



**THE STOIC
PHILOSOPHER**

Does the use of artificial Intelligence (AI)/ChatGPT influence our moral decision-making?

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Introduction

In the present time, the development of computer technology and artificial intelligence (AI)/ChatGPT has become increasingly important in our society. Computer technology is a description of the equipment (hardware) with which data (information) can be processed. For example, a laptop, tablet, or mobile phone. We often see that this equipment (hardware) is also equipped with an artificial intelligence (AI) component. Artificial intelligence is the ability of a machine to display intelligent behavior and/or to perform human tasks. The most recent example of this is ChatGPT. This is a prototype artificial intelligence chatbot specialized in having human-like conversations with a user.

What are the advantages of using artificial Intelligence (AI)/ChatGPT? In a research paper for the International Journal of Library & Information Science, by Ku. Chhaya A. Khanzode and Dr. Ravindra D. Sarode, the advantages and disadvantages of artificial intelligence are described. They write that the advantages of artificial intelligence are incredible. Some of the examples given are: Completes work faster than a human being, stressful and complex work done effortlessly and in a shorter time, several functions can be performed simultaneously. However, according to them, there are also disadvantages. Some of the examples given are: At some time it can be misused and might lead to mass scale destruction, unemployment will rise, technological dependence will increase (Chhaya & Ravindra, 2020, p. 5).

How are we to look at this in relation to our daily use of a laptop, tablet, or mobile phone? What happens when we view videos, photos and/or texts on the internet? Everything that is viewed is analyzed and stored and processed in the form of data. Large companies such as Google, Bing, LinkedIn, Meta (Facebook) et cetera keep track of everything we look at. Algorithms are developed to determine what we get to see based on the enormous amount of extracted data. The information we receive also determines for a big part the way we think. How does this influence our reasoning processes and moral decisions? Therefore, the following problem statement can be defined: does the use of artificial intelligence (AI)/ChatGPT influence our moral decision-making?

In a study conducted in March 2021, by S. Krügel, A. Ostermaier and M. Uhl, they did experiments where the



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subjects took the role of decision-makers who received advice from an algorithm on how to deal with an ethical dilemma. One of the most important findings from this research was:

“Our data suggest that people follow AI-generated as much as human advice; that they do not bother about untransparency; that they follow AI-generated advice even in the presence of suspicious information; that they (over) confidently believe others are more susceptible to the algorithm’s influence than themselves” (Krügel et al., 2021).

They conducted another study in December 2022, on the use of ChatGPT, whether it improves users' moral judgement. This research showed that even if the user knows that the advice comes from a chatbot (ChatGPT), this does not make the user immune to this influence. The subjects appeared to adopt ChatGPT's (arbitrary) moral position as their own. With this research it was established that ChatGPT influences users' moral decision-making. An important point that this research also shows, is that users underestimate the influence of ChatGPT's advice on their moral judgement (Krügel et al., 2023).

So, it turns out that both studies have established that artificial intelligence (AI)/ChatGPT influences our moral decision-making. What could be the role of Stoic philosophy in this problem?

I will therefore cover the following three elements:

- How should this problem be brought into the realm of Stoicism?
- How can Stoic philosophy help to address this problem?
- What arguments are there for the use of Stoic philosophy?

Discussion

We first need to understand what is meant by morality. This refers to the most important code of conduct put forward and accepted by any group, or even by an individual (Gert & Gert, 2020). In modern day language, morality has to do with right and wrong actions. And how does this relate to the concept of decision-making? According to Epictetus a decision should be justified, because if a decision is unreasonable, one needs to change it (Discourses 2.14).

The first element is: how should this problem be brought into the realm of Stoicism?

What is actually happening in our society and beyond? Why do so many people spend so much time on a laptop, tablet, or mobile phone? This is generally done to communicate with other people and to search for information. It is used for work, study, but also for leisure. It seems that we live in a time where it is almost impossible to live without these devices.

We can see that the technological developments in recent years are the result of an ever-evolving system of computer technology. And that these technological developments seem to follow the path of a chain of causes. Meaning that every event is caused by events before it. This is compatible with the Stoic theory of rigid causal determinism (Sellars, 2006, pp. 99-100). “Causal determinism is, roughly speaking, the idea that every event is necessitated by antecedent events and conditions together with the laws of nature” (Hoefer, 2016). But how are we to understand these 'laws of nature'?



For the Stoics there are two all-pervasive principles in nature. This is the foundation of Stoic physics. These are the active and passive principle. In the view of the Stoics this could also be understood as God and matter. The active principle is identified with air and fire, and is called *pneuma*, also known as breath (God). The passive principle is to be identified with the four inert elements of the physical world: fire, water, air, and earth (matter). What we can understand is that the Stoics used many names for the active principle. These names are: Zeus, nature, *pneuma*, *logos* (reason), and universal reason. For the Stoics, they all mean God.

That is why Epictetus said to his students, that the first thing that needs to be learned, is that there is a God, and a God who exercises providential care for the universe (Discourses 2.14.11). What does Epictetus mean by providential care? According to Epictetus it is God who governs the universe, and that everything works out for the good of the whole. The Stoics conceived God as an active force, immanent, and permeates the whole cosmos and everything in it. And therefore, also in human beings.

How does Stoic physics relate to their ethics? Long describes the connection between Stoic physics and ethics:

“Cosmic events and human actions are therefore not happenings of two quite different orders: in the last analysis they are both alike consequences of one thing – *logos*. To put it another way, cosmic Nature or God (the terms refer to the same thing in Stoicism) and man are related to each other at the heart of their being as rational agents” (Long, 1974, p. 108).

With this we can see that *logos* (reason) rules everything and that humanity derives their rationality from the same *logos* embodied in the universe. Therefore, Stoic physics is foundational to Stoic ethics, because a providential and rationally organized cosmos is the basis of the ethical theory of the Stoics and supports their psychological tools and ethical precepts for living a virtuous life.

The Stoics were quite aware of the fact that in the realm of Stoicism to all events there is a divine nature to it, which they called fate (*heimarmenê*). The Stoics defined fate as an endless chain of causation, whereby things are, or as the reason or formula by which the world goes on (Laërtius, 2015, p. 93). This also means that the technological development of artificial intelligence (AI)/ChatGPT is the work of fate and thus part of the governing principle of the universe. Although according to the Stoics everything is preordained by fate, they did not try to exempt human actions from the aforementioned causal determination, because human beings are as much part of the causal network as is all else. So neither their friends nor their adversaries denied that the Stoics were compatibilists and that there is room for personal responsibility (Inwood et al., 2003, p. 192). That is why fate does not lead the Stoics to any kind of resignation.

For the Stoics it is in our power to respond to events, within our possibilities and limitations.

But how are we to conceive this power? I will therefore move on to the second element.

The second element is: how can Stoic philosophy help to address this problem?



According to the Stoic theory of *oikeiōsis* the basic desire or drive in all animals (including human beings) is for self-preservation (Sellars, 2006, p. 108). As human beings, we want to preserve ourselves as a rational being, who is free and independent of others. How then should we relate ourselves to all that exists? According to Zeno all things that exist are divided into three groups: good, bad and indifferent. The only things which are classified as 'good' are virtue (*aretē*) and things that participate in virtue. The only things that are classified as 'bad' are vice (*kakia*) and things that participate in vice. Everything else is considered to be 'indifferent' (*adiaphoron*).

For the Stoics indifferents are classed as 'externals', and are not inherently good, because they can also be used for bad ends. So they are neither good nor bad in themselves and thus morally indifferent. However, for the Stoics there is nothing wrong with preferring some indifferents over others. Health and wealth are examples of 'preferred indifferents' (*proēgmenon*). Sickness and poverty are examples of 'non-preferred indifferents' (*apoproēgmenon*). They also have an intermediate class of things, 'neutral indifferents', for example an odd or even number of hairs on one's head (Sellars, 2006, pp. 110-112).

Another part is that according to Epictetus, things are divided into two categories: what is 'up to us' (or 'in our power', *eph' hēmin*) and what is not 'up to us' (*ouk eph' hēmin*), and that we should focus our concern and desire on the first group, rather than the second. The first group are our psychological states and responses such as beliefs and motives. The second group are our bodily condition, property, or social standing (Hard, 2014, pp. xii-xiii). Epictetus therefore argues that the only thing which is truly 'up to us' is our faculty of choice (*prohairesis*). This is part of the commanding faculty (*hēgemonikon*) of our soul. "The only things that we have complete control over are our judgements, made by this faculty of choice" (Sellars, 2006, p. 114).

How are we to understand the consequences of these judgements? For the Stoics emotions are the product of our judgements. When we make a judgement about an impression (*phantasiai*), this is based on our opinion of the value (*axia*) of that impression, whether it is good, bad, or indifferent. So, as human beings we need to assent (*sunkatathesis*) to the impression before this stimulates motivation to action (*hormē*) or other such reactions, including emotions or feelings (Hard, 2014, p. xiii). When we attribute good or bad to something that is indifferent, we have made a false judgement. The product of a false judgement is called a bad emotion or passion (*pathē*). These are for instance: anger, fear, grief, desire (*orexis*), pleasure et cetera. Therefore, according to the Stoics, emotions are completely within our control and therefore 'up to us'.

According to the Stoics there are four stages of assent. First there is a perception of an external event or state of affairs. Second, we sometimes add an involuntary unconscious value judgement that is made about the content of the perception. Third is the presentation to the conscious mind of an impression in the form of a proposition that is composed of both the perceptual data received from outside and the unconscious value judgement. Fourth is the act of assent or rejection of the impression (Sellars, 2006, p. 67).

Therefore, if we want to understand the inner workings of our mind, we must pay attention (*prosochē*) to the impressions we receive. We cannot choose or control the impressions we receive, but we are able to choose, whether to assent to the impressions or not. Before we assent to an impression, we need to



examine the content of the impression. With this, we can determine whether the things concerned with the impression are 'up to us' or are not 'up to us', and if they do or don't fall within the scope for choice or decision (*prohairesis*). That is why Epictetus reminds his students of the importance of how we should struggle against impressions. Epictetus therefore said: "Here is the true athlete, one who trains himself to confront such impressions! Hold firm, poor man, don't allow yourself to be carried away" (*Discourses* 2.18.27 Hard trans).

What is Epictetus trying to teach us? How often does your mind get carried away by the information you receive on one of your devices? Are you always aware of your own reasoning processes and value judgements? Do you allow yourself to take time to think?

What is it in Stoic practical ethics that you need to do? When you receive an impression, you need to examine your perception and value judgement of that impression. Then ask yourself the following questions: is the impression true? How do you know it is true? Are there more perspectives to interpret the impression? What could be a proposition that is composed of both the perceptual data received from outside and the unconscious value judgement? How do you know this is justified? After this step-by-step plan, you are more likely to assent or reject the impression in a correct and justified way.

The next step for a Stoic could be to take an appropriate action (*kathēkon*). We must therefore consciously think about the appropriateness of the action we would like to take. There are two types of appropriate actions. The first type corresponds to the pursuit of preferred indifferents. The second type are actions that correspond to the pursuit of virtue. The first appropriate action is considered to be value neutral, because the pursuit are preferred indifferents. The second one is considered completely correct actions (*katorthōmata*), because they pursue virtue, and are thus good (Sellars, 2006, pp. 121-122).

When we look at these Stoic principles and artificial intelligence (AI)/ChatGPT, we are able to determine that the Stoics would classify these as externals. So, for the Stoics they are indifferents and therefore not 'up to us'. However, what is truly 'up to us' is our faculty of choice (*prohairesis*) and completely correct actions. With these Stoic principles we are able to address the problem of the influence of artificial intelligence (AI)/ChatGPT on our moral decision-making.

What could support the view that Stoic philosophy can help to address this problem? I will therefore move on to the third element.

The third element is: what arguments are there for the use of Stoic philosophy?

I have compiled the following syllogisms:

If you make use of the Stoic psychological technique of *prohairesis*, then you learn to examine your impressions before assenting to them.

If you learn to examine your impressions before assenting to them, then you learn to establish the truth, reject what is false, or suspend judgement in doubtful cases.



Therefore, if you make use of the Stoic psychological technique of prohairesis, then you learn to establish the truth, reject what is false, or suspend judgement in doubtful cases.

With the Stoic psychological technique of prohairesis, you make the right use of impressions and are in control of your psychological states and responses such as beliefs and motives. What if your judgement motivates action? What action accordingly should you pursue? For the Stoics virtue is perfect rationality, an excellent disposition of the soul (Sellars, 2006, p. 110). Therefore, it can also be argued:

If the action is appropriate and to the pursuit of virtue, then the action is 'completely correct' and thus good.

If the action is 'completely correct' and thus good, then the action is in harmony with universal reason.

Therefore, if the action is appropriate and to the pursuit of virtue, then the action is in harmony with universal reason.

With this we can see that human reason is an emanation or part of Universal Reason (Hadot, 1998, p. 76).

These syllogisms therefore support the view that Stoic philosophy can help to address the problem of the influence of artificial intelligence (AI)/ChatGPT on our moral decision-making.

Conclusion

When we look at the arguments, we have been able to determine that when you make use of the Stoic psychological technique of prohairesis, then you learn to examine your impressions before assenting to them. And if you learn to examine your impressions before assenting to them, then you learn to establish the truth, reject what is false, or suspend judgement in doubtful cases. This enables you to scrutinize your moral decision-making before agreeing to it, and you have control over your moral decision-making.

I have also argued that when your judgement motivates action, and the action is to the pursuit of virtue, then the action is 'completely correct' and thus good. And if the action is 'completely correct' and thus good, then the action is in harmony with universal reason. With this we also have been able to determine that human reason is in accordance with universal reason (God). So, there will be no influence of artificial intelligence (AI)/ChatGPT on our moral decision-making.

We should pay attention (prosochê) to the divinity inside of us. Because with this we can bring our own reason into harmony with universal reason (logos).

We can therefore say: to know thyself is to know the divine logos (i.e. God) that dwells within us.



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