, but that it is in our purely rational nature to try to reach that ideal. This process of leaning towards virtue and rationality is explained by the Stoic theory of appropriation which claims that each individual matures on two different levels, going through two different phases (Long and Sedley, 1987 57A, 57G). Both phases include acknowledging what things are truly ours and we begin by becoming aware of our body and its needs (Stephens, n.d.). As we grow older, we notice the changes in our physique accompanied by gaining the ability to reason, slowly shifting our identity from being one with the body to being one with the rational inner self. In other words, as was stated earlier in this thesis, we start to live in accordance with our nature and, consequently, the greater nature of the universe. Thus, the first phase of appropriation is completed once we fully embrace our faultless rational self, i.e., our perfectly rational soul which is now in a state the Stoics refer to as virtue (Stephens, n.d.).

The second phase of appropriation, which I consider to be problematic, is related to our conduct towards other people. The reason for that is the Stoic explanation of why we form social relationships. Specifically, they deny the need for, as well as the importance of, any kind of an emotional bond claiming that we grow attached to other people simply because they are rational beings like us, which makes them merely appropriate but not intrinsically valuable. What follows is that all rational beings are a part of one community in which forming relationships is appropriate according to our virtuous state of the rational soul. Of course, once we find ourselves in that state it is only reasonable that we should like to maintain it and, as a part of a larger community, it is in our best interest to promote the well-being of others so that we could stay happy (Nussbaum 1996, p. 342). At first glance, this might seem logical and unproblematic since it promotes everyone's

happiness but, if we turn our attention to the motivation behind it, we will discover that it stems from our selfish urge for self-preservation. We first experience this urge as children when we intuitively rely on our parents to keep us safe. As we grow older, we become aware of our rational nature and realize it is something we share with others. Recognition of this shared nature then becomes synonymous with our urge for self-preservation and, as the Stoics believe, a reason why we are drawn to other people. Hence, when we form a relationship with someone it is not because we want to establish an emotional connection but because others are appropriate for us according to our nature. Furthermore, as we learn to distinguish between preferred and dispreferred indifferents we also learn that other people fall into the category of externals, which makes them indifferents too. Since they are rational and thus appropriate for us according to our nature, they belong among those indifferents we should prefer. Following from this is the fact that the Stoics did not think of others as intrinsically valuable beings but rather as externals that are a part of our *eudaimonia,* but do not contribute to achieving it, which I deem to be an unrealistic explanation of why we seek the company of others.

To better illustrate the claim made above, I will introduce the way in which the Stoics interpreted friendship. It is true they encouraged such relationships but, once again, it was because they were appropriate, preferable and in accordance with our rational nature. So, if a virtuous person were to be spending time with a friend, they would be "programmed" in a way to understand that there is no difference between being accompanied by another person and spending that same time alone, for virtue does not depend on the presence or absence of someone else (Stephens, n.d.). Moreover, the Stoics believed that a true friendship can be developed only between virtuous people because they are the only ones who understand that friends, even though they are externals, have perfected their character, which makes them preferrable and desired company (Long 2013, p. 233). When two or more friends have a virtuous character, they exercise their virtue together and encourage each other's betterment. This further entails that, when a Stoic is choosing a friend, she will not focus on their individuality but on excellence of character that they both have in common, which means that "any virtuous person could potentially become the friend of any other virtuous person because all virtuous persons share the same wise and benevolent character" (Long 2013, p. 236). Since this is the case, it follows that a truly virtuous person will always have a friend by her side because, even if her only friend dies, she can establish a new friendship with another virtuous person (Long 2013, p. 235). Indeed, the Stoic ethics tells us that friends are replaceable and that

their death should not cause us much sorrow because we have enjoyed their company while they were alive and shall find someone else with whom we will share an equally strong connection (Long 2013, p. 235).

Certainly, the Stoic view on friendship is not the one we could expect to be held in modern time. It seems that such a profound friendship which the Stoics ascribed only to virtuous people can be found in today's society, even though none of us are virtuous according to the Stoic standards. Moreover, I doubt that a person whose dear friend passes away can control their grief and focus only on the happy memories they created together or start looking for someone who could replace the friend who deceased, which is even more problematic. Yet, a virtuous Stoic would probably dismiss such concerns because, as Marcus Aurelius says, "Human lives are brief and trivial. Yesterday a blob of semen; tomorrow embalming fluid, ash." (Hays, n.d., Book 4, para. 48). Hence, it is obvious that life itself belongs to the category of indifferent externals, which then makes fear of death irrational and the person who feels it non-virtuous. What would then a Stoic say to, for example, her elderly mother who is afraid of dying? Firstly, it is important to recall the maturing process explained by the theory of appropriation and mention that one of the first people a Stoic recognizes as appropriate are her family members (Stephens, n.d.). That is why a Stoic is, in a way, obliged to try to comfort her worried mother but still keep in mind that she has no influence over the suffering caused by her mother's fear, thus restraining herself from wishing to eradicate it (Stephens 2007, p. 97). The reasoning behind this attitude is grounded upon the abovementioned Stoic belief that they should not interfere with nature's order. In other words, suffering is entirely the mother's problem because she holds a false belief that life is something good and death something bad. Any attempt by her daughter to eliminate that suffering would mean going against Zeus' will and disturbing her own peace that she had gained by becoming a Stoic (Stephens 2007, pp. 97-98).

What this further implies is that a Stoic will act like any other person when they are comforting someone who feels emotional pain but will not take on any of that pain because that would negatively affect their rational mind. In short, they will seem to be grieving with another person while internally being completely unbothered by their emotions. On the other hand, a Stoic will gladly partake in someone else's happiness without the outward pretense and reserved support they give to a person who is suffering since being happy with and for another person is an appropriate

response a virtuous Stoic should give. The main reason for that seems to be, once again, their own interest, since being around joyful people does not harm their inner contentment but even improves it (Stephens 2007, p. 99). However, what the Stoics focus on the most in the case of a grieving person is the false belief they hold about externals and their value, pointing it out as the root of a painful emotional experience; but what if that false belief makes a person happy? What if, for instance, someone were given a very nice present that improved their mood or had a lovely time with friends or family? That person would probably feel genuinely happy, especially if she is content with the life she has. It is not hard to imagine someone who has a great career, loving family, a close group of friends and enough free time for her favorite hobbies. Most likely, that person would say that she is leading a good life because she has reached her goals and can now enjoy what she has. Yet, the Stoics would not agree. No matter how good someone deems their life to be, if that goodness depends on the externals, they simply cannot experience true happiness. Ultimately, as long as we let external circumstances affect us, even if in a positive way, the Stoics would deny that our life is genuinely good.

The happiness Stoics believed we should all strive to achieve is not a simple emotion like the one we get while being in the company of our loved ones or when we get a nice present. Even though happiness is supposed to be a state in accordance with our nature, the Stoics did not consider it to be an emotional state since, as we have seen, a virtuous person should not have any emotions at all. Because this does sound counterintuitive, the Stoics found a solution by introducing the *eupatheiai* or three affective responses that somewhat resemble emotions but are not dependent on externals, which makes them acceptable in contrast with false beliefs. These affective responses set out a strict perimeter of what is allowed for a virtuous person to feel. This means that in a dangerous and scary situation, a Stoic is not allowed to feel fear, anger or cowardice but react with (1) prudent caution, i.e., make rational judgments about the surrounding events and calmly choose a preferable indifferent, such as hiding from an intruder who came to kill them instead of confronting the murderer. If a Stoic is awaiting for something to happen in the future, she cannot be excited or nervous but only have a (2) rational wish and, if something good happens, she will feel a (3) "rational uplift" which equals a non-Stoic joy (Nussbaum 1996, pp. 398-399).

Even though incorporating affective responses into their ethics might have seemed like a good idea to avoid passions, I think that, in reality, the Stoics had to admit to themselves humans cannot live

a completely emotionless life, hence permitting a type of feelings that would fit into their theory. However, the fact is that feeling strong emotions is a part of who we are, it is a way in which we express ourselves and react to the world around us. Depriving ourselves of intense emotions would resemble depriving the world of bright colors – soothing at first, but ultimately too plain and dull.

Focusing on the Stoic concept of joy as a rational uplift Nussbaum (1996, p. 400) comments that "It is like a child that is born inside of one and never leaves the womb to go out into the world. It has no commerce with laughter and elation." Indeed, by trying to explain emotions as a kind of rational response the Stoics deprived them of their nature. In other words, the Stoics emphasized the cognitive aspect of emotions, but ignored the affective element which emotions also have. Even though human beings are rational creatures, that does not mean we are also not emotional, passionate, and expressive, or at least should be able to be all of that. Nonetheless, the Stoic ethics tells us differently by rejecting the idea that people are not purely rational and encourages us to reach the Stoic ideal of a wise man or the Sage who I will describe in the next subsection.

2.4. The Sage or the wise man

After discussing all the important elements of the Stoic ethics in the previous parts of this thesis, it is time to turn our attention towards the person who embodies them all – the Sage. Namely, the Sage is a perfect, flawless, infallible, rational, self-sufficient being who is even considered to be godlike (Stephens 2007, p. 115). Despite the fact that this ideal sounds unattainable, the Stoics firmly believed it is our purpose in this world to try to transform ourselves into this perfection. It has already been mentioned several times that the Stoics deny any real value to the external objects, but they went a step further with that claim in the case of the wise man. Specifically, being a wise man entails that one has obtained all virtues, lives in accordance with nature, and without a mistake knows what is truly good and how to differentiate it from evil. We now know that the only true good for the Stoics is virtue that cannot be corrupted by externals once someone, i.e., the Sage possesses it. What they have further derived from this is that it is not even necessary for the Sage to leave her house, because she has no use of the outside world and her perfect, inner self is enough to fulfill all of her needs (Nussbaum 1996, p. 363). So not only does the Sage realize that externals cannot hurt her nor make her happy, but she also has no problem with completely isolating herself from the rest of the world. This does sound strange because we all know that a healthy life includes socialization and physical activity. Yet for true Stoics this does not seem to be particularly important for they do not identify with their body but with their rational mind, which is probably

best illustrated by the example of the Stoic slave (Nussbaum 1996, p. 363; Stephens 2007, p. 118). We cannot always control what happens with and to our body – especially if one becomes a slave and endures severe physical torture. Most people would say that such brutal conditions would make their lives utterly miserable but, for a Stoic slave, being owned by a cruel master does not represent an obstacle to leading a good life. As long as they have the strength of will, their freedom will not be restrained by heavy chains around their wrists and neck, or even by death, for they feel free in their mind (Stephens 2007, p. 118).

Once again, this example shows how little appreciation the Stoics had for human life. As soon as they found themselves in a situation they could not control, instead of accepting it for what it was and embracing the unpredictability of life as something that will, from time to time, devastate us, they chose to find solace within themselves, withdrawing from the world just because it might hurt them. They thought this kind of life was meant for all of us, that our imperfections had to be eliminated because that is the only way we could ever be happy, even claiming that people who do not approve of the Stoic ethics are simply lazy and do not want to be truly happy (Stephens 2007, p. 122). Moreover, while being a dedicated Stoic is indeed praiseworthy, the Stoics themselves admit only a rare few will ever come close to becoming the Sage who is incapable of making any mistakes and, until that ideal is reached, we all remain fools (Nussbaum 1996, p. 365).

The Sage's *eudaimonia* mainly manifests itself in her absolute self-sufficiency, the awareness that there is not a thing or a person who contributes to or corrupts her happiness. Even her expression of love comes down to knowing the difference between virtues, vices and indifferents, meaning that she does not desire a lover or show romantic interest, but, rather, as an act of love, shares her knowledge of the Stoic teachings (Stephens 2007, pp. 108-109). For the Sage, manifesting any of the passions represents a corruption of her rationality and a reason to be condemned because she would be guilty of succumbing to false beliefs (Stephens 2007, p. 142).

Let us now imagine a scenario in which the Sage comes home only to find her family brutally murdered and her home completely wrecked. She is supposed to stay perfectly calm, remind herself that people are mortal and that it is not meant for us to be in their company forever. Instead of crying, grieving, feeling scared and angry, it is expected of her to hold a funeral, clean up the house, repair the possible damage and move on with her life as if nothing had happened. When people asked her how she felt after such a traumatic event, the answer would be "happy". This kind of

behavior just seems so inhuman and deeply unnatural to me. It is true no one has yet become the Sage, but even the ones who are trying to reach that goal have to "play the part". On the one hand, it is possible to understand such devotion to a philosophical theory and its practical usage in life but, as Nussbaum (1996, p. 403) herself writes:

> On the other hand, not to get angry when horrible things take place seems itself to be a diminution of one's humanity. In circumstances where evil prevails, anger is an assertion of concern for human well-being and human dignity; and the failure to become angry seems at best "slavish" (as Aristotle put it), at worst a collaboration with evil.

I strongly agree with Nussbaum's claim because it just seems unreasonable for a philosophical position which claims to have a therapeutic purpose to demand sacrificing an essential part of our being out of fear that we will sometimes suffer. Instead of insisting that emotions are false beliefs and that being reasonable distinguishes us from animals, I think we should rather focus on collaboration between emotions and reason, the faculty that helps us properly express them, as something distinctively and essentially human. If we were to completely shut off our emotional side and rely solely on reason, would that not make our behavior almost mechanistic, similar to animalistic urges? Having to rationalize to ourselves that eating, drinking and sleeping will keep us alive seems to resemble an impulsive tendency for self-preservation, with an additional requirement of reason's approval. For example, when she thinks about having a meal "what motivates the Sage, on this account, is her perception that this instance of eating… constitutes a virtuous action, and thus a good thing" (Brennan 2003, p. 285). Having to think so much about trivial things such as eating almost reminds us of a computer processing data before performing a certain task.

Marcus Aurelius says "The mind without passions is a fortress. No place is more secure. Once we take refuge there we are safe forever. Not to see this is ignorance. To see it and not seek safety means misery." (Hays, n.d., Book 8, para. 48). If we combine this claim with what has been said above, raising mental walls around ourselves and isolating ourselves from the influences of the external world helps to further build the analogy of a person becoming mere automaton. If we do not feel, do not find our loved ones to be intrinsically valuable or affect our happiness, think life and death are indifferents we have no control over and thus should not worry about them, then, what do we have? According to the Stoics, we have the title of the Sage, the most perfect being

and the only one capable of real happiness. But is the Stoic concept of happiness, which requires so many sacrifices and seemingly turns us into human machines, really the end one should work this hard for, especially when we know that the Sage does not even yet exist? In the following chapters of this thesis, I will argue that a person cannot emotionally escape from the happenings around them, that other people are crucial for our view on happiness and that efforts to reach an ideal even its advocates did not obtain can make a person more miserable than leading a non-virtuous life as perceived by the Stoics.

3. Can external circumstances affect our happiness?

At the end of the year 2019 in Wuhan, China, an unknown virus began to spread, causing serious respiratory problems among people who contracted it (About the virus, 2021). In February 2020, the WHO China Joint Mission "reported that the disease was caused by a new strain of coronavirus, which was later renamed SARS-CoV-2, and that it had affected 75,465 people all over China by February 20, 2020." (Koley & Dhole 2021, under "Origin spread and global response to COVID-19"). The new disease caused by the coronavirus[1] was soon named COVID-19 and cases of infected people were being recorded all over the world. During the first months of 2020 people were well aware of this new sickness but did not consider it to be a serious threat, especially because the symptoms resembled those of the seasonal flu. However, as the virus continued to spread, healthcare professionals began noticing more severe symptoms in patients suffering from the COVID-19 and, as the situation only kept getting worse, people were even starting to die. By March 2020 the virus was present in 114 states, the number of infected people climbed to over 118 000, and the death toll was 4291 (About the virus, 2021). In the time span of just a few short months the world found itself in serious danger and on March 11, 2020, World Health Organization declared a pandemic[2] (About the virus, 2021). From that moment on, our lives drastically changed.

When the world faces a crisis such as a pandemic, it is reasonable to expect that the authorities will impose certain restrictions and implement safety measures that people are expected to follow and comply with. One of the strictest measures in the majority of countries was the lockdown, i.e., a

[1] Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. A novel coronavirus (nCoV) is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans. (About the virus, 2021)

[2] occurring over a wide geographic area (such as multiple countries or continents) and typically affecting a significant proportion of the population (Definition of PANDEMIC, 2021)

period of time in which people had to stay in their homes and could leave them only to buy the necessities such as food or sanitary products. Coffee shops, theaters, cinemas, schools, colleges were all closed since social gatherings of any kind were not allowed. Traveling, including going from one city to another, was banned or limited only to cases when people had valid reasons and special passes that enabled them to travel. Some countries ended their lockdowns sooner, and some later, but as this is still an ongoing pandemic, there are certain persisting limitations present all over the globe. In public indoor places, as well as in situations where it is impossible to maintain a six feet social distance, it is necessary to wear a face mask that covers your nose and mouth. Hand sanitizing or wearing rubber gloves is a part of every trip to the store, ride in public transport, visiting a hospital, nursing home, any state institution, or any other indoor public place. People had to get used to working from home, students and teachers had to get used to online classes. Everyone was affected by the COVID-19, one way or the other.

The process of learning how to live with a dangerous disease is not easy, especially because it has lasted for almost two years now, and still continues. As soon as all of us realized how serious the situation was, the first reaction was panic and fear. People began to hoard supplies or completely isolate themselves, avoiding contact even with the members of one's nuclear family. Media reports about the increase of death rate which indicated that the most vulnerable groups include elderly population and people suffering from chronic illnesses made people stay away from anyone they knew was at such serious risk. At one point no one was allowed to visit their loved ones in nursing homes or hospitals, which only contributed to the feelings of worry, sadness and desperation. However, during all this time people knew they had to be responsible, not just to protect themselves, but to protect others as well. Healthcare workers tirelessly cared for every patient who was hospitalized, scientists worked hard to develop the vaccine against the SARS-CoV-2, producing several different vaccines that were distributed across countries. Now, in August of 2021 the epidemiological[3] situation does look better, but caution and responsibility are still necessary since the latest statistics inform us that there are 198 778 175 confirmed cases of the disease and 4 235 559 lives that have been lost due to the SARS-CoV-2 infection (Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) – World Health Organization, 2021).

[3] Definition of *epidemiology*: a branch of medical science that deals with the incidence, distribution, and control of disease in a population (Definition of EPIDEMIOLOGY, 2021)

3.1. How would the Stoics deal with a global pandemic?

In the previous subsection I have described a dire situation that has caught the whole world off guard, making everyone adapt to a new, strange reality and a way of living that consists mostly of avoiding close contacts with other people since that is how the virus spreads the fastest. Being a person who is a part of this unusual state of affairs, I have, from personal experience, written about how it is to live during a time of a global pandemic. However, the fact is that my experience is not much different from the experiences of other people who have learned how to function under these circumstances, at least in the aspect of respecting the same safety measures and receiving the same information about the disease and its effects. However, probably the biggest difference among all of us is the individual reaction to changing our lifestyles and the ways we have found to deal with it. I shall now try to apply the Stoic ethics and imagine what advice they would give to a person who has found herself in the midst of a global pandemic.

Sure enough, none of us could have known about or influenced the arrival of a new disease and, with that being the case, the Stoics would label this pandemic as an indifferent, external matter. Moreover, as viruses develop naturally, and the Stoics believed that nature is rational and infallible, they would not understand a person's concern for their health that is being threatened by a disease. Since neither viruses nor health are under our complete control, getting infected should not be a reason to worry because everything that happens is under the guidance of a higher power, so, if "Something happens to you. Good. It was meant for you by nature, woven into the pattern from the beginning. Life is short. That's all there is to say." (Hays, n.d., Book 4, para. 26). Indeed, the only true sickness the Stoics acknowledged was that of the soul ruined by passions and Nussbaum (1996, p. 392) explains why they held such a belief:

> In making the case for seeing the passions as sick conditions of the personality, their underlying dispositional bases as forms of chronic illness, the Stoics like to point out that, after all, passions are felt, more often than not, as violent pains and upheavals of the organism; moreover, the person subject to them feels herself to be in a chronic condition of weakness and lassitude.

It is clear then that, if we were to take the Stoic approach towards the pandemic, we should be more worried about our soul getting sick than about our body. Consequently, the fear of us or our loved ones dying is irrational because it disrupts our inner peace, making us incapable of achieving *eudaimonia*. Presuming the Stoic conception of a good life is what we strive for, we ought to keep in mind what Marcus Aurelius (Hays, n.d., Book 4, para. 50) says about life:

> Our lifetime is so brief. And to live it out in these circumstances, among these people, in this body? Nothing to get excited about. Consider the abyss of time past, the infinite future. Three days of life or three generations: what's the difference?

Based on everything that was presented so far about the Stoic ethics and their beliefs about what it means to be truly happy, I think it is time to interpret people's behavior during this pandemic from the Stoic point of view, focusing on our compliance with safety measures. The fact is that wearing a face mask and keeping social distance has been a part of everyone's daily routine for almost two years. But does that really make sense? It has been mentioned above that viruses emerge from nature, and we know that nature is perfect, which means that nothing coming out if it can be bad for us. So, if the nature, or Zeus decided humanity should face a new virus, which is in this case SARS-CoV-2, we are not supposed to question that decision. The fact is that Stoicism tells us that life, death, and health are not intrinsically valuable, that external circumstances are not under our control, which means they should not have any effect on our lives, and that only virtue is good in itself. What follows is that the COVID-19 pandemic should not have been a reason for all the drastic changes we had to make to our lives in order to try and protect ourselves from the virus. After all, sickness and death mean nothing to the Stoics since, as Marcus Aurelius writes, "Nothing has meaning to my mind except its own actions. Which are within its own control. And it's only the immediate ones that matter." (Hays, n.d., Book 6, para. 32).

In the context of the Stoic ethics, mind's immediate actions Marcus Aurelius writes about can be interpreted as exercising virtue and choosing preferred indifferents regardless of the situation we are in. If we were to apply the Stoic terminology to the current pandemic, we would say that having classes in person, not having to work from home, freely going where and when we want, and socializing without safety measures would all be preferred indifferents we should not have sacrificed for the sake of those who are the most vulnerable. Our fear of death and the whish to protect others are not, according to Stoicism, valid reasons for giving up on the life we had before the outbreak of the COVID-19. Furthermore, a rational Stoic knows that getting sick from the virus cannot harm her happiness, while becoming subject to passions such as fear, anger or grief does have that power. Thus, instead of worrying about the possibility of getting the virus or dying from it, the Stoic will focus on maintaining her self-sufficiency, accepting that, in Nussbaum's (1996, pp. 359-360) words:

> Items that are not fully under the control of the agent—such as health, wealth, freedom from pain, the good functioning of the bodily faculties—have no intrinsic worth, nor is their causal relationship to eudaimonia even that of an instrumental necessary condition. In short, if we take all these things away, if we imagine a wise person living in the worst possible natural circumstances, so long as she is good—and once good she cannot be corrupted—her eudaimonia will still be complete.

What we can now conclude is that a good, self-sufficient Stoic would not be particularly appreciative of contributions and efforts of the scientists and medical workers during this pandemic, since she does not need their help in dealing with the disease. She is completely untouched by the external events, emotionless, does not think life and death themselves are valuable and has nothing against being isolated. Once again, this description sounds more like that of an automaton than a person living a good life, and yet, the Stoics would consider those of us who do not live this way non-virtuous fools. Both virtue and vice are imagined as absolutes, meaning that a person can either be good and rational or bad and irrational. Because I consider this kind of attitude to be counterintuitive, in the next chapter I will introduce the ethics of care as a theory that I believe offers a better understanding of life and motivations behind human behavior, arguing that the Stoic ethics is too strict and demanding, has unrealistic expectations from people and cannot be applied in situations such as a global pandemic.

4. The ethics of care as an alternative to Stoicism

The Stoic position, as we have by now seen, has high expectations from people who decide to dedicate their lives to achieving *eudaimonia* and live a good life by Stoic standards. In this paper I have focused on several aspects of the Stoic ethics that I consider to be problematic. Firstly, their understanding of human nature as purely rational, which leads to the requirement of sacrificing one's emotions, does not seem to offer a realistic explanation of human psychology, but rather asks of us to abandon an essential part of who we are. Secondly, due to their belief that people should rely only on reason, the Stoics neglected our innate need for establishing emotional relationships and claimed that the realization all of us are rational beings is what motivates us to seek company of others. This means that, when we care for someone else, we actually care for their rationality, and everything we do for them is out of our duty to listen to reason, and not because we share an emotional bond with them. I believe such an idea of relationships is contrary to what we usually experience since emotions do play an important role in establishing a meaningful connection with another person. And finally, implementing the Stoic ethics during the current global pandemic

would result in disrespecting our genuine fears, concerns, emotions, and efforts we put in to return to our normal lives.

The ethics of care, on the other hand, does not require of us to change who we are and understands that humans are not perfect, infallible beings capable of living by obeying only the rules of reason. This theory acknowledges that there is a relationship between us and the external world, emphasizing that it is in human nature to have an emotional response to our surroundings. Moreover, the advocates of the ethics of care believe that caring is innate to all of us, and I think Noddings (2013, p. 49) gives a good explanation of this when she writes:

> I am arguing that natural caring - some degree of which each of us has been dependent upon for our continued existence - is the natural state that we inevitably identify as "good." This goodness is felt, and it guides our thinking implicitly. Our picture of ourselves as ethical inevitably involves a consideration of this goodness.

This view of goodness as a natural state of caring forms the basis of the ethical ideal within the ethics of care and it includes our natural tendency to establish emotional relationships with others, as well as "the longing to maintain, recapture, or enhance our most caring and tender moments" (Noddings 2013, p. 104). Instead of suggesting one should chase an abstract ideal such as the Stoic Sage, the ethics of care embraces the emotional part of human nature and gives a more realistic picture of human behavior (Noddings 2013, p. 100). Of course, this does not mean that we should ignore what reason tells us to do since all of us have accepted certain moral principles that guide our actions, but we are also aware that they are not universal and that life is unpredictable (Noddings 2013, p. 56). We never know what awaits us tomorrow, what circumstances we will find ourselves in, and that is why I consider it important to acknowledge that both emotions and reason can be good motivators for our behavior and hold that the current global pandemic is a great example of that. People do not choose to wear masks, keep social distance and overall act responsibly just because it is a reasonable thing to do, but because they are also scared, worried, and want to protect themselves, as well as the others, from a deadly virus. At any given moment any one of us could get infected with the SARS-CoV-2, and during this time of almost two years we have witnessed the terrible consequences of the COVID-19, from developed symptoms to permanently impaired health. Certainly, none of us wish to experience the suffering caused by this

disease or want to see our loved ones going through it, and Noddings (2013, p. 14) offers a nice insight into why we feel that way:

> When we see the other's reality as a possibility for us, we must act to eliminate the intolerable, to reduce the pain, to fill the need, to actualize the dream. When I am in this sort of relationship with another, when the other's reality becomes a real possibility for me, I care.

It is possible to see from this that genuinely caring for another person does not stand in the way of our own happiness. Contrary to the Stoic belief that it is possible to lead a good life in complete isolation, the ethics of care highlights the need for emotional relationships with others as a constitutive part of our being. If we choose to deny the intrinsic value of people we care for, in exchange for some sense of freedom the Stoics promise to those who put up walls around them to protect themselves from profound passions and external influences, we also choose to discard the love and effort others invested into building a relationship with us. In trying times such as these, finding comfort in Stoicism might result in an increased feeling of alienation that first emerged as a consequence of safety measures such as lockdown, social distancing and the ban on social gatherings. The Stoics might call upon their notion of self-sufficiency as a solution to transforming alienation into inner contentment, but I believe that Noddings (2013, p. 51) captures the human nature more realistically when she states:

> I am not naturally alone. I am naturally in a relation from which I derive nourishment and guidance. When I am alone, either because I have detached myself or because circumstances have wrenched me free, I seek first and most naturally to reestablish my relatedness. My very individuality is defined in a set of relations. This is my basic reality.

When this natural human need to establish and maintain relationships cannot be fulfilled because of the unpredictable outer circumstances such as the pandemic, a person is likely to suffer emotionally. Whereas the Stoics interpret this need as being rational, the ethics of care points out that through caring for others we learn more about ourselves and recognize that the love we receive in return teaches us to care about our own emotions and how to handle them (Noddings 2013, p. 49). Although it is not always easy to understand why we feel a certain way, especially if we are jealous, envious or selfish, that is not the reason to discard these emotions completely. Instead, we should pay attention to them, accept they are an essential part of who we are, even when it is hard to cope with what we are feeling (Noddings 2013, p. 109). The fact is that life can and will be

challenging from time to time, yet I do think it is more rewarding and enjoyable to embrace it, than to distance yourself from the possibility of being surprised, spontaneous, or genuinely loved.

However, not every surprise is nice, as we have all witnessed when the SARS-CoV-2 first appeared. While the Stoics would insist on staying undisturbed and at peace with what is happening, the reality is quite different. Living during the time of a global pandemic has proven to be stressful for the majority of the world's population. In the early months of 2020, namely before the situation had gotten so serious that the authorities had to implement lockdowns, it was expected that the spread of the coronavirus would be under control in a matter of weeks. However, those expectations soon turned into wishful thinking as the number of infected people began to grow and was accompanied by an increase in the number of deaths. Of course, this caused panic and fear to spread together with the disease, which even led to serious mental health problems. People were losing jobs, watching their loved ones die, isolating themselves and keeping distance from friends and family, while, at the same time, being troubled by the uncertainty of how long their lives would be altered and affected by this disease (Lazzari *et al*., 2020). Naturally, different people also reacted differently to the changes we all had to make to adapt to the current situation, meaning that there are those who did not develop any serious mental health issues while enduring the events brought about by the pandemic. However, for some people this pandemic was, and still is, too much to handle, and that has led either to the triggering or worsening of mental illnesses, including depression, severe anxiety, certain phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder, hypochondria, paranoia, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicides, and even homicides (Lazzari *et al.*, 2020).

Mental health problems some people are facing during this time require professional psychological or psychiatric help and it is indeed known that Stoicism is used today as a part of the cognitive-behavioral therapy or CBT. This therapy primarily focuses on rebuilding the patient's belief system so that they could learn how to cope with their problems. For an example, one of the most used Stoic strategies in CBT is to imagine an event or a situation the patient is afraid of, which should help them realize that whatever happens cannot be as bad as they think it will be. I do believe CBT has helped many people, yet I doubt that telling someone at this point in the pandemic to imagine that the situation will get worse could ease their mind.[4] However, even if this Stoic advice could

[4] Of course, the Stoic strategy I have mentioned here is one out of many that are used in CBT. However, that topic is too broad to be covered in this paper and I recommend consulting Robertson, D., 2010. *THE PHILOSOPHY OF*

be helpful during the pandemic, the fact that people get seriously affected by the external circumstances proves that our nature is not as rational or resilient as the Stoics believed it to be. In my opinion, this proves that humans are not and cannot be completely rational beings that can decide to eliminate their emotions and think of the externals as preferred or dispreffered indifferents. It is in our core to have genuine feelings and emotional reactions to what is happening around us, to us, and to those we love. Caring comes to us naturally, as a response to someone else's troubles in which we choose to be fully involved because of the innate relatedness we share with others. The ethical self, as seen by the ethics of care, is dependent on other people because the relationships with them help us better understand ourselves. In one of the previous subsections in this paper I have described how the Stoics comfort others from a certain distance in order to preserve their inner peace, yet I find such disinterested approach, based on a duty imposed by reason, to be dishonest and unfair toward the person who is suffering. Although sometimes it is necessary to isolate the reason of one's suffering and look at it objectively, I must agree with Noddings (2013, p. 36) who says that, after it, we "move back to the concrete and the personal… we keep our objective thinking tied to a relational stake at the heart of caring."

In this case "the concrete and personal" can be used to describe the way in which individuals continue to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, and the link Noddings makes between objective and caring aspect of comfort we provide for others seems to be more intuitive than the Stoic approach. Indeed, the Stoics would probably keep on insisting that those who refuse to take the path that might lead to becoming the Sage are denying their true nature, can never be truly happy, and shall remain non-virtuous. However, I do believe that accepting our nature is imperfect, as opposed to striving for an ideal no one yet reached, can guarantee a happy life. Making irrational mistakes that the Stoics tried to avoid makes us more aware of ourselves and motivates us to be and do better. Having a friend that will genuinely sympathize with our emotions and get involved in finding a solution to our problems still seems to be more valuable than absolute self-sufficiency, especially in a global pandemic. Leading a good life should not demand sacrificing any part of who we are, and the ethics of care shows us that it is possible to combine reason with emotions because both are present within us. Instead of deeming people as non-virtuous, lazy or fools, the ethics of care offers a more realistic view of human nature and does not expect a complete transformation

COGNITIVE–BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT) Stoic Philosophy as Rational and Cognitive Psychotherapy. 1st ed. London: Karnac Books Ltd. for further information.

of one's life, but rather encourages us to accept that we are not, and were not meant to be, perfectly rational, infallible beings.

5. Conclusion

As has been presented in this thesis, Stoicism is an elaborate theory consisting of many important views on elements of human life. My focus throughout this work has been the Stoic understanding of human nature as purely rational and showing that their idea about what it means to lead a good life is an unrealistic ideal. Even though people are rational beings, that does not mean we must discard our emotional side and reject the possibility of establishing a relationship that is based on how we feel for the sake of what our reason tells us to do. I have used the current COVID-19 pandemic as an example of a situation in which people instinctively acted in accordance with both reason and the emotional connection we share with others. Our well-being should not entail sacrificing any part of our humanity and that is why I chose the ethics of care as an alternative to the strict Stoic requirements for attaining happiness.

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