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Problem of relation between luck and morality in selected ancient philosophers

I. Introduction

The beginnings of the debate on the role of luck in morality, and the introduction of the expression "moral luck", go back to the articles by Williams and Nagel published in the 1970s. Before delving into the details of the problem, however, one should examine a few aspects associated with luck.

Firstly, it needs to be explored what a given philosopher understands under the concept of luck. Secondly, it must be established whether a particular philosopher believes that luck impacts human life – including people's moral efforts. In other words, it is pertinent to determine if moral luck perceived as this very type of interaction is incorporated in the philosophical framework. Thirdly, it should be assessed whether moral luck existing in a particular framework of thought represents a conceptual problem which is verbalized and expected to be resolved in some way. It may happen, as the line of argument below demonstrates, that some philosophers embrace the idea that luck affects morality, however without exploring the association as a separate problem, as opposed to Nagel and Williams.

The works by Nagel and Williams have proven to be so seminal because they propose that luck plays a major role in moral assessment. Based on the dictionary definition, luck refers to "the good or bad things that happen to a person in the course of events (as if) by chance; fate; fortune".[1] However, the

[1] Definition of "luck" in: *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. *New Edition*, Warsaw 1990, p. 624.

word sometimes tends to be interpreted in a more narrow sense, i.e. first and foremost as good fortune or prosperity. In the forthcoming sections, luck is deemed to refer to the chance happening of both fortunate and adverse events, i.e. in a broad sense. The notion of luck is usually used to describe unexpected events or occurrences beyond anyone's control. The role of moral luck involves the negation of an important element of evaluation: control over one's actions. It seems obvious that no person can be held accountable for their actions, if they were involuntary and not controllable. In Nagel's view, however, moral luck reveals that such an evaluation is performed. Consequently, the philosopher calls into question the sense of moral assessment as such.

Nagel proposes the following definition of moral luck: "where a significant aspect of what someone does depends on factors beyond his control, yet we continue to treat him in that respect as an object of moral judgment, it can be called moral luck. Such luck can be good or bad".[2]

A classic literary example of moral luck is the fate that befalls King Oedipus from Sophocles' play. Oedipus commits his wrongful deeds unwittingly. In fact, it must be noted, he becomes an instrument of evil despite his struggle to avoid evil. Unfortunately, as fate dictates, his actions lead to evil consequences.

The philosophical debate relies on slightly different examples, though. They include the truck driver who, driving at an excessive speed, involuntarily runs over a child, or a fictionalized Gauguin who chooses a life of painting over a life with his wife and children. In the discussion below, the majority of references are to the example with the truck driver. It is simpler because, as opposed Williams' Gaugin example, the loss of life or health is an irrefutably wrong act – contrary to artistic accomplishments which are difficult to classify and evaluate in objective terms.

Before embarking on further discussions on the topic of moral luck, it appears useful to quote the following differentiation proposed by Nagel:

> The driver, if he is entirely without fault, will feel terrible about his role in the event, but will not have to reproach himself. Therefore this example of agent-regret is not yet a case of moral bad luck. However, if the driver was guilty of even a minor degree of negligence – failing to have his brakes checked recently, for example – then if that negligence contributes to the death of the child, he will not merely feel terrible. He will blame himself for the death. And what makes this an example of moral luck is that he would have to blame himself only slightly for the negligence itself if no situation arose which required him to brake suddenly and violently to avoid hitting a child. Yet the negligence is the same in both cases, and the driver has no control over whether a child will run into his path.[3]

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[2] T. Nagel, *Moral Luck*, in: *Moral Luck*, ed. D. Statman, New York 1993, p. 59.

[3] Ibid, p. 61.

In this context, it is essential to make a clear distinction between a situation in which an unfortunate event occurs without anyone's fault, and moral luck, which describes circumstances involving a certain relationship (usually causality) between previous actions and their fortunate – or unfortunate – consequences.

The literature includes many attempts to classify moral luck. As Nagel points out:

> There are roughly four ways in which the natural objects of moral assessment are disturbingly subject to luck. One is the phenomenon of constitutive luck – the kind of person you are, where this is not just a question of what you deliberately do, but of your inclinations, capacities, and temperament. Another category is luck in one's circumstances – the kind of problems and situations one faces. The other two have to do with the causes and effects of action: luck in how one is determined by antecedent circumstances, and luck in the way one's actions and projects turn out.[4]

The category of constitutive luck is also mentioned by Williams.[5] However, the scholar also makes a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic luck. He emphasizes that

> the intrinsic luck in Gauguin's case concentrates itself on virtually the one question of whether he is a genuinely gifted painter who can succeed in doing genuinely valuable work. Not all the conditions of the project's coming off lie in him, obviously, since others' actions and refrainings provide many necessary conditions of its coming off – and that is an important locus of extrinsic luck. But the conditions of its coming off which are relevant to unjustification, the locus of intrinsic luck, largely lie in him – which is not to say, of course, that they depend on his will, though some may.[6]

It thus follows that intrinsic luck is a derivative of the internal features of the agent – a result of him possessing a particular characteristic or condition. It cannot always be equated with constitutive luck. The latter is a set of factors stemming from the nature and environment in which the agent is born – or from his purely biological endowment which may have a bearing on behaviour. Constitutive luck is not always equivalent to intrinsic luck. Certain environmental influences, such as getting a better or worse education, may partially be classified under the term of extrinsic luck. Intrinsic luck cannot be equated with constitutive luck, either. After all, certain features of character

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[4] Ibid, p. 60.
[5] B. Williams, *Moral Luck*, in: idem, *Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, Cambridge 1981, p. 21.
[6] B. Williams, *Moral Luck*, in: op. cit., p. 26.

may change, which means that they elude the criterion of constitutiveness conceived of as something pre-existing. It can be seen, then, that the distinctions proposed by Nagel and Williams overlap to a certain extent, however they cannot be equated, since they are an effect of divergent criteria of differentiation. In the most essential terms, the guiding principle is that one should not cast blame or give credit to anyone in situations where the person concerned has no control over the circumstances. According to Nagel, however, aside from events in which the lack of control precludes any moral judgment, there are also cases in which we morally assess agents for things depending on factors that are not, in fact, in their control:

> However jewel-like the good will may be in its own right, there is a morally significant difference between rescuing someone from a burning building and dropping him from a twelfth-story window while trying to rescue him. Similarly, there is a morally significant difference between reckless driving and manslaughter. But whether a reckless driver hits a pedestrian depends on the presence of the pedestrian at the point where he recklessly passes a red light. What we do is also limited by the opportunities and choices with which we are faced, and these are largely determined by factors beyond our control. Someone who was an officer in a concentration camp might have led a quiet and harmless life if the Nazis had never come to power in Germany. And someone who led a quiet and harmless life in Argentina might have become an officer in a concentration camp if he had not left Germany for business reasons in 1930.[7]

Going further, people are judged for what they actually did rather than for what they would have done had the circumstances been different.[8] The driver who drove too fast with defective brakes in his truck and ran over a child that accidentally ran onto the road is judged to be more morally blameworthy than the driver who, under the same initial circumstances, did not run over anyone. What the examples above show is that an uneven judgment cannot be eliminated, as it would breach the principle stating that whoever did more evil deserves a more severe judgment.[9] As Nagel claims, moral luck is the factor which provides an element of difference with respect to the effects, circumstances and causes.[10] What is more, constitutive luck, defining the agent's characteristics, inclinations, abilities and temperament, makes the determined "accidentality" of the deed even more conspicuous,[11] for it describes human

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[7] T. Nagel, *Moral Luck*, op. cit., pp. 58-59.
[8] Ibid., pp. 59-60.
[9] N. Richards, *Luck and Desert*, in: *Moral Luck*, ed. D. Statman, New York 1993, p. 168.
[10] T. Nagel, *Moral Luck*, op. cit., p. 59.
[11] Ibid., p. 60.

personality and will, and in this way affects the consequences of actions. Also, due note should be taken of Nagel's argument that: "It may be true of someone that in a dangerous situation he would behave in a cowardly or heroic fashion, but if the situation never arises, he will never have the chance to distinguish or disgrace himself in this way, and his moral record will be different".[12]

The above line of argument, Nagel argues, leads to a paradox which is thus described by Richards: "On the one hand, it requires that matters beyond one's control can have no bearing on one's deserts. On the other, it requires that they have enormous bearing after all".[13]

Consequently, Nagel draws attention to the fact that the nature of moral judgements appears problematic. The problem is formulated in the following manner:

> If the condition of control is consistently applied, it threatens to erode most of the moral assessments we find it natural to make. The things for which people are morally judged are determined in more ways than we at first realize by what is beyond their control. And when the seemingly natural requirement of fault or responsibility is applied in light of these facts, it leaves few pre-reflective moral judgments intact. Ultimately, nothing or almost nothing about what a person does seems to be under his control.[14]

If Nagel's line of argument is accepted – along with its emphasis on determinism – it follows that people are not in actual fact responsible for their deeds. Human actions are a corollary of previous states and coincidences of events in which we participate. Moral luck accentuates the state of the human moral condition. If this line of thinking is embraced, culpability as an effect of causative responsibility for the perpetration of evil ceases to be based on responsibility. Therefore, upon a closer look, we are not in fact responsible for our actions – at least not in the sense of voluntary agency which is a commonly recognized condition for the attribution of causative responsibility for a particular deed. Nagel proceeds to outlining even more far-reaching consequences. If we are determined by constitutive luck, even our will is predetermined. What this means is that our exercise of will ceases to be "free will". As a result, it is difficult to establish whether autonomy and potential responsibility for actions exist at all "because the self which acts and is the object of moral judgment is threatened with dissolution by the absorption of its acts and impulses into the class of events".[15]

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[12] Ibid., p. 65.
[13] N. Richards, *Luck and Desert*, op. cit., p. 168.
[14] T. Nagel, *Moral Luck*, op. cit., p. 59.
[15] Ibid., p. 67.

Consequently, he argues, "nothing remains which can be ascribed to the responsible self, and we are left with nothing but a portion of the larger sequence of events, which can be deplored or celebrated, but not blamed or praised".[16]

Even the existence of "the self" then becomes problematic.[17] For the contemporary analysis would be worthy to review, what about luck thought ancient philosophers. This is purpose of the present paper.

The paper traces the relationship between luck and morality back to ancient philosophical thought, exploring the ideas proposed by Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics.

II. Luck in Plato's philosophy

The problem of how people's fate, though not necessarily their morality, is affected by luck can be found in the first literary works which are of fundamental importance for the European civilization. The life histories of Paris and Helen, Achilles and Agamemnon, and Odysseus and Penelope, were determined by Olympian Gods and the Moirai – the Three Fates controlling the metaphorical thread of life. The fate of Oedipus shows that Ananke is able to trap a protagonist – who is otherwise capable of solving the Sphinx's riddle – in an unending labyrinth of guilt with no way out. As opposed to the wanderings of Agamemnon's fleet of ships or the spell cast on Paris, the labyrinth was moral in character. Oedipus, led imperiously by blind fate, commits a crime in good faith, for which, in an act of tragic irony, he ultimately blinds himself.

A broader and more in-depth analysis of literary references to fate can be found in the book by Martha Nussbaum entitled "The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy". The work is an extensive review of the struggle of ancient Greek literature and philosophy with the problem of destiny, luck or chance. The publication paints a picture of a world where the impact of luck on human existence cannot be refuted. However, it seeks to find a remedy: a way not to surrender to chance, to minimize the role of luck or identify a portion of a human being which is luck-independent. Greek tragedy authors tended to emphasize the dramatic side of human existence, and fate was often given the face of gods. Chance, luck, fate – all of them afflicted people through frequently astonishing decisions of godly beings or social factors which were largely beyond human control. The fate of Sophocles' Antigone, Nussbaum argues, is meant to show that human life stands

[16] T. Nagel, *Moral Luck*, op. cit., p. 68.
[17] Ibid.

on the edge of fate, well-established social conventions should be followed, and fundamental human values are not free from the influence of destiny.[18] The above also applies to fate which brings the social conventions and values into conflict. Religious myths and rituals were meant to entreat deities to give people good fortune, not adversity. Philosophical reflection, in turn, attempted to identify not divine interventions but rather the intrinsic character of fate and ways to shield oneself from its impact: both in terms of circumstances which pose a risk to life and health, and situations generating social conflicts, including those that affect the ethicality of human life.

In Plato's "Protagoras", human life is, by nature, completely dependent on fate (Greek *touche*). Due to the fact that Epimetheus distributed traits among animals and humans without any foresight, people are exposed to the mercy of elements and beasts. Fortunately, Prometheus endowed humans with a set of basic skills including *technai* (techniques, arts) which help people stand up to fate. These additional skills, often acquired through effort and practice, aid people in achieving partial independence of luck. Furthermore, they support humans in attaining self-sufficiency. The aspect of *techne* – and knowledge which is intended to lead to technical skills such as measuring, counting or weighing, which are important in the struggle with fate – is stressed by Nussbaum.[19] The author claims that the notion of *techne* is mutually interchangeable in Plato, and in even in Aristotle, with the concept of *episteme.*[20] The operations of measuring and counting referred to above are derivatives of a broader intellectual activity called philosophy. Philosophy, in turn, seeks not only natural things, but ever since Socrates' times, it has been searching for a formula for good human life. Measuring, counting or searching for a formula are based on pinpointing the constancy which stands in opposition to variability dictated by blind fate. It is in constancy that Plato seeks a remedy for the changeability and randomness of human existence. It is no wonder, then,

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[18] M.C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge 2001, p. 89.

[19] Ibid., pp. 89-90.

[20] "The word «techne»' is translated in several ways: «craft», «art», and «science» are the most frequent. Examples of recognized technai include items that we would call by each of these three names. There are house-building, shoemaking, and weaving; horsemanship, flute-playing, dancing, acting, and poetry-writing; medicine, mathematics, and meteorology. The Greek word is more inclusive than anyone of these English terms. It is also very closely associated with the word «epistiflll», usually translated «knowledge», «understanding»; or «science», «body of knowledge» (depending on whether it is being used of the known or of the cognitive condition of the knower). In fact, to judge from my own work and in the consensus of philologists, there is, at least through Plato's time, no systematic or general distinction between episteme and techne. Even in some of Aristotle's most important writings on this topic, the two terms are used interchangeably. This situation obtains in the Protagoras" – M.C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 94.

that the world of ideas is a non-material world, though existing in actual reality in an unchanging manner, in which the human soul learns the permanent elements, including those safeguarding from bad conduct. What Plato considers to be the greatest threat to a morally commendable and happy life (at least internally) are changeable desires and passions of the soul. The rescue is in the ability of thinking which, searching for the truth, must be based on the *modo geometrico* of established ways of thinking and acting. Looking at Plato's fundamental human faculties, or the Platonic tripartite theory of soul consisting of reason, spirit and appetite, it follows that only one of the parts – by nature – is able to enjoy consistency. It is no wonder, then, that the reasonable part of the soul is meant to control the remaining elements by delineating the limits (measures) of their influence. In the context of fate, Nussbaum points out, *Protagoras* includes a thought which plays a rudimentary role for further deliberations on the topic of luck, namely that shaping one's character is possible, and humans carry a moral responsibility for this endeavour:

> I have been showing that they are right in admitting every man as a counsellor about this sort of virtue, as they are of opinion that every man is a partaker of it. And I will now endeavour to show further that they do not conceive this virtue to be given by nature, or to grow spontaneously, but to be a thing which may be taught; and which comes to a man by taking pains. No one would instruct, no one would rebuke, or be angry with those whose calamities they suppose to be due to nature or chance; they do not try to punish or to prevent them from being what they are; they do but pity them. Who is so foolish as to chastise or instruct the ugly, or the diminutive, or the feeble? And for this reason. Because he knows that good and evil of this kind is the work of nature and of chance; whereas if a man is wanting in those good qualities which are attained by study and exercise and teaching, and has only the contrary evil qualities, other men are angry with him, and punish and reprove him-of these evil qualities one is impiety, another injustice, and they may be described generally as the very opposite of political virtue. In such cases any man will be angry with another, and reprimand him,-clearly because he thinks that by study and learning, the virtue in which the other is deficient may be acquired".[21]

Elsewhere, Plato highlights the problem of fair legal assessment of deeds committed involuntarily, including accidental actions. In the ideal state, the law-maker should provide for more lenient penalties to perpetrators who involuntarily cause another person's death:

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[21] Plato, *Protagoras*, tr. B. Jowett, http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/protagoras.html, [accessed: 01.12.2016].

> If any one slays a freeman with his own hand and the deed be done in passion, in the case of such actions we must begin by making a distinction. For a deed is done from passion either when men suddenly, and without intention to kill, cause the death of another by blows and the like on a momentary impulse, and are sorry for the deed immediately afterwards; or again, when after having been insulted in deed or word, men pursue revenge, and kill a person intentionally, and are not sorry for the act. And, therefore, we must assume that these homicides are of two kinds, both of them arising from passion, which may be justly said to be in a mean between the voluntary and involuntary; at the same time, they are neither of them anything more than a likeness or shadow of either. …And we should make the penalties heavier for those who commit homicide with angry premeditation, and lighter for those who do not premeditate, but smite upon the instant; for that which is like a greater evil should be punished more severely, and that which is like a less evil should be punished less severely: this shall be the rule of our laws.[22]

Plato does not deny, therefore, that luck has an impact on people's fate and morality. What he asserts, though, is that attempts should be made to control this impact with knowledge, and in the case of morality – with virtues. In the latter case, it is possible to achieve a complete independence from luck. Consequently, even in adverse external circumstances one can remain a good and noble person. As Nussbaum puts it, Plato endeavours to make good life independent of luck.[23] However, the philosopher goes so far in internalizing being happy that he almost fails to take note of the external conditions of happiness, and does not necessarily link it to morality. This is a consequence of searching for constancy in the world of ideas whose characteristics must also be embraced by a human soul derived from it. In this context, there is one quite remarkable passage in "Crito" which should be evoked here. It relates to a dream recounted to Crito by Socrates, who is already imprisoned. While dreaming, Socrates has a vision of a gorgeous statuesque woman dressed in white who, as if dashing all thoughts of escape, says to him: "O Socrates. The third day hence, to Phthia shalt thou go".[24] Even though, as Witwicki points out in his commentary, the lines recited by the woman come straight from the Iliad, and were originally uttered by Achilles when threatening Agamemnon about abandoning the war against Troy and returning home, the metaphor of fertility is suggestive of the Elysian Fields.[25]

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[22] Plato, *Laws*, tr. B. Jowett, book IX, http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/laws.9.ix.html [accessed: 01.12.2016].

[23] D. Statman, *Introduction*, in: *Moral Luck*, ed. idem, State University of New York Press 1993, p. 3.

[24] Plato, *Crito*, tr. B. Jowett, http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/crito.html, [accessed: 01.12.2016].

[25] Plato, *Kriton*, tr. W. Witwicki, Warszawa 1984, p. 338.

Another aspect, emphasized by Jedan, is the fact that the date of death given in the dream was consistent with the anticipated date of administering the death penalty to Socrates.[26] What follows is that Socrates had a prophetic dream. This, in turn, may be taken to mean that Plato did not reject the possibility of theological determinism altogether. Evidence for that claim can be found in one passage from "Republic" which addresses the allocation of fate to individual people:

> When Er and the spirits arrived, their duty was to go at once to Lachesis; but first of all there came a prophet who arranged them in order; then he took from the knees of Lachesis lots and samples of lives, and having mounted a high pulpit, spoke as follows: 'Hear the word of Lachesis, the daughter of Necessity. Mortal souls, behold a new cycle of life and mortality. Your genius will not be allotted to you, but you choose your genius; and let him who draws the first lot have the first choice, and the life which he chooses shall be his destiny. Virtue is free, and as a man honours or dishonours her he will have more or less of her; the responsibility is with the chooser – God is justified.' When the Interpreter had thus spoken he scattered lots indifferently among them all, and each of them took up the lot which fell near him, all but Er himself (he was not allowed), and each as he took his lot perceived the number which he had obtained.[27]

Paradoxically, it is the passage which also addresses the concept of luck. As Hadot states, *daimon* (i.e. individual fate), which according to Plato is tied to every soul, is ascribed to it by luck but, at the same time, chosen by it".[28] What is at play here is a complicated convolution of three elements. There is a draw which, *nolens volens*, involves souls voluntarily picking their numbers in the draw. As Witwicki states in one of the footnotes: "the Prophet presents those souls which are about to enter bodies and begin their life on Earth with sample human fates. Fate is not preordained by God, for fate may be vicious. God must not be blamed for any evil, so Plato prefers to believe that every individual is culpable for their own unlucky fate. This is the fate everyone picks before birth, and must accept. If they make a wrong choice, they have no one else to blame. They may complain about their own stupidity, but not the divine will. However, even wise people are unable to choose any fate they want, because chance plays a major role. The prophet distributes lives like draw tick-

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[26] Ch. Jedan, *Stoic Virtues. Chrysippus and the Religious Character of Stoic Virtues*, New York 2009, p. 36.

[27] Plato, *Republic*, tr. B. Jowett, book X, http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.11.x.html, [accessed: 01.12.2016].

[28] P. Hadot, *The Inner Citadel. The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, tr. Ch. Michael, London 1998, p. 222.

ets, and everyone picks up the fate that lands at their feet. Tough luck".[29] The randomness can be seen when souls "draw lots" to determine the sequence of choosing ways of life which, one might presume, are varied but limited in their repeatability.

> Then the Interpreter placed on the ground before them the samples of lives; and there were many more lives than the souls present, and they were of all sorts. There were lives of every animal and of man in every condition. And there were tyrannies among them, some lasting out the tyrant's life, others which broke off in the middle and came to an end in poverty and exile and beggary; and there were lives of famous men, some who were famous for their form and beauty as well as for their strength and success in games, or, again, for their birth and the qualities of their ancestors; and some who were the reverse of famous for the opposite qualities. And of women likewise; there was not, however, any definite character them, because the soul, when choosing a new life, must of necessity become different. But there was every other quality, and the all mingled with one another, and also with elements of wealth and poverty, and disease and health; and there were mean states also. And here, my dear Glaucon, is the supreme peril of our human state; and therefore the utmost care should be taken. Let each one of us leave every other kind of knowledge and seek and follow one thing only, if peradventure he may be able to learn and may find someone who will make him able to learn and discern between good and evil, and so to choose always and everywhere the better life as he has opportunity. …and so he will choose, giving the name of evil to the life which will make his soul more unjust, and good to the life which will make his soul more just; all else he will disregard. For we have seen and know that this is the best choice both in life and after death.[30]

One may embrace the interpretation that even though the sequence of selecting typical ways of life is a result of "a draw of lots", the samples of lives themselves are fully selectable. Factors influencing the selection process include existing propensities and predispositions, character developed in the body throughout life, and experience (a consequence being that the status of souls making the selection process for the first time is impaired). Consequently, a certain form of choice – and a certain impact on one's life – does in fact exist. However, it takes place mainly in the world of ideas. Even if, according to the circular concept of time that was adhered to by the ancient Greeks, people living their lives in their bodies are able to acquire virtues and hence influence the selection of another incarnation, the choice is made ultimately in the world of ideas. It seems that from the perspective of people living on

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[29] Platon, *Państwo*, 617 C-E, tr. W. Witwicki, Kęty 2003, footnote 15, p. 334.

[30] Plato, *Republic*, tr. B. Jowett, book X, http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.11.x.html, [accessed: 01.12.2016].

Earth both possibilities of influencing their faith are rather remote and illusory. What dominates is the notion of living a preordained life. As Witwicki aptly summarizes: "Once embarked upon in the other world, the course of life is irreversible and set in the steel frames of necessity, similarly to the course of the Universe. With respect to this world – and this life – Plato is a determinist. He transplanted some pretence of indeterminism into the period before people's birth".[31] One can agree that it is actually a question of appearances. How, then, can determinism be reconciled with previously discussed passages addressing the topics of accidental guilt and possibilities for a character change through exercises in virtuous life? One should therefore concede that the issue of luck and determinism has not been finally resolved in Plato's philosophical system. What emerges here is a framework in which fate, i.e. everything that takes place outside the human being, does not necessarily affect the unalterable core (the soul) which is thus able to achieve control of its desires and impulses. It also seems that a predetermined sequence of external events may be interpreted by humans as accidental. Consequently, people committing bad deeds are not guilty. It thus follows that Plato did not discuss separately the topic of whether morality can be modified under the influence of luck and whether luck can impact the moral evaluation of people's actions. It was only Aristotle, Plato's disciple, who noticed that human happiness linked to virtuous life may have an effect on external factors, accidental factors included.

III. Luck in Aristotle's philosophy

Aristotle analyzes the good not in the contemplation of the abstract Platonic idea of the good but rather in the categories of happiness (Greek *eudaimone*). Achieving luck is largely dependent on human efforts:

> For this reason also the question is asked, whether happiness is to be acquired by learning or by habituation or some other sort of training, or comes in virtue of some divine providence or again by chance. Now if there is any gift of the gods to men, it is reasonable that happiness should be god-given, and most surely god-given of all human things inasmuch as it is the best. But this question would perhaps be more appropriate to another inquiry; happiness seems, however, even if it is not god-sent but comes as a result of virtue and some process of learning or training, to be among the most godlike things; for that which is the prize and end of virtue seems to be the best thing in the world, and something godlike and blessed. It will also on this view be very generally shared; for all who are not maimed as regards their potentiality for virtue may win it by a certain kind of

[31] Platon, *Państwo*, 617 C-E, tr. W. Witwicki, Kęty 2003, footnote 16, p. 337.

> study and care. But if it is better to be happy thus than by chance, it is reasonable that the facts should be so, since everything that depends on the action of nature is by nature as good as it can be, and similarly everything that depends on art or any rational cause, and especially if it depends on the best of all causes. To entrust to chance what is greatest and most noble would be a very defective arrangement.[32]

Aristotle writes that a negative response to the role of luck in being happy "… is plain also from the definition of happiness; for it has been said to be a virtuous activity of soul, of a certain kind".[33] Nonetheless, he notes that

> evidently, as we said, it needs the external goods as well; for it is impossible, or not easy, to do noble acts without the proper equipment. In many actions we use friends and riches and political power as instruments; and there are some things the lack of which takes the lustre from happiness, as good birth, goodly children, beauty; for the man who is very ugly in appearance or ill-born or solitary and childless is not very likely to be happy, and perhaps a man would be still less likely if he had thoroughly bad children or friends or had lost good children or friends by death. As we said, then, happiness seems to need this sort of prosperity in addition.[34]

The quote is about happiness (Greek *eudaimonia*), so Aristotle recognizes that being happy depends on the operation of fate. Happiness was not equated solely with pleasure – it was also associated with being ethical: the road to happiness was deemed to be paved with virtue: "with those who identify happiness with virtue or some one virtue our account is in harmony; for to virtue belongs virtuous activity".[35] However, the accomplishment of virtue is dependent not only on the character traits of a given individual, but also on external factors. And the latter are not always subject to the control or agency of human powers.

The problems of happiness and the impact of luck in the Aristotelian view are discussed in-depth by Nussbaum. She highlights that according to the Stagirite life experience changes juvenile traits from good to worse, which may impact further conduct. Sample passages from *Rhethoric* indicate indisputably that character is correlated with age.[36] According to Nussbaum, the fragments

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[32] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. W.D. Ross, book I, part 9, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.1.i.html, [accessed: 01.12.2016].

[33] Ibid.

[34] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. W.D. Ross, book I, part 8, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.1.i.html, [accessed: 01.12.2016].

[35] Aristotle, EN, p. 91. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. W.D. Ross, book I, part 8, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.1.i.html, [accessed: 01.12.2016].

[36] "Such, then is the character of the Young. The character of Elderly Men-men who are past their prime-may be said to be formed for the most part of elements that are the contrary of all these.

show that even when specific virtues of character are achieved and exercised, the vicissitudes of fate make them difficult to maintain.[37]

Nussbaum's line of argument in the context of the debate on moral luck is summarized by Nelkin.[38] She argues that Aristotelian luck operates in at least two ways: 1. Firstly, one becomes a virtuous person by undergoing the right kind of upbringing and training (exercising of virtues). Whether one receives the upbringing/training or not is at least to some extent beyond one's control. Therefore, the ability to live a virtuous life depends on luck. 2. Secondly, the practice of virtues, i.e. the precondition for becoming a virtuous individual, depends to a certain measure on life circumstances.

What follows is that being happy also depends on whether someone has had an opportunity to practise virtues. For example, to be generous, one needs to have resources to share, and someone to share them with. Certain elements of life are thus a matter of luck – especially circumstantial luck – so the value of one's life also depends to a degree on things that are beyond one's control. As Nelkin points out, in some interpretations of Aristotle luck enters the picture in yet a third way. In order to be happy, humans need a minimum set of external goods (in addition to virtues), such as health, security, access to material resources. Their role is broader than just to facilitate virtuous life. The key aspect is that they themselves are capable of creating luck.[39]

In her summary of Aristotle's position on luck, Nussbaum concludes that being virtuous is not a sufficient prerequisite for the goodness of living. Since life requires an active approach, there is a risk of violating moral sensitivity. Consequently, a person may succumb to external factors and become "dislodged" from *eudaimonia* itself.[40]

Aristotle's views on the connection between the moral value of human beings, their happy life and luck is also linked to the concept of disposition. The

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They have lived many years; they have often been taken in, and often made mistakes; and life on the whole is a bad business. The result is that they are sure about nothing and under-do everything. They «think», but they never «know»; and because of their hesitation they always add a «possibly» or a «perhaps», putting everything this way and nothing positively. They are cynical; that is, they tend to put the worse construction on everything. Further, their experience makes them distrustful and therefore suspicious of evil. Consequently they neither love warmly nor hate bitterly, but following the hint of Bias they love as though they will someday hate and hate as though they will someday love. They are small-minded, because they have been humbled by life: their desires are set upon nothing more exalted or unusual than what will help them to keep alive" – Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, tr. W. Rhys Roberts, book II, part 13, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/rhetoric.mb.txt, [accessed: 01.12.2016].

[37] C.M. Nussbaum, *Luck and Ethics*, in: D. Stateman, *Moral Luck*, New York 1993, p. 99.

[38] D.K. Nelkin, *Moral Luck*, in: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2013 Edition), ed. E.N. Zalta), URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/moral-luck/, [accessed: 23.02.2016].

[39] T. Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles*, Oxford 1988, p. 445.

[40] C.M. Nussbaum, *Luck and Ethics*, op. cit., p. 100.

disposition for action (Greek *hexis*) is a key constituent of virtuous action. Repeatable good actions both determine and corroborate the permanent nature of "goodness" in a given entity. Nevertheless, the permanence must rely on the readiness for action, i.e. disposition. It represents the moral residuum – the very essence of morality. What is at stake here, however, is not permanence itself, but rather the permanence of orientation on the good, in a manner that is voluntary, conscious and aimed at the good itself.[41] Nussbaum notes that dispositions may never emerge without action. One of the problems which is not resolved in a final manner in the Aristotelian philosophical system is whether dispositions are able to persist in a given individual without action. If not, an inactive individual would lose the dispositions.[42] The problem is beyond the scope of the present study, however if such a relationship between virtue and action were to be accepted – along with the additional premise that action takes place in a variable world – it would follow that the existing circumstances impact not only the effects of human actions but even the potential for being virtuous or the lack of it. It can thus be concluded that Aristotle accepted the possibility that luck might affect the moral assessment of human actions, even though this question was never addressed by Aristotle as a separate philosophical problem.

Although the philosopher recognized the status of luck, he seemed not to notice a theoretical contradiction between luck and the possibility of being virtuous. This is clearly visible in the discrepancy between the cited statement about the implausibility of the view that happiness depends on luck and the simultaneous incorporation of the role of circumstances which are independent of a given entity. The fact that the problem is not thoroughly analyzed by Aristotle is pointed out by Andre and Williams.[43]

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[41] "Again, the case of the arts and that of the virtues are not similar; for the products of the arts have their goodness in themselves, so that it is enough that they should have a certain character, but if the acts that are in accordance with the virtues have themselves a certain character it does not follow that they are done justly or temperately. The agent also must be in a certain condition when he does them; in the first place he must have knowledge, secondly he must choose the acts, and choose them for their own sakes, and thirdly his action must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character" from Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. W.D. Ross, The Internet Classics Archive by Daniel C. Stevenson, Web Atomics. World Wide Web presentation is copyright (C) 1994-2000, Daniel C. Stevenson, Web Atomics, book II, part 4.

[42] C.M. Nussbaum, *Luck and Ethics*, op. cit., footnotes 22 and 23, pp. 106-107.

[43] Williams Bernard Postscript State University of New York Press 1993, pp. 251-252; A. Judith, *Nagel, Williams, and Moral Luck*, State University of New York Press 1993, pp. 126-128.

IV. Luck in the Stoic philosophy

Fate, and dignified human conduct in the face of fate, rank among the core subjects of the Stoic philosophy. The discussion below does not incorporate a distinction between the ancient Greek and Roman, and early, middle and late Stoics. An in-depth analysis of the problem would probably exhaust the scope of a separate monograph. In view of the above, the considerations regarding the Stoic philosophy in general, as presented below, involve a certain degree of overgeneralization.

In the anecdote mentioned by Diogenes by Laertios, Zeno of Citium – the founder of the Stoic school of philosophy – appears to support the idea of determinism of human fate: "We are told that he was once chastising a slave for stealing, and when the latter pleaded that it was his fate to steal, «Yes, and to be beaten too», said Zeno".[44] Zeno's views, Bobzien and Jedan argue, are deterministic in character.[45] Nonetheless, the determination does not mean that penalties or awards should be abolished.

Destiny – predetermined fate – is viewed by the Stoics in two ways. In one, classically Greek, which is manifest in Homer's works or in Sophocles' tragedies, fate reveals itself to individual people (idea of *personal fate*). According to this vision, "certain landmarks in individual lives and in human history are preordained: a victory, a hero's return home, an illness, someone's murdering his father, the date of one's own death".[46] However, the necessity and preordination of fate do not signify the lack of moral autonomy. Quite the opposite, preordained fate is a proper context for it to reveal itself.[47] As Origen writes about the Stoic philosophy:

> the philosophers of the Porch, who, not amiss, place man in the foremost rank, and rational nature in general before irrational animals, and who maintain that Providence created all things mainly on account of rational nature. Rational beings, then, as being the principal ones, occupy the place, as it were, of children in the womb, while irrational and soulless beings hold that of the envelope which is created along with the child. I think, too, that as in cities the superintendents of the goods and market discharge their duties for the sake of no other than human beings, while dogs and other irrational animals have the benefit of the superabun-

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[44] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, ed. R.D. Hicks, book VII, chapter I, Part 23, Harvard 1972, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0258%3Abook%3D7%3Achapter%3D1, [accessed: 01.12.2016].

[45] S. Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy*, Oxford 1998, pp. 16-58; Ch. Jedan, *Stoic Virtues. Chrysippus and the Religious Character of Stoic Virtues*, New York 2009, p. 31.

[46] Ch. Jedan, *Stoic Virtues. Chrysippus and the Religious Character of Stoics Ethics*, op. cit., p. 31.

[47] Ch. Jedan, *Stoic Virtues*, op. cit., p. 32.

dance; so Providence provides in a special manner for rational creatures; while this also follows, that irrational creatures likewise enjoy the benefit of what is done for the sake of man".[48]

The primacy of moral goods logically overshadows any external goods – health, charm, or even life itself. As Jedan points out, destiny – or human fate – were a natural consequence of the polytheistic view on the divine being as a power exterior to humans and thus exerting only a limited influence on their fate.[49] What ensues is that fate and destiny are external factors which are not always consistent with the human will and desires, and do not exhaustively describe the way of achieving the end or final outcome which is predestined. One example of the relationship between freedom and fate thus perceived can be found in the words spoken by Cleanthes in *The Enchiridion of Epictetus*: "Lead me, Zeus and Destiny, wherever you have ordained for me. For I shall follow unflinching. But if I become bad and am unwilling, I shall follow none the less".[50] In the passage, fate and destiny do not interfere with people's will and their desires. As Jedan notes, "nonetheless, the resolution of the human agent will be immaterial to the final outcome, which is preordained: even if the agent is unwilling, the outcome will be the same".[51] In line with this vision, Socrates would have died even if he had escaped from prison and refrained from drinking a mixture containing poison hemlock – provided that his destiny was to die. In the second meaning, destiny encompasses the entire reality (Bobzien defines it as "all-embracing"[52]). It is no longer the question of personal fate but the destiny which, after being chosen by a god, logos or nature, applies to everything and in a permanent manner: "God is one and the same with Reason, Fate, and Zeus he is also called by many other names", as Zeno states in the treatise *On the Whole*.[53] The idea that the whole reality is controlled by the divine logos causes that fate is a manifestation of providence. As Jedan notes, the theological determinism of the Stoics is less disconcerting than the contemporary mechanistic determinism derived from Laplace. The

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[48] Origen, *Contra Celsus*, tr. F. Crombie. From Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 4, ed. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.) Revised and edited for New Advent by K. Knight, book IV, chapter 74, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04164.htm, [accessed: 01.12.2016].

[49] Ch. Jedan, *Stoic Virtues, op. cit.*, p. 32.

[50] Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, part 53, from: A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, Cambridge, 1987, vol. 1. 62B.

[51] Ch. Jedan, *Stoic Virtues*, op. cit., p. 32.

[52] S. Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy*, Oxford 1998, p. 84.

[53] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, ed. R.D. Hicks, book VII, chapter I, Part 23, Harvard 1972, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0258%3Abook%3D7%3Achapter%3D1, [accessed: 01.12.2016].

former involves the idea of divine providence aimed at the good of the world and the human beings.[54] Jedan argues that it is the goodness of the all-controlling logos/god or fate that made the Stoics adopt the idea of all-embracing determinism.[55] According to Chrysippus the all-embracing fate "is a certain natural everlasting ordering of the whole: one set of things follows on and succeeds another, and the interconnexion is inviolable".[56] As Aurelius asserts, people exist at the point of intersection of a combination of causes: "whatever may happen to thee, it was prepared for thee from all eternity; and the implication of causes was from eternity spinning the thread of thy being, and of that which is incident to it.".[57] Jedan notes that even though Chrysippus introduced the other understanding of fate, the original one was nevertheless present in his thought.[58]

Also, attention should be given to the fact that the concatenation of causes and effects differs in the Stoic version from the aspects emphasized by Hume which were later adopted in the Western culture. To differentiate between the real and magical causality, Hume mainly pointed to the temporal sequence which must be repeatable and irreplaceable.[59] The vision relies on linearity and the succession of causes and effects, where causes produce effects that themselves become causes for subsequent effects. The Stoics, Meyer asserts, did not recognize the temporal reversal of causes and effects, but spoke of their simultaneity and the reciprocity of causes.[60] They also excluded the necessity of the effect becoming another cause. Hence fate and destiny are nothing else than this reciprocal and simultaneous interaction. Searching for the answer what motivated the Stoics to embrace a broader vision of providence and destiny, it seems fitting to refer to Aurelius' alternative between chance and providence: "recall to thy recollection this alternative; either there is providence or atoms, fortuitous concurrence of things; or remember the arguments by which it has been proved that the world is a kind of political community, and be quiet at last".[61]

The alternative between the Stoic world governed by reason and the Epicurean world ruled by the movement of randomly connecting atoms is resolved

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[54] Ch. Jedan, *Stoic Virtues*, op. cit., p. 34.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., p. 32.

[57] Aurelius Marcus, *The Meditations*, tr. G. Long, book X, http://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.10.ten.html, [accessed: 01.12.2016].

[58] Ch. Jedan *Stoic Virtues*, op. cit., footnote 6, p. 34.

[59] S.S. Meyer, *Chain of Causes. What is Stoic Fate?*, in: R. Salless, *God and Cosmos in Stoicism*, Oxford 2009, pp. 76-77.

[60] Ibid., p. 74.

[61] Aurelius Marcus, *The Meditations*, tr. G. Long, book IV, http://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.10.ten.html, [accessed: 01.12.2016].

by Aurelius in favour of the world that is structured rather than condemned to the chaos of randomness. As mentioned above, a world controlled through the reason of nature or deity heads towards the good, which is undeniably a less disturbing and more optimistic option compared to the vision of a world ruled by accident. The argument that convinced Aurelius to adopt this outlook on the world was the order he saw in a part of the surrounding reality. Extrapolating it to the entire universe, he inferred that it had to be governed by providence rather than random collisions of atoms. He noted that "either it is a well-arranged universe or a chaos huddled together, but still a universe. But can a certain order subsist in thee, and disorder in the All? And this too when all things are so separated and diffused and sympathetic".[62] The ontological resolution also has an ethical dimension, for it delineates the things that one should adopt as guiding posts while living in such a world. What is important for the line of argument presented here, however, is the fact that recognizing the status of providence and the established order completely rules out luck as a separate causative power influencing the general state of affairs.

Even though it was recognized by the Stoics as more adequate and "human-friendly", is the vision of all-embracing providence not more difficult to reconcile with the freedom of will and responsibility than Zeno's personal *fatum*? In the other concept, the will would seek freedom despite – or in opposition to – the interactions of fate that are external to the agent. What is more, the discontinuity of the interaction would suggest that every human being is governed by free will on a daily basis, and is not predetermined. No less important is the fact that the effect of destiny does not involve the person's will and desires. Meanwhile, in line with the concept of all-embracing fate, no aspects of the reality (including longer or shorter moments) may be outside the concatenation of mutually interconnected causes that are preordained by the logos/destiny or god. However, the Stoics did not espouse the idea that humans lack the freedom of choice – including the crucial distinction between good and evil. In one of key passages, known only indirectly, Chrysippus notes that the person who pushes the cylinder – and thus gives it a principle of motion – represents the original cause of the cylinder rolling.[63] The person that pushes the cylinder and *actually* makes it roll provides the "proximate" cause and turns the cylinder's fate into *actuality*. Nonetheless, as Athanassoulis writes, fate is not the same as determinism because the pushing person does not need to turn the potential "rollability" of the cylinder into actuality.[64] A similar view is shared by Bobzien who argues that the pushing of the cylinder in Chrysip-

[62] Ibid.
[63] Cicero, *On Fate*, 41, cf. 9, 21, 23, 31.
[64] N. Athanassoulis, *Morality, Moral Luck and Responsibility*, New York 2005, p. 91.

pus' writings does not mean that the person succumbs to external pressures or forces. The person pushes the cylinder out of their own volition which, however, does not signify that it contradicts destiny. What Chrysippus advocated was a compatibility between determinism (all-embracing fate) and free will. One of the critics of that approach was Plutarch who claimed that determinism and free will were mutually contradictory.[65] Chrysippus did not view the freedom of will in the categories of the freedom to "act otherwise", which would assume an inner freedom to act otherwise, but rather as the "autonomy of the agent". In this framework, autonomy refers to actions that are free from coercion and outside pressures.[66] Therefore, he advocates the position that is contemporarily referred to compatibilism or soft determinism, and attempts to reconcile the contradictions mentioned above. People are thus responsible for their actions, and for what they become.[67] Consequently, even though people are one of mutually interconnected elements of the world having a predetermined impact, they retain their freedom. Nevertheless, a question arises as to whether the awareness of choices, and the possible reluctance about acting in accordance with what reveals itself as the good, are beyond the influence of destiny. A certain incongruity is thus apparent there, or the inability to disentangle theological determinism from the freedom of action. From one perspective, actions should be beyond the impact of fate. From another, however, if the position were to be accepted, fate would not be all-embracing. Obviously, death or other natural necessities are beyond the decisions of will, provided that one awaits death without accelerating it through suicide. In the face of such determinism, human freedom is limited to accepting the inevitable and refraining from putting up resistance.

Expounding this aspect of the deterministic vision of reality, Zeno and Chrysippus compared the human condition to that of a dog tied to a cart. In this metaphor, the dog may run after the cart, if it wishes to. However, if it does not want to, it will be dragged by the cart anyway.[68] Retaining free choice which is independent of fate but limited to a change of attitude on the predestined course of things appears to create a tiny margin of freedom. The problem is that, as the Stoics believed, freedom comes down to accepting necessity and, going further, adopting a personal attitude which embraces that which is necessary. In that framework, it needs to be added, necessity is a corollary of the predetermined course of things which head towards the good. Recognizing

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[65] Plutarch, *On Stoic Self-Contradictions*, in: idem, *Moralia*, tr. Ch. Harold, London 1976, vol. XIII, Part II, pp. 369-603.

[66] S. Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom in Stoics philosophy*, Oxford 2003, s. 335n.

[67] R.J. Hankinson, *Determinism and indeterminism*, in: *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, ed. K. Algra, J. Barnes, J. Mansfeld, M. Schofield, Cambridge 2008, pp. 529-541.

[68] *Hippolit Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, tr. H. Arnim, Leipzig 1921, vol. III, p. 191.

necessity is thus a good thing, so that freedom is conceived of as reorientation towards the good and the pursuit of it. This concept is accepted by St. Thomas Aquinas, to name but one example. Aquinas believed that being free was equivalent to the choice of actions that were consistent with the objective good. A question arises whether the necessity to accept the only possible action – to fine-tune one's soul to necessity which is predestined without any human contribution – cannot be viewed as a specific restriction and a form of pressure. One way to bypass the problem is to acknowledge that predestined necessity is a non-debatable issue, as its primary nature delineates the very domain of freedom. This, however, does not seem an entirely satisfactory solution. It may be comforting, but at the same time leaves the feeling of a certain deficiency. The problem is compounded by the fact that Chrysippus' attempt, as Bobzien notes, was not aimed solely at recognizing human freedom but also people's responsibility for their deeds.

Importantly, the Stoics focused not only on the question of being morally responsible but also on the possibility of inner transformation. As Seneca writes in one of his letters to Lucilius:

> No man can have a peaceful life who thinks too much about lengthening it, or believes that living through many consulships is a great blessing. Rehearse this thought every day, that you may be able to depart from life contentedly; for many men clutch and cling to life, even as those who are carried down a rushing stream clutch and cling to briars and sharp rocks. …Therefore, encourage and toughen your spirit against the mishaps that afflict even the most powerful.[69]

It needs to be highlighted, therefore, that the Stoics recognized a possibility of influencing – and transforming – one's inner states. Since that was deemed feasible, perhaps not everything was preordained by providence, and its all-embracing understanding had certain boundaries. The possbility of changing inner states actually turns out to play a central role in becoming reconciled to necessity and following its commands without question – or even with joy – on the one hand, and protecting oneself from the impact of accident on the other. This approach builds upon the premise of the agency of human subjects and their decision-making powers, which also implies their moral responsibility. It is the establishment of one's thinking about the world, imperviousness to emotions and self-control that acquire the status of moral obligations. Marcus Aurelius' arguments in favour of the existence of order in the world, and hence the existence of providence, are not entirely convincing (there is no order in someone else, to so *per analogiam* to the view espoused by the philosopher-

[69] Seneca, *Moral Letters to Lucilius*, tr. R. Guemmere Mott, in: *A Loeb Classical Library edition*, vol. I, Harvard 1917, letter IV.

emperor the world is not controlled by providence). What is more, from the human perspective anything can be regarded as an accident or necessity. In both possible versions of the world, however, people should be governed by their reason and virtues. Quoting Aurelius, "In a word, if there is a god, all is well; and if chance rules, do not thou also be governed by it.".[70] As Seneca notes, people can make themselves independent of fate through virtue:

> All injury implies a making less of that which it affects, and no one can sustain an injury without some loss either of his dignity, or of some part of his body, or of some of the things external to ourselves; but the wise man can lose nothing. He has invested everything in himself, has entrusted nothing to fortune, has his property in safety, and is content with virtue, which does not need casual accessories, and therefore can neither be increased or diminished; for virtue, as having attained to the highest position, has no room for addition to herself, and fortune can take nothing away save what she gave. Now fortune does not give virtue; therefore she does not take it away. Virtue is free, inviolable, not to be moved, not to be shaken, and so hardened against misfortunes that she cannot be bent, let alone overcome by them".[71]

Fate is understood here as the general human fate composed of necessities and aspects which, from the human perspective, are incidental. In a similar vein, Aurelius suggests that being a wise man, that is adherence to the Stoic lifestyle and virtues, on the one hand helps people to reconcile themselves to necessity and, on the other, makes them independent of luck, fortune or accident, as seen from the human point of view.

The two understandings of fate, destiny or providence create a stage where the problem of freedom of human decisions may be played out. The older concept, confined to concrete occurrences, gave gods a possibility to influence human fates in an on and off manner, occasionally, leaving them with considerable leeway to engage in voluntary acts. Inspired partially by the desire to attain a vision of the world which is more caring towards rational beings, the extension of the scope of providence presented the Stoics with the problem of space to be accommodated by free human decisions – with the focus on freedom, as opposed to accidentality. Human decisions are meant to be rational, which is why human beings become rational *causa sui* to themselves. As can be seen, they identified an inner space within humans in the possibility of their transformation from beings that are torn by emotions induced by the

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[70] Aurelius Marcus, *The Meditations*, tr. G. Long, book IX, http://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.10.ten.html, [accessed: 01.12.2016].

[71] Seneca, *On the Firmness of the Wise Man*, from: L. Annaeus Seneca, *Minor Dialogs Together with the Dialog "On Clemency"*, tr. A. Stewart, London 1900, book II, part V.

outside world into the stability and independence of reason – or in virtuous self-sufficiency. An interesting aspect is that the very same rationality which had weaved the fate of the world in such a way that it became a predetermined and necessary system of causes and effects inside a human turns into a seed that bears the fruit of liberation from the yoke of determinism. The liberation, however, is preplanned as the only path to be genuinely happy independently of the frequently hurtful and destructive effects of good-oriented providence.

Comparing the attempts to reconcile human freedom with the predetermined world, as outlined above, it must be noted that one of them is to confine the freedom to people's inner actions and the other to view will and determinism as non-contradictory due to the fact that the operation of free will is not about the choice of an alternative but rather about being free from inner compulsion. The second solution, which is evocative of contemporary compatibilism, does not mention the lack of free will outright, but implies it, shifting the understanding of the freedom of will into the domain of inner compulsion. The first solution, by giving the freedom of choice, nonetheless conjures up the thought that only one part of the alternative represents the appropriate answer. An inappropriate answer causes that people are dragged by their fate as a dog tied up to a rolling cart – instead of joyfully and peacefully following the inevitability of their destiny. Whether these attempts defend themselves against Plutarch's charge of contradiction is another issue which would be resolved by a more in-depth analysis of the Stoic views. Such an analysis, however, is not essential for the purpose of the present study.

The difficulties faced by the Stoics with respect to the freedom of will and determinism are not the only ones. Yet another thorny issue is the attempt to integrate fate with the occurrence of luck. The first point that needs to be addressed in this vein concerns the meaning of the notion of luck. Seneca in his treatise *Of Clemency* writes that "we have all of us sinned, some more deeply than others, some of set purpose, some either by chance impulse or led away by the wickedness of others; some of us have not stood bravely enough by our good resolutions, and have lost our innocence, although unwillingly and after a struggle; nor have we only sinned, but to the very end of our lives we shall continue to sin".[72]

Indirectly, the above passage suggests that a person may be guilty through accident but, at the same time, there are people who have been exonerated of their guilt precisely because it was accidental. What this seems to imply is that Seneca could not make up his mind as to whether those who commit a bad deed are culpable or not. One of the passages contained in *The Medita-*

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[72] Seneca, *Of Clemency*, tr. A. Stewart, Book I, part VI, from: L. Annaeus Seneca, *Minor Dialogs Together with the Dialog "On Clemency"*, London 1900, pp. 380-414.

tions deals with human actions: "first, do nothing inconsiderately, nor without a purpose. Second, make thy acts refer to nothing else than to a social end".[73] An accidental human action does not serve any purpose. The postulate stems from the recognition of life governed by reason as an ideal. In a similar vein, Aurelius notes that "In the things which thou doest do nothing either inconsiderately or otherwise than as justice herself would act; but with respect to what may happen to thee from without, consider that it happens either by chance or according to Providence, and thou must neither blame chance nor accuse Providence".[74]

Therefore, as the emperor-philosopher claims, luck happens in the world. Nevertheless, certain additional statements are required here. Above all, however, luck does not determine differences in being happy, contrary to what was claimed by Aristotle. Aurelius writes:

> Now that which does not make a man worse, how can it make a man's life worse? But neither through ignorance, nor having the knowledge, but not the power to guard against or correct these things, is it possible that the nature of the universe has overlooked them; nor is it possible that it has made so great a mistake, either through want of power or want of skill, that good and evil should happen indiscriminately to the good and the bad. But death certainly, and life, honour and dishonour, pain and pleasure, all these things equally happen to good men and bad, being things which make us neither better nor worse. Therefore they are neither good nor evil.[75]

Also, a point needs to be made that Aurelius seems to recognize the idea of fate as all-embracing. Secondly, at least in Hadot's interpretation, Aurelius completely rejects luck as a possible alternative to providence. He also enumerates several potential sources of occurrences: "And either the universal intelligence puts itself in motion for every separate effect, and if this is so, be thou content with that which is the result of its activity; or it puts itself in motion once, and everything else comes by way of sequence in a manner; or indivisible elements are the origin of all things".[76]

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[73] Aurelius Marcus, *The Meditations*, tr. G. Long, book XII, http://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.10.ten.html, [accessed: 01.12.2016].

[74] Ibid.

[75] Aurelius Marcus, *The Meditations*, tr. G. Long, book II, http://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.10.ten.html, [accessed: 01.12.2016].

[76] Aurelius Marcus, *The Meditations*, tr. G. Long, book IX, http://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.10.ten.html, [accessed: 01.12.2016]. Hadot illustrates the cited passage with a schematic which shows the separation between the main alternative components: providence and luck; compare P. Hadot, *The Inner Citadel. The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, tr. Ch. Michael, London 1998, p. 152.

Importantly, the list is consistent with Seneca's approach, as Hadot points out[77]. Seneca's account, however, is extended by the idea of impersonal providence. The aspect is disregarded here, for it is not relevant to the problem of luck. What, then, is luck? What can be an event outside the concatenation of mutually interacting causes? Can it also be a cause originating beyond the world planned by the logos? If a positive answer were to be given to the two questions, it would mean consent to another contradiction in the Stoics' conception – in addition to that suggested by Plutarch – related to luck operating independently and unexpectedly in a completely predetermined world. In a two-valued logic concerning the world which is conceptually anchored in the common-sense framework, such a combination is not possible. The only way out of the conundrum is to accept that luck, as Seneca and Aurelius write, is an event determined by fate which is recognized as luck solely from the perspective of human consciousness, as it was completely unnecessary or pointless. The luck is thus relative. This interpretation is also corroborated by the passage: "All that is from the gods is full of Providence. That which is from fortune is not separated from nature or without an interweaving and involution with the things which are ordered by Providence".[78]

Therefore, there are many arguments in favour of the assumption that the Stoics viewed luck as a sequence of events which, in objective terms, are an outcome of a planned intervention of providence, but from the subjective human perspective are something unnecessary and pointless.

In this context, the question should be raised whether luck, or accident, may impact human fate. Secondly, it needs to be considered whether in the Stoic view luck may influence morality and, if so, whether the Stoics addressed the problem of moral luck. The answer to the problem of potential interference of luck with human fate has already been given. Nonetheless, it should also be said that luck is luck by reason of the human ignorance of causation, or failure to predict it, rather than because of a rift in the predetermined concatenation of causes and effects. What thus emerges is – subjectively – called luck.

In an attempt to resolve the issue of the impact of luck on morality, one may draw on the study by Athanassoulis entitled *Morality, moral luck and responsibility*. The author argues that the concept proposed by the Stoics, similarly to the views propounded later by Kant, fails to incorporate the premise that luck may impact morality.[79] As opposed to Aristotle, they did not believe

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[77] P. Hadot, *The Inner Citadel. The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, op. cit., p. 149.

[78] Aurelius Marcus, *The Meditations*, tr. G. Long, book II, http://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.10.ten.html, [accessed: 01.12.2016].

[79] N. Athanassoulis, *Morality, Moral Luck and Responsibility*, New York 2005, p. 82.

that luck could be affected by external goods such as excellent health, honour, social respect, wealth or successful offspring. As Seneca reflects:

> What, then, is such a soul? One which is resplendent with no external good, but only with its own. For what is more foolish than to praise in a man the qualities which come from without? And what is more insane than to marvel at characteristics which may at the next instant be passed on to someone else? A golden bit does not make a better horse. …No man ought to glory except in that which is his own. …Suppose that he has a retinue of comely slaves and a beautiful house, that his farm is large and large his income; none of these things is in the man himself; they are all on the outside. Praise the quality in him which cannot be given or snatched away, that which is the peculiar property of the man. Do you ask what this is? It is soul, and reason brought to perfection in the soul. For man is a reasoning animal.[80]

Luck was conceived of by the Stoics as the rule of reason over emotions, which was meant to lead to a virtuous life. Virtue, on the other hand, was neither gradable nor losable. The Stoics regarded self-sufficiency based on virtue alone as an ideal of morality. In opposition to Aristotle, however, virtue is not associated with feelings in the Stoic system. Even more than that, it is a consequence of being controlled exclusively by reason which has effectively mastered the control of feelings. Theoretically, then, in the Stoic concept, emotions should not succumb to external influences, which is why a virtuous person is free from the effects of some outside factors, as Aurelius suggested. Potential accidental events must not, therefore, affect humans by stirring up emotions. Human beings ought to adopt *apatheia* as their ideal. In this theoretical framework, luck does not influence morality. This does not mean that every proponent of the Stoic school succeeds in being immediately and entirely independent of the effect of stirred-up emotions and thus ensure that accidental factors will not have a bearing on the moral evaluation of their acts.[81] Moral luck, as mentioned above, may be implicated both in the effects, circumstances and the moment constituting a given person in their physicality, character, social background, etc. These types of luck exemplify interactions of external and accidental factors affecting human life which either make people guilty or morally virtuous. In Athanassoulis' view, the postulated resistance to emotions is intended to prevent the operation of accident and situational luck, for it improves self-control.[82] By the same token, the indifference towards ex-

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[80] Seneca, *Moral Letters to Lucilius*, op. cit., letter XLI, parts 6-8.

[81] Compare N. Athanassoulis, *Morality, Moral Luck and Responsibility*, op. cit., pp. 82-90.

[82] Athanasoulis in her studies uses the term of developmental luck which is broader in scope than situational luck – see N. Athanassoulis, *Morality, Moral Luck and Responsibility*, op. cit., p. 173, footnote 35.

ternal goods (as opposed to internal goods including virtue, *apatheia* or self-sufficiency) suggests that the central focus is on the state of the mind, spirit and emotions. That state should not be under any influence of outside factors enumerated above. In the ideal state postulated in the Stoic theory external factors may not impact action in such a manner as to change the moral assessment of the agent's activities. Circumstantial luck, situational luck, or even constitutive luck do not, then, have a theoretical impact on the evaluation of human actions.

Through their focus on self-sufficiency and independence of emotions, the Stoics implicitly regarded the skill of self-control as a key determinant of being a good and happy person.[83]

Whether the Stoics reflected on the control requirement as a precondition for moral responsibility is a separate problem. An analysis of the source materials fails to yield a clear resolution. Hence, even though the Stoics noticed the impact of luck on human life, though not on morality (at least theoretically), they were unable to provide an account of the problem of moral luck such as has been done contemporarily. What Athanassoulis also notes is that the Stoic theory also rejects, though not *expressis verbis*, the effect of resultant luck. This is achieved by basing the assessment of actions not on their outcome but, primarily, on the agent's state of the mind and intentions while performing a given action. The right state of mind is more important than the action itself. As Athanassoulis points out, a Stoic wise man is morally responsible for the state of his spirit, mind and feelings, and is capable of controlling them, for they pertain to his inner self. No person is responsible for that which happens outside them.[84] Evoking the figure of the Stoic sage is meant to put into focus the fact that the only path to attain independence of external factors, including accident, is to become a sage through mastering the virtue of *apatheia* and the rule of reason (as, for example, in Aurelius' reflections on the dilemma summarized above). It can thus be concluded that the practice of the Stoic philosophy is an instrument of becoming independent of the effect of accident potentially interfering with inner states.

Although the Stoics made no outright declaration to that effect, it can be assumed after Athanassoulis that they would also negate the problem of moral luck as impossible to occur. The above would, naturally, would hold true for the sage. However, what about those still practising or, for that matter, those that have not yet become familiar with the Stoic proposal at all? Could such a person's deeds be subjected to any moral assessment despite the occurrence of an accidental event inflaming emotions and inducing uncontrollable anger?

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[83] N. Athanassoulis, *Morality, Moral Luck and Responsibility*, op. cit., p. 87.

[84] Ibid., p. 89.

The gradual pursuit of virtue means that a person becomes progressively independent of such chance external occurrences. Therefore, before the attainment of complete independence, accidental interactions affecting the agent may not only modify the agent's deeds but also the moral evaluation of effects produced by such deeds. It may take the form of manifestation of defects in character, which may happen precisely in the context of accidental occurrences. The same point is made by Athanassoulis: time needed to take control of one's feelings is a period when accidental external interactions come to the fore, and desires and inclinations may be stimulated.[85] It appears, then, that there is a possible interpretation of the Stoic philosophy in which the problem of moral luck is plausibly incorporated. The problem would pertain to those that have only just begun to cultivate virtue in themselves. If the interpretation of the Stoic thought is justified, it follows that the problem of moral luck was, for some reasons, overlooked by the Stoics, despite it being logically valid. Athanassoulis argues that the Stoic system simply passes over the problem, and the Stoics' "response to moral luck is not so much a solution, but a refusal to acknowledge the problem altogether by removing morality from the sphere of luck".[86]

According to the author, the Stoic thought has a number of inconsistencies – or insufficiently resolved issues. They are the "price" paid by the Stoics for their attempt to build a theory of morality which would comprise egalitarism, self-sufficiency and independence of external factors. One of the consequences is the contradiction existing between the statement of self-sufficiency, generality and rationality of every human being with respect to the pursuit of virtue and the simultaneous suggestion that it is necessary to provide moral education to young people.[87] What the above indicates is that morality is not self-sufficient. In addition, its quality may be dependent on the influence of educators, their morality and abilities. Athanassoulis notes that another way in which the Stoic concept of morality pays for the attempt outlined above is the lack of concordance with the everyday observation of the human condition. For example, not all people are equally rational. To compound the problem, the Stoics are unable to explain the underlying origin of vice.[88] After all, humans are born good. Where do evil traits come from, then? Is the phenomenon attributable to luck? This gives rise to the question whether the Stoics proposed an ethical theory which is excessively idealized, and discordant with reality.

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[85] N. Athanassoulis, *Morality, Moral Luck and Responsibility*, op. cit., p. 97.

[86] Ibid., pp. 93-94.

[87] Ibid., p. 96.

[88] Galen, *On Hippocrates' and Plato's Doctrines*, 5.5.8-26, in: A.A. Long, and D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1, Cambridge 1999, p. 415; J. Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, New York 1993, p. 5.

Going further, this means that they assume free will which is not determined, and freedom to experience and reason which are not driven by the necessity of fate.

V. Concluding remarks

The overview of positions given above reveals that the problem of impact of luck on the moral assessment – or morality – of an agent performing actions is addressed in a number of ways. The Stoics negate such an impact. The same view is shared by Plato. Aristotle, on the other hand, notes that the impact exists. The interaction, however, is not addressed in any depth as a separate philosophical problem. Also, the accident and its operations is not seen as a threat to morality as such – or a risk to the concept of moral subject. This is perhaps associated with the fact that the attribution of moral responsibility and morality fail to be conceptualized as a separate category. Even though they were defined as preconditions for the discussion of morality, they were not singled out conceptually and reflected upon separately.

The difference in the notions and concepts used can also be noticed in the problem of determinism. The Stoics claimed that while human fate could be determined by gods or nature, the same was not true for human will. The Stoic philosophers had no knowledge or tools that might commit them to the view that will is determined biologically. In the contemporary debate on determinism, certain aspects which would have been unthinkable to the Stoics seem, at least to some measure, justified.

Still, the differences do not change the fundamental assessment that some ancient philosophers perceived the impact of luck as an evident phenomenon which had to be given an explanation. Plato pointed to the operation of luck rather in the world of ideas – while Aristotle and the Stoics drew attention to it in the earthly reality. To Aristotle, luck was not given by gods. The Stoics, however, held a different view. These varying stances on the matter served as points of reference for later philosophers. A particularly notable position was taken by Kant, who linked morality to will, just like the Stoics, in order to separate morality from accidental interactions. Nagel and Williams investigated the interconnection between luck and morality focusing on the question whether such separation is excessively arbitrary. Definitely, the relationship between morality and luck has not been ultimately resolved, and warrants further studies.

THE PROBLEM OF RELATION BETWEEN LUCK AND MORALITY IN SELECTED ANCIENT PHILOSOPHERS

Summary

The article presents views of selected philosophers, from antiquity and the Middle Ages, on luck and its role in morality. It shows that, for example, Plato did not consider moral luck. Aristotle did but without such concequences as Williams and Nagel did. Stoics also considered morality as independent from the fortune provided that the wise man is able to become independent from luck. In the ancient times, the role of luck or fate was undoubtedly perceived but not theorized.

The luck was not the reason for the question of the meaning of moral responsibility.

Keywords: luck; moral luck; Plato; Aristotel; Stoics; Thomas of Aquin; Williams; Nagel

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