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Certainty in Uncertainty: The Value of Stoic Virtue Ethics

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the relevance and application of Stoic virtue ethics during times of moral uncertainty and upheaval. Contrasting with Aristotle's ideal of the Good, the study suggests a dualistic metaphysic, one in which both good and evil are provided substance. Arguing for realism, a new ethics is proposed. One grounded upon observation and practical wisdom. Taking an eclectic approach, Aristotle, Machiavelli, and the Stoics are consulted, with strengths gathered from each. Likewise Arndt and Heidegger, with *das Man* reimagined. With Stoicism's dichotomy of control supporting self-actualisation amidst societal decline. Ultimately, this treatise aims to serve the conscience, offering an adaptable means towards morality. Pursuing reality and truth as the most noble ends.

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INTRODUCTION

The point of departure

This study proposes philosophy is recognised by its intention toward continual improvement. Added to which, humankind's ongoing progression driving philosophy, suggests any sense of final accomplishment remains beyond reach. Thus, philosophy might be described as an initiative that follows where the human condition leads. Accompanying the subject to make the best of circumstances as they are now, while inviting new thought with betterment in mind—the rationale upon which this dissertation proceeds. Reflecting this ambition, the purpose of this dissertation is to craft a novel virtue ethics. One that challenges the classical tradition for such endeavours. Reimagining key concepts in service to contemporary issues. Accordingly, we depart from Aristotle's moral treatise—foremost his *Metaphysics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Ethos

Here the suggestion is made that an *ethics* is that which supports life itself.[1] Thus honouring this standard, the moral framework presented by this dissertation, advances upon an ontological basis.[2] Where the intention is to secure moral absolutes that proceed independent of shifting societal consensus. First to serve the subject guided by moral conscience, yet also as a contribution toward humanity in general, specifically the fundament upon which it rests. Where philosophy, the arts, literature, and so on are recognised to extend from secure grounds for existence. Then in service to the same, the author proposes philosophy ought to work for its origin. Accordingly, *morality* concerns this study—the means by which existence is maintained at the most fundamental degree—from which upward developments can be made.

[1] Principally by solving a problem in the world or further improving conditions therein.
[2] With death as a moral absolute, we ground ethics upon the ontological—suggested as the most appropriate basis.

Approach

Employing a first principles approach, this work seeks to examine matters from a fresh perspective. Where it follows that an analysis is made outside of tradition. Then pursuing a realist outlook, the object at hand is viewed absent of convention *as is*, with founding assumptions tested against reality. The purpose being to confirm what works, with prior consensus put to one side.[3] An attitude that demands more resolve upon which to start out. Yet for the purpose of establishing solid grounds, we advance according to the standard suggested by this text: the effect that follows the object as its truth, whatever this may be.[4] To mean a propositional attitude absent of moral bias, whereby the full spectrum of human moral potential is equally considered. By which the outcome might be a virtue ethics that provides both theoretical and practical utility.

Method and Sources

The principal method of this study is grounded upon critical analysis—where this process first identifies key principles, offers critique, and then presents a synthesis of various philosophical thought. Thereafter, concepts are clarified and made discrete to the next, with these premises comprising the argument put forward here—with each premise contributing towards a definitive conclusion by means of logical inference.[5] The idea being that each development is made accessible for consideration by the reader. For this purpose, the intention has been to address matters with transparency and certainty, while stirring an accompanying variety of thought. Accordingly, this approach incorporates primary and secondary sources, ancient and contemporary, by which historical outlooks might offer insight toward contemporary matters.

Structure and style

This text presents a conceptual framework—one intended to be somewhat novel. Thus, for the

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[3] Heidegger addresses the object that is *being* itself, taken for granted with its essence overlooked in philosophical terms (Heidegger 2010). Similarly this study suggests *reality itself* is relatively overlooked compared to the human dealings that take place in same.
[4] An outlook similar to Machiavelli's *verità effettuale*, the effectual truth, prioritising the object as it is in reality (Scott 2016, p.151).
[5] See figure iv. *premises and inferences* presented in the appendix (p.42) presenting a diagram of the argument made by this study.

reader's benefit, its premises are offered in discrete segments. The purpose being to supply building blocks that are most tangible in isolation. Offering the choice whether to gather a gestalt in the mind or to consider each idea alone.[6] Then rather then demanding commitment at the outset, this format affords an engagement at the reader's discretion. Similarly, the ethics presented does not provide practical instruction regarding particular moral quandaries. The rationale being that this study presumes it more effective to present universal concepts and principles. With the reader applying these to particulars as circumstances develop—by which an emergent structure is suggested to follow[7]—one that is informed by reality and verifiable against the same.

The eclectic

To harness the philosophical corpus to its full extent, this study takes an eclectic approach. In the main, three schools are consulted: first Aristotle's coherent schema, one that incorporates various principles grounded upon a precedent metaphysic.[8] Then Machiavelli's naturalism addressing the reality of things as they are.[9] Prioritising the subject's adaptation to circumstances, with a pragmatic approach involving amoral reasoning. Thereafter, Stoicism, with its indifference to externals, assent, and personal actualisation as priorities. Added to which Heidegger[10] and Arndt[11] are raised to provide a contemporary context, specifically to address the morality of the crowd.[12] Where, finally, this culmination is expressed in accord with the tenets of Stoicism. With the preceding philosophical schools mentioned in support of the claim that Stoic virtue offers the most utility, particularly during times of societal moral uncertainty.

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[6] See figure iv. *premises and inferences* presented in the appendix (p.42) presenting a diagram of the argument made by this study.

[7] Making a close observation of nature and self, that which moves towards death *vs*. life are revealed among subtle phenomenon. Thereafter, with the moral conscience recognising the transience of all objects, the preciousness of life, morality follows. The suggestion being that an ethics cannot impart morality—rather, merely an appeal to observe to nature with a particular knowledge and end in mind. By which the subject's relation with life itself serves as moral counsel—the imperative about which these concepts are organised.

[8] For example, *virtue, phronesis, ergon, telos, eudaimonia,* grounded upon his *God* that extends as *the Good* (Aristotle 2016, 2019); where this study reworks versions of the same.

[9] For Machiavelli's *naturalism* see Brown 2016.

[10] Specifically Heidegger's concept that is *das Man*, suggested in his work *Being and Time* (2010).

[11] As put forward by Arndt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951).

[12] Along with a number of other supporting voices addressing this matter.

The importance of history

Contrary to humankind's advance toward an ever more accomplished present, this study presumes a differing procession of events. To mean, although modernity excels in some matters, the excellence among past eras might also be acknowledged. Furthermore, humankind's problems appear to remain generally the same across all epochs. Then ancient wisdom represents a useful means to address current issues. Yet that said, history's goods are brought forward amidst a context. Consequently, hermeneutical insight is useful. For which reason, Aristotle and Machiavelli are introduced with consideration to their life and times.[13] Following which analysis and reflection is offered for the reader's consideration. The point to show that their respective philosophies were as a response to immediate circumstances as they were then, albeit grounded upon timeless principles. Thus revealing the need for a contemporary virtue ethics that addresses conditions as they are now.

THE PROBLEM

A problem in the world

The impetus for this study stems from the author's observation of *manufactured dependency*,[14] the method by which a problem is purported as a solution. Where, given the solution worsens the problem, the practice compounds its presence to the worsening detriment of the subject. Then as one solution is offered, a variety of new problems follow—which also call for further solutions. Thus to manufacture multiple dependencies, only one problem and one such solution need be introduced, by which harm is pursued for profit.[15] Thereafter, considering the initiative that claims the good, while pursuing an opposite end. We note, no matter that such malevolent intent is openly

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[13] For the purpose of brevity, the detail is not included here; please see the full version of this study regarding this historical context.

[14] See Ghosh 2001 where *dependency theory* is more often applied among intentional economic relations. Yet here the same is used to describe the relation between subject and detrimental object, accompanied by a third party that instills weakness for profit: with the purported cure for the weakness being the debilitating agent itself. The same premise opening the author's MA thesis successfully defended 5th March 2020, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Sc. Aneta Karageorgieva.

[15] For example the technology that is *social media* claims to connect, yet in truth isolates (Hunt et al 2018; Primack 2017; Luxton 2012). Wherein the subject seeking human connection, engages to their detriment. Thereafter more isolated and less socially able, the third party profits in the dependency that follows. This being an applicable method wherever a solution is claimed to be a problem. Or absent of a problem, it may happen that a real or imagined issue is manufactured to initiate this cycle.

expressed, with research often confirming the harm being done. Nonetheless these endeavours enjoy near unquantifiable material success.[16]

The suggestion being that this practice is facilitated by society's increasing acceptance of malevolent intent, possibly due to the decline of religious influence in the West, where evil was once addressed as a significant matter in itself. Consequently, destructive initiatives have come to be normalised, with *good* redefined as *evil* and vice versa, leading to moral confusion. Moreover, it would appear that despite environmental damage, animal mistreatment, and a decline in human health, such initiatives experience ongoing success. Growing more abundant as the condition of the commodity being exploited declines. Likewise, although being impacted by the outcomes, the majority would appear to celebrate the goods produced by these means. With a demand to share these profits, albeit by proxy, through the financial markets and so on.

Accordingly, we ponder the unhindered advance of this practice—at times celebrated by the crowd—which leads us to consider evil upon metaphysical terms.[17] Particularly as evil being normalised appears to be advancing in society. To mean the moral order reversed—with that which supports creation, supplanting that which supports destruction—an inversion by which good is evil, and evil is good. Thereafter, this study critiques classical Western moral theory, which more often frames evil as a mere aberration or moral ignorance. Where the proposal is made that this outlook follows civilisation, specifically the abstractions from reality this development affords. Reminding us, that to be effective, an ethics myst recall the harsh founding layer upon which human advancement proceeds. Where the proposal is made that the issue lies not in evil itself but in humankind's relationship with it.[18]

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[16] *Success* mentioned here is without moral quality *i.e.* to merely indicate that said scheme has delivered goods and ends as intended.

[17] (*i*) To mean *evil* itself as an object, secular and measurable upon objective terms *e.g.* wilful harm done toward the self and Other, where tangible, observable outcomes follow. Thus *positive* in the sense that evil acts with self-awareness and intent *i.e.* not by chance, incompetence, ignorance, or deficiency. (*ii*) As employed by this study, *evil* is a euphemism for the destructive principle, that which moves the subject towards death, flourishing as it destroys.

[18] Rather than evil itself as the problem in the world, it is suggested that the perception, response, reception, and thus facilitation and amplification of evil in the subject is the problem. Or in other words, the human relation with evil—since evil itself is merely the opposite principle to creation, the destructive force also required by life to proceed.

das Man

Defined by Heidegger as an anonymous mass that avoids an awareness of its death,[19] favouring distractions to maintain its hedonic state, this study raises *das Man*[20] as the means by which to address the crowd's behaviour. Thereafter, Heidegger's original definition is expanded herein,[21] with *das Man* first suggested as a primal survival mechanism aligned with nature's amoral workings.[22] Thus fearing objects that deliver angst relative to its being, *das Man* also avoids an awareness of evil—which in turn enables evil to flourish.[23] Likewise, pursuing a *perception* of safety, it subjugates itself to the foremost power that promises its survival.[24] Seeking to avoid self-awareness and responsibility in this symbiotic relation, appeals toward genuine morality provoke its hostility, where instead obedience is the principal virtue. Thus an ethics must respect *das Man's* amoral constitution, as the principal means by which evil in the world is facilitated and amplified.

das Man and the narrative

Heidegger's *das Man* denotes a collective entity, one that avoids confronting its existential fears, specifically its death. Thereafter, this study reimagines this being, to propose an equivalent that fears reality itself—the medium in which all of its fears are contained. Consequently, it is suggested *das Man* is that which retreats into a simplified, emotionalised narrative crafted by the expert *technician*—offering perceived safety, consensus emotion, group membership in exchange for

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[19] With this condition beyond its comprehension, *das Man* does not know what death itself *is*. Rather *das Man* fears an unknown object that signals the end of its hedonic condition.

[20] Foremost introduced in his work *Being and Time* (Heidegger 2010, D1.4), *das Man* signifies the subject subsumed by the anonymous homogenous crowd; mirroring the inauthentic attitude of the mass. An everyday mode of being which reflects the *They* not yet having grasped its authentic being. Were we note, *das Man* does not apply to a particular group, rather any subject not itself *i.e.* avoiding an awareness of self-existence and individuality. To which this study differs in that here *das Man* is authentic in its being *i.e.* the full extent of its potential, with these characteristics demonstrating its natural condition.

[21] We proceed with Heidegger to the point that *das Man* fears and avoids an awareness of its end. After that, all further proposed characteristics appear as additions made by this study.

[22] (*i*) The psychological body which serves strength in numbers; the unconscious, more present in the material, aggregating material as a supra-mass; where *natural conditions* refers to *das Man* dwelling subordinate to nature—in contrast to the problem that is *das Man* situated among unnatural conditions *i.e.* human civilisation. (*ii*) For context see Sheldrake (2012) who suggests *morphic fields* as a phenomenon by which collective animal behaviours are organised. (*iii*) Likewise somewhat reminiscent of Hegel's *Geist* as a *spirit* or *mind* encompassing individual and collective cultural phenomena (Hegel 1977).

[23] Here *das Man* avoids *Death* and *evil* as two principal objects that cause it angst; yet more accurately, this organism avoids or seeks to diminish any object that interrupts its hedonic frame. To mean, objects are avoided that (*i*) remove it from consensus emotion; (*ii*) invite an awareness of being; (*iii*) indicate disobedience to power; (*iv*) signal disloyalty from the group; (*v*) imply independent perception or thought; (*vi*) prioritise reality over fantasy; (*vii*) require genuine moral effort in place of emulated or signalled virtue.

[24] Most often a charismatic leader, institution, mythical figure, real or imagined; the object that serves as the archetypical *parent*, *protector*, *guardian*, that confronts evil upon *das Man's* behalf.

obedience and belief.[25] Where moral correctness depends upon in-group inclusion, no matter the if the self or Other are harmed. Added to which, detached from reality, we find *das Man* reliant upon an organising power to maintain its existence. Offering belief even when injured by the entity that rules over it. Then seeking to escape responsibility and reality in the chaos that follows. *das Man* may call for absolute rule, considering its obedience equivalent to virtue.

das Man and the moral appeal

The absence of moral conscience in the majority[26] confronts Aristotle's reason as grounds for morality—where instead the reasoned appeal often appears burdensome. Thus we might observe the amoral crowd rejects such appeals, particularly those other to the narrative's ideal[27] or contrasting with its obedience.[28] Causing the well-meaning philosopher to be met with hostility. Similarly, Aristotle's elevation of reason as the height of human agency discounts the reality that physical coercion is more potent than intellectual persuasion. Therefore, in crafting a virtue ethics, we must consider the moral constitution of the recipient, particularly the majority represented by *das Man*.[29] Most certainly, where the appeal is perceived to question the relation between *das Man* and organising power.[30]

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[25] Where this expansion of Heidegger's original concept reflects related philosophical thought. For example, Kierkegaard's *crowd*, suppressing individuality, encouraging conformity; with the subject less responsible, more cowardly, and more likely to believe and spread falsehoods (Kierkegaard 2009). Nietzsche's *herd morality*, suppressing the individual in mediocrity and conformity over individual excellence (Nietzsche 2001). Durkheim's *collective conscience*, with the crowd as a psychic mass driven by group sentiment (Smith 2014). Also relevant, Freud's *id i.e.* the primal human psyche, instinctual and pleasure seeking, with gratification of desires as its end (Freud 1960).

[26] Milgram (1963) demonstrated 65% of subjects prioritise obedience to commands issued by authority, over the well-being of the Other. Similarly, in his work *Ordinary Men*, Browning comments upon the average subject's ability to commit moral atrocity when following orders (Browning 1992).

[27] (*i*) Here *das Man's* amoral constitution principally reflects the conclusions of Le Bon (1895), Sighele (2018), Arendt (1951), Desmet (2022). (*ii*) this study suggests *das Man* as a natural organism, one that reflects nature in its immediacy, unobstructed by moral conscience, moved by reflex.

[28] Where *obedience* is an expression of *belief* in the object that is transcendent power; the object that it perceives to ensure its survival. Where then to believe is equivalent to survival. Thus rational enquiry that questions this belief will be met with a response as if *das Man* were fighting its existence. For context see *annihilation anxiety* Hurvich 1989.

[29] Reimagined and elaborated upon by this study; not as per Heidegger's original description.

[30] This being a symbiotic relation in which these aspects advance as a single entity.

Aristotle's *Good* and the ideal

Aristotle is considered a realist by most,[31] yet this study suggests his ethics accords with the idealist school. As grounds for this claim, we consider Aristotle's *Good*:[32] a metaphysical ideal, one that precedes tangible reality and thus requires belief to fully function.[33] In response, it is argued that reality provides a more robust grounds for an ethics. Avoiding the assumption that the moral ideal will be universally received and that the Good will naturally prevail. Likewise accounting for the majority's amoral disposition, represented here as *das Man* reimagined. Furthermore, Aristotle's ethics denies evil substance,[34] yet paradoxically the object defaults to an evil when absent of the Good. Where it would follow that absent of deficiency the world ought to return to the good, demanding an idealised ethics for this purpose. Thereafter, we question Aristotle's precedent Good as an object that invites moral confusion.

Aristotle as idealism

Considering Aristotle as an idealist rather than realist,[35] we differentiate between Aristotle's imminent idealism, the divine potential embodied upon earth *vs*. Plato's transcendent idealism separated between realms, dividing the perfect from the imperfect.[36] Where it suggested that Aristotle's Good implies the object ought to embody this ideal, since failure to do so, indicates an error or deficiency. Thus although this view promotes the actualisation of personal potential, this outlook is proposed to present unexpected risks when taken to extremes. For example, the in-group perceiving itself as closer to the imminent divine than the Other.[37] Thus caution toward the

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[31] Aristotle's treatise asserts empirical knowledge and the independence of reality from human perception; the criterion for realism (Heinaman 1996).
[32] Here we consider Aristotle's God as absolute the embodiment of the Good. To mean, where the Good is mentioned his God is also implied. Where this God is the first principle that is the cause of good and the cause of being for all other things (*Met*. 12.7.1072b1-3); the unmoved mover as cause of everything, including motion and change (*Met.* 12.6.1071b3-1072a2); eternity in actuality, having always existed (*Met.* 12.6.1071b12-14); pure thought, pure actuality, thinking of itself as thought (*Met.* 12.9.1074b34-1075a5); and the first cause of the universe; the final cause towards which all things strive (*Met.* 12.7.1072b1-3). *Met*. 4.9.1051a19-21.
[33] Upon the belief that doing good will likely deliver the Good as a matter of course; where Aristotle's *virtue for the sake of virtue* is suggested to somewhat support this claim, in that the reward is first intellectual *i.e.* an intangible gain, dependent upon subjective value judgement, requiring the presence of moral conscience and faith.
[34] *Met.* 12.7.1072b1-3
[35] Reflecting *the Good* (the embodiment of God) as the precedent metaphysical object, real in mind alone, upon which material reality is grounded.
[36] See Duignan 2018, *Plato and Aristotle: How Do They Differ?*
[37] Potentially resulting in the persecution of the out-group by the in-group, considered as *other* to the deal.

imminent ideal is suggested, highlighting endeavours that may result in harm when taken to absolute extents.[38]

The problem of positive evil

Aristotle's metaphysics suggests that evil lacks substance, and thus merely represents a privation of the Good.[39] To mean, the term *evil* describes a deficiency; rather than an existent object in itself. Contrary to this view, this study provides substance to good and evil—thereby, both existent and self-determinant in the "positive" sense.[40] Thus contrary to Aristotle's subject, always striving for the Good;[41] with the moral conscience in opposite alignment,[42] here the subject may actively seek the bad with awareness and intention. Flourishing as the good, albeit upon an inverted moral standard, an equivalent eudaemonic status might be attained.[43] The point being, in perceiving evil as the Good expressed in error, deficiency, or ignorance, the Aristotelian subject inadvertently facilitates positive evil. When, in reality, the first step towards reconciling the destructive principle is to recognise its existence, intent, and attainments *as is*.

Challenges that face society

This study proposes a virtue ethics that serves moral certainty during times of uncertainty brought by societal moral decline. For this reason, we consider the means by which a society's morality may rapidly decline—and where in turn the persecution of the out-group can follow. The proposal being that to be functional, a virtue ethics must account for such developments. Yet not as a means to counter these moral shifts and outcomes—suggested as inevitable once initiated—more so that the

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[38] When taken to the absolute, the perception may follow that with a sufficient elimination of "errors" or "deficiencies" in the ideal's embodiment, the mundane might be made proximal to the divine—whereby the restoration of a eudaemonic, ideal, more "real" world will follow as a matter of course.
[39] *Met.* 12.7.1072b1-3
[40] Although morally negative, here, *positive evil* is that which possesses substance, acts for and of itself, and flourishes through destruction; the point being to draw a contrast between Aristotle's evil as the consequence of deficiency *vs*. an object existent in itself, gaining and expanding upon its own terms; then a "positive" self-determinant force or principle in this respect.
[41] Aristotle proposes that all actions, in all subjects, originate in the Good. In contrast, here, the bad subject neither misconceives the starting-out point nor worthwhile ends; developing a practical wisdom that serves the self. For contrast see *NE* VI.12.1144a35-38, *NE* IX.4.1166a15.
[42] The positively bad are suggested to possess moral conscience; one that holds destruction, that is evil, as the moral good. Hence, as the positively good are bound to do good, the positively bad are bound to do harm by conscience; rewarded with an equivalent psychological ease and esteem when committing evil.
[43] Refuting Aristotle's notion that the vicious or bad cannot attain any *true* eudaemonic goods or competences.

subject may maintain a personal morality in accord with the moral conscience to the best possible degree. Thus enabling the internal alignment necessary for self-actualisation as a moral good.

Bezmenov's moral subversion

Bezmenov's four stages of moral subversion[44] describe the orchestration of societal moral decline leading to a new order. The first stage, *demoralisation*, involves an endeavour to alter the collective consciousness, whereby the ability to identify reality is lost. With consensus truth fractured, society is made more suggestible, with the amoral as the moral. The second stage, *destabilisation*,[45] intensifies societal discord, economic disparities, and undermines institutions, eroding morale still further. Followed by *crisis*,[46] a series of catastrophic events that precipitate sudden, drastic changes, exploiting the earlier created weaknesses. Finally, *normalisation*,[47] solidifies and institutionalises the new order, written into law and accepted as reality. Demoralised and seeking stability, the populace embraces and enforces the new normal, preventing a return to the previous moral order.

Arendt's Totalitarianism

Arendt raises the relation between moral decline and totalitarian initiatives.[48] Proposing ideology, terror, and crises are employed to justify standards unacceptable under normal conditions.[49] Specifically, an imperative toward safety that calls for a sudden moral shift—with the narrative's ideal as the highest good. Other means are used, for example collective identity through mass mobilisation and ceremonies; surveillance and self-regulation encouraged among the populace; the dismantling of legal standards toward arbitrary rulings. Notably, social isolation is promoted to detach individuals from meaningful relationships, increasing the narrative's appeal. Arendt

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[44] Schuman 1984, p.21
[45] See *destabilisation*, *Ibid.*, p.42-43
[46] *crisis*, *Ibid.*, p.43-44
[47] *normalisation*, *Ibid.*, p.44-46
[48] See Hannah Arendt's 1951 work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, where the same explores the emergence of totalitarianism, specifically Nazism. Then examining the historical foundations and mechanisms of totalitarian rule, she contends this to be a unique form of governance. One that aims to control every facet of life via ideological manipulation and the use of terror, going beyond the mere suppression of political dissent.
[49] See Arendt's essay *Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government* (1951)

highlights the *banality of evil*:[50] described as an unquestioning obedience to authority and lack of moral reflection—by which the ordinary subject becomes complicit in moral atrocity.[51]

Supporting views

As precursors to Arendt, we consider Mackay's *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds,*[52] likewise Sighele's *The Criminal Crowd and Other Writings Upon Mass Society*,[53] and Le Bon's *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind.*[54] Where throughout, crowd psychology and collective behaviour is addressed. The common theme: the phenomenon by which the crowd subsumes the individual—and the destructive behaviour that follows. For example Le Bon and Sighele suggest the subject's rational mind is diluted in the crowd.[55] Inviting the intensification of emotion in the absence of critical, analytical, moral thought. Likewise, Mackay mentions the collective delusions and mass psychoses occurring throughout history. Specifically, the various manias, social contagions, and witch-hunts that have gripped Europe in the past *i.e.* those occasions in which society has departed from reality en masse.

Desmet's Totalitarianism

Building upon the ideas of Le Bon and Arendt, Desmet's theory of *mass formation*[56] suggests totalitarian initiatives leverage psychological conditions among society. Circumstances such as social isolation, a lack of personal meaning, free-floating anxiety, frustration, and confusion. Added to which, a narrative that suggests a purported threat, real or imagined, is introduced. With this

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[50] See Arendt's *banality of evil* mentioned in her text *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963).

[51] We note Milgram's *Behavioral Study of Obedience,* 1963, that appears to support this premise. Wherein Milgram examines obedience to authority, revealing 65% of subjects will harm the Other upon command. In this case, administering electric shocks, despite the participant's distress (an actor, not receiving real shocks).

[52] See Mackay 1841, sections 2-3. Addressing crowd psychology, Mackay's analysis includes historical instances of mass hysteria and irrational conduct. Addressing social contagions, he examines political manias and witch hunts, where logical thinking is forsaken by collective ideology. In short, his outlook considers human irrationality and the risks presented by group dynamics. Then underscoring the role of fear and superstition, he offers a warning regarding the effects of social influence upon individual decision-making.

[53] In summary Sighele (1891) examines the relation between individual and collective accountability; most significantly, the crowd's tendency toward mass criminal behaviour.

[54] Le Bon (1895) explores group psychology, suggesting that individuals lose their capacity for rational thought amidst the crowd. Merging into a collective consciousness marked by impulsivity and susceptibility to suggestion, absent of critical reflection. Likewise he details how crowds exhibit behaviours driven by emotions and instincts rather than by logical reasoning. With the crowd motivated by imagination, thus particularly susceptible to emotive, vivid language delivered by a charismatic leader.

[55] See Le Bon (1895) and Sighele (1891), regarding the subject's rational mind diluted among the crowd.

[56] Desmet 2022, Part II *Mass Formation and Totalitarianism*

monologue providing certainty and unity for the fractured populace—about which the mass formation gathers. Thereafter, two thirds support the narrative without question, with the remaining out-group persecuted, dehumanised, and sought to be eliminated in the name of the good. With the in-group perceiving itself engaged in a noble moral battle throughout.[57] Ritualistic behaviour also features, for example dance and mass movement. Likewise the wearing of emblems and insignia indicating loyalty to the group. Where we note technology amplifies mass formation in digital spaces, enabling more efficient manipulation and control. Finally in sum, Desmet posits that society submits to totalitarian endeavours willingly, pursuing subjugation amidst the chaotic conditions that follow its noble battle against aspects of itself.

Hyper-normalisation

Yurchak's *hyper-normalisation*[58] describes a societal condition where reality is replaced with a simplified, fictional narrative, one that is more pleasing and reassuring for the populace. Circulated through media, this narrative distills complex issues into simple terms, creating a collective belief that departs from actuality. Then as this hyper-normalised version of reality is accepted, moral decline follows. Whereby critical thought and moral reasoning is diminished, resulting in moral apathy toward real-world concerns. Furthermore, given the narrative's simplicity and emotional appeal, complex uncomfortable truths are disfavoured, resulting in widespread dependence upon the untruth. Over time, this faux reality requires the reinforcement of duplicity at all levels, encouraging a culture where truth is seen as immoral—whereas supporting the lie is virtuous. Consequently, as the societal ethic proceeds upon the unreal, society's moral fabric disintegrates.

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[57] Where the "heroic fight" comprises moral posturing, displays of belief, loyalty, the repetition of phrases, wearing of insignia, dancing, clapping, the administration of substances, adornments, and so on, yet most significantly, the persecution of the Other that is the out-group; with all actions signalling moral virtue in obedience to authority (Desmet 2022).

[58] A term made known by the 2016 documentary of the same name, wherein filmmaker Adam Curtis explores the notion that power crafts a simplified version of reality toward its own ends. One that replaces the complexities of the real world—requiring less effort and intellectual acumen to process. The origin of this concept stems from Yurchak's (2005) work *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More.* Where citizens might recognise societal failure, yet an alternative cannot be envisaged. Thus facing chaos and disarray, a collective false perception is agreed upon, one that requires a departure from reality en masse. Lacking objective standard for truth, unfavourable conditions follow as a matter of course.

Moral idealism

Idealism's appeal is suggested to stem from the suffering inherent to life—with existential discomfort being attributed to an imperfection or corruption that ought to be eliminated. Where this elimination is purported to restore the subject or the world to its real condition.[59] The means by which the Other might be framed as the obstruction toward this end.[60] After which, failing to arrive, the ideal may seek to justify harm in the name of its good, worsening moral conditions still further.[61] Then detached from reality, the ideal is that which measures morality upon subjective terms. Invoking circumstances in which the subject concerned with objective standards may face persecution. By which, given this departure from the actual, the basis for truth, idealism invites moral decline—ultimately requiring force to maintain the moral ideal's prevalence.

PART II TOWARDS A SOLUTION

A new old metaphysics

In contrast to Aristotle's concept of the Good, the study suggests a metaphysics in which both good and evil are provided with substance—with these terms as euphemisms for *creation* and *destruction*.[62] Thereafter, the premise follows, as intended by nature, some organisms will flourish as they create, whereas some will flourish as they destroy. Implying that when grounded upon a metaphysic which comprises the absolute good, the ideal that extends from this basis is unattainable. Where instead, to be achievable in full, an ethics must acknowledge the moral duality inherent to life.[63] Requiring a departure from the moral ideal, by which this relation between

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[59] Morality serves to overcome suffering, yet morality requires effort. Then with the third party perceived responsible for life's suffering, in exchange for obedience and belief, the ideal provides a means to avoid personal responsibly and moral effort. Thus moral realism with its proactive demands, is suggested to be less attractive.

[60] The object that is *other*, will not merely be considered *different* to the ideal. Rather its otherness confers the status of *contrary* to the ideal. Thus the object deemed *other* is considered immoral in its existence—by which the ideal establishes a self-reinforcing mechanism among its adherents.

[61] Where this harm *i.e.* immoral action is conducted in the name of the ideal's good—that being the endeavour toward the ideal's actualisation—by definition unobtainable; the mechanism by which the ideal is pursued and enforced to increasingly harmful degrees.

[62] Far from a new concept, it appears throughout ancient schools of thought, for example Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism (Heinrichs 2018).

[63] In the sense that any figurative "perfection" in being, is suggested to require the acceptance of imperfection, as a requisite aspect of life itself. Thus avoiding appeal's made towards moral perfection, absolute justice, utopian abstractions, and so on. Reconciling the presumption that with certain reasoned interventions and eliminations, humankind will return to its more real condition amidst a more real world *i.e.* so to say, the delivery of Plato's *Forms* to earth.

creation and destruction is better respected. Following which, with both principles acknowledged, a more robust ethics might follow.

Necessary evil

The destructive principle is suggested as necessary for life to proceed. Countering simplex notions of good *vs*. evil, where instead all beings are recognised to comprise both principles. Specifically, the proposal is made that existence necessitates the destructive capacity. Where we observe all living beings must eat. Yet for humans the matter is more complex: embodying these principles as any other being, in addition humankind is afforded the choice to select from either principle.[64] Accordingly, moral effort and practical wisdom are required to reconcile this duality towards creation overall—the rationale for an ethics. Moreover, recognising this capacity for destruction, with evil essential for survival, the premise that evil can be eradicated is made void. Thereby avoiding appeals made toward moral ideal, those that claim moral perfection is achievable.

Evil recognised in the self

Aristotle's denial of evil[65] is suggested to raise a potential issue, namely the subject's perception of self as an embodiment of the good alone, thus ignoring an inherent potential for evil common to all subjects *i.e*. the destructive principle expressed through the self. In response, this study argues that recognising evil within the self is necessary for practical wisdom, enabling a self-awareness that fosters an authentic approach to morality.[66] Furthermore, acknowledging this capacity for good and evil, the subject may cultivate compassion toward the similarly imperfect Other. Likewise, better recognising evil in the world, the subject is less able to overlook or discount destructive endeavours, particularly those that advance and flourish openly. Where then either a solution is pursued or an acceptance follows in which the best is made of circumstances.[67] By which we arrive upon an ethics

[64] This is not to suggest that certain animals are without moral choice, more that humans are the most apparent example of this phenomenon.
[65] *Met.* 12.7.1072b1-3
[66] The Jungian type integration whereby the different aspects of the self are integrated and harmonised; specifically the conscious vs. unconscious; yet more in this particular case, the integration of the shadow self as conceptualised by Jung (Colacicchi 2021).
[67] Referring to the concept of *radical acceptance*; the practice of truthfully accepting the self and circumstances (Brach 2003)

that acknowledges the full spectrum of human behaviour.

Appeals to the ideal made void

By failing to account for the imperfect dualistic nature of existence, the dissertation argues that moral appeals to an ideal are inherently flawed.[68] Thus recognising that all subjects embody both good and evil, it becomes clear that striving for an absolute moral ideal is unrealistic. Instead, practical wisdom might better guide ethical behaviour, one that serves to balance these opposing forces. Refuting the view that moral behaviour should aim for an ideal state of goodness, proposing instead that an ethics grounded in the reality of human existence. For example, recognising in creation and destruction all beings suffer and strive for life, evidently a surplus of suffering already exists. To mean, more suffering towards an ideal cannot be justified. Rather the most noble ends here and now, are then the reduction of suffering and the preservation of life.

Virtue as its own reward

Aristotle's virtue as its own reward, is contrasted with the suggestion that virtue must deliver tangible benefits in reality. Which is not to deny the comfort brought to the moral conscience by virtue. More, given that the subject lives and dies in reality, virtue, excellence in moral living, must serve to deliver tangible benefits in the same. To mean, virtue is that which enhances the subject's potential for survival and well-being, providing concrete rewards that reflect moral behaviour. Revealing the need for ethics to produce observable outcomes that assist the subject. Or said more specifically, virtue ought not service an abstract ideal, but rather a standard against which life is improved and suffering reduced. Inviting results beyond intellectual satisfaction, to also include practical benefits as grounds for moral excellence. Then respecting the subject's material existence, which provides the necessary means to prevail.

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[68] Particularly those that claim the moral perfection of humankind is possible; or more, a moral obligation.

The grounds for an ethics

Modern civilisation often overlooks its fragile foundation and presumes a certain linear progression from primitive to refined states. As though it were humankind may never return to the elemental. Neglecting this development exists as a delicate layer upon the primal basis beneath, that is *nature*: an entity that would appear to covet our return to the primal. Seemingly a view which presumes civilisation to be humankind's starting point. In contrast, recognising this fragility, the study proposes a definition of virtue that respects this harsh reality. Arguing that ethics ought not be based upon idealistic notions of progress, but rather acknowledge the inherent uncertainty of life. Where it follows that virtue is attributed, from the starting point that is survival, upwards. With every development celebrated as a moral success. Rather than from a position, beneath a transcendent ideal, which given its defining characteristics, remains unobtainable.

The appropriate recipient

Aristotle appears to presume *reason* invokes moral behaviour as a matter of course. Yet Milgram's experiments demonstrate the majority of subjects proceed absent of moral conscience.[69] In response, the appropriate recipient for a virtue ethics is discussed. Whereby, respecting that morality and ethics appear as an optional encumbrance to the amoral, the assertion is made that such an appeal ought to only address the subject bound by moral conscience. This being the internal monologue that drives the subject to enact the good—irregardless of circumstance or consequence. An intention, when absent of practical wisdom, that may result in harm to the subject or amoral endeavours furthered contrary to expectation. The goal then, to provide an ethics that works for the subject bound by this imperative. For which reason, practical wisdom is suggested as the means by which to temper the moral conscience, to avoid endeavours the result in unintended outcomes.

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[69] Milgram (1963) demonstrated 65% of subjects prioritise sacrifice the well-being of the Other in obedience to commands issued by authority. Similarly, in his work *Ordinary Men*, Browning comments upon the average individual's ability to commit moral atrocity when following orders (Browning 1992).

Moral conscience over moral character

In contrast to Aristotle's moral character developed through habit and societal accord. Here innate morality stems from the moral conscience—furnishing empathy and remaining constant throughout life. Where otherwise, inculcated morality is proposed to result in emulated moral conduct, which is thus vulnerable to circumstances. Thus explaining the crowd's rapid shift toward immorality in the presence of fear or an equivalent stimulus. Thereafter, moral character is proposed as a secondary effect, shaped by the relationship between the self and the moral conscience, that which persistently enforces its directives. However, it is also acknowledged that the moral conscience, while consistent, is not inherently wise. To mean, its pursuit of absolute good does not guarantee favourable outcomes in all situations, hence practical wisdom is required.

Tempering the moral conscience

To reconcile the potential for unfavourable outcomes brought by the moral conscience, this study suggests a practical wisdom that balances the moral endeavour against survival. Tempering the moral conscience to ensure actions align with reality rather than idealistic notions. Using Plato's allegory of *The Cave*[70] as an example, the suggestion is made moral duty, while noble, may lead to personal harm and is more frequently unsuccessful.[71] Accordingly, practical wisdom avoids such futile sacrifice, selecting actions in keeping with what *is* or *can be*—rather than what ought to be. Or said otherwise, a practical wisdom that incorporates virtue in moral conscience: a median standard that rests between moral abandon vs. moral paralysis—with this median determined by the criteria for the subject's survival in the world.[72] Where the moral potential of circumstances alone, decide the expression of this conscience.

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[70] Plato (2000) *The Republic*, Book VII

[71] It is proposed, anecdotally, that the subject attempting to do right by the moral conscience, appears more often undone than the subject going with the amoral flow.

[72] We recognise the moral conscience may forbid the criteria necessary for the realisation of personal potential among an amoral society. Where rather than eudaemonic flourishing, virtue in obedience to the conscience may deliver the subject to an opposite end.

Agents focused

An agents focused approach is proposed, one that recognises the moral potential of the self and the Other. By which the subject attempting to invite good, carefully determines an appropriate appeal. Inspired by *Plato's Cave*, this perspective cautions against overestimating the Other's receptiveness toward moral appeals, where otherwise hostility may follow. Accordingly, practical wisdom tempers the subject's moral intent. Acknowledging that both good and evil exist within all subjects, including the self. Thus contrasting with Aristotle's moral subjects as categories,[73] suggesting instead the subject embodies a blend of attributes invoked by circumstances, albeit relative to constitution. Likewise, voiding *us versus them* type divisions of good and evil, where assumed moral superiority may enable evil to flourish, both in the self and the world.

Reconciling duality in the subject

Here the subject embodies both the creative and destructive force, the basis for existence itself. Whereby, reconciling this duality within the self towards life overall, an ethics earns its definition. Thus, in contrast to the Socratic or Aristotelian view that attributes self-destruction to error or ignorance. While such causes are valid, the perspective presented by this study, acknowledges that the subject can wilfully engage in both creation and destruction—in this case a differentiation akin to Freud's *eros*[74] and *thanatos*.[75] By which the proposal is made that the subject exists as a *being-between-life-and-death*. Then requiring an accompanying moral endeavour, that is the mediation between these dispositions. Employing the destructive as means towards survival, yet preserving the self from the will of the same.

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[73] The *virtuous, vicious*, *akratic*, the *brute* and so on (Aristotle 2009).

[74] Freud's *eros,* the life instinct, signifying the sum of self-preservation drives. The creative force that motivates us to sustain life (Freud 1990).

[75] Freud's *thanatos*, the death instinct, the drive towards destruction and non-being, motivating self-destructive tendencies. With *eros* and *thanatos* constant conflict. *Eros* striving for structures that maintain life, while *thanatos* seeks to break these down return to a state of pre-being. The struggle between these drives shaping human behaviour and personality (Freud 1990).

Avoiding bad-faith appeals

The subject possessed of moral conscience is suggested to be vulnerable to bad-faith appeals. Circumstances in which the subject, seeking the good, furthers the ideal serving an outcome opposite to that claimed. Particularly those endeavours claiming the absolute good, denoting anything other to the ideal as immoral. With this in mind, this study proposes a practical wisdom that prioritises good intent aligned with genuine moral action. Pursuing initiatives that secure the grounds for life, while avoiding those that aim toward destruction. Then rather than challenge such initiatives, the subject is guided toward a focus upon personal morality. Which is to recognise evil in the self and the world. Then serving the well-intentioned middle, and thus avoiding the ideal advancing with malintent.

Assent

The proposal is made that the creative and destructive potential comprise all circumstances. Thus choosing where to attribute attention, practical wisdom discerns between impressions[76] that furnish a movement towards life or otherwise. Then even amidst dire circumstances, the creative path might be selected, albeit to most minimal degree as defined by circumstances. The idea being that, during times of moral decline, an alignment remains between the conscience, moral action, and outcome. Where this self-accord furnishes the grounds for self-actualisation. Added to which, such careful consideration of impressions avoids self-harm in response to appeals employing pathos. Particularly towards the ideal that demands sacrifice from its adherents—where instead the subject focuses upon the self's morality. While recognising that life's destructive aspect cannot be overcome, only managed where possible.

[76] Raising the Stoic concept that is *assent*—albeit in the frame of this study. The notion that when encountering an impression, with rational evaluation, the subject may accept or reject the impression at hand. Then a deliberate rather than automatic response (Laertius 2020, *Chrysippus* Book VII).

Dichotomy of control

Stoicism's *dichotomy of control* suggests only those matters that respond to personal agency are addressed.[77] All else ought to be accepted as beyond influence and left alone.[78] Liberating the subject from futile efforts and directing energy toward meaningful improvements. Then with personal well-being prioritised over abstract moral ideals, practical wisdom acknowledges the limitation of the self's influence. Reconciling the moral conscience where it may otherwise invite the subject's harm. In turn avoiding amoral initiatives, those that seek profit by claiming to address an issue beyond influence. An outlook by which the subject comes to accept the potentials among reality as they are. Preserving the self from succumbing to the ideal, which in turn cultivates resilience and stability. Similarly, amidst societal moral decline and what follows, the subject is afforded clear focus regarding adaptation and continuation, absent of surrounding distractions.

Honouring creation and destruction

A virtue ethics ought to respect the relation between creation and destruction, acknowledging that life depends upon these principles. To mean, where destruction unfolds as the effect of a preceding cause, intervention may result in more harm than good. The proposal being that good and evil coexist in symbiotic relation—as the recognition of causal relations throughout history demonstrates.[79] Where in short, if an organism facilitates its end, in the presence of influence that seeks the same, nothing can be done to avert the outcome. Rather the voice attempting to interrupt this progression will face persecution. Thus practical wisdom prioritising well-being, may identify the presence of such causes, allowing the natural order to proceed undisturbed. Moreover,

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[77] Epictetus 2004, *Enchiridion* Section 1

[78] The subject recognising limitation in the self, recognises boundaries of personal influence. Where practical wisdom suggests before addressing worldly issues, it is more appropriate, more wise, to apply moral interventions inwardly to the self. Then when recognising this limitation, and only if invited, and only if a foreseeable benefit might follow, then the subject may consider practical wisdom applied beyond the self. The point being that rather than abstract concerns as a priority, the subject's wisdom first serves personal wellbeing, where this faculty serves to maintain the self. Thus rather than an Aristotelian appeal to act in the world as an assertion of the Good, politically and so on, which may involve self-sacrifice in pursuit the ought. Instead this virtue ethics suggests inward imperfections are addressed and through this process the basis for survival is improved.

[79] See Black (2002) regarding Egypt, Carthage, Greece, and Rome, where the argument is made that these societies collapsed due to moral decline; mentioned here as the precedent cause by which this effect follows.

respecting evil consumes itself in the absence of good, the subject refrains from involvement, focusing instead upon the self's moral condition, suggested as the most moral response.

Moral inversion

The proposal is made that the narrative may frame matters in simplistic terms, appealing to collective emotion, in such a way to invert societal perceptions of good and bad. Leading to situations where efforts to promote good are perceived as harmful, while harmful actions are defended as virtuous. Supplying ready made views that supply moral virtue with repetition. Given this benefit, it follows that the nuanced accounts are rejected in favour of the sensational and pleasing simplification. Machiavelli is raised as an example, recounting the misinterpretation of his sophisticated project,[80] which ultimately led to negative outcomes.[81] Notably, where the reportage regarding his moral intent has been inverted, with Machiavelli's name now a euphemism for evil. The suggestion being that lacking practical wisdom, moral appeals may result in opposite outcomes. Thus an ethics respects the amoral majority, only addressing suitable subjects, while allowing the remainder of society to proceed undisturbed.

A new virtue

Aristotle's *eudaimonia* centres upon the actualisation of personal potential, incorporating social, political, and economic achievements.[82] In contrast, this study suggests *survival* as the preeminent human potential. With practical wisdom, rather than reason, deemed the essential virtue, enabling adaptation and continuation through challenging circumstances. Then taking this approach, we recognise the human organism's vulnerability and the necessity of civilisation for survival. Accordingly, the preservation of life and the avoidance of death serve as non-negotiable moral absolutes. The most relevant grounds amidst a society in moral decline, one that comes to celebrate

[80] This study suggests Machiavelli's *Prince* was written as sophisticated satire (Benner 2013, xxix-lv).
[81] Unger 2012, IX, *Machiavelli Dismissed, Deprived, and Totally Removed*
[82] Aristotle 2009, Book I, Chapter 7

destruction over creation. Thus here, rather than societal flourishing, the import is upon personal resilience and survival amidst inevitable change.

Personal flourishing uncoupled

The subject possessed of moral conscience may proceed at odds with an amoral society. Requiring the consequences of personal flourishing to be addressed. For example, associating reason with *eudaimonia*, Aristotle assumes the actualisation of personal potential as an intrinsic good. Yet here the argument is made that moral excellence may lead to persecution, failure, or worse when applied among amoral society. Historical examples are mentioned—prominent thinkers granted ill treatment or worse in response to their intellectual excellence. Thus a pragmatic approach is suggested: wherein practical wisdom guides personal potential—with personal well-being as the priority. Reflecting that *survival* features as the principal measure of virtue. By which the subject respects the world's terms, rather than attempting to reshape it in the image of the self.

Right action

Aristotle's right action suggests virtue for its own sake and reward[83]—suggested to imply an element of belief or faith. Here instead, right action demands tangible outcomes in reality, assessing consequences objectively and refining action to align with intended results. Thereafter, practical wisdom ensures creative action is accompanied by an equal advance in insight. Avoiding the invocation of the destructive by unchecked creation. Where then, right action denotes that which is necessary to prevail through change and adversity. Added to which, right action supporting the well-lived life anticipates and adapts to challenges. Developing personal meaning in the reduction of suffering, malice, and the preservation of life. Initially pursued for the self then extended to the Other—providing well-being is maintained.

[83] Aristotle 2009, Book II, Chapter 4

Practical wisdom as *ergon*

Supplanting Aristotle's reason, here *practical wisdom* is suggested as the human *ergon*. Where practical wisdom is that which comprehends and manages causal chains. Reconciling the destructive principle toward the creative overall—that is the continuation of life. Thereafter, said wisdom mirrors the divine wisdom expressed in existence. Thus, aligning actions with the very grounds for existence, the subject advances in accord with this universal wisdom—furnishing survival. In contrast to virtue as per the reasoned ideal, practical wisdom's deliberations are affirmed or refuted by reality at each stage of inference. Thereafter, rather than relative to an ideal, virtue is attributed from the baseline that is survival. Making virtue accessible to all subjects, irrespective of materiel means or moral luck. Promoting self-esteem with each incremental success recognised and celebrated—contrary to an ever deficient standard beneath an unobtainable ideal.

A new vision of practical wisdom

Rather than an embodiment of Aristotle's Good,[84] life itself is considered an interrelation of creation and destruction, good and evil. An outlook that recognises the inherent difficulties and uncertainties of existence. In response, rather than eudaemonic flourishing, practical wisdom focuses upon balancing these opposing principles toward sustainable grounds for life. In addition, Aristotle's *eudaimonia* is reconfigured to consider moral luck and reality's terms. Thus reconciling contingent factors such as wealth and social status. Likewise, Aristotle's theoretical being held over the practical is questioned. Instead, the epistemic order is reversed with the practical defining the theoretical. Whereby the principles that ground reality are discerned. Enabling the subject to align actions towards better outcomes in the same.

[84] Aristotle's Good is mentioned as a euphemism for his notion of God, the highest good that informs all objects *i.e.* implying the basis for life is the highest good—albeit interrupted by deficiency, error, or any other perturbations (*Met.*XII.9-10, *Met.*XII.7.1072a18-b29). Whereas here, the equivalent entity is both creative and destructive, good and evil—thus life, extending from this metaphysical basis, reflects the same.

The value of stoic virtue ethics

Stoic virtue ethics is proposed as the most suitable approach toward living well. Particularly during times of moral uncertainty and societal change. For example, we consider Stoicism's mental and emotional regimen, cultivating resilience. Similarly, the Stoic acceptance of fate[85] aligned with a universal order. Likewise, the value of contemplating mortality[86] to encourage life embraced. Added to which, Stoic virtue being valued over external goods, equips the subject towards fulfilment despite material deprivation. For example, Stoicism's joy in life itself, with appreciation for even the most elementary conditions. Added to which, *assent* directs attention towards impressions that furnish life, while Stoicism's *dichotomy of control* supplies resources to responsive matters alone. Universal principles provide moral certainty, supporting self-actualisation among both favourable and adverse conditions. Where then practical wisdom applies these principles appropriately, avoiding endeavours towards absolutes.

The Sage

The Stoic Sage (*sophos*)[87] is raised as a useful summary of Stoicism's tenets. Highlighting practical wisdom as the foundation of a virtue ethics. Embodying the integration of Stoic principles such as wisdom, virtue, and rationality. Although an unattainable ideal, the figurative Sage serves the end destination of this study. Representing an exemplar for continuous self-improvement, resilience, and inner peace. Focusing upon personal virtue over external goods, engaging in community life where appropriate, the Sage demonstrates reason and justice. Thus while embodying Stoic cosmopolitanism, the Sage's lifelong pursuit encourages challenges to be met with equanimity. Prioritising meaningful, virtuous actions over theoretical perfection—a most advantageous trait

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[85] A concept referred to as *amor fati* (love of fate) denoting the Stoic acceptance of fate with equanimity. In the words of Marcus Aurelius "*Willingly give yourself up to Clotho [one of the Fates], allowing her to spin your thread into whatever things she pleases.*" (Aurelius 2002, 4.34) "*Entrust everything willingly to the gods, and then make your way through life—no one's master and no one's slave*." (Aurelius 2002, 4.31).

[86] The Stoic awareness of mortality (*memento mori*) serves to invite virtue and relinquish trivial pursuits, as Marcus Aurelius states "*You could leave life right now. Let that determine what you do and say and think.*" (Aurelius 2002, 2.11). Likewise Seneca "*Let us prepare our minds as if we'd come to the very end of life. Let us postpone nothing. Let us balance life's books each day.*" (Seneca 1915, 3.101 Section 7-8).

[87] Brouwer 2014

during times of moral and societal decline.

DISCUSSION

Good as God

Contrary to Aristotle's evil as a privation,[88] the proposal is made that both good and evil possess substance. Likewise, this study questions Aristotle's view that all objects originate and move towards the Good—where initially Aristotle is suggested to commit an error. Yet, if we presume the Good is life, and all aspects of life are configured to ensure that life continues. Then including evil, all objects in life would indeed serve the Good. Furthermore, it would follow that the Good in deficiency could be described as *an evil*—since if all is life, and all is Good, the Good is never completely absent. Which in turn denies evil the grounds for existence, then incapable of occurring as a "positive" force *i.e.* in and of itself.[89] Then whether creative or destructive, if all actions further the Good that is life, we find Aristotle's Good as God to express positive moral intention—no matter that life's innate destruction and suffering is perceived by humankind as *evil*.

Theodicy

Returning to the premise that Aristotle's omission of substantive evil represents an error—which this study maintains—the suggestion is made that rather than a objective secular text, Aristotle's treatise serves more as an expression of transcendent faith. One that proposes the Good as an equivalent to an omnipotent God. This being a position that necessarily discounts evil as existent in itself. Where it follows that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is then an extension of Aristotle's theological metaphysics expressed in praxis. Thus the claim is made, in denying substantive evil, Aristotle's ethics suggests grounds to be considered a theodicy.

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[88] *Met*. 12.7.1072b1-3

[89] Since evil ultimately serves and contributes towards the whole—no matter how unfavourable for the beings involved.

Reality

Reality is proposed as a discrete object existent upon its own terms. Independent of human interpretation, the basis and sum of all phenomena—with the human organism a constituent aspect dependent upon this object. Yet despite this dependency, the human imagination is able to perceive reality as something other or optional—an abstraction or mere setting for human experience. Nonetheless, the absolutes that ground existence, *life* and *death*,[90] creation and destruction, remain non-negotiable terms in reality. In response, this ethics suggests *life* and *death* as moral absolutes. Thus implying good and evil are equally substantive, reconciling the complexity that stems from Aristotle's evil as privation.[91] Likewise with reality recognised as a wholly encompassing body, the perceived abstraction that is *self vs. reality* is made impossible. Securing the grounds for truth, and authentic moral introspection towards the self—that is the basis for personal morality and ethics.

Perennial characteristics

Considering reality's workings, we recognise its perennial characteristics that prevail irrespective of humankind, so to say its virtues. For example, its ongoing maintenance of life and death among all things. The becoming and unbecoming by which reality prevails, the *change* here referred to as *time*: proposed as the culmination of all nature's virtues. So then if we consider this organism proceeds upon unchanging principles and thrives in change, the subject may proceed in the same way. Which is to honour absolutes as grounds for a personal ethics—one that maintains moral certainty among shifting standards. Most notably when ideals contra to reality enter into circulation.

Differing ideals

Religious and modern philosophical ideals are contrasted, highlighting their differences. The suggestion: the religious ideal accepts human imperfection and earthly life as flawed; accompanied

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[90] *Life* and *death* as the absolute expressions of *creation* and *destruction*, that are the basis for *good* and *evil* as qualitative terms.

[91] The argument is made that in order to maintain the omnipotence of his God, Aristotle's evil as privation necessitates an array of caveats, allowances, and justifications—inviting moral confusion.

by a transcendent being as a guide, fostering a sense of humility, forgiveness, and community. In contrast, the modern philosophical ideal removes the transcendent being, while elevating the human subject to a god-like status; crafting an idealised vision of humanity that is ultimately unattainable. Leading to a cycle of elevation and subjugation, where the subject is first exalted in theory, then punished for failing the unrealistic ideal in reality.[92] Accordingly, an ethics grounded in actuality is required. One that recognises the subject as limited and imperfect. Likewise, life's inherent flaws and suffering. Avoiding the abstract ideal leading to harm, to instead make the best of circumstances.

Benefits of realism

While the ideal may promise virtue without moral effort,[93] harm follows as the force required to enforce the perceptions that deliver this end. Likewise the necessary subversion of truth and the faculties that otherwise determine the real *vs*. unreal. In contrast, a realist ethics, proceeding in accord with reality's terms, appears more sustainable over time. Offering reliable outcomes measured against objective standards. Preserving reason, logic, knowledge, wisdom, truth and so on, from the necessary subversion in support of objects real only in imagination and emotion. Moreover, with the integrity of these faculties preserved, objective standards protect the out-group from persecution as the ideal fails to actualise. Testable and validated by real-world success, the realist endeavour is thus capable of transcending eras, whereas the ideal requires continual upkeep.

Realism inviting compassion

In recognition of the persecution and harm that follows, this study raises the danger posed to the rational thinker by mass irrationalism. Where the immediate reflex might be to condemn the crowd for embodying this trait. In response, the argument is made that human survival en masse may

[92] With the ideal being arrived upon by reason alone, and where this retribution may involve elimination.
[93] Where belief and obedience toward the ideal supplies moral virtue.

depend upon the crowd's amoral, arational, illogical disposition. Where this organism serves as the primal kernel of humankind—the collective will to survive made manifest. Thus rather than scorn, respect is recommend as the most appropriate reflection toward the psychic mass. Acknowledging the crowd only presents a danger when its constitution is disrespected, its unconscious automatic lethality dismissed. With this awareness releasing the subject from presumed moral obligations towards it—avoiding the consequences that follow moral appeals made to the same.

An uncomfortable truth

Contrary to Aristotle's reason, intellect, and moral virtue delivering eudaemonic flourishing as a matter of course. History demonstrates reasoned or moral thought may deliver persecution rather than reward. With examples like Socrates, Hypatia, Machiavelli, among many others revealing the unfavourable outcomes that follow appeals made to an arational, amoral, illogical world. Where in practice, rather than the Good life delivered as an ideal end, base instincts and power dynamics more often respond. Therefore, to preserve the subject's well-being, an ethics must recognise this reality. Understanding that the reasoned moral appeal alone may not suffice, with practical wisdom accounting for the elemental human condition—in service to the subject's preservation.

Weakness of the good

The metaphysic that grounds reality is suggested to facilitate destruction more than creation.[94] Thus, evil, being spontaneous and self-organising, without need for an coordinating force, more often thrives. Furthermore, evil is ultimately robust, its prevalence only requiring an object to destroy. To mean wherever there is creation, the good unmaintained, evil is provided grounds to flourish. In contrast, the good requires an organising body and constant effort. Dependent upon the fragile capacities that are reason, logic, wisdom, and moral standards. Mistakenly assuming these values are universal. Likewise, that evil can be reconciled through rational discourse. Then less effective in

[94] Demonstrated by the fact that it takes far less effort to destroy than create the object; likewise, life requiring constant effort to maintain, death, none.

influencing the crowd driven by emotion and impulse. Where rather than catalyse a moral response en masse, endeavours to reveal evil's presence merely entertains the crowd.

Comparison of virtue

A comparison is made between the virtue of Aristotle, the Stoics, and Machiavelli. First, Aristotle's *eudaimonia* arriving through moral excellence and external goods, contrasting with the Stoic view that virtue alone suffices for a fulfilling life—with externals deemed indifferent. Then Machiavelli contrasting with both, raising *virtù* as a political tool rather than moral character per se. Focusing instead upon pragmatic and amoral strategies to maintain power. Thereafter, aggregating aspects from each—Aristotelian reason, Stoic indifference, Machiavellian realism—a more robust and adaptable virtue ethics is suggested to preserve the subject among societal moral decline.

CONCLUSION

Regarding the title of this study

The author acknowledges the dissertation title appears to suggest a study that solely concerns Stoic philosophy. In response, the rationale for the absence of this characteristic is provided here. First, respecting the heading itself, this treatise presents a virtue ethics that imparts moral certainty among societal moral decline and the moral disarray that follows—thus the premise *certainty in uncertainty* is presented in the title;[95] for which purpose, Stoicism, specifically, *Stoic virtue* is suggested. Accordingly, the *value* of Stoic virtue is proposed, since for the Stoic, (*i*) virtue itself is considered the most valuable good;[96] (*ii*) virtue demands behaviour that reconciles the moral uncertainty amidst societal moral decline;[97] (*iii*) virtue furnishes self-actualisation irrespective of external conditions; thus we arrive upon *Certainty in Uncertainty: the Value of Stoic Virtue Ethics*.

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[95] Most notable in the crowd gripped by a moral ideal that demands *sacrifices.* Where, absent of objective moral standards in reality, justified against the ideal's subjective moral terms, harm may follow in the name of the good.

[96] (*i*) Amidst societal moral decline, it might be that goods are removed from the subject's possession, leaving *virtue* as the only good that remains inalienable and truly valuable; (*ii*) likewise, against this standard, the Stoic accepts *life* as transient, avoiding moral manipulation by fear of death.

[97] (*i*) By maintaining a rational, objective, moral outlook, guided by moral principles grounded upon moral absolutes; (*ii*) where *uncertainty* refers to moral subjectivism, culminating in relativism, toward arbitrary measures justified by the ideal *i.e*. the absence of objective standards by which to determine the moral *vs*. immoral, the chaotic preconditions by which Arndt's totalitarianism presents itself as the solution (Arendt 1951).

Addressing the quantity of Stoic content relative to the body of this text, the case has been made for Stoicism as the most suitable response to societal moral decline. Calling for a detailed argument—both recognising the problem, and suggesting a means towards a solution. Or said otherwise, this text advances as a dialogical treatise, consulting a variety of philosophical thought from various philosophical schools, gathered towards the final frame or lens that is Stoicism. Where, throughout, before arriving at this end, Stoic concepts have been raised implicitly. For example, themes have included the subject's accord with nature, that is, congruence with *logos*;[98] the acceptance of life's imperfection; ethical self-actualisation; persistent virtue, and so forth.

Following which, this accord with Stoicism is made explicit in the latter half of the work, with Stoic principles as key findings, namely, the *dichotomy of control*, Stoic *assent*, practical wisdom, and the Stoic Sage as exemplar.[99] Furthermore, beyond these particulars, the grounding premise of this dissertation mirrors Stoicism's fundament, namely, the cosmos as that which informs moral principle.[100] In this respect, representing a normative order, independent of human consensus—recognised here by practical wisdom. Thus, as Stoicism, a unity of ethics and physics is proposed.[101] Culminating in a moral schema which reflects the workings of the cosmos itself. Or more specifically, a comprehension of causality that enables the subject to align moral intention *vs*. moral outcome.

Summary of findings

The author's observation of manufactured dependency has been the impetus for this study: the circumstance in which a purported solution is the problem. Causing the subject to perceive the necessity for an increasing quantity of the solution as conditions to worsen. Where then, the subject, environment, or any other object, is harmed for profit—in the name of the moral good. With this

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[98] Albeit this study suggests the cosmos is ordered by *divine wisdom* rather than reason.
[99] Irrespective of external chaos, the Sage's moral virtue remains certain, proceeding beyond the reach of social contagion, manias, and so forth.
[100] In the most elemental sense, *the preservation of life itself* as the moral good.
[101] As mentioned here, *physics* represents the principles that ground reality, which in turn determine the conditions for causality (Three Initiates 1908).

source of profit being damaged until the moment of expiration. This being a method that requires a crafted perception of reality to initiate. To claim or manufacture a problem where there was none, until such moment that the detrimental solution generates a real world problem. Where this perceived reality is fuelled by emotion—foremost fear and anger—encouraging irrationalism and illogical thought, which furthers the necessary departure from reality. With this disconnection invoking moral decline as societal ethics detach from objective standards.

Accordingly, the presented findings underscore the importance of assent to impressions, wisdom, rationality, emotional resilience—capacities key to Stoic virtue. Thus, this dissertation suggests Stoicism as the most appropriate response to wider societal concerns. Particularly those matters in which the crowd advances in heightened emotion—more so when moved by methods stirring primal fear, isolation, and psychological distress. Likewise, that Stoic practices might enable the subject to resist such influences and maintain moral certainty amidst immoral initiatives. For example, at such times that the out-group is selected for persecution, with calls for elimination in the name of the in-group's prevalence. Then Stoicism, with its attention toward intellectual self-sufficiency and objective thought, might encourage a certain sovereignty. An outlook that avoids the subject's sublimation into the amoral mass, wherein wrongs are pursued as moral rights.

Similarly, recognising that once established, the causal conditions for moral decline inevitably result in the moral voice facing persecution. Whereby appeals towards morality and rationality invite opposite outcomes. In response, according to practical wisdom, the concept that is Stoicism's *dichotomy of control*, allows the subject to focus upon what can be influenced, namely personal moral virtue. Whereas the crowd is left alone to proceed towards its terminus undisturbed. Affording the Stoic subject the means to maintain an alignment with the moral conscience among such circumstances. This being the necessary basis for self-actualisation, despite surrounding conditions. Then Stoicism's principles bound by universal tenets are particularly useful in this

setting. Remaining sovereign amidst shifting moral standards, the subject is afforded grounds to maintain moral certainty throughout.

Likewise, Stoicism's tempering of emotion, accompanied by meditation towards the same end, equips the subject to better manage reflexive responses. For example, in such instances where crisis is stirred in service to totalising ends. Where then, beyond the crowd, the Stoic maintains an imperative towards inward peace, one that considers favourable *vs*. unfavourable externals with equanimity—while making the best of the circumstances delivered by fate. Recognising that life is finite and mortality certain, natural beauty and joy are appreciated wherever encountered. Then Stoicism's outlook encourages an active rather than reactive disposition. Affording the subject a certain agency over the self, accompanied by an objective frame irrespective of external events. Thus avoiding orchestrated concerns that vie for moral concern, particularly where such endeavours seek an opposite end to that claimed.

Discussion of contributions

In contrast to the Aristotelian school, this project has sought to challenge the conventional approach toward virtue ethics—at least in terms of the particulars, albeit the framework is similar. Where the intention has been to advance more in keeping with reality. Thus reconciling those aspects that would otherwise require a certain faith or belief in a transcendent ideal. Likewise, although Aristotle raises empirical and objective measures, his treatise appears to rest upon a relativistic standard, with matters considered relative to the Good and its embodiment. In response, this study has contributed an ethical model grounded upon moral absolutes that apply in either direction, good or evil. Then equipped with these terms, the subject might maintain moral certainty throughout morally uncertain times—the central purpose of this ethics.

Furthermore, pursuing an eclectic method, gathering the strengths among the schools mentioned herein, this dissertation is suggested to offer robust grounds for virtue as intended. The

rationale for this encompassing approach, being that death and suffering make no such categorical distinctions between philosophical thought. Thus likewise, the philosopher ought to be equipped with all available means. With this offering seeking to direct this collective insight, foremost toward the subject's prevalence amidst change. The end product: a variety of contributions gathered to support this end, including the author's, where the intention has been to ensure an epistemic coherence throughout. Then, ultimately, these threads are brought together in the context that is Stoic virtue, with each line of enquiry contributing to this overarching context.

Thereafter, in more general terms, this focus upon Stoicism has sought to benefit the relation between philosophy and psychological wellbeing. For example, Stoicism's tempering of emotion serves the modern cognitive-behavioural approach. In addition, daily Stoic practices such as journaling, reflection, and awareness of mortality, provide the subject a means towards resilience. The basis upon which the attainment of personal potential might be better achieved, specifically among chaotic conditions. Then overall, as intended, it would appear this treatise offers the subject a certain reassurance. To mean, although this text might deliver utility during times of calm and peace. The intention here is to assist the subject possessed of moral conscience at odds to the amoral disposition of the crowd. More so at such times when ostracised from the *endoxa,* the rational thinker is declared immoral and persecuted by the majority.

In short, this study offers some degree of practical and therapeutic potential. Or at the minimum, an outlook that serves the safety and well-being of the concerned. Foremost preserving the subject from the moral conscience absent of practical wisdom. The monologue susceptible to the ideal initiative, being that this internal narrative proceeds upon ideal terms. Thus providing utility to the subject otherwise at risk from moral appeals made in bad faith. First by instigating a practical wisdom that recognises evil itself—present as the destructive principle in nature—also present in the self as matter of course. The point being to offer the moral conscience, the third

perspective of reflection, the means to look upon the self *as is* in absolute truth. Furnishing personal growth and self-improvement, while observing the world upon the same terms.

With this in mind, this text contributes a means towards personal development. An imperative towards actualisation that recognises the subject's need for life meaning. Suggested to be found in pursuits that preserve life and reduce suffering—first in the self—where later the subject might decide to extend this intention. Thereafter, with this foundation, more nuanced meaning might be found in bespoke endeavours. The caveat, that personal well-being is maintained, avoiding self-sacrifice inspired by the moral conscience or elsewhere. Thus an offering is made to the subject seeking a fulfilling life. Likewise guiding the conscience towards worthy endeavours, furnishing the Stoic peace that follows action in accord with principle and conscience.

To sum up, overall, the principal contribution has been Stoic virtue aligned toward the subject's prevalence through adversity. With the various offerings presented here, culminating towards this end. Specifically at such times, that the crowd gripped by negative emotion, comes to persecute rational, moral, objective, logical thought. Instead considering hedonic, self-destructive pursuits—either toward the self or Other—as moral and justified. Most notably as the crowd directs its collective angst toward the out-group, framed as the cause of its ills. It is hoped, then, that a sanctuary of sorts is provided—albeit figuratively—since we recognise the continuation of the inner world depends upon civilisation in the outer. Then beyond the academic contributions provided by this text, a potential outlook upon the world is supplied. One that supports the best made of circumstances and inner contentment being found.

Limitations

This study is limited by its theoretical focus, relying upon philosophical texts and interpretations. Although useful for academic exploration, this approach may not meet the needs of everyday life. Added to which, employing classical sources may limit its perceived relevance. Particularly for the

contemporary audience, unfamiliar with philosophical traditions. Likewise, its bias toward the interpretation of Stoic philosophy is acknowledged. A view that pays slight attention to the criticism of Stoicism. Thus despite highlighting the practicality of Stoic virtues, paradoxically, this text does not fully address the pitfalls that confront the Stoic in society. Potentially inviting more issues than are solved. In short, this propositional bias influences the outlook presented here, with disproportionate attention to Stoicism's positives while omitting the full extent of its limitations.

Likewise, pursuing an expressly qualitative methodology, this study relies upon a textual analysis as per the author's interpretation. Then while appropriate for the stated objectives, it advances without the rigour associated with quantitative studies. For example, the absence of empirical data, such as surveys, real world experiments and so on. Thus its conclusions are interpretative and may not be empirically verifiable. Lacking concrete evidence in support of its claims, a significant concern among real-world situations. Consequently, rather than offering definitive findings, its assertions are acknowledged as tending more toward the speculative at times, and thus requiring further empirical investigation.

Furthermore, we recognise the limited scope of this study. Where the expanse of Stoic philosophy means that sufficient depth remains absent. Merely superficial compared to the Stoic corpus that precedes it. Added to which, a robust ethics must surely address contemporary issues. For instance, the application of moral virtue relative to current dilemmas, which may include bioethics, artificial intelligence and so on. The outcome being that in attempting an encompassing view, its breadth has led to a more generalised discussion. Similarly lacking specific, actionable guidance regarding modern issues. Then albeit this omission is intentional, still potentially unfavourable outcomes may follow. Thus honouring these limitations, rather than conclusive answers throughout, a number assertions made here might better serve as a point of departure for more thorough investigation.

Future research

Recognising this dissertation merely touches upon the distinctions between Stoic, Machiavellian, and Aristotelian ethics, a deeper comparative analysis will be valuable. Likewise in keeping with an eclectic approach, the author suggests comparative studies between Stoic ethics and other philosophical traditions, focusing upon the strengths and limitations of each, as per the intention here. This might include comparisons with Eastern philosophies, those which also prioritise the cultivation of inner virtues, albeit with different methods. Thereafter, examining these parallels and divergences, a more comprehensive virtue ethics may follow. One that builds upon the basis presented here. Although that being said, before crafting additional structures, the conceptual grounds for this study ought to be deepened.

Moving to consider Stoicism itself, given its robust provision of theory, further empirical research will be useful. Accordingly, future studies might investigate how Stoic practices impact the subject's psychological well-being and moral decision-making. For example exercises such as mindfulness, reflective journaling, and the maintenance of rational judgment. With an analysis that accounts for the subject's response in real world settings. Everyday scenarios will be suitable, yet perhaps most insightful, examination of the subject with regard to stress management, resilience, and emotional regulation in demanding circumstances. Examples may include corporate settings, medical practice, and so on. Then by these means, Stoicism's tenets might be reinforced with empirical data—with adaptions and adjustments in praxis being made where appropriate.

Yet above all, future research might prioritise artificial intelligence the moral quandaries it presents. For example, AI augmented reality and the eudaemonic promises this development claims of itself. Specifically, with Stoicism's indifference to externals in mind—whether those goods are real, virtual, or a blend of the same. Then it could be that happiness is measured relative to the subject's integration with this technology. Experiencing *virtual external goods*, with reality a

simulated, virtual object. Or another potential avenue, Stoicism's practical wisdom contrasted with AI's potentially hyper-rational deliberation. One compassionate to the human condition, the other perhaps differing in its final analysis. Yet either way, Stoicism's priority upon nature in accord with universal principle may offer alternatives amidst the changes brought by AI.

Final thoughts

This study offers a virtue ethics suited to uncertain times. For this purpose, the strengths of several philosophies have been brought together into a singular approach. Joining Aristotle's conceptual framework, Machiavelli's naturalism, and the author's own thought. Likewise, Heidegger and Arndt have also been consulted. With this combination expressed in praxis through the lens of Stoic virtue. To mean, these accompanying philosophies provide a rationale by which Stoicism's value is made even more tangible. Most notably, Arndt's thought regarding particular grounds and the developments that may follow. To which in response, the author's intention has been to recognise potential circumstances in advance. Where then the subject may accord with moral conscience, while pursuing self-actualisation and well-being to the best possible extent. Highlighting practical wisdom's significance as the faculty that affords adaptation to change.

Added to which, whether abundant or meagre conditions follow, Stoicism provides the subject with means for contentment. With the very action of living suggested to bring joy. Similarly, this dissertation has proposed an accord with reality presents an equivalent benefit. Whereby although uncomfortable truths arrive at times, rather than seeking to avoid the actual, the subject might embrace all that reality has to offer. An action by which, respecting the continual presence of its opposite, an invitation toward living life to the full extent is made. The frame in which self-actualisation may best advance irrespective of circumstances. Then in recognising both good and evil, we not only invite a moral response toward the good, but also a deeper appreciation and celebration of the good in the world.

APPENDIX

Aristotle

Aristotle's key concepts provide a useful framework, upon which to reimagine equivalents in support of this study. First, Aristotle's *virtue*, the median by which *eudaimonia* delivered. Where here instead, *virtue* represents the subject's capacity for adaptation—with *prevalence through adversity* replacing Aristotle's ideal end in abundance and philosophical contemplation. Likewise, rather than an ideal providing the measure of moral excellence, the subject's moral conduct amidst societal moral decline represents qualitative attainment[102]—reconciling Aristotle's *eudaimonia* dependent upon external goods and society. Where then, recognising the fragility of civilisation, more robust grounds are provided for an optimal end—one sovereign to the subject. With *eudaimonia* representing the subject's *prevalence amidst change*.

Aristotle asserts *reason* as humankind's *ergon* or preeminent function. Yet recognising humankind's precarious grounds for existence, unadapted to nature, requiring civilisation, technology, clothing and shelter to survive. Here the human *ergon* is proposed as *practical wisdom serving survival*. The faculty charged with comprehending creation and destruction, good and evil, the metaphysical impetus that drives casual relations. Similarly, Aristotle's *akrasia* or moral incontinence is addressed—otherwise the defeat of reason brought by a lack of self-control. Where instead, this dissertation proposes *akrasia* occurs as the subject fails to reconcile the self's destructive aspect. Respecting the inherent duality that comprises the subject, while also illustrating the epistemic benefit of providing evil with substance, for the awareness this brings.

Finally, although this study mentions Aristotle's Good embodying his God may indeed accurately portray the metaphysic that grounds reality.[103] Still the objection is made that evil as

[102] The idea being that the subject's true moral quality is known in the face of adversity.
[103] With good and evil both supporting the continuation of this being.

privation represents an inaccuracy. To which in response, a differing basis is proposed, one that centres upon an entity possessed of both the creative and destructive, good and evil. Whereby, omnipotence is maintained absent of theodicy. Then resolving the need for various caveats which follow Aristotle's evil as an error, deficiency, ignorance etc. This being a development that both improves the clarity of the ethical framework, while also facilitating more transparent moral differentiations. Particularly since we forgo Aristotle's categories of moral subject, the *vicious*, *akratic*, the *brute* and so on. With the attention upon the moral action in itself—where its quality is known by its effect—rather than the quality of the moral agent delivering said action.

Machiavelli

Machiavelli's philosophy departs from the idealism of his predecessors. Instead suggesting amoral means to achieve moral ends, with evil confronted by the good upon equal terms. Where effectiveness, rather than intention, provides the measure of moral action. A realist approach in which the context decides whether traditional virtue or ruthlessness is applied. Yet despite these characteristics, Machiavelli is proposed as an idealist of sorts. Specifically, he appears to elevate the significance of reason and intellect to an unrealistic degree. With rhetoric and satire presumed adequate to overcome amoral initiatives employing force and pathos.[104] Added to which, he would seem to overestimate the moral potential of the crowd. Believing that when alerted to evil, this body ought to express an innate moral disposition—by which to dispose morally its corrupt rulers. Heralding the republic's restoration and a moral order that ought to return as a matter of course.

Yet despite his endeavour, Machiavelli's project ended in imprisonment, torture, and exile. Revealing the advantage of the amoral over the moral, and what follows such appeals. Where then failing to recognise the crowd and its rulership in symbiosis, we find Machiavelli's attempt

[104] This study suggests Machiavelli's *Prince* as a satirical text written to expose and undermine the amoral powers of his time (Benner 2013, xxix-lv).

delivered an opposite outcome to that intended: his name synonymous with evil, and *The Prince*[105] serving the body he sought to reconcile. Then recognising amoral power proceeds upon force, supported by the amoral crowd. Forgoing the intellectual ideal, a virtue ethics must account for the world *as is*—allowing this entity to proceed undisturbed. Thus practical wisdom tempers the moral conscience to avoid futile efforts. Which in turn, respecting the limitation of moral action in the world, directs moral intention towards the self.

Eclectic philosophy

Taking an eclectic approach toward crafting a virtue ethics, this study seeks to gather the strengths offered by various schools of thought—in this case, Aristotle, Machiavelli, and the Stoics. Numerous benefits are suggested to follow, for example a wider philosophical corpus is made available from which appropriate concepts can be selected. Providing the philosopher a certain flexibility when addressing complex issues. Furnishing an adaptable schema, one that might respond to societal moral decline and the conditions that follow. Moreover, consulting a variety of outlooks would seem to encourage critical thought. While also reconciling the apparent tendency for philosophers to remain within a particular school.

Yet despite these advantages, the eclectic approach invites potential pitfalls. For example superficial comprehension, incoherence, and misinterpretation. Notably, where concepts are separated from their native framework, this isolation may weaken their integrity. Or it might be that certain thought is employed contrary to the original philosopher's intent. Likewise, the eclectic treatise presenting multiple outlooks, may result in a lack of internal consistency. Or similarly, the endeavour towards breadth may necessitate a deficiency of depth. Then although these issues are significant in themselves, these flaws may culminate in an ineffective philosophy. One that is

[105] Where in this case Machiavelli appears to overestimate the moral potential of the crowd, while underestimating the power of amoral rule to frame objects as moral or immoral, irregardless of actual moral quality.

fractured, demanding continual effort to uphold. Diverting the philosopher's attention toward maintaining the philosophy, rather than solving the quandary at hand.

Acknowledging these risks, Aristotle, Machiavelli, and the Stoics, have been chosen with their similarities in mind. For example, each present an endeavour towards the greater good—bound by their pursuit toward reason and practical wisdom expressed in virtue. The intention being a foundation upon which various perspectives advance in coordination. Then although particulars differ, this schema might proceed in self-alignment, honouring the original philosophers' intentions. Added to which, this text purposely uses common language and terms, by which ideas from different schools are identifiable and easily understood. Finally these concepts are considered through the lens of Stoic virtue, united by a singular aim: the subject's well-being and survival.

FIGURES

Figure i. The effects of evil denied substance

The proposal is made that Aristotle's evil as privation[106] invites an outlook that discounts evil in itself. In contrast, this study suggests evil as a proactive, existent object. One that acts with self-awareness and knowledge, rather than the outcome of deficiency, ignorance, or error. Thereafter addressing the problem of evil in the world, the consequences of this premise are raised at length, with this comment interspersed among various sections. Accordingly, for the reader's convenience, the assertions upon this matter are summarised in the figure below. The central premise being that, discounted and overlooked, evil is enabled to flourish in self and world. With this development posited to advance through a series of identifiable stages.

First order cause >	**First order effect >**	**Second order effect >**	**Third order effect >**
↓ Evil denied substance	Positive evil denied	Evil denied in the self	Moral character over conscience; the subjective over the objective; illusion over the actual.
↓ An unawareness of evil follows	*das Man* amplifies this denial, pursuing hedonism	Supporting bad-faith appeals towards a moral ideal	The *self-in-belief*, the *moral-us*, as the absolute good. Humankind declared perfectible.

[106] Aristotle's evil, absent of substance, is denied a basis for existence as an object in itself (Aristotle 2016, *Met*. IX.9).

First order cause >	First order effect >	Second order effect >	Third order effect >
↓ Evil can be done in the name of the good	In keeping with a bad-faith moral ideal	Hyper-normalisation follows, mass departure from reality	Humankind as the measure of all things; currently imperfect; blame manufactured and directed.
↓ Good considered evil for obstructing the new good (evil)	Moral decline	Totalitarianism	Obedience as salvation; untruth as truth; morality in unreality; subject remains imperfect.
↓ Moral inversion complete	Life is bad, death is good; creation immoral.	Signalled virtue toward the new "good," supports the bad	Call for the imperfect's elimination in the name of the new "good"; clear the way to the ideal.
Good denied substance	Positive good denied	Good denied in the self	Morality as the absence of morality; conditions decline; "imperfection" increases; elimination ∞

Figure ii. The effects of good and evil provided substance

In contrast to Aristotle, the argument is made that the creative and destructive, good and evil, are both substantive. Moreover, the interaction of these principles is proposed as the first cause that precedes all effects—both necessary for the continuation of life. Acknowledging this dynamic, we respect the grounds for existence itself. Observing the same, the subject advances in accord with the fundament from which reality emerges.[107] Where in turn, honouring this natural order, the self-balancing relation between good and evil is better maintained. Put simply, nature's wisdom is mirrored in the human realm—present as an ethics that reconciles creation and destruction towards preserving life overall. Or said otherwise, recognising evil in the self and world, guided by practical wisdom, the subject possessed of moral conscience is better able to pursue the good. Thereafter accompanied by the moral absolutes that are life and death, with truth as the highest aim.

The resolution, the synthesis
↓ Good and evil provided substance.
↓ Awareness of their symbiotic relation: the grounds for all objects, including reality (that is change, that is time). Good and evil acknowledged in the self > then the world > world and subject recognised as imperfect, cannot be perfected, necessarily so for life to proceed.
↓ Morality established upon absolutes: life and death. Life recognised as fragile and precious; likewise, civilisation. More principles follow with observation, *correspondence*, *polarity* etc. Leading to nascent practical wisdom, causality intuited.
↓ Good and evil recognised as effects consequent to particular causes; moral knowledge follows > maturing practical wisdom. The creative and destructive seen in their own name; voiding bad-faith appeals *i.e.* initiatives toward bad, in the name of the good.
↓ Terms for morality established, thereafter, ethics: the reconciliation of good and evil toward life. Requiring practical wisdom; awareness of causal relations. With human *ergon*, then: *to prevail in practical wisdom*.
↓ The truth recognised, that is reality > leading to morality in reality > humankind survives in reality > upon reality's terms: the human *telos* achieved. Outcomes observed objectively, more practical wisdom follows ∞. As grounds for life improve, ethics confirmed and refined.
The truth as the highest good; the measure for all moral standards, upon the absolutes that are life and death.

[107] This study suggests *reality* as an emergent property that stems from a living entity, an object equivalent to the Stoic *cosmos*. Regarding the phenomenon that is *emergence* see Bedau 2008.

Figure iii. The virtue ethics in summary

For the reader's convenience, this dissertation presents its concepts as discrete segments. The intention being that each idea is more readily accessible. Forgoing the requirement to ingest and memorise an entire schema at the outset—where instead the making of this gestalt is presented as a choice to be pursued or not.[108] Yet despite this rationale, the author acknowledges this format may not appeal to all. For this reason, a summary is made of the virtue ethics presented herein. Where accordingly, given the grounds for a complete method are sought, this synopsis is arranged about the necessary constituents of a philosophy.

Constituent aspect	**Terms**
Epistemology	(*i*) The truth occurs as an objective standard, recognised as the effect that follows a precedent cause; (*ii*) observing the effect, practical wisdom is that which observes or intuits the correlating cause (the means by which this study suggests its metaphysics); (*iii*) knowledge as that derived and tested against observable phenomena *i.e.* reality, which in turn furnishes practical wisdom addressing casual relations; (*iv*) knowledge advances absent of moral bias *i.e.* both good and evil as equal epistemic objects.
Ontology	(*i*) The tension between creation and destruction as the basis for existence (thus an ethics reconciles these forces towards life); (*ii*) given the subject lives, dies, and suffers in the corporeal realm, the material realm as most real *i.e.* reality, the real preeminent over the ideal; (*iii*) the being of all objects as creation and destruction (*good* and *evil* in human parlance); (*iv*) the action of *being* is constrained by reality's terms, with the subject as an aspect of a living gestalt *i.e.* the cosmos; (*v*) being marked by constant change, impermanence, and suffering; (*vi*) living and dying as the absolute reality of being (the basis for an ontologically grounded ethics with life and death as moral absolutes).
Aesthetics	(*i*) Beauty reveals duality, dark and light; (*ii*) revealing the cosmos advances absent of moral bias; with its only moral imperative being that life, that is, *itself*, prevails upon these terms—pursuing a self-actualisation of sorts; (*ii*) thus, the aesthetic furnishes self-actualisation; with *practical wisdom* as an art-form, *survival* the art (*iii*); whereby, the moral impact of art correlates with beauty, which in turn encourages moral virtue.
Ethics	(*i*) The *moral* as that which moves towards life and well-being; the *immoral*, death and suffering; (*ii*) *moral action* determined against life and death as moral absolutes; (*iii*) moral decision as the pre-emption of outcomes dependent upon causal relations; (*iv*) practical wisdom as the culmination of all human faculties towards survival; (*v*) reason serves practical wisdom, which serves survival, the highest moral good; (*vi*) moral conscience guided by practical wisdom as grounds for morality; (*vii*) the human condition recognised as morally imperfect, avoiding moral ideals as harmful; (*viii*) inner goods—virtue, wisdom—as the sources of fulfilment; (*ix*) The Stoic Sage as moral exemplar.
Logic	(*i*) *logic* as directly applicable to the real world, grounded in observable facts, tested against practical outcomes *i.e.* what works *vs*. what doesn't; (*ii*) deductive, inductive, and abductive reasoning as constituents of practical wisdom; (*iii*) practical wisdom guides logical reasoning, a tool toward outcomes in reality; (*iv*) logical inferences according to cause and effect, thus revealing causal relations before and after the present moment.
Metaphysics	(*i*) a metaphysics tested against reality, absent of belief *i.e.* reality as the effect that reveals its metaphysical cause; (*ii*) creation and destruction, as good and evil, acknowledged as substantive objects; *existence* as the tension between these objects; (*iii*) the cosmos as a living gestalt, an arational entity governed by practical wisdom as logos; (*iv*) wisdom as the universe's substance; (*v*) its workings as emergent principles *e.g.* cause and effect; (*vi*) change as the basis for reality, with change perceived as *time;* (*vii*) reality comprises opposing forces in tension; where practical wisdom is that which comprehends this dynamic.
Teleology	(*i*) *survival* as the human organism's ultimate end; then with survival as the first priority, self-actualisation second; (*ii*) an endeavour that respects the boundary of personal influence; the self adapting to the world's terms, rather than attempting to adapt the world as self—an impossible endeavour that invites harm to the self, Other, or environment; (*iii*) practical wisdom as that which furnishes survival; (*iv*) the human *ergon* as practical wisdom enabling adaptation to change; (*v*) rather than eudaemonic flourishing as the ideal end, sustainable equilibrium is sought *i.e* longevity.

[108] The suggestion is made that an effective virtue ethics only occurs as a consequence of the reader's own mind. Namely, reflection made toward life and the self with certain concepts in mind. Thus this study strives to provide these concepts.

Figure iv. Premises and inferences

The dissertation presents a series of discrete concepts in service to a central argument. Yet given its discursive format, this thread may not be immediately apparent. For this reason, now follows a figure in which each principal premise is shown in relation to the next. Illustrating the inferences that lead from the opening hypothesis to the final conclusion. While we note, for the purpose of clarity, this diagram only features the most salient points. Omitting supporting premises and the finer details presented as footnotes. Thus although useful as a guide, where clarification is required, the author suggests the body of the dissertation is consulted. Then in combination, the reader might be afforded both clarity and detail regarding the proposal put forward here.

PROBLEM
The problem of evil in the world, increasingly evident as manufactured dependency for profit. Yet we note, the problem is not evil itself, rather its reception, facilitation, and amplification.

Facilitated and amplified by…

Idealism
Hellenic idealism suggests a more substantial, more real realm, preceding material reality; intellectually dividing the subject from objective reality; enabling grounds for idealism employed towards power.

Evil as privation
Idealism allows for evil perceived as deficiency, error, or moral ignorance *i.e*. an object that is non-existent in itself. Thereafter, it follows that evil is discounted and overlooked as a distasteful and uncomfortable matter, since this acknowledging this object points to the presence of evil in the self. Unidentified, unobstructed evil flourishes in the self and society.

das Man
A primal survival mechanism, perceiving safety in obedience, *das Man* invites harm to itself and the Other in the name of the good. Seeking to avoid angst causing objects contained by reality, specifically evil and death, *das Man* strives to depart from reality. Thus favouring the ideal, *das Man* enables evil to flourish in the self and world.

Reason as preeminent
Reason overemphasised may lead to hyper-rational thought detached from reality—by which the ideal is fashioned. Likewise, reason presumed as more potent than the terms that bind reality itself. Where reason absent of wisdom furnishes the ideal. Which, as a reasoned intervention, may seek to justify harm in the name of the ideal, towards the attainment of power.

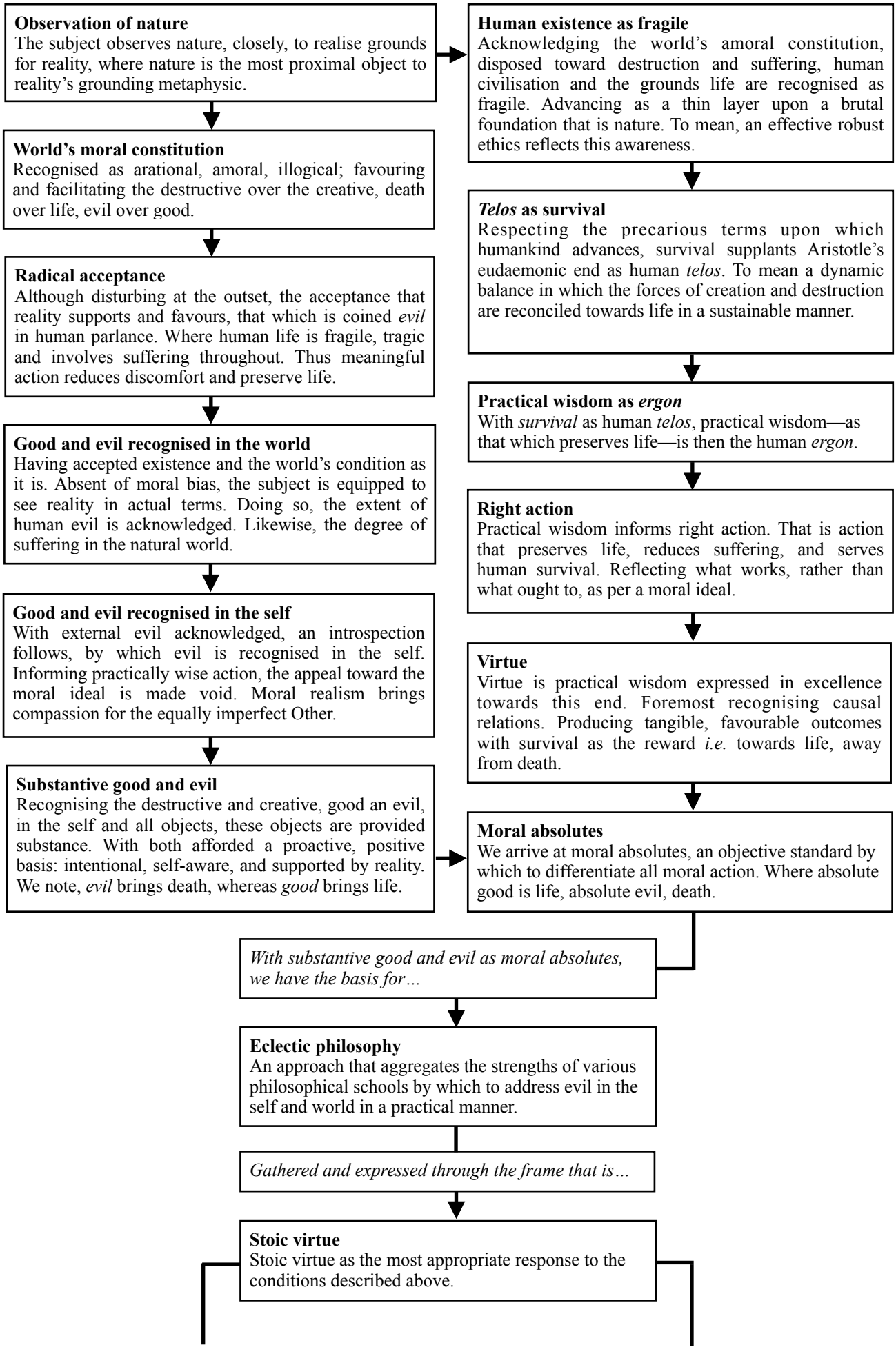
Moral character
Aristotle proposes moral character as inculcated habit, with morality presumed as the natural outcome of where reason is present. Yet absent of moral conscience, this study posits Aristotle's moral character as emulated morality. Contrary to innate morality, responsive to circumstance and emotion, and thus fluid *i.e.* amoral. Hence why *das Man*, as the crowd, is capable of rapid and sudden moral shifts towards immorality—while perceiving itself to be moral. Although, that said, we note moral conscience absent of practical wisdom may facilitate evil by supporting initiatives that claim a moral ends opposite to their intent.

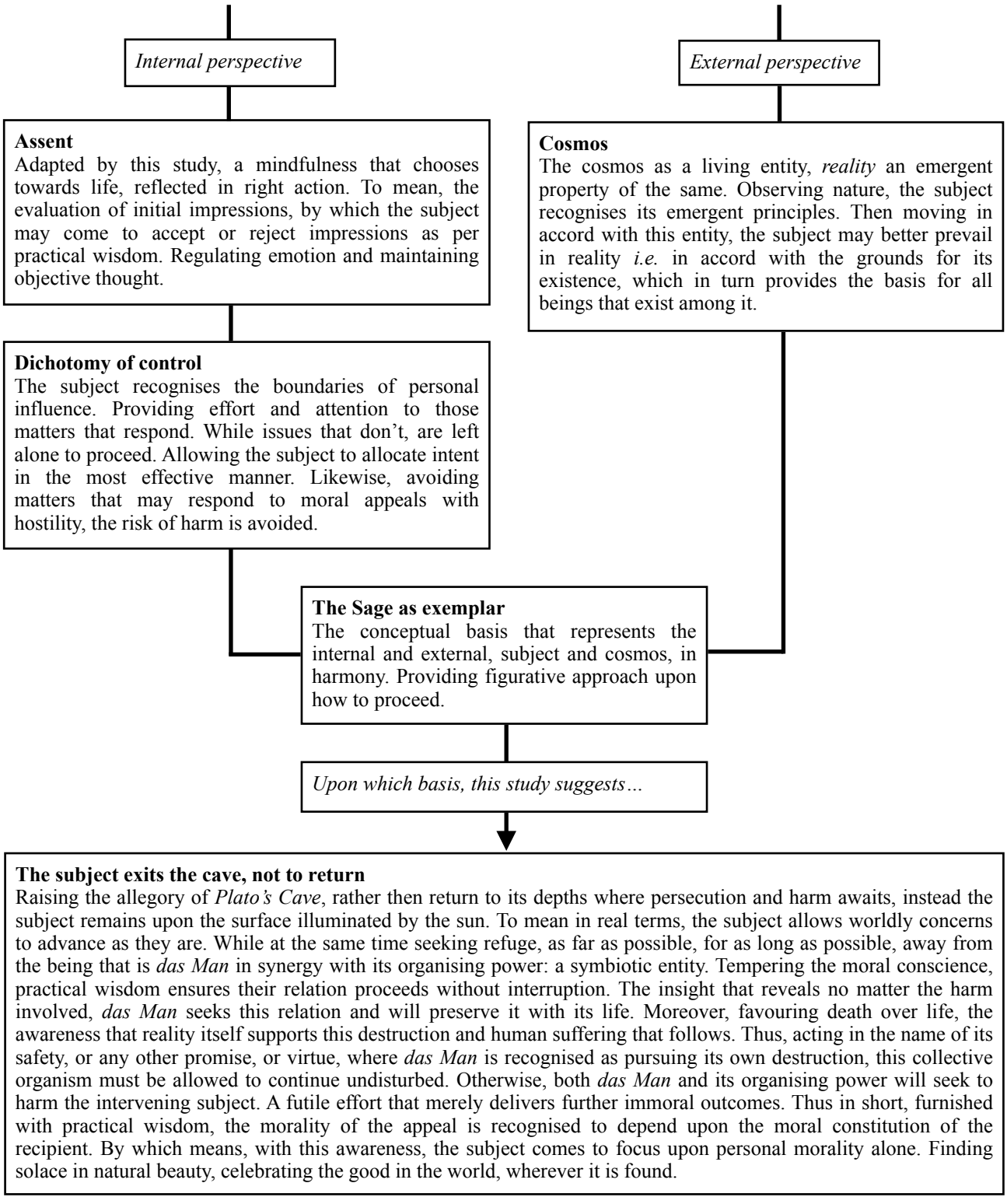
Leading to…

Demoralisation
das Man seeks to depart from reality into a simplified fantasy that supplies emotion. With consensus, obedience, and group membership as moral virtue; where signalled virtue (furnishing group membership) is considered more moral than authentic moral effort. Characteristics which cause *das Man* to embrace and call for subversive initiatives made towards it, delivered by a unifying narrative under which the in-group proceeds. Moreover, lacking moral conscience —the capacity to determine the moral *vs*. immoral upon innate terms—*das Man* may commit moral atrocity in the name of the good. With the *good* as that which it perceives to secure its safety, as promised by the narrative. Yet no matter if this safety requires its own harm or the Other's. Demoralisation is considered complete at the moment of moral inversion. The instance in which *das Man* comes to enforce evil as the new good, and good as the new evil. With life, that is creation, considered immoral, and destruction, that is death, considered moral.

In response this study presents a hypothesis…

TOWARDS A SOLUTION
To reconcile the issues presented by idealism, realism is suggested as a solution: the object's observation *as is.*


Observation of nature
The subject observes nature, closely, to realise grounds for reality, where nature is the most proximal object to reality's grounding metaphysic.
World's moral constitution
Recognised as arational, amoral, illogical; favouring and facilitating the destructive over the creative, death over life, evil over good.
Radical acceptance
Although disturbing at the outset, the acceptance that reality supports and favours, that which is coined *evil* in human parlance. Where human life is fragile, tragic and involves suffering throughout. Thus meaningful action reduces discomfort and preserve life.
Good and evil recognised in the world
Having accepted existence and the world's condition as it is. Absent of moral bias, the subject is equipped to see reality in actual terms. Doing so, the extent of human evil is acknowledged. Likewise, the degree of suffering in the natural world.
Good and evil recognised in the self
With external evil acknowledged, an introspection follows, by which evil is recognised in the self. Informing practically wise action, the appeal toward the moral ideal is made void. Moral realism brings compassion for the equally imperfect Other.
Substantive good and evil
Recognising the destructive and creative, good an evil, in the self and all objects, these objects are provided substance. With both afforded a proactive, positive basis: intentional, self-aware, and supported by reality. We note, *evil* brings death, whereas *good* brings life.
Human existence as fragile
Acknowledging the world's amoral constitution, disposed toward destruction and suffering, human civilisation and the grounds life are recognised as fragile. Advancing as a thin layer upon a brutal foundation that is nature. To mean, an effective robust ethics reflects this awareness.
***Telos* as survival**
Respecting the precarious terms upon which humankind advances, survival supplants Aristotle's eudaemonic end as human *telos*. To mean a dynamic balance in which the forces of creation and destruction are reconciled towards life in a sustainable manner.
Practical wisdom as *ergon*
With *survival* as human *telos*, practical wisdom—as that which preserves life—is then the human *ergon*.
Right action
Practical wisdom informs right action. That is action that preserves life, reduces suffering, and serves human survival. Reflecting what works, rather than what ought to, as per a moral ideal.
Virtue
Virtue is practical wisdom expressed in excellence towards this end. Foremost recognising causal relations. Producing tangible, favourable outcomes with survival as the reward *i.e.* towards life, away from death.
Moral absolutes
We arrive at moral absolutes, an objective standard by which to differentiate all moral action. Where absolute good is life, absolute evil, death.
With substantive good and evil as moral absolutes, we have the basis for…
Eclectic philosophy
An approach that aggregates the strengths of various philosophical schools by which to address evil in the self and world in a practical manner.
Gathered and expressed through the frame that is…
Stoic virtue
Stoic virtue as the most appropriate response to the conditions described above.



GLOSSARY

Among this text, particular words are employed with non-standard meanings. For this reason, to avoid confusion, a glossary of terms is provided.[109] Most significantly, Heidegger's *das Man*

[109] with the provision and definition of key terms, providing a conceptual framework for the argument being made

reimagined and expanded upon. Incorporating influences from Kierkegaard's *Crowd*, Nietzsche's *Herd Morality*, Freud's *Id*,[110] addressing the anonymous mass. In this case, as Heidegger, *das Man* first represents the impersonal, unconscious crowd—a collective organism driven by fear, specifically the fear of death and an awareness of its existence. Thereafter additional characteristics are suggested by this study. Specifically, *das Man* as that which strives to avoid reality itself. Demanding a simplified narrative that supplies emotional stimulation and promises of safety. With obedience as virtue, shunning rational thought and moral responsibility. Persecuting the voice raising uncomfortable truths, irregardless of the harm caused by its pursuit toward falsehoods.

Lacking an internal monologue, the third perspective furnishing moral conscience, self-reflection, and empathy, *das Man* senses its existence by means of emotional stimulation. Embracing mass emotionalism, where negative emotion provides the most vital sense of its being.[111] With the *moral* and *real* as that which supports consensus emotion—reality itself is then subjective—as defined by the narrative. Sought from organising power, the voice providing it terms for consensus emotion, delivering in-group membership. Whereby the attribution of *good* and *evil* is fluid within this amoral framework: the *good* as any object that supports the narrative, obedience, and group homogeny. Whereas *evil* challenges these terms—the phenomenon by which *das Man* commits moral atrocity while considering itself moral, persecuting the objector as immoral.

PRINCIPAL CONTRIBUTIONS

1. Grounds for the reintroduction of Stoicism

The dissertation considers the crowd[112] gripped by fear, specifically where its arational, amoral condition is directed towards destructive ends. In response, Stoicism is recognised as maintaining

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[110] Kierkegaard's *Crowd*, suppressing individuality, encouraging conformity; with the subject less responsible, more cowardly, and more likely to believe and spread falsehoods (Kierkegaard 2009). Nietzsche's *Herd Morality*, suppressing the individual in mediocrity and conformity over individual excellence (Nietzsche 2001). Durkheim's *Collective Conscience*, the crowd as a psychic mass driven by group sentiment (Smith 2014). Also relevant, Freud's *Id* i.e. the primal human psyche, instinctual and pleasure seeking, with gratification of desires as its end (Freud 1960).

[111] Fear and anger principally.

[112] With reference to the work of Mackay (1841), Milgram (1963), Sighele (2018), Bezmenov (1984), Desmet (2022) and Yurchak (2005).

rational, moral action, despite mass emotion, thus revealing its utility in the modern political epoch.

2. Aristotle's ethics as a theological ethics

Mirroring Thomas Aquinas's thought, this study reiterates the neglected view that Aristotle's ethics reflects a theological basis. Wherein, as proposed here, to fully embody virtue, the subject's belief in a transcendent ideal is required—the Good that extends from Aristotle's concept of God.

3. *Summum bonum* reimagined

Cicero's concept of *summum bonum* represents a striving for the highest good. In contrast, to avoid invoking an equivalent opposite response, *satis bonum* or *good enough* is instead proposed as the optimal degree of good—that which is merely adequate to preserve life and reduce suffering.

4. Machiavelli reconsidered

Machiavelli's *Prince* is suggested to be misinterpreted. Specifically, that his text was intended as a satirical polemic, rather than a manual for power. One that sought to provoke moral action among the populace, while seeking to subvert any rulership that followed its guidance verbatim.

5. Aristotle's relativistic ethics

Aristotle's moral virtue is grounded upon his God, and by extension, the Good. Accordingly, this subjective ideal is the measure for all moral matters. Thus, contrasting to Aristotle categorised as a moral objectivist, the argument is made that he presents a relativistic moral standard.

6. Aristotle's privation theory reconciled

Aristotle denies substance to evil, with *evils* occurring in the absence of the Good—suggested here to invite moral confusion and thus facilitate evil. In response, to the contrary, evil is proposed to be positive force[113] with an equal metaphysical basis, thus allowing for clear moral distinction.

7. *Phronesis* reimagined

To better comprehend causality and secure outcomes congruent with moral intent—rather than a

[113] While morally negative, here evil is provided with substance; an existent object acting for and of itself *i.e*. a "positive force," in contrast to Aristotle's evil as a deficiency of the Good.

transcendent ideal, the Good—here practical wisdom acknowledges both good and evil. That is, creation and destruction as grounds for reality *i.e*. actuality as the priority, rather than the ideal.

PUBLICATIONS

On the topic of the dissertation:

1. *The Poetic and Scientific in the Educational Frame* accepted in the volume Школи, знания, университети. Eds. Kristina Yapova, Ivan Iliev, Yassen Andreev.

2. *A New Vision of Practical Wisdom* accepted in Sofia Philosophical Review.

3. *Certainty in Uncertainty, The Value of Stoic Virtue Ethics* accepted in Philosophical Alternatives.

All articles are forthcoming in the first quarter of 2025.

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