Zeno of Citium and Zhuangzi on Virtue and Eudaimonia

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Περίληψη:
Αμφότεροι ο Ζήνων ο Κιτιεύς και ο Κινέζος Ταοϊστής Τσουάνγκ Τσου ζουν τον 4ο αιώνα π.Χ. Ως φιλοσοφικός απόγονος της σωκρατικής διανόησης, ο Ζήνων υποθέματιζε τον ρόλο της αρετής στην ανθρώπινη ζωή και υποστηρίζει μια πρακτική ανάλυση της ανθρώπινης πραγματικότητας από μια λογική και ηθική σκοπιά, η οποία σε ουδεμία περίπτωση δεν αποσυνδέεται από τη γενικότερη αρχαιοελληνική έμφαση στην τελεολογική στόχευση της ευδαιμονίας. Κατά τη σχετική θεώρηση του Ζήνωνος, είναι αναγκαίο για τον ανθρώπο να απελευθερωθεί του εαυτού του από την τυραννία των παθών που τον αποπροσανατολίζει από την αυθεντική μορφή ύπαρξης του και από την αυτοκατανόησή του, την αυτογνώσια του. Το ζήνα κατά φύσιν σημαίνει πως το ανθρώπινο ον αποκτά την έννοια της ευδαιμονίας, κατά την διαδικασία της απελευθέρωσης του εαυτού του από την τυραννία των παθών, που διεξάγεται από την αυθεντική μορφή ύπαρξης του, η οποία σε ουδεμία περίπτωση δεν αποσυνδέεται από τη γενικότερη αρχαιοελληνική έμφαση στην τελεολογική στόχευση της ευδαιμονίας. Κατά τη σχετική θεώρηση του Ζήνωνος, είναι αναγκαίο για τον ανθρώπο να απελευθερωθεί του εαυτού του από τη τυραννία των παθών, που διεξάγεται από την αυθεντική μορφή ύπαρξης του, η οποία σε ουδεμία περίπτωση δεν αποσυνδέεται από τη γενικότερη αρχαιοελληνική έμφαση στην τελεολογική στόχευση της ευδαιμονίας. Κατά τη σχετική θεώρηση του Ζήνωνος, είναι αναγκαίο για τον ανθρώπο να απελευθερωθεί του εαυτού του από την τυραννία των παθών, που διεξάγεται από την αυθεντική μορφή ύπαρξης του, η οποία σε ουδεμία περίπτωση δεν αποσυνδέεται από τη γενικότερη αρχαιοελληνική έμφαση στην τελεολογική στόχευση της ευδαιμονίας. Εντούτοις, ο Ζήνων αναφέρει ότι το ανθρώπινο ον αποκτά την έννοια της ευδαιμονίας, από την αυθεντική μορφή ύπαρξης του, η οποία σε ουδεμία περίπτωση δεν αποσυνδέεται από τη γενικότερη αρχαιοελληνική έμφαση στην τελεολογική στόχευση της ευδαιμονίας. Εντούτοις, ο Ζήνων αναφέρει ότι το ανθρώπινο ον αποκτά την έννοια της ευδαιμονίας, από την αυθεντική μορφή ύπαρξης του, η οποία σε ουδεμία περίπτωση δεν αποσυνδέεται από τη γενικότερη αρχαιοελληνική έμφαση στην τελεολογική στόχευση της ευδαιμονίας. Εντούτοις, ο Ζήνων αναφέρει ότι το ανθρώπινο ον αποκτά την έννοια της ευδαιμονίας, από την αυθεντική μορφή ύπαρξης του, η οποία σε ουδεμία περίπτωση δεν αποσυνδέεται από τη γενικότερη αρχαιοελληνική έμφαση στην τελεολογική στόχευση της ευδαιμονίας. Εντούτοις, ο Ζήνων αναφέρει ότι το ανθρώπινο ον αποκτά την έννοια της ευδαιμονίας, από την αυθεντική μορφή ύπαρξης του, η οποία σε ουδεμία περίπτωση δεν αποσυνδέεται από τη γενικότερη αρχαιοελληνική έμφαση στην τελεολογική στόχευση της ευδαιμονίας. Εντούτοις, ο Ζήνων αναφέρει ότι το ανθρώπινο ον απο.κτά την έννοια της ευδαιμονίας, από την αυθεντική μορφή ύπαρξης του, η οποία σε ουδεμία περίπτωση δεν απο- 

Abstract:
Both the Stoic Zeno of Citium and the Chinese Taoist Zhuangzi live around the 4th century BC. As a philosophical descendant of the Socratic thought, Zeno highlights the role of virtue in human life and he supports a practical analysis of the human world from a rational and ethical point of view, which at no point disconnects from the general Greek emphasis on the teleological target of eudaimonia. For Zeno, man has to release himself from the tyranny of passions, which disorientate him from an authentic form of living and self understanding. Living in accordance with nature means that man becomes aware of the restraints of necessity, but at the same time, within these restraints, he acquires a clear perception of freedom; freedom deriving from a reasonable and mature acceptance of the real world. The sage of Zhuang-
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Zeni realizes a comparable form of existence. His virtue is self complete; also, it does not need the presence of other goods than itself. For the Taoist thinker, man is naturally able for well being in the case that he is not impeded from a stronger awareness of natural phenomenology. Passions do not belong to him, whereas he does not cling on any form of abstinence either. Being in the manner of Tao, which is the manner of virtue, suffices for his experience of eudaimonia. For Zeno and Zhuangzi, the concepts of virtue and eudaimonia are direct derivatives of a subjective perception of reality. In both theorizations, nature is a constant reference. In the doctrines of the Stoic Zeno, nature embodies the qualities of Logos so that the two are eventually tautological. In Zhuangzi’s view, the eternal Tao does not energize man’s logical ability; on the contrary, man fulfils his destiny by being, not by making logical distinctions.

Both the Stoic Zeno of Citium and the Chinese Taoist Zhuangzi live around the 4th century BC. Other than the fact of the coincidence of their time they seem to share a multitude of characteristics which principally concentrate either around the basis of their common diagnosis that nature is a key reference term in human life or on the spirituality and moral action which are originated from that initial and so influential recognition. The Greek and the Chinese philosopher show noteworthy and almost parallel concern to concepts such as subjectivism, the divine element of Dao or Logos, determinism, freedom, virtue as self completion, the impact of logical distinctions, criteria of truth, harmony and an easy flow of life (euroia biou), approval and disapproval as restrictive categorizations (although to different extents), the classification of certain things as indifferents, the utilization of the model of a sage as an exemplar for ordinary people, the systematic insistence that the human being who has reached wisdom shall not be affected by the frivolous changes of fortune or by destiny, their emphasis on tranquillity, on the abstinence from desire and certain emotions, on the idea that the cosmos is actually one thing, that knowledge is futile if it does not lead to a practical awareness of the world and of how is to live, in a vast plethora of other things.

These similarities are no conclusive and not inclusive of all the issues. There are quite some more. Nonetheless it has to be clarified that similarities in the thought of these two philosophers are not the only thing that abounds. There are equally many dissimilarities, perhaps even more significant ones, whose origin is mainly the fact that the basis of their metaphysics and ontology is quite different, along with their totally distinct apprehension of man’s rational faculty. Furthermore, a number of the dissimilarities may be owing to the cultural context around them that determines at least their terminology if not all in all the aims of their philosophical theorizations. In this paper I will argue, although not exhaustively at all, due to the restrictions of time, that in both thinkers there is a concrete realization of the psychological reference of our perception of the world and of the phenomena of human action, thus leading them both to uphold that the practice of virtue and the state of perfect happiness, or eudaimonia, primarily spring from our inner place, a place eventually so closely connected with the eternal and the true.

Zhuangzi’s path of thought is simultaneously a path of life. His primary message reflects the need for a constant preoccupation with the Dao and with the way to attain spirited emancipation and an independent personality. The Dao actually is the way and equals a situation of absolute freedom. Human freedom through the eternal Dao facilitates human fulfil-
ment, which is the ultimate telos of life. In the hidden schemes of his fables polysemous philosophical notions about the Dao and the way of the sage are revealed, often in a poetic manner, which exploits what remains unuttered. Zhuangzi wishes to educate, not to proceed to elaborate dialectics about the nature of man and the universe. At the same time his work is imbued by a noticeably aesthetic appreciation of nature.

For the Taoist philosopher, beings are different in their nature, as in the story of Xiao Yao You. Moreover, they move and live in different ways because they simply follow their nature, and live according to their inner abilities and functions. Both creatures of this fable, the big and the small, receive the same satisfaction, unless there is a distinction between them as the superior and the inferior. Zhuangzi emphasizes the principle of Qui Wu, the equalization of all things, as a fundamental principle of his philosophical theory. This principle directly conduces to a theory of knowledge and of its utility in the course of human action. The Chinese philosopher makes it manifest that to judge by means of the customary things that are not made customarily distracts us far from the truth. As a matter of fact he lays particular stress to the fact that in our consideration of things from the point of view of their similarities, all living things indeed seem to share a unity. At that point, we become persons that not only don’t evaluate things empirically through their senses, but let their hearts and minds experience the harmony of their own nature and concentrate on achieving virtue. In such a case we consider the unity of things, and we don’t look for what they’re lacking. This is the perspective that the human being who strives for completion and happiness needs and this is also a type of knowledge that is not supported by typical logical-gnoseological traits. Rather its meaning is condensed in the affirmation of basic facts, that life and death are linked on a single branch, that approval and disapproval are linked on a single thread.

In the same context of the experience of knowledge, he examines the feasibility of perfect happiness. For Zhuangzi, there is a seeming paradox: perfect happiness has no happiness in it. This paradox is based on Zhuangzi’s distinction between the absolute state of happiness (zhile) and mere happiness (le). In order to become able to understand “zhile”, we must first compromise with “le”. This form of simpler happiness springs from things such as wealth, honor, a long life, kindness, good food, etc. Zeno would not have disagreed on that, because he would have classified them as indifferent but preferable indifferents to others. The Chinese philosopher realises that the things which comprise the basis for this form of “everyday” happiness, as I would call it, are actually no more than a weight, a burden for the man who seeks fulfillment. His sceptical stance towards these material goods, or rather emotional products of a material happiness, extends to the degree where all these are seen as pure vanity, empty possessions, due to the fact that they exceed the actual needs that are derived from our presence in life. Becoming a possession of these possessions, that is to say, a slave to objects, signifies an elusive form of happiness, one that cannot endure. Thus, the perfect happiness of “zhile” prevails as the one which does not allow man to surrender to the tempting influence and to the idolatry of material things and treasures. In fact, absolute happiness is present

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when relative or mere happiness is absent. The two cannot coexist. The common values of the unwise, of the everyday people, are no fitting values in the condition of “zhile”. Absolute happiness is a state of mind, purified from all desire, free from every restriction. Its essence lies in the core, in taking no action (wu wei) which practically means spiritual independence. Perfect happiness is a state of mind at which the human being is incapable of distinction; there is no life and death, no prosperity or misery, as according to the principle of “Qui Wu”. The distinctions are nothing else than consequences of having overlooked the fact that everything is part and participant in the ceaseless flow of change. The eternal Dao is the solution to this problem of the absence of constancy due to its emphasis on the way of making no distinction. Since there’s no way to base personal harmony on something as unpredictable as life circumstances, one should have the ability at least to affect his own spiritual powers and to participate in what really causes harmony. The way of the Dao, of making no distinction, is a synonym for the Supreme One (tai yi).

For Zhuangzi everything is succumbed to the principle of relativity. All things enjoy naturally their individual abilities; to compare them is the act of a fool. The worthy man discards all social norms and lives a life of peace, free from disturbance and ambition, as those would not consist a natural life. The connection between the Heaven Dao (tian dao) and the human Dao (ren dao) intends to moralize the connection between heaven and man. This oneness of the two, abolishing all distinction ennobles the human effort. At the same time it connotes that there is an objective necessity for virtue as well as unalterable and diachronic characteristics in the moral system. Although there is a visible metaphysical basis, the emphasis is given to the practical art of living, the way the sage can opt for while aiming at perfect virtue and happiness.

The sage of Zhuangzi realizes a comparable form of existence with that of the sage of the Stoic Zeno. His virtue is self-complete; it does not need the presence of other goods than itself. For the Taoist thinker, man is naturally able for well-being, in the case that he is not prevented, due to an inner awareness of natural phenomenology. Passions do not belong to his psychological and spiritual sphere, whereas he does not cling on any form of abstinence either. Being in the manner of the Dao, which is the manner of virtue, suffices for his experience of eudaimonia as good fortune and well-being which are born where there is tranquility, i.e. where there is psychological and spiritual relief from the agonies of the existential strife. This becomes so important in the texts of Zhuangzi that he considers it imperative for the human being to be able to serve his heart by not allowing joy or grief in it and by cultivating the abandonment to the inevitable which is the culmination of virtue. The occurrence of the term “heart” is quite frequent in Zhuangzi. He empathically returns to the term when he as-

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9 Chuang Tzu, *Ibid*, sixth chapter, p. 70. It has to be noted that here Zhuangzi describes how one who has knowledge about what actions are of the heavens and what actions are of people has reached attainment. One who knows the actions of the heavens merges his life with the heavens. One who knows the actions of people accepts that knowledge is a part of his intellect and increases that knowledge because he accepts his own ignorance. One has to become a true person before he can have true knowledge. According to Zhuangzi a true person is the one whose whole knowledge is targeted to the Dao.
serts that only a person with a clear heart (that is, a virtuous person) has the ability to realize that certain things can’t be changed and quietly accept destiny13.

Virtue, as depicted above, will not lead the sage to an external depiction of his superiority. He acts in such a conduct so as to remain safe from envy but also to be able to guide others by doing things, seemingly, in their way if such need be14. He does so in order to avoid grief for himself, since he would not resort to resisting against social norms in a futile manner. However, like in the case of the ugly Ai Ta Ta15, the virtuous person gains everybody’s acceptance and his abilities, although not demonstrated, as no outer form16 is of any concern to him, are never doubted. This persistent focus on acceptance, in my estimation, among other things, denotes the didactic orientation of Zhuangzi’s fables as a practical orientation that exceeds its purely theoretical basis.

A parallel discussion is developed in the texts of Zhuangzi with reference to sentimentality and judgment. The Taoist philosopher insists that the person who follows the Dao is without sentimentality, therefore judgments about right and wrong can’t affect him. His single accomplishment is with the heavens17. Hui Zi doubts that and asks Zhuangzi if there are indeed humans without any sentimentality, that is without passions at all, and if there are any how can they be called humans. Zhuangzi’s brilliant answer is that there are persons like that and the Dao gives them their demeanor and their physical shape, so how could they not be called humans. For Zhuangzi the nucleus of the response lies in an interpretation of the conceptualization of sentimentality as a primary sense of right and wrong. Someone without that sense is a being without sentimentality and he is the kind of person that wouldn’t allow his likes and dislikes to cause physical harm to his body. He would only follow what naturally occurs without looking to gain profit from life.

In Zeno’s stoicism there are some remarkable theoretical convergences with Zhuangzi’s beliefs. As a philosophical descendant of the Socratic thought, Zeno highlights the role of virtue in human life and he supports a practical analysis of the human world from a rational and ethical point of view, which at no point disconnects from the general Greek emphasis on the teleological target of eudaimonia. For Zeno, man has to release himself from the tyranny of desires and passions, which disorientate him from an authentic form of living and from self-understanding. Living in accordance with nature means that man becomes aware of the restraints of necessity, but at the same time, within these restraints, he acquires a clear perception of freedom. Zeno is conclusive in his logical schema that the cosmos is a souled being precisely because our human soul is extracted from it (apospasma)18. As a part of the cosmos, man acknowledges freedom as deriving from a mature acceptance of the real world. Hence, and through this awareness, the stoic sage is perceived as the perfect man whose capability for free action remains unimpeded under any obstructive circumstance19.

14 Chuang Tzu, Ibid, p. 56.
15 Chuang Tzu, Ibid, p. 64.
19 Diogenes Laertius, Ibid, VII. 121-122.
It is precisely this real world that, as Cicero upholds in *De Finibus*, makes Zeno discern an element of difference among the things that are of no importance for happiness or misery. Although virtue alone is good, there are certain things that can still receive a positive value such as health, freedom from pain, fame, wealth and the like. Zeno calls these “proegmena” as opposed to “apropoegmena”, things such as pain, disease, poverty etc. Stobaeus in the *Eclogai*, clarifies that for the founder of the Stoic school, the “proegmena” are not conducive to eudaimonia, however it is necessary to choose those against their opposites who are of an undeniably negative value. Zeno is inclined to accepting the idea of unity among all beings. Despite certain differences among species, there is an advancement of logos in the human being which brings him closer to the divine principle. Nature itself does not discriminate between animals and plants. They all seek what is appropriate for them, like the big and small animal of Zhuangzi’s story, but for man it is reason which is the appropriate and distinct feature that allows him to live in a protected way. Living according to reason for human beings signifies their adherence to living according to their own “physis” (nature). It is common knowledge that there is a tripartite axiom in the stoic philosophy: living in accordance with reason is living in accordance with nature which is living in accordance with virtue. Virtue in Zeno retains much of its Homeric conceptual virility: it is the inner ability of the human being to fulfil itself, much like in Zhuangzi’s conception of virtue. In Diogenes Laertius this is clarified in book seven, 86 to 88. In parts 127-128 it is added that virtue is self sufficient, it needs nothing more for the mental state of eudaimonia and thus it contempts anything else. To live according to these three principles is the telos of the human life, i.e. for man to live, as for every other being, is to live according to his proper nature, which is no other than his rational nature. This is his own peculiar authenticity but apart from that, apart from the symbolic significance that authenticity attributes to human living, there is the recognition of this living as one which is characterized by its easy flow, its uninterrupted continuation, without any spiritual or psychological turmoil. The life of “ataraxia” (tranquillity) is the aim of the human being, which is found trapped in controversy, strife, subjected to existential trauma, due to the fickleness of fortune. The harmonization of one’s inner will and terms of living with the will of the governing principle, which is the divine Logos, a divinity that man and every being shares, but particularly man due to his greater participation in it as a rational being, is not only a prudent decision but also a natural as well as deliberate choice.

The Stoic philosopher elucidates that virtue as harmonious accordance with Logos is chosen for itself, and does not originate from emotions of fear, hope or other external to the human soul factors. The stoic sage is without passions, in constancy. He is not occupied with tasks, and he has rejected any form of hypocrisy or false exterior appearance. His self belongs to him, being beyond grief and joy. Eudaimonia exists in the area of this virtue not as a conceptual pair but as a state of mind within its circle. The perfect man does not pretend happiness either, nor does he pretend kindness and mercy for his fellow human beings; his exist-

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20 Cicero, *De Finibus*, III. 50-51.
ence is natural, hence his virtue is stable (anypolvitós) and he always uses his perfect soul\(^{26}\). Zeno further clarifies that virtue is “teleiosis”, completion, and a noetic elaboration, which he calls prudence, “phronesis”\(^{27}\). Virtues are, simultaneously, means and ends. They are means as far as their aim is the human eudaimonia, and they are ends in themselves as far as they complete eudaimonia and become its constituents. The human being who possesses virtue has conquered the natural perfection of the rational being as a rational being, Zeno characteristically remarks\(^{28}\).

To synopsize, unlike the perfect man of Zhuangzi, the perfect man of the Stoic Zeno has a self; moreover, the initiation of his action is his rational faculty which allows him to provide his assent (synkatathesis), his ability for rational decisions (which he calls “kathekonta”, duties) and for right reason. Yet, I am afraid that Xunzi’s observation that Zhuangzi is more obsessed with the law of nature than with the knowledge of mankind\(^{29}\), apparently could hold true for Zeno as well. However, in order to be fair to their thought, it has to be admitted that in their doctrines there is an evident soteriological pursuit, and nature seems to hold the place where from their approaches begin. Not only that but the affirmation of the fact that the transformation of things proves that the differences among things are not absolute points to the direction of an elementary metaphysical concurrence\(^{30}\). For Zeno and Zhuangzi, the concepts of virtue and eudaimonia are direct derivatives of a subjective perception of reality. In both theorizations, nature as we discerned so far remains as a constant reference. In the doctrines of the Stoic Zeno, nature embodies the qualities of Logos so that the two are eventually tautological. In Zhuangzi’s view, the eternal Dao does not energize man’s logical ability; on the contrary, man fulfills his destiny by being, not by making logical distinctions, or by resorting to the approval of certain actions. The “that” and the “this” cease to be opposites, that is the essence of the Dao. Even right and wrong are on endless change, hence Zhuangzi suggests that the human being should use the light of reason (yi ming)\(^{31}\). Freedom as independence from the tyranny of the incoherence of the phenomena of the human life tends to this, common between the two, liberating end: man is superior to the setting of his life’s drama. He is superior because he has the psychological ability to live an authentic, complete and natural life, in full symmetry with the eternal element, thus a life of perfection, unimpeded virtue and happiness.

Bibliography


