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THE STOICS ON NATURE AND TRUTH

MARTIN J CONNOR

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ABSTRACT

THE STOICS ON NATURE AND TRUTH

MARTIN CONNOR

First, this thesis outlines part of the thought of some pre-Socratic thinkers, particularly Heraclitus. In doing this, I explore the historical provenance of certain ideas which came to be important in Stoicism. It then moves on to look at the Stoic view of 'physics', including some comparison with Epicurus and Aristotle, and with a focus on the concept of the continuum. The third chapter attempts to synthesise a common problem arising from a belief in the continuum, namely a problem of *indeterminacy*. In the fourth chapter, certain characterisations of Stoic epistemology are considered, along with an overview of recent interpretations of the Stoic theory of impressions. It concludes with the thought that at certain crucial points – such as whether impressions themselves are to be thought of as true and false – the Stoic position is underdetermined with respect to the evidence. Pursuing this thought into the fifth chapter, we see the evidence as being equivalently consistent with a 'two-tier' theory of perception, where impressions themselves are understood as neither true nor false in any sense, but in which 'the true' arises as a result of the *transformative* effect of reason. This theory is shown to connect with verbalisation through the 'rational impression'. This leads to the suggestion that the Stoics had a linguistic diagnosis for some problems in philosophy, arrived at by their reflections on ambiguity and etymology. In the final chapter, an account of intersubjectivity is explored, which preserves for the Stoics the claim that their truth has an objective character and is thus appropriate for a 'dogmatic' philosophy.

FOR MY MOTHER AND FATHER

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ABBREVIATIONS

Long and Sedley

LS = *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, (2 vols)

Diogenes Laertius

D.L. = *Lives of the Philosophers*

Sextus Empiricus

S.E. *M* = *Against the Professors*

S.E. *PH* = *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*

Cicero

Acad. = *Academica*

ND = *On the nature of the gods*

De Fin = *On ends*

Plutarch

Comm. not. = *On Common Conceptions*

St. rep. = *On Stoic self-contradictions*

Galen

Diff. Puls. = *On the differences in pulses*

Qual. inc. = *On incorporeal qualities*

Plac. = *On Hippocrates' and Plato's doctrines*

Alexander of Aphrodisias

In Ar. An. Pr. = *On Aristotle's Prior Analytics*

Epicurus

Ep. Hdt. = *Letter to Herodotus*

PREFACE

Stoicism emerged as the Platonic vision of transcendent forms was fading, into a philosophical milieu powerfully clear about the possibilities of logic. Into this context, we can speculate, came Zeno – a fiery philosopher himself, advocating a fiery metaphysics. In placing fire at the foundation of his view of the world, he placed something flickering, uncertain, consuming and sustaining. In chapter three, we will look at Michael White’s argument constructed around the notion that the Stoics believed surfaces were fuzzy, and subject to indeterminacy and artifice. If we need to imagine the ‘fuzzy regions’ he mentions, we need only think of the detailed, shimmering edge of a candle flame. Perhaps, by staring at a certain flame, it occurred to Zeno that *hyle* was flexible in a similar way to the flame.

As we see in Chapter Four, there were unquestioned presuppositions in Greek thinking, and because of these Zeno was faced with the challenge of explaining how we could speak truly of something that was, at a crucial level, indeterminate. One solution to this problem is to locate determination within human conceptualisation, rather than as a property of the world. The philosophical task then becomes not to examine our relationship as individuals to the world, but to explain our relationship as individuals to each other, where we each have determinate conceptions, secured by causation and revealed in language. This is the picture I develop in Chapter Five.

We are called by the Stoics to ‘live in accordance with nature’, with the underlying belief that the unfolding cosmos is sentient, rational and perfect. We can detect in this injunction an imperative to philosophise that goes as follows : “Since it is our folly that stands in the way of the universe’s perfection, we must philosophise

to perfect the universe.” Ultimately, what we recognise after a period reflecting on Stoic doctrines is that an attractive and inclusive image of humanity emerges. We exist collectively, in our relation to the true. What is a rational animal? For the Stoics, it is the *universe’s consciousness of itself*. We explore one account of the way in which the *logos* inspires self-reflection in Chapter Six. Once self-reflection is seen as complementary to the Stoic account of impressions, it is but a small step to the conviction that wise people speaking truly express infallible knowledge about the world. From such wise people, goes the Stoic hope, we could build a city, and from such a city a new world based on citizenship of the universe. In a certain sense – in *this* certain sense – Stoicism was a declaration of intrinsic human value. It used its intriguing epistemology (and whoever is closest to the truth, Stoic epistemology is intriguing), and staggering command of logic to claim a universality for its doctrines that less ambitious positions could not countenance.

This thesis represents a certain stage in my thinking about Stoicism. Since I am neither a classicist (in any formal sense) nor a linguist, my interpretation is not based on a ‘philological’ level of analysis. Rather, my method has been that of a philosophical investigation based on the Stoic texts in translation. I have where possible studied these translations against the texts in the original language to develop my readings of them. The greatest danger for the student of these texts who is not steeped in Classical Studies is that elementary philological errors will lead to confusions at the level of philosophical interpretation. As a safeguard against this danger, I have tried where possible to couch my argument in the language of others, whose relationship to the Stoic texts is expert and direct. As a result of this, the reader will notice that I often quote extensively from the scholarly literature. In doing this I can claim two ancient precedents. First, it was said of Chrysippus’ writings that

if the quotations were removed, there would be hardly anything left (D.L. 7.81).

Second, we are told of a Stoic injunction to ‘follow the good authors’ – those who used the rules of language correctly to succinctly frame a definition or argument (D.L. 7.59).

Where I have disagreed with others, this disagreement is never based on a reading of a text which I claim is *right* where others have been *wrong*. Due to the fragmentary nature of the sources, it has been an important part of my method to tell a story about Stoicism which is *justified* by the evidence, but not necessarily *proved* by it. What emerges from chapters Three to Six, then, is a certain picture of Stoicism, developed ‘through the lens’ (as it were) of contemporary Hellenistic scholarship.

The account of Stoicism in this thesis is incomplete in a number of respects. For its argument to be brought to a final conclusion it would have to reach out in a number of directions. Towards logic, it would need to show how the Stoics combined epistemological and logical concerns. Towards ethics, it would need to account much more for the determination of value that ‘intersubjectivity’ suggests. Towards meaning, it would need to examine in much more detail the argumentative role of *koinai ennoiai*, and the relation, if any, between our common conceptions and the Stoic ‘categories’. On the doctrine of the incorporeals, it would need to explain more about their status, and discuss whether the Stoics had a notion of ‘ontology’ in an Aristotelian or modern sense. On the matter of history, it could say more about the possibilities of linking the Stoics to Heraclitus through a consideration of the *Theaetetus*.

All these topics lie, as it were, around the edges of this thesis, and I believe one effect of my argument has been to suggest ways in which each might be approached in the future. In what follows, I have attempted to connect Stoic physics

(their beliefs about nature) to Stoic epistemology (their beliefs about truth) by the notion of *indeterminacy* in a way which would be well suited to a philosophy which sought to be systematic.

I am grateful to Angela, for all her love, support and belief - and James and Paul who provided the counterbalancing joy when the work was difficult. Important help with the maths (and much else) came from Dr. Richard Morris at Leeds, whose constant willingness to talk at tricky moments was invaluable.

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CHAPTER ONE : THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

The first people to be called Stoics in antiquity were not philosophers but poets (D.L. 7.5). This pleasing fact reflects the close association enjoyed between poetry and philosophy in the Athens of the fourth and third centuries before Christ. The word 'Stoic' comes from *stoa poikilê*, the name for the painted colonnade in Athens where these early poets gave performances. This same place was also where Zeno of Citium (circa. 333-261BC) taught philosophy, where his followers gathered to listen and subsequently where his school lived out its early history. The association between philosophy and poetry is also demonstrated by the fact that, in accordance with the practice of the day, the early Stoic philosophers took lines from poetry to illustrate their doctrines. An example from Diogenes Laertius records one example of this technique:

"It is said, moreover, that he [Zeno] corrected Hesiod's lines thus:

'He is best of all who follows good advice; good too
is he who finds out all things for himself.'

The reason he gave for this was that the man capable of giving proper hearing to what is said and profiting by it was superior to him who discovers everything himself. For the one had merely a right apprehension, the other in obeying good counsel superadded conduct."(D.L. 25-26)



The original Hesiod reads as follows:

“He is best of all who finds out everything for himself;

Good too is he who follows good advice.”

After Zeno, headship of the school passed to Cleanthes (c. 331-232 BC) and from him to Chrysippus (c. 282-206BC). Together, these three thinkers represent what we know as the ‘early Stoa’. After Chrysippus, the next historical point of departure were the contributions of Panaetius (c. 185-110BC) and Posidonius (c.135-50BC), both from Rhodes, whose doctrines seem in certain respects to challenge certain early Stoic themes, principally in psychology (the unity of the soul) and ethics (the role of indifferents)¹. These two thinkers are the principal characters from the period known as the ‘middle Stoa’. Finally, the output from Epictetus (c. 55-135AD) to Marcus Aurelius (Emperor of Rome 161-80AD) is known as the late, or Roman Stoa.

The purpose of this work is to discuss a possible reading of the surviving fragments about Stoicism. It is an attempt to speculatively construct a philosophical system which coheres with the attitude of the early Stoa towards knowledge, and suggests a context they may have had in mind within which knowledge was acquired and understood. I shall use the thought that there was some systematic philosophy grasped and espoused first by Zeno and subsequently by Cleanthes and Chrysippus as my grounding statement . The textual evidence which survives is neither detailed nor contemporaneous enough to isolate specific differences of opinion between the thinkers of this period, and so I take the view that whilst Chrysippus probably did alter

¹ See for example, I.G. Kidd (1971). For an introductory to Stoicism and the main thinkers, see amongst others Sedley (1980).

Zeno's formulations in order to serve better the systematic nature of his exposition, this was done sympathetically where possible, and nowhere represented a radical doctrinal departure. This is my position despite the suggestion to the contrary from D.L. 7.179:

“[Chrysippus] showed the greatest acuteness in every branch of the subject; so much so that he differed on most points from Zeno, and from Cleanthes as well, to whom he often used to say that all he wanted was to be told what the doctrines were; he would find out the proofs for himself.”

We do not have the means to discover what ‘differed on most points’ might mean. It may be that Chrysippus gave different proofs whilst maintaining the doctrines because he had his eye on a deeper coherence - it is known that Zeno, whilst creative with both definitions and syllogisms, was not one for logical consistency across his proofs.² Whatever the reason, Diogenes both records that it was said “But for Chrysippus, there would have been no Stoa” (D.L. 7.183) and also that:

“whenever [Chrysippus] contended against Cleanthes, he would afterwards feel remorse, so that he constantly came out with the lines:
Blest in all else am I, save only where
I touch Cleanthes: there I am ill-fortuned.” (D.L. 7.180)

Which, if it is accurate, indicates a profound respect. The main indication of the difference between the early, middle and late Stoa is the emphasis on ethics. For

² For an excellent discussion of this see Schofield (1983).

Zeno and those who followed immediately after, philosophy was an enterprise of three divisions - logic, physics and ethics. Each of these was important, each was developed, and each was taught; and this is the foundational idea for the notion that the early Stoics were systematic in their ambition for philosophy. By the time of Panaetius, the emphasis had shifted distinctly towards ethics, with physics and logic beginning to drop from the picture. For the Romans, the meaning of being a Stoic could be defined almost exclusively by the attitude taken to life, and particularly to misfortune. We can see this as the result of an accident of history: in an important sense, Zeno lived on a cusp as the powers of the Attic peninsula gave way to the broader sweep of first Alexander, then Rome. His teaching can be seen on the one hand as a meditation on the three hundred and fifty previous years of Ionian and Italian philosophy, formulated at a time when the Athens which had assimilated and enjoyed this philosophy was going into decline. On the other hand, it was the source for a definitive practical philosophy of the kind which could be incorporated into the less abstract perspectives of the civilisations brought into the Alexandrian hegemony and later on the Roman Republic and Empire.

From this point of view, the concentration on ethics of the later periods represents a degeneration from the idea of philosophy as an all-embracing system although in another, more historical, sense the concentration on ethics of the middle and later periods is true to the spirit of the Stoic outlook - the Cynics, who initially represented the ideal of philosophy to Zeno, had as their motto 'Ethics alone'. We will consider this Cynic connection in some more detail shortly.

There is of course the possibility that all attempts to describe Stoic philosophy may end up as a negotiation between fictions, but given the state of the evidence we

have for 'what the Stoics thought', this is perhaps inevitable. Of course I claim that my particular fiction commits me to as little paradox as possible, and that the philosophical system I will attempt to present as possibly Stoic has philosophical benefits which other fictions lack, although the price paid is in permitting speculation to play a part in the reconstruction. My use of the word 'fiction' is intended as an honest expression of my experience that attempting to engage sympathetically with a past point of view of which only fragmentary evidence survives necessarily involves the imagination as well as the application of critical methods of analysis.

Which 'critical methods of analysis' ought to be applied to the textual evidence about Stoicism is a difficult question. As Long and Sedley write, "The surviving record of Hellenistic philosophy, though extensive, varies greatly in quality and reliability."³ In recent years, the Stoic texts have been submitted to detailed linguistic and philological analyses, and from this process of analysis a series of possibilities has emerged about the 'meaning' of various parts of the evidence. We can see how such an approach is most reliable where a complete, or substantial, portion of text exists that can be reliably linked to a single author. In this situation, the overall text acts as a control on the interpretation of any segment of it. A picture can be built up of, say, 'the type of thing this author meant when using this word'. Words can be understood as representing distinct ideas, or as cognates; concepts can be seen in various lights as the writer addresses different issues, or issues in different contexts; the impact of a writerly style on the content of what is presented can be assessed. As a result of the unified text being used as a control in this way, the conclusions of a linguistic or

³ Long and Sedley (1987), Vol. 1, *xi*.

philological investigation can be used as the foundation for representing a philosophy. Thus we can have a (relatively) clear debate about Platonic forms, or Aristotelian syllogistic since these ideas are so well attested to in some unified literature which survives.

If we then move on to consider, say, the Stoic use of the term *phantasia*, we find ourselves at a disadvantage. Whilst linguistic and philological investigation of Stoic texts can provide a range of possibilities for what a word could have meant, it cannot provide any means of selecting between various interpretations, since we lack the controls outlined above. Thus we can 'investigate' the use of *phantasia* by Sextus or Diogenes, and come to some conclusion about how these writers utilised the term, but a number of problems arise when attempting to allocate to the Stoics particular ideas on the basis of such investigations. Firstly, there is the lack of extensive text evidence written by the early Stoics. This might lead the honest scholar to give up on the enterprise of attempting to say anything about the early Stoa at all. But the reason why the early period is so fascinating is that here, clearly, is where the main thrust of Stoicism was developed. Here, if anywhere, we might expect the 'miraculous coherence' of the Stoic system to have been first articulated. And it is the wide respect gained by Stoicism for its coherence which justifies a consideration of the evidence which proceeds along a path not clearly given by linguistic or philological investigation, but guided by a concern for philosophical coherence.

The second main problem is the time which separates our main sources from the source of the ideas they claim to represent. Chrysippus becomes head of the school c.262 BC, yet the earliest surviving extensive mentions of Stoicism come in Cicero, probably written 30 – 40BC. Epictetus (c.55 – c.135 AD) provides us with

extensive writing on his brand of Stoicism, but records little of interest about logical matters. Sextus Empiricus and Diogenes Laertius (probably second and third centuries AD respectively) do provide quite a lot of significant material, but by this stage we are considering a gap of around 400 years between the conception of the original Stoics' thoughts, and the representation offered here.

Apart from the absence of original Stoic texts, and the huge time gap between the early Stoics and the later representations, there is also the question of the quality of the material we perceive. For example, for each of the three writers mentioned there are associated problems with reading their accounts of Stoic thought. For Cicero and Sextus, there arises the issue of their prior philosophical commitments, and how this may have affected their representation of Stoic ideas. Reading Cicero, who came at the Hellenistic philosophies from the standpoint of the 'New Academy', we might be reluctant to believe that the picture he gives of Stoic epistemology, for example, is clear-eyed. Reading Sextus, and knowing how his favoured lines of argument work, we might suspect that he feels it acceptable to present a position in such a way that it will be possible for him to declare its absurdity.⁴ And Diogenes Laertius provides a wealth of interesting information, but precious little of it can be reliably sourced. Even if Jaap Mansfeld is right to suggest that the middle part of Book 7 is taken from another source, this source is not in existence to act as a control.

Finally, even if we accept that a certain text or texts represent an original Stoic idea clearly, there is the issue of our own interpretative involvement in coming to a judgment about what it might mean in a broader philosophical context. It is one thing

⁴ His writings on music, for example, and astrology, bear this out: one gets the impression that his 'set up' of a position has the sceptical conclusion clearly in mind.

to reconstruct Stoic propositional theory, since we can make some reasonable progress on the core issues: enough key ideas are corroborated for us to see the outlines of a theory. But on ontological questions, for example, the evidence is catastrophically vague. Again, a possible response to this is to say that *pace* Wittgenstein that “What we cannot speak about, we must pass over in silence.” But if a certain reading of the texts points us in a certain direction, and this direction is not directly contradicted by the evidence we have available, then it becomes a reasonable use of philosophical speculation to attempt to ‘join the dots’ in a coherent way. Some level of faith is essential to even grant the word ‘Stoicism’ a determinate meaning, and what I will aim to produce is something that is *possibly* what the early Stoics held – the standard applied being that of logical possibility rather than historical likelihood, which the evidence provides too little material for.

The method which has guided this thesis is to ask of the evidence whether it points to some philosophy which can be seen as coherent, when viewed systematically. In a sense, we can see linguistic and philological analysis as involving a certain ‘focal distance’ on the part of the enquirer: when doing this, we are looking at the texts as an opaque surface, and examining the properties of that surface. Instead of this, I have sought to alter that focal distance and understand the fragmentary evidence as transparent – if distorted – and as providing a window to some ancient system which was hugely influential and is now largely lost.

Ambiguities abound about the Stoics. Were they innovators - genuine artists - ushering in a new age of philosophy, reorienting the agenda towards a comprehensive systematisation? Or were they more like craftsmen, cutting and pasting the philosophical genres of their time and its past into a patchwork - novel in itself, but

comprised of already established ideas? Of course these alternatives are not strictly exclusive and one of the challenges of the study of the Stoics is to tease out what we can genuinely call new ideas and what are developments of others' notions. I would like to begin with a brief consideration of some ideas which perhaps emerge in pre-Socratic thought, and which may have pre-figured some Stoic ideas.

THE PRE-SOCRATIC INHERITANCE

It is a standard part of the analysis of the fourth and third centuries that the figure of Socrates (mythologised to a greater or lesser extent perhaps) informed the philosophical development of the era. This is usually meant in the sense that the schools which grew up during this period defined themselves in terms of Socratic ideals. For example, Frede (1983) writes "Both Stoics and sceptics saw themselves as followers of Socrates, but they took a different view as to the moral to be drawn from Socrates' experience." (p.151)

It is another possibility (bearing in mind the conscious self-association the early Stoics undertook with Heraclitus) that Zeno and Cleanthes in fact sought to find a historical trajectory for their ideas which was distinct from the traditions which dominated Athens at their time. Perhaps the invocation of Heraclitus, for example, is a device which was intended to have the effect of saying 'Our philosophy is utterly unlike what you have been previously taught - its boundaries and methods cannot be mapped onto Platonic or Aristotelian schemes. Yet it is rooted in a distinct tradition of its own. We are pulling a new thread from the past.'

Without getting into too many doxographical details⁵, it is possible to view the story of pre-Socratic thought as an ongoing process of development of the Greek language by introducing notions which provide layers of meaning beneath common words. As a result of this layering, we end up with a language in fourth century Athens which has a philosophically rich vocabulary. The evolution of language in this way can be seen as being contingent on both thought and transmission: on thought, because it requires thinkers to provide useful or stimulating connotations for words which can take their place in the intellectual market-place of ideas; on transmission because without some means of recording such connotations in such a way that they can be reliably passed down across generations (in short without inscription), the layering process we are suggesting cannot happen. This view of inscription being a necessary condition of the evolution of the philosophical character of a language is based on the idea that without text, there is no fixed reference for thought in language.

The idea at work behind the following brief excursions into history is that each language is tied to an epoch - in fact, in an important way the rise and fall of languages measure epochs. The history of philosophy in Europe spans a series of major epoch-making language transformations - Greek giving way to Classical Latin, Classical Latin evolving into Medieval Latin and the employment of Medieval Latin giving way to the use in philosophy of the modern European languages we have today. The point is that the beginnings of this story (which is our story), in so far as they can be known, lie with the development of the philosophical character of the language of the Greeks. I should like to present the Greek language at the end of the fourth century and through

⁵ Since this type of exegesis has already been extensively developed - see Barnes (1979), Mansfeld (1986) and a wealth of philological commentary.

the third century BC (the era with which I am concerned) as being a fertile ground in which the ideas of the early Stoics could take root and grow. In the analysis which follows I am not in any way claiming that the thinkers presented should be thought of as proto-Stoics. There are many aspects of each of their ways of seeing the world which would be inimical to a Stoic perspective. I have not mentioned these since my aim is not to assert that these thoughts initiated some temporal sequence which culminated in the thoughts of, say, Zeno. Rather that it was the fact that these had been said and recorded in these ways that developed the Greek language in such a way as to enable certain forms of expression and debate to be available to the Stoics. With these they framed their ideas, and in their turn coined new words and defined fresh concepts, developing a philosophical language which sought to be adequate for the problems their generation faced.

XENOPHANES

If we look at the pre-Socratic thinkers and consider whose words might have had an impact on the philosophical character of the language the Stoics inherited, Xenophanes may seem like a strange choice - after all, wasn't he a sceptic and as such opposed to the ideas of foundational knowledge assumed by the Stoics?

On the evidence of his thought which survives I don't believe Xenophanes can be called a sceptic without some considerable qualification.⁶ The story of how he

⁶ In common with Barnes (1979), Vol. 1, p.137-143

came to be thought of as a sceptical thinker, however, is interesting both in its own right and also because it provides a case study of how distortion can set in and multiply, leaving behind a trail of partial truth which gains credibility for itself partly through its persistent reiteration and partly through the sheer weight of its antiquity.

The most radical form of scepticism in fourth century Athens was that advocated by Pyrrho (c.365-270) which denied to human cognition even the knowledge that no knowledge was possible. It is difficult to see how this operated as a philosophy at all (cf. Burnyeat 1980), leaving open as it does only the pathway to some kind of radical ataraxia. The main source of knowledge we have about Pyrrho which survives is as the result of writings made initially by Timon of Phlius (325-235), a pupil, who seems to have written on his master's life and attitude. From what Diogenes Laertius records Timon was a vicious critic, his description of the Stoic Zeno being "a greedy old Phoenician fisherwoman in her dark conceit seeking after everything" (Timon fr. 812).

The importance of Pyrrho in Western philosophy can hardly be overstated. Through the writings of Timon he became the figurehead for the revival of scepticism in the first century BC initiated by Aenesidemus. From here, he was again praised by Sextus Empiricus the rediscovery of whose writings in the fifteenth century AD propelled the ancient modes of scepticism into the discourse of the enlightenment. From there, of course, it is but a short step to Descartes.

Diogenes Laertius tells us:

"There are three books of the *Silloi*, in which Timon, adopting the stance of a sceptic, insults everyone and spoofs the doctrinaire philosophers in the form of parody. The first book has him as narrator, while the second and third are in the style of a dialogue. He appears

questioning Xenophanes of Colon about each philosopher, and Xenophanes responds to him. In the second book he deals with the older philosophers, and in the third with the later ones... The first book covers the same subjects, except that the poem is a monologue. It begins like this: 'Tell me now, all you busybody sophists.'" (Timon fr.775, LS 3A).

We can surmise that the words Timon placed in Xenophanes' mouth were helpful to his Pyrrhonic arguments and that this assistance would have had a higher priority than historical accuracy. Thus we see from Timon's appropriation of Xenophanes comes the conflation between his original thought and Pyrrhonian scepticism. This has two consequences - the first (intended by Timon) is to add the weight of tradition to the power of the sceptical argument, the second (not intended but probably more influential) is to cast Xenophanes as an early proponent of such a radical perspective. So if we treat Timon's writings as propaganda, his characterisation of Xenophanes is harmless and, to an extent, perfectly in order. But if we treat his writings as historical, this does commit us to attitudes towards Xenophanes' thought which are incompatible with the facts. Let us consider these facts then, such as they are. Attributed to Xenophanes is the following:

"No man knows, or ever will know, the truth about the gods and about everything I speak of: for even if he chanced to say the complete truth, yet oneself knows it not; but seeming is wrought over all things." (Kirk, Raven, Schofield 1983 (=KRS), fr. 186)

Xenophanes' word for 'truth' (*to saphes*) is interesting since it contains the connotation for clarity and distinctness, issues which come to the fore in Hellenistic times with Stoic and Epicurean usage of *enargês* (evident) and *plektikê* (striking) when

discussing the criteria of truth. It also has the threefold connotation of being about things either heard, seen or known. The phrase 'or ever will know' (*oude tis estai eidôs*) uses the participle of the verb *eidenai* which can be rendered 'to see', but the standard usage by Xenophanes' day was to mean 'know' (cf. Barnes 1979, Vol. 1, p.138). This can give us some confidence that the fragment is about knowledge rather than perception, and the explicit mention of the knowledge of men gives it a further, specifically human bent. So it is about human knowledge, and the claim made is that no man will know 'the truth about the gods and about everything'. This can be interpreted as placing a limit on the possibility of human knowledge of the divine on the one hand, and any kind of ultimate scientific knowledge on the other. Neither of these is promised by Stoicism either, although the precise nature of their claims for the scope of human knowledge is not knowable on the surviving evidence. A further fragment, this time from Stobaeus, suggests again that Xenophanes does not have an objection to the principle of knowledge *per se*:

"Yet the gods have not revealed all things to men from the beginning; but by seeking men find out better in time." (KRS fr. 188)

So we begin to gain a notion of human knowledge as conceived by Xenophanes which is limited in scope yet incrementally improvable. This notion of improvement would have been anathema to a Pyrrhonist, whose aim would be to demonstrate the futility of all 'seeking'. The final fragment I will mention fits in well with this picture, and suggests that Xenophanes' alternative to the voicing of any ultimate truth was probabilistic:

"Let these things be opined as resembling the truth...." (KRS fr. 187)

On Xenophanes' conception, this opining may not have a negative connotation, but instead be a statement of what it is possible for language to convey. For the Stoics, with their relatively sophisticated psychology and theory of meaning, it became possible to set up the framework within which a distinction could be drawn between 'mere' opinion and scientific knowledge (in the Hellenistic sense). Our interest in Xenophanes stems in part from this delineation of the knowable: it can be seen as an example of the type of necessary first move in the way of thinking about human knowledge which underlies the Stoic notion of the sayable.

I wish to mention briefly Xenophanes' theology, which seems to bear the hallmarks of systematic coherence. He made out cases against the anthropomorphism of the gods of conventional religion - his famous remark that "The Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black, the Thracians that theirs have light blue eyes and red hair."⁷ He also writes of 'One god, greatest among gods and men, in no way similar to mortals either in body or in thought' and claims for the one god that he is eternal, immortal, morally perfect and sentient - "All of him sees, all thinks, all hears." By the time of Zeno, these ideas had taken their place among a wide diversity of religious opinion but many of them were taken over by the Stoics as descriptive of a divinity they recognised:

"The Stoics say that god is an animal which is immortal and rational or intelligent, perfect in happiness, not admitting of any evil, provident towards the world and its occupants, but not anthropomorphic." (D.L. 7.147)

⁷ Kirk and Raven (1966) (=KR), fr. 171. For the following comments, see fr. 169- 177.

HERACLITUS

Heraclitus was the specific pre-Socratic philosopher to whom the Stoics appealed directly. We are told that both Cleanthes and Sphaerus (a pupil of Cleanthes) wrote on Heraclitus. Cleanthes wrote 'Interpretations of Heraclitus, four books' (D.L. 7.174), and Sphaerus is credited with 'A course of five lectures on Heraclitus' (D.L. 7.178). This is interesting in its own right for the light it sheds on how the Stoics presented themselves initially - in the type of context they chose within which their ideas were to be considered.

There are three ideas which come from Heraclitus which we can count as novel contributions to the development of the philosophical aspect of Greek and which have conceptual overlaps with what the Stoics later taught. These ideas can be summarised as follows -there is something it is appropriate to name *logos* which exists as some universal law, immanent in both 'things' and 'sayings'; man's general ignorance of the meaning of the *logos* (about which of course the Stoics had some very specific ideas) and on a more physical footing the notion that fire (*pur*) is the most fundamental element. The first two ideas, I think, can be seen as forerunners of notions which lie behind the development of Stoic logic and will be dealt with together below. The third idea is one taken over by the Stoics in their physics.⁸ The first Heraclitean fragment we will consider reads as follows:

"Of the Logos which is as I describe it men always prove to be
uncomprehending, both before they have heard it and when once they

⁸ I think there may also be scope for suggesting that the Heraclitean notion of flux can be seen as a forerunner of the Stoic continuum, but this is much more speculative and difficult to demonstrate, so these initial three will do for now.

have heard it. For although all things happen according to this Logos men are like people of no experience, even when they experience such words and deeds as I explain, when I distinguish each thing according to its constitution and declare how it is; but the rest of men fail to notice what they do after they wake up just as they forget what they do when asleep." (KRS, fr. 194)

Barnes, for example, is ambiguous about the way we should take the use of *logos* in this passage. On the one hand, he makes the reasonable point that "The noun *logos* picks up, in an ordinary and metaphysically unexciting way, the verb *legei*; it is wasted labour to seek Heraclitus' secret in the sense of *logos*" and yet then goes on to say "It does not, of course, follow from this that Heraclitus had no 'metaphysical' theory to propound, no 'Logos-doctrine', as the commentators have it. On the contrary, [this fragment] makes it clear that his 'account' must include or embody something like a general 'law of nature'." (Barnes 1979, Vol. 1, p.59)

At any rate, in terms of our history, we can say that Heraclitus' use of *logos* is innovative in two ways - it is the first (inscribed and surviving in the Western tradition) use of the term which postulates something like a unified general *law* of nature, and it is the first use which connects this law directly with human apprehension. Both these facts, I would argue, provide some insight into the later Stoic appropriation of Heraclitus.

Of course experiencing difficulties gaining a precise and univocal interpretation of Heraclitus is not a new phenomenon. As Diogenes Laertius records, Socrates did not feel confident in approaching the task and he had more information than us –

"Euripides gave Socrates a copy of Heraclitus' book and asked him what he thought of it; Socrates replied "What I understand is good;

and I think what I don't understand is good too - but it would take a Delian diver to get to the bottom of it." (D.L. 2.2). (The 'book' of Heraclitus mentioned here was not necessarily a monograph written by the man himself, it may have been a collection inscribed by others.)

Like our modern word 'meaning', it seems as if the Greek word *logos* was subject to profound ambiguity. Whilst there are those who lament this fact, as if it were desirable to have a perfectly parsed language where every word had a unique sense, publicly acknowledged, there is another and more generous way of seeing things. From a certain philosophical viewpoint, it is sufficient to endow certain words with a central purpose: not because they express a definitive idea unambiguously, but because they point to an essential ambiguity in the way we see, and say, the world. One way of explaining the Stoic fascination with ambiguity - and Atherton (1993) has proved this fascination and documented it in detail - is that in some sense they believed it was a necessary part of the philosophical endeavour. There is no suggestion that they were anxious about ambiguity - rather, if one were to choose a word to sum up the impression we get of the early Stoics response to ambiguity it might be 'amused' rather than 'hostile'. It is a trait of the modern analytic tradition to worry about ambiguity, we should not assume all ages have shared its fears.

The next aspect of Heraclitus which may have some bearing has to do with the relationship of the senses and their information to secure knowledge:

"Evil witnesses are eyes and ears for men, if they have souls that do not understand their language." (KRS, fr. 198)

"The things we learn of by sight and hearing, those do I prefer." (KRS, fr. 197)

There are two ideas from these fragments which we shall see come into play with the Stoics. Firstly, the 'preference' for things which can be sensed - which we could interpret as an early statement of the philosophical attitude which later became empiricism. Secondly, the idea that the same senses which inform us about the world we prefer - the tangible world - can in the wrong circumstances (that is, unchecked by a reason with knowledge of the logos) be 'evil' (which a Stoic could easily have interpreted 'will lead us away from virtue'). The first idea we can see as a forerunner of the Stoic rejection of metaphysical notions such as the Platonic Forms and the second idea can be seen to underly the Stoic hostility to the sceptics who tried to argue that the senses were always unreliable. In Hellenistic times, there were three dominant attitudes to the information we receive from the senses, encapsulated by the positions of the Stoics, the Epicureans and the Sceptical Academy. These were, respectively, that sense-impressions were reliable when checked by the reason of a sage (who had an appropriate 'system of cognitions' by reference to which truth claims about the world could be assessed); that sense-impressions were always true (this surprising result came about as the result of determined logical argument and certain epistemological beliefs e.g. that each sense reveals a different type of object); and finally that sense-impressions were always unreliable (or even if they did accurately convey the world, there is no way of confirming this beyond reasonable doubt). Of these positions, we can see the Stoics to be most in tune with Heraclitean ideas.

Some fragments attributed to Heraclitus seem to suggest the sense that there is a frustrating limit to what can be said in words, "Listening not to me but to the Logos it is wise to agree that all things are one." (KRS, fr. 196) And extending from this is perhaps the earliest notion of the public/private distinction in Western philosophy:

“Therefore it is necessary to follow the common; but although the Logos is common the many live as though they had a private understanding.” (KRS, fr. 195)

This sense of ‘common’ (*xunou*) can be seen as an early prototype of the Stoic idea of *ennoiai*, or common conceptions. This Heraclitean interpretation of the Stoic idea gives it much more metaphysical bite, and tends to count against the most prevalent modern interpretation which has the Stoic idea being more the result of a Lockean abstraction.

The point of taking this brief look at some notions about language we ascribe to Heraclitus is that ideas like these were present in the culture at Athens that the early Stoics learnt from and contributed to. It is not that they took over from him a specific idea of language, mind and world; indeed there is no evidence to suggest that Heraclitus bequeathed any such comprehensive notion in either his writing or his oral pronouncements. What is suggested is that the Stoics saw in Heraclitus a thinker similar to themselves in believing that the senses were the criteria of truth, that knowledge was attainable (if difficult to attain), that knowledge requires not only the senses but also right reason and that there is a universal Logos which has the power to teach us, if we are prepared to come into sympathy with its lesson of what lies beneath the surface world of apparent instability.

The notion that ‘everything is fire’ has (at least) a twofold consequence for Heraclitus - on the one hand it is a cosmological hypothesis that “All things are an equal exchange for fire and fire for all things, as goods are for gold and gold for goods.” (KRS, fr. 219) And a tangential but complementary message is given by “This world-order did none of gods or men make, but it always was and is and shall be: an

everliving fire, kindling in measures and going out in measures.” (KRS, fr. 217) The parallels with Stoic physical theory here are direct. The Stoics had a coherent (if to us mythical) notion that there was a periodic conflagration during which everything was consumed into pure fire. One consequence of this is that the universe does not have a beginning as such - the Stoics are no creationists. Rather this particular world we inhabit has a beginning, which is that certain moment in history when the fire has cooled to a point at which it becomes ‘turned from fire through air into moisture; then the thicker parts of the moisture condense and end up as earth’ (D.L. 7.142). During the period of the conflagration, there is nothing but fire. The Stoics were also explicit in their monism - there is one substance, according to them, and fire is the only candidate.

On the other hand, there is the theological component - the ‘intelligence’ of fire which Heraclitus seems to be expressing as follows:

“What we call ‘hot’ seems to me to be immortal and to apprehend all things and to see and hear and know all things, both present and future. This, then, the most of all, when all things became confused, went out to the furthest revolution, and seems to me to have been what was called aither by the men of old.” (KRS 2.223)

Again, we find a direct parallel in Stoic thought:

“The Stoics made God out to be intelligent, a designing fire which methodically proceeds towards the creation of the world, and encompasses all the seminal principles according to which everything comes about according to fate.” (Aetius 1.7.33, LS 46A)

“Zeno says that the sun and the moon and each of the other stars are intelligent and prudent and have the fieriness of designing fire.”
(Stobaeus 1.213, 15-21, LS 46D)

It has been shown elsewhere (cf. Long 1985) how the Stoic idea of everlasting recurrence was an integral part of their system, and how it can be seen as demanded by the logic of their other beliefs. As for Heraclitus himself, there seems no possibility of answering the question ‘Why did he believe this rather than that?’ I do not have a story to tell about how the ‘physics’ of Heraclitus ought to be read, although the Stoic notion can be seen to be far more explicitly theological, and to place ‘fire’ in a thoroughly central position, forming and informing everything that knows and can be known. Perhaps we can speculate, given the discussion so far, that the effect of ‘Stoicising’ Heraclitus was to merge the notions of the Logos with the divine fire. The result of this, would be, roughly speaking, the Stoic seminal principle of the universe - the active of the two principles from which the cosmos is produced, and by which it is sustained.

PYTHAGORAS

The surviving evidence of the Pythagorean communities is scarce and unreliable, and the figure of Pythagoras himself is shrouded in mystery. He is placed by Apollodorus on the island of Samos during the reign of the tyrant Polycrates, about 532 BC. He subsequently had to flee and settled in Croton in Italy where he established a school which “numbered nearly 300, and they administered the affairs of

state so well that the constitution was virtually an aristocracy." (D.L. 8.3). But later there was a revolt by the people of Croton and Pythagoras was forced to flee.

For our purposes, Pythagoras is an interesting figure since there are a number of testimonies which paint him as a polymath who studied a wide variety of disciplines:

"Pythagoras, son of Mnesarchus at first worked strenuously at mathematics and numbers, but later could not resist the miracle-mongering of Pherecydes." (KR, fr. 259)

"Pythagoras, son of Mnesarchus, practised scientific enquiry beyond all other men and, making a selection of these writings, claimed for his own a wisdom which was really dilettantism and malpractice." (KRS, fr. 256)

"Empedocles too bears witness to this, writing of [Pythagoras]: 'And there was among them a man of rare knowledge, most skilled in all manner of wise works, a man who had won the utmost wealth of wisdom; for whensoever he strained with all his mind, he easily saw everything of all the things that are, in ten, yea, twenty lifetimes of man.'" (KRS, fr. 259)

This polymathic feature of Pythagoras is important for our story because of the following suggestion from Porphyry which suggests that he was an important locus of transmission in our history, from which a sequence of new ideas flowed:

"None the less the following became universally known: first that he maintains that the soul is immortal; next, that it changes into other kinds of living things; also that events recur in certain cycles, and that nothing is ever absolutely new; and finally that all living things should be regarded as akin. Pythagoras seems to have been the first to bring these ideas to the Greeks." (KRS, fr. 285)

In relation to the Stoics, these ideas have a limited application. The idea of the soul (*psychê*) being immortal (*athanaton*) was rejected by the Stoics who had instead a notion of limited survival after death - if one was virtuous. The idea of the soul transforming into other things may not have been totally rejected, since by the Stoic account, each individual is but another manifestation of a single organising principle, which is itself universal. Given that this was accepted, we could imagine a Stoic assenting both to the idea that the soul of one thing, in a sense, became the soul of another and also that all living things are akin. They are akin, a Stoic might say, to the extent that they are informed by the same principle. But to bridge the gap between Stoicism and what we know of Pythagoras about such matters is to stretch the ideas of each school to a scope beyond that originally intended. The most striking point of agreement here is in the idea of recurrence, which was a major plank in early Stoic cosmology.

That it was a feature of Pythagorean thought is substantiated by the following:

“If one were to believe the Pythagoreans, with the result that the same individual things will recur, than I shall be talking to you again sitting as you are now, with this pointer in my hand, and everything else shall be just as it is now, and it is reasonable to suppose that the time then is the same as the time now.” (Eudemius, KR fr. 272)

Eudemius may be jumping to conclusions here, since even if we accept that ‘events occur in certain cycles’ and that ‘nothing is ever absolutely new’, this does not by itself lead us to the much stronger Chrysippean conclusion:

“Chrysippus... when speaking of the world’s renewal, drew the following conclusion: ‘Since this is so, it is evidently not impossible that we too after our death will return again to the shape we now are, after

certain periods of time have elapsed.” (Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 7.23, LS 52B).

But any similarity we might detect cannot be overstated since there are logical reasons which limit cosmological speculation. There are only a certain number of geomorphic possibilities - either the world is eternal, the world is passing, the world will recur. These generally are allied to one of the following cosmic claims - the universe is finite and linear, it is infinite and linear, it is finite and cyclical or infinite and cyclical. Within these ranges fall most of the possibilities. The Stoics, in common with Pythagoras, opted for a recurring world. We have no specific record of Pythagorean cosmology so we do not know whether or not he would have been in agreement with the Stoics in placing the recurring world in an infinite and cyclical (as well as combustible!) universe.

But what we should note is the entry into the picture of the idea of recurrence, which both (in some way) seems to have been introduced by Pythagoras and continued to exert an influence through the Eleatic school - most notably in the thought of Empedocles.

PARMENIDES

The text we have which can be attributed to Parmenides amounts to about a hundred and fifty lines gleaned from extensive quotation in Simplicius and Sextus Empiricus, with some corroboration from Plato, Proclus and Clement. The text is a poem, written in hexameter verse, in tone its introduction is mystical, or like a

(Chaucerian) dream-vision. It tells of a young man, carried in a chariot, urged on by the daughters of the Sun, going to meet the goddess 'who leads the man who knows through every town'. This allegory of the philosophical life culminates in the words of the goddess on his arrival:

"Welcome, o youth... tended by immortal charioteers. It is no ill chance, but right and justice, that has sent thee forth to travel on this way. Far indeed does it lie from the beaten track of men. Right it is that thou shouldst learn all things, as well the unshaken heart of well-rounded truth (*alêtheies*), as the opinions (*doxas*) of mortals in which is not true belief (*pistis alêthes*) at all. Yet none the less shalt thou learn these things also - how the things that seem, as they all pass through everything, must gain the semblance of being." (KRS, fr. 288)

The first thing of importance for us, considering the development of the philosophical character of the Greek language, is the distinction here between the true (*alêthes*) and opinion (*doxa*). In this distinction lies the claim that Parmenides is the originator of metaphysics - or at least the first expositor of a metaphysical viewpoint. The idea that truth is to be juxtaposed with what seems to be the case is a part of this innovation. Whilst previously we have seen thinkers wary of the senses, concerned with the limits of knowledge, aware of the vagaries of cognition, Parmenides' step forward is the epoch-making insight that the profound truth (the one revealed by the goddess of those who know) is utterly distinct, tangential and incompatible with the conclusions we would draw were we to rest our thinking on the unexamined inputs of the senses. It is on this unexamined experience that the 'opinions' of 'the many' rest.

We find an echo of this distinction in some of the writings on Stoicism, although with a Hellenistic twist. The issue of the possibility and role of truth was by

the time of Chrysippus (which we should remember may only have been a hundred and fifty years after Parmenides) debated almost exclusively in terms of the criterion. In place of truth, and against the 'opinion' of the many, the Stoics had 'scientific knowledge':

“Scientific knowledge (*epistêmê*) is cognition which is secure and firm and unchangeable by reason. Opinion (*doxa*) is weak and false assent.” (S.E. *M* 7.151, LS 41C)

“For there are two kinds of opinion (*doxa*), assent to the incognitive, and weak supposition, and these are alien to the wise man's disposition.” (Stobaeus 2.111, LS 41G)

Another interesting point to draw out of the Parmenides fragment is the possible sense of 'well-rounded Truth' (*alêtheias eukukleos*) which can be allied with another fragment from Proclus "It is all one to me where I begin; for I shall come back there again in time" (KRS, fr. 289). Kirk and Raven suggest that 'well-rounded' should be taken to imply something like "wherever you pick up the chain of Parmenides' reasoning, you can follow it round in a circle, passing through each of its links in turn, back to your starting point." (KR, p. 268)

From here, going on into Parmenides' verse, we encounter the following:

“Come now, and I will tell thee - and do thou hearken and carry my word away - the only ways of enquiry that can be thought of : the one way, that it is and cannot not-be, is the path of Persuasion, for it attends upon Truth; the other, that it is-not and needs must not-be, that I tell thee is a path altogether unthinkable. For thou couldst not know that which is-not (that is impossible) nor utter it; for the same thing can be thought as can be.” (KRS, fr. 291)

The parenthetical 'do thou hearken and carry my words away' may be read as giving some insight into how Parmenides conceived of the language-function - as a means of depositing the contents of one psyche into another. This physical metaphor for meaning, where what is said is a thing projected from one psyche into another, is another aspect of Parmenides' poem which can be considered as a potential innovation. Here is one of the earliest records of a philosophical method which requires both 'I' and 'thou' to be in play in the narrative for the intention of the writer to be fulfilled. The tradition from here on is virtually unbroken in its various forms. In Plato, the 'I' and 'thou' are philosophical interlocutors. In neo-platonism and on through scholasticism, the tendency is to have the 'I' as believer and 'thou' as God in the discourse of the relationship between humanity and divinity. And then in Descartes' meditations the radical new device of the first-person narrative which gives an intimate twist to the same idea: 'I' is the text and 'thou' is the reader. The injunction to 'carry my words away' can be seen simultaneously as a rhetorical device to engage the attention and a point of view on what must be happening at the very least when we engage in discourse.

We then pass to a delineation of what it is possible to conceive. Here we are offered two paths:

“...the one way, that it is and cannot not-be, is the path of persuasion, for it attends upon Truth; the other, that it is-not and needs must not-be, that I tell thee is a path altogether unthinkable.”

These lines can be read as expressing something of the incontrovertible grip that necessity exercises in the binding up of thought, language and existence. The two paths represent different aspects of this continuum. On the one hand existence is

wholly given, unalterable and necessary, on the other hand non-existence is alien to our comprehension. The exciting thing about this fragment for our purposes is the coda that Parmenides adds to his summary:

“For thou couldst not know that which is-not (that is impossible) nor utter it.”

The verb used for utterance here (*phrasais*) does not carry any special technical sense, but we ought to remember that the parsing of all the parts of speech was not developed until later, and we do not need to say that Parmenides has a theory of communication to note here that ‘knowing’ and ‘being able to say’ carry the same limitation (neither can be of that which is-not).

This motif of the symbiotic unity of thought, existence and language continues throughout the poem:

“That which can be spoken and thought needs must be; for it is possible for it, but not for nothing, to be.” (KRS, fr. 293)

“For never shall this be proved, that things that are not are; but do thou hold back thy thought from this way of enquiry, nor let custom, born of much experience, force thee to let wander along this road thy aimless eye, thy echoing ear or tongue; but do thou judge by reason the strife-encompassed proof that I have spoken.” (KRS, fr. 294)

“One way only is left to be spoken of, that it is; and on this way are full many signs... Nor shall I allow thee to say or to think , ‘from that which is not’; for it is not to be said or thought that it is not... But it has surely been decided, as it must be, to leave alone the one way as unthinkable and nameless.” (KRS, fr. 295)

“What can be thought is only the thought that it is... For you will not find thought without what is, in relation to which it is uttered;

for there is not, nor shall be, anything else besides what is, since Fate fettered it to be entire and immovable. Wherefore all these are mere names which mortals laid down believing them to be true - coming into being and perishing, being and not being, change of place and variation of bright colour.” (KRS, fr. 299)

If it is true that the Stoics operated some kind of Parmenidean metaphysics (I hasten to add that this is an unverifiable speculation) then it accounts for two otherwise puzzling fragments. Firstly, there is Zeno of Citium’s injunction not to hear the opposite case in an inquiry:

“In response to him who said, ‘Do not pass judgement until you have heard both sides’, Zeno stated the contrary thesis, with this sort of argument. ‘The second speaker must not be heard, whether the first speaker has proved his case (for the inquiry is then finished) or did not prove it (for that is just like his not having complied when summoned, or his having complied by talking nonsense). But either he proved his case or he did not prove it. Therefore the second speaker must not be heard’.” (Plutarch, *St. rep.* 1034E, LS 31L)

On the one hand, this can be read as being an argument against the basic sceptical tactic of delivering an equivalent antithesis for every thesis, thus inclining reason to suspend judgement. But seen in the light of the ideas mentioned above about the tie-up between thought, language and existence, it makes perfect sense as a positive claim on the nature of assertion. Since the only thing which is (ultimately) being said is ‘that it is’, and since the only opposing case to this results in what can neither be thought nor spoken of (‘that it is not’), there is no place for the counter-argument. I suggest that this perspective serves well as a way of understanding the

context in which Stoic logic was developed: that is, in the context of a metaphysics concerned with the nature of ultimate reality, rather than a dialectical duel.

Secondly, for a school which was engaged in so much epistemological debate there is a curious lack of enthusiasm for the problem of reference. I am not casting doubt on Benson Mates' claim that the Stoics had some intuition in some way analogous with Frege's sense/reference distinction, but merely suggesting that for the Stoics the provenance (and consequence) of this distinction was not truth-functional, but metaphysical. That is, it does not serve to distinguish between assertions which are truth-functional and those which are not, but rather it serves to delimit the universe within which truth-functionality begins. I will try and flesh this idea out later in my consideration of the fragments Mates connected together, but for the present all we need is to see how this more metaphysical interpretation of Stoicism explains Chrysippus' indifference (and the way he expresses this indifference) towards the problem of reference:

“...when they are asked what ‘that which is’ is, they say it is that which activates a cognitive impression. And then, when examined concerning the cognitive impression, they again retreat to ‘that which is’ (which is equally unknown), saying that a cognitive impression has its source in that which is, in conformity with the very thing that is.”
(S.E. *M* 8.85-6, LS 34D)

The words used here for ‘that which is’ (*to hyparchon*) do not appear in the poem of Parmenides but this is no problem since I am not trying to establish a direct influence, merely pointing out a possible way there was an indirect influence. Just as Zeno knows he will never make sense of someone speaking against the (truly stated)

argument 'that it is', Chrysippus knows that unless we allow the proposition 'that it is' to go about its work, our logical investigations will be stillborn.

So the claim about Parmenides and his contribution to the development of the philosophical character of the Greek language is that he opened up the way for people to begin to think by having on the one hand an atmosphere of constant change and motion, yet on the other hand maintaining the contemplation of a divine, changeless, monistic unity. Of course once this is achieved, the way is open for all manner of attempts to describe the fertilisation which goes on between the two ways, and systematic metaphysics is born. On a more mundane level, this metaphysics entails the engagement of the incorporeal, a notion not well exercised until shortly after Parmenides. The Stoics, if we are to complete our hypothesis, positioned the incorporeal as an explanation for the apparent gaps between the One and the Many. Pinioned here are time, place, void and lekta.

The possibility that Stoicism was forged in the furnace of some kind of Parminedean metaphysics is I think reasonable, and is supported further by another consideration. The Stoic concept of the continuum can be seen as a direct response to the challenge of providing a metaphysics which could answer the paradoxes of motion and divisibility. As I hope to show in later sections, this reading is compatible with the evidence, and forces us to look at Stoicism in a slightly new light.

So often, our testimonies of the Stoics is in a setting that is either philosophically hostile (Sextus Empiricus), indifferent (Diogenes Laertius) or eclectic (Cicero). Either that, or they lie buried in the mire of later Platonists and Aristotelians. Because of this it is not possible, on the state of the available evidence, to provide any connections between the Stoics and their predecessors which have a solid historical

validity. What rapidly becomes clear conceptually, is that in logic they are incompatible with Aristotle, and in physics and epistemology they are incompatible with Plato. Given the Stoics' own mention of Heraclitus, the pre-Socratics are a reasonable place to look for the inspiration behind the positive doctrines of Stoicism. We are encouraged further in this belief by the following comment by Diogenes:

“It is stated by Hecato and by Apollonius of Tyre in his first book on Zeno that he consulted the oracle to know what he should do to attain the best life, and that the god's response was that he should take on the complexion of the dead. Whereupon, perceiving what this meant, he studied ancient authors.” (D.L. 7.2)

ANTISTHENES AND THE CYNICS

In a sense, philosophy splintered after Socrates (c. 469-399BC), as if his death sent a shower of intellectual and ethical sparks across Athens. The Plato-Aristotle line, the dominant surviving ideology, records one aspect of the inspiration Socrates provided by his life. But Plato was not his only friend, nor the only one who wrote about him. Of those whose works survive are accounts by Aristophanes the comic poet (c.450-388BC) and Xenophon (c. 427-354). One whose work does not survive, but is attested to by other sources was Aeschines. There were seven Socratic logoi written by Aeschines which are known of and it has been written “that Aeschines' depiction of Socrates was widely admired in antiquity for its fidelity to the actual Socrates...as far as we can judge, the Socrates of Aeschines even more than the Socrates of Xenophon is entirely occupied with problems of practical morality.”

We are familiar with Plato's depiction of Socrates as, variously, a deep political thinker, a refined aesthete, a frustrated metaphysician and a sublime mystic. In a sense, these are the conflicting images of Socrates which dominated the fourth century BC in Athens - on the one hand a self-sufficient moralist, concerned only with the issues of the good life, and on the other hand a broad intellectual with a questioning attitude for everything. That there were diverse interpretations of Socrates is clear, and his contemporaries took up different attitudes to his life. This point is well made by Nehamas:

“For Antisthenes, Socrates was the inspiration for Cynicism; for Aristippus, the first hedonist... Even his contemporaries, that is, were radically, passionately divided about the nature of his views, the substance of his actions, and the structure of his motives.” (Nehamas 1992, p.175)

The textual (and therefore historical) hinterland for philosophy does not end in the person of Socrates, it ends in the person of Plato. To do justice to the situation when Zeno arrived in Athens, we must remember that Plato would not have enjoyed a monopoly over Socratic interpretation. There were other traditions which could trace their roots back to Socrates just as authentically as the Academy, and amongst these were the Cynics:

“Antisthenes [c.446-366BC], the son of Antisthenes, was an Athenian... To begin with, he became a pupil of Gorgias the rhetorician... Later on, however, he came into touch with Socrates, and derived so much benefit from him that he used to advise his own disciples to become fellow pupils with him of Socrates. He lived in the Peiraeus, and every day would tramp the five miles to Athens in order to hear Socrates. From Socrates he learned his hardihood, emulating

his disregard of feeling, and thus he inaugurated the Cynic way of life.”

(D.L. 6.2)

This section of Diogenes Laertius which deals with the Cynics is especially interesting for the suggestions it makes that there was a public hostility between Plato and Antisthenes, as if they were jockeying for position beneath the Socratic mantle:

“Being told the Plato was abusing him, he remarked, ‘It is a royal privilege to do good and be ill spoken of’ (D.L. 6.3)

“And he used to taunt Plato with being conceited. At all events when in a procession he spied a spirited charger he said, turning to Plato, ‘It seems to me that you would have made just such a proud, showy steed’. This because Plato was constantly praising horseflesh. And one day he visited Plato, who was ill, and seeing the basin into which he had vomited, remarked, ‘The bile I see, but not the pride’”.
(D.L. 6. 7-8).

I wonder if there is a trace of this same hostility in Zeno’s words about one hundred years later: “If we want to master the sciences, there is nothing so fatal as conceit.” (D.L. 7.23) If so, then these words grow sharper than a mere musing and become a veiled attack on the Platonic Academy. This is plausible, since the Academy’s idealistic epistemology must have seemed obscure to the relatively empirical Zeno.

Antisthenes, according to Diogenes Laertius’ record, lived an extremely simple life and his teachings ranged from the high-minded and idealistic - “When brothers agree, no fortress is so strong as their common life” (D.L. 6.6) to the witty and practical, “Pay attention to your enemies, for they are the first to discover your

mistakes.” (D.L. 6.12). The section in the *Lives of the Philosophers* which deals with Antisthenes ends with a testimony of his historical importance:

“Antisthenes gave the impulse to the indifference of Diogenes, the continence of Crates, and the hardiness of Zeno, himself laying the foundation of their state. Xenophon calls him the most agreeable of men in conversation and the most temperate in everything else.” (D.L. 6.15)

The words ‘pleasant’ and ‘temperate’ are not so easy to apply to Diogenes the Cynic. It is perhaps more appropriate to describe Cynicism as a movement or a cult rather than a philosophical school. As Diogenes Laertius records things, the Cynics were passionate, committed and extreme. These attributes, which arguably made the Cynics the only philosophers in history to have truly lived their philosophy⁹, did not make them easy company. One of the stories about Diogenes goes as follows:

“Some one took him into a magnificent house and warned him not to spit, whereupon having cleared his throat he discharged the phlegm into the man’s face, being unable, he said, to find a meaner receptacle.”(D.L. 6.32)

The account of the way in which Diogenes and Antisthenes became associates makes it plain that Antisthenes, unlike Plato, was not interested in founding a school or gathering interested parties around him:

“On reaching Athens, [Diogenes] fell in with Antisthenes, and was at first repulsed by him, because he never welcomed pupils. By sheer persistence Diogenes wore him out. Once when he stretched out

⁹ This at least is the wry opinion held by Professor Moles of the Classics Department at Durham.

his staff against him, the pupil offered his head with the words, 'Strike, for you will find no wood hard enough to keep me away from you, so long as I think you've something to say.' From that time forward he was his pupil, and, exile as he was, set out upon a simple life." (D.L. 6.21)

Diogenes the Cynic was an exile for disreputable reasons. He was a native of Sinope, and the son of a banker who was entrusted with the money of the state. Between them, father and son adulterated the coinage and were forced to leave. He embraced hardship positively as a way of life and took the Cynic aspiration of simplicity to greater heights than Antisthenes:

"One day, observing a child drinking out of his hands, he cast away the cup from his wallet with the words, 'A child has beaten me in plainness of living.' He also threw away his bowl when in like manner he saw a child who had broken his plate taking up his lentils with the hollow part of a morsel of bread." (D.L. 6.37)

Diogenes followed his master in sharing a mutual hostility with Plato:

"The school of Euclides he called bilious, and Plato's lectures a waste of time" (D.L. 6.24)

"...another time he was eating dried figs and encountered Plato and offered him a share of them. When Plato took them and ate them, he said 'I said you might share them, not that you might eat them all up.'" (D.L. 6.25)

"And one day when Plato had invited to his house friends coming from Dionysius, Diogenes trampled upon his carpets and said 'I trample on Plato's vainglory.' Plato's reply was, 'How much pride you expose to view, Diogenes, by seeming not to be proud'. Others tell us

that what Diogenes said was 'I trample upon the pride of Plato', who retorted, 'Yes, Diogenes, with pride of another sort'." (D.L. 6.26)

"Plato had defined Man as an animal, biped and featherless, and was applauded. Diogenes plucked a fowl and brought it into the lecture-room with the words, 'Here is Plato's man'." (D.L. 6.40)

"As Plato was conversing about Ideas and using the nouns 'tablehood' and 'cuphood' he said, 'Table and cup I can see; but your tablehood and cuphood, Plato I can nowise see'. 'That's readily accounted for', said Plato, 'for you have the eyes to see the visible table and cup; but not the understanding by which ideal tablehood and cuphood are discerned.'" (D.L. 6.53)

But for courage in the face of tyrants, Diogenes cannot be faulted. Apart from the famous story of one of his encounters with Alexander the Great, there is recorded the time when he was "dragged off to Philip, and being asked who he was, replied, 'A spy on your insatiable greed'". (D.L. 6.44)

It is possible to view Cynicism as a lived critique of all the pretensions, necessary illusions and downright lies required to ensure the smooth march of civilisation. In his own way, Diogenes stands as the least compromising and most impressive of the fourth century figures, and one who makes Aristotle's association with Alexander embarrassing. In Athens at the time, however, surely most people who came across him or heard of him would be more likely agree to Plato's estimation of Diogenes:

“On [Plato] being asked by somebody, ‘What sort of a man do you consider Diogenes to be?’ ‘A Socrates gone mad,’ said he.” (D.L. 6.54)

Our brief consideration of Crates (flourished 326 BC) brings us up to the time of Zeno and so concludes this historical introduction. Not much is known of Crates himself, although a charming and probably apocryphal story of how Zeno met him is found in Diogenes:

“[Zeno] was shipwrecked on a voyage from Phoenicia to Peiraeus with a cargo of purple. He went up into Athens and sat down in a bookseller’s shop, being then a man of thirty. As he went on reading the second book of Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, he was so pleased that he inquired where men like Socrates were to be found. Crates passed by in the nick of time, so the bookseller pointed to him and said ‘Follow yonder man’.” (D.L. 7.2-3)

It is perhaps worthwhile to note that Diogenes Laertius says that Zeno had “too much native modesty to assimilate Cynic shamelessness” (D.L. 7.3), and this sort of dispositional difference could have been among the reasons he had for parting company with the Cynics. But they were the first to teach him, it seems, and to this extent had a guiding hand in the beginnings of Stoicism. The final tale from the *Lives of the Philosophers* we will mention here alludes to the breakaway of Zeno from Cynicism, and it is worth noting that his next point of arrival was with Stilpo, who was senior in the Megarian school. The Megarians had a passionate interest in logic and reason, and we could see this as the beginning of Zeno’s broader philosophical education, as he stepped out from the narrow confines of the Cynic lifestyle and into the intellectual heart of Athens:

“Apollonius of Tyre tells us how, when Crates laid hold on him by the cloak to drag him from Stilpo, Zeno said, ‘The right way to seize a philosopher, Crates, is by the ears: persuade me then and drag me off by them; but, if you use violence, my body will be with you, but my mind with Stilpo.’” (D.L. 7.24)

PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

If we imagine a graph on which the x axis is a time line running from 550BC to 250BC and the y axis is some measure of ‘surviving writings of a philosophical character’, then the period 399 - 322 (covering Plato’s active period to the death of Aristotle) would show a text explosion. Indeed, what we have surviving from this period in the writings of these two thinkers, provides the historical foundation of the subject of philosophy. It remains possible that the true history of Stoicism (which we cannot at present be sure of) is one that places them on a different conceptual trajectory to that of Plato and Aristotle. This is not to say that the Stoics were not ‘influenced’ by their thinking - of course they were, since they developed their thinking in a culture which was influenced by them. But the early Stoics were probably deeply eclectic - I imagine them as ‘freethinkers’ who would consult anyone’s writing if they thought it might contain something of value, rather than as the rigid dogmatists they are so often painted as by their many hostile commentators.

We find echoes of both Aristotle and Plato in Stoic thoughts. For example, the word Zeno coined to describe ‘cognition’ was *katalêpsis*, the adjectival form of a word

found in Plato - *katalambanesthai*, also meaning to 'grasp'.¹⁰ And Plato's Forms are mentioned explicitly as what the Stoics did *not* intend to signify by their use of *ennoiai*, or common conceptions. A part of Stoic logic theory could be read as a clarification of Aristotle's Categories - clearing up the ontological confusion about 'secondary substance' by stating clearly that no general term was substantial, and that the 'corporeal' (Aristotle's primary substances) were the only really existing entities. Also, the Stoics had as their definition of 'the incorporeal', 'that which neither acts nor is acted upon'. The notion of 'acting on' is in Plato as an equivalent of reality, and the Stoics may have had such a passage in mind when framing their definition.¹¹ And they said that 'the sayable' (a unit of language compatible with truth-functional meaning, usually equivalent to a sentence) was incorporeal. We find a similar point of view in Aristotle:

"For what has become cold instead of hot, or dark instead of pale, or good instead of bad, has changed (has altered); similarly in other cases too it is by itself undergoing change that each thing is able to receive contraries. Statements and beliefs, on the other hand, themselves remain completely unchangeable in every way ; it is because the *actual thing* changes that the contrary comes to belong to them."¹²

Later parts of this thesis will involve historical comparisons between the Stoics and Plato and Aristotle. Whilst this is often necessary, it is hard to come to a firm conclusion about the actual *influences* which affected the Stoics. As Sandbach writes:

¹⁰ Also found in the sense of "seize, lay hold of...*tou kata nôta labôn* [Homer's *Odyssey* 9.433], cf. Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 624, etc." (Liddell, Scott, Jones, p.897)

¹¹ This was first pointed out to me by Dr. Fitzpatrick at Durham University. (Also cf. Brunschwig (1992), p. 121-126)

¹² *Categories* 4: 4a, 30-36. (Ackrill, *A New Aristotle Reader*, p.11).

“No one will doubt that Stoicism was formed as an amalgam of original thought and of material which its founders learned from earlier and contemporary philosophers. Unfortunately any attempt to separate these factors is condemned to a great measure of uncertainty because we are so inadequately informed about what was available to the early Stoics.”(Sandbach 1985, p.55)¹³

CONCLUSION

We have seen examples of the way in which the philosophical character of the Greek language developed in writing from the time of Thales, c. 600 BC up to the point at which Zeno arrived, aged about thirty, in Athens. Around him swirled a rich culture of argumentation, and available to him were lectures, public debates and meetings of the many schools which had a visible presence in Athenian life. Whilst we will go on to credit the Stoics with some innovation, and even if the thought is accepted that they developed outside an allegiance to the systems of Plato and Aristotle, this is not to say that their ideas are without precedent. Whilst I will argue that for various reasons they generated a new amalgam in their philosophy, their thought is clearly located in the philosophical traditions of the Greeks, from which it sprang and to which it so richly contributed.

¹³ Barnes takes a different view in Barnes and Griffin (1989).

CHAPTER TWO: THE CONTEXT OF KNOWLEDGE

INTRODUCTION

The broad aim of this thesis is to supply some kind of answer to the question of how to characterise Stoic epistemology. For the Stoics, the theory of knowledge straddles two of the three divisions of philosophy – Logic and Physics. It will provide some useful context for the argument we will go on to develop if we consider now how Logic and Physics were understood by the Stoics, and what role it had in their philosophy.

To ask “What should we understand when we think of Stoic logic?” is in a sense, to have begged two motivating questions: What is Stoicism? What is logic? The priority of these questions is significant, since if we approach ancient sources with pre-conceived ideas about logic we shall find only a patchy reflection of these ideas and our conclusion will only be something like ‘Stoic logic is more or less like this other idea of logic’. And any broader reflections about Stoicism will be constricted by this conclusion. This method rests on the argument: ‘We do not know about Stoicism in detail, but we do know about logic in detail therefore we can use our knowledge of logic to link up the blocks of Stoic theory which survive.’

In approaching a fragmentary record, this method has its merits. Benson Mates’ use of the assumption that the logic of the Stoics was conceived along similar

theoretical lines to the logic of Frege and Carnap yielded a rich and powerful analysis which shed new light on parts of the evidence, especially those from Sextus Empiricus. His reconstruction focuses specifically on the notions of sense and reference, and of intension and extension for the properties of assertions. But as he himself noted, no further development of this idea is possible without a consideration of the ontological commitments of the Stoics, a consideration he did not pursue. This insight is valuable, and I think Mates' mention of ontology is significant, since in an important sense the Stoics went where modern logical theories fear to tread. The fragments which record Stoic definitions concerning logic do reveal a significant historical advance (from the categorical syllogistic to the propositional) but they cannot be considered in isolation as if the Stoics were 'logicians' in the modern sense. In this modern sense (say, such thinkers as Frege and Wittgenstein) logic has been the 'hard core' of philosophy while other positions, such as those regarding ontology or epistemology, have been attempted by a 'building out' from a logical point of view. A contemporary instance of this is the debate in ethics where 'particularism' (influenced by Wittgensteinian concerns) has replaced 'principle ethics' as the dominant point of view (cf. Reader 1997). There is perhaps an interesting difference we can draw between Aristotle and the Stoics on the role of logic in philosophy. Ackrill writes thus of Aristotle's

Organon:

"The treatises in question are logical (in a broad sense of the word), and they were called the *Organon* - the tool or instrument - because logic was thought to be, not one of the substantial parts of philosophy, like metaphysics or natural philosophy or ethics, but rather a method or discipline useful as a tool in all enquiries, whatever their subject-matter." (Ackrill 1981, p.79)

On the contrary, the Stoics believed precisely that logic was one of the 'substantial parts of philosophy':

"They [the Stoics] say that philosophical discourse has three parts, one of these being physical, another ethical, and another logical. This division was first made by Zeno of Citium in his book *On Discourse*, and also by Chrysippus... They compare philosophy to a living being, likening logic to bones and sinews, ethics to the fleshier parts, and physics to the soul. They make a further comparison to an egg: logic is the outside, ethics what comes next, and physics the innermost parts; or to a fertile field: the surrounding wall corresponds to logic, its fruit to ethics, and its land or trees to physics... On the statements of some of them, no part is given preference over another but they are mixed together; and they [these Stoics] used to transmit them in mixed form. But others assign the first place to logic, the second to physics and the third to ethics; these include Zeno in his book *On Discourse*, Chrysippus, Archedemus and Eudromus... Cleanthes says there are six parts: dialectic, rhetoric, ethics, politics, physics, theology. But others, including Zeno of Tarsus, say these are not parts of [philosophical] discourse but of philosophy itself." (D.L. 7.39-41, LS 26B)

Hinted at here is one of the basic difficulties in trying to give a univocal account of Stoicism - which is that on some quite important things they didn't agree amongst themselves! Of course we need to remember that Diogenes Laertius (here quoted) is compiling a history of personalities long after the event - his *Lives of the Philosophers* (of which Book 7 will be one of our main sources) was probably written in early 3AD, whereas Zeno arrived in Athens c.310 BC. For our purposes in this discussion, the main positions of interest are those of Zeno and Chrysippus, whose contributions to the development of Stoicism were likely to have been most coherent

and systematic around logic and physics. Cleanthes, who goes after Zeno and before Chrysippus, was renowned more for his theological inspiration than the rigour of his proofs. And in the latter part of the excerpt above, Zeno and Chrysippus agree: Logic first, Physics next, Ethics third.

Is there a real difference here, between the attitude of Aristotle and the Stoics, concerning the role of logic in philosophy? I believe so, and that it can be accounted for in the following way. For Aristotle, who perhaps never quite shed his Platonic skin, the philosopher was one who was in essence different to the world, who rationalises over facts in the world, using discoverable formal processes. For the Stoics, the philosopher is one whose rationality is an extension of the rationality of the world: one who is essentially identical with the world (both are instantiations of the divine *logos* and manifestations of the organising principle imbued in matter), and thus the formal processes of philosophical thought directly reflect the way the world is organised. Doing logic, for the Stoics, is as much an investigation of the world (albeit a different aspect of it) as empirical enquiry, and any divorce between the logical and the empirical on this outlook seems strained and artificial.

We can perhaps make some suggestion about the relative role of logic and physics - at least in terms of their position in the Stoic system relative to ethics. We know it was the school of the Cynics which Zeno, founder of Stoicism, first attached himself to when he turned to philosophy in Athens. There is a good enough record of his association with Crates the Cynic for us to be confident in this fact. Now the Cynic motto was 'Ethics alone', yet the fact the Zeno so conspicuously went beyond this conceptual boundary is evidence of how unsatisfactory it was for him. This is not to say that ethics ever lost its overarching priority, but at least a couple of reasons could be imagined for why Zeno thought the Cynic programme was too narrow:

1) He may have concluded that an adequate account of ethics required an adequate account of phenomena and the modes of expression. This would keep ethics as the 'end' of philosophy and require the development of physical and ethical doctrines as 'means'. Thus the question 'How should I live right?' is here conceived as intertwined with the questions 'What are the circumstances of my actions?' and 'Assuming I can attain virtue, how can it be taught?'

2) He may not have shared the Cynic disgust for civilisation and all that goes with it. Without this disgust, it would have been hard to maintain aloofness from the debates of the day (a hallmark of the Cynic) and difficult to dismiss the broader intellectual curriculum available in Athens.

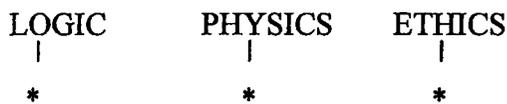
In breaking away from the Cynics who had nurtured his philosophical *daemon*, we can imagine Zeno adopting the following process of inquiry which leads to the three-way division:

ETHICS:	'Ethics alone.'	Cynic doctrine.
	'To be virtuous is to live in accordance with nature'.	Standard eudaimonistic motto (which Zeno adopted)
PHYSICS:	What, then, is nature?	
LOGIC:	What is it to ask this question?	

And the fact that in their respective treatises 'On Discourse', Zeno and Chrysippus inverted this order is a testimony to the importance they attached to the 'teachability' of their doctrine. If we are right in imagining this outline for the transformation of Zeno from Cynic to Stoic, he could still have coherently thought that 'Even though my own journey through philosophy has begun in ethics and led to

physics and logic, in the teaching of the results of this journey, logic must come first so that the doctrines, once established, cannot be overturned'.

Since the physical and logical divisions are Zeno's additions to the narrower (of course a Cynic would say 'purer') notion of philosophy he was initially taught, we can suggest that together they represent a pairing within the division. So instead of thinking of three equi-distant topic heads:



We should instead think of the more 'grouped':



In an important sense, Stoicism did not provide rules for life. The stoics perhaps thought that the sage does not hold *a priori* moral principles which can be used as guides for action. Rather, what is attained with the attainment of wisdom is a way of being in the world from which appropriate action flows. It is not correctness but goodness which the Stoics advocate. Confusion and error disrupt the good flow of life because they disguise the rationality of what is given. The Stoic studies logic and physics in order to avoid (or at least minimise) confusion and error. But even if he is successful in this avoidance, virtue is not guaranteed. A good grasp of logic and a clear view of nature are necessary but not sufficient conditions for virtue.¹

So much for one way of seeing the relationship between logic and physics on the one hand, and ethics on the other. What of the relationship between logic and physics? Not enough of the right kind of evidence survives for a satisfactory answer to

¹ For a different point of view about these relationships, see White (1984)

this question to be made good. The following discussion attempts to outline the portion of Stoic physics we know about which describes notions relevant to our account of Stoic logic. The reason for having to do this is that some notions in Stoic philosophy (such as the 'incorporeal' nature of the sayable, the role of the categories of substance and quality, the nature of 'what is referred to' in ostensive definition) have the effect of causing a 'short-circuit' in the modern way of thinking. They do this by uncomfortably straddling our modern divisions between logic, ontology and metaphysics. In a sense what we are doing is attempting to describe as much of the Stoic system as the evidence allows, in order that it can seem coherent across these topic headings.

HELLENISTIC SCIENCE

"Too much must not be made of Hellenistic science, exciting as it is, since of the two sciences which today bulk so large, physics and chemistry, chemistry (except for alchemy) never got started and physics died with Strato... The Greek got no further than he did because he had no scientific instruments, and, except in surgery, rarely experimented; he had, perhaps for his happiness, no gift for instruments and machines, and probably went about as far as was possible without the telescope, the microscope, and the test-tube... for the bent of the Greek mind was to try to think the thing out by itself; philosophy rather than science was the goddess to be served, and of the sciences mathematics, for this reason, far surpassed the others." (Tarn and Griffith 1952, p.308)

These remarks should serve as a translatory caution. We have seen already the three divisions of philosophy the Stoics recommended as 'Logic, Physics, and Ethics',

but we should be careful about the meaning of Physics. It may seem too obvious to mention that what the Hellenistic thinkers had in mind could not have been anything like what a modern physics researcher thinks he is doing, but the way in which it is different is not so immediately clear.

Most importantly, as Tarn says, the Greek tendency was to 'think the thing out by itself'. This often looks to the modern eye as if the ancient accounts are just more or less scholastic exercises, generating a wealth of opinions from arbitrarily chosen assumptions - Aristotle's stated aim, for example, was to 'set out the opinion'.

Without any experimental basis, why should a philosopher in Hellenistic times choose atomism over the continuum, or vice versa? Concerning Stoicism, there is insufficient evidence to gain a detailed conclusion about many of their motivations. But there is something to say in defence of the overall project. Whilst they did not have an experimental regime for verification, this is not to say that they carried on in a conceptual vacuum. What they had in place of experiment was observation, and this was what led to theorising and what theories were referred back to. We can see the beginnings of this approach in Aristotle, where his various *logoi* are attempts to apply logical apparatus to the 'facts of the matter'. The crucial difference between ancient and modern science is what counts as a fact of the matter. In the ancient case, there was no clear boundary of the acceptable, and whatever could be taken to be true was available for comment. There is a sense in which modern science and ancient science of the type we are discussing are similar, and this is that they both seek to tie into a coherent whole observations and theory.

'Whatever was lying around' included poetry (we have already seen Zeno adapting Hesiod), geometry (Chrysippus commented on a problem associated with the bisection of a cone in a fragment we will shortly discuss relevant to the Stoics' notion

of the continuum²), myth (the appearance of Electra to Orestes in his madness is mentioned in one of Sextus' accounts of Stoic impression- theory³), etymology (the slightly embarrassing conclusion of Chrysippus that the word 'ego' was such because in saying the word the chin points to the heart twice⁴), and anatomy (a type of argument structure is instantiated thus: 'If sweat flows through the surface, there are ducts discoverable by thought. But the first, therefore the second'⁵).

A good example of the way direct observation was used to support a doctrine is given by Stobaeus:

"That the qualities of blended constituents persist in such blendings is quite evident from the fact that they are frequently separated from one another artificially. If one dips an oiled sponge into the wine which has been blended with water, it will separate the water from the wine since the water runs up into the sponge." (Stobaeus 1.144, 5-11. LS 48D)

Of course, the problem was that without an experimental process (most specifically, the modern idea of a control experiment in which as many factors as possible can be held constant) and in the absence of the relatively rigorous theoretical procedures which go to make 'good science' today, there was a lot of latitude for theorists of the fourth and third centuries BC to include only what was favourable to their case, and to leave out the inconvenient. Having said this, perhaps every age (including our own) falls foul of this temptation in their pursuit of the defensible.

² Plutarch, *Comm. not.*, 1079E. LS 50, C 5.

³ S.E., M, 7.245-6. LS 39, G 9.

⁴ Galen, *Plac.* 2.2.9. LS 34 J, 2.

⁵ S.E., *PH* 2.141. LS 36, B 10.

If Stoic *phusike* is not quite 'physics' as we know it, nor like any contemporary theoretical science, how do we place it in our argument towards understanding Stoicism as a system? There are two things to contend with here. First, it is not clear precisely what role the Stoics envisaged for their division of philosophy. Was it a radical division, in which the objects of enquiry were different for each of Logic, Physics and Ethics, and proofs were thought not to be transferable? Or it was merely a teaching device, to divide the range of doctrines into manageable disciplines. Perhaps it was some mixture of these two. Secondly, it is not immediately obvious how we can manage an accommodation between modern ways of talking and the evidence for what the ancients thought. The intersection between Stoic logic and physics creates problems for us, as we tend to think in terms of the intersection between ontology and logic. To this extent, Stoic physics and modern ontology can be seen as similar in the role they play in the generation of a defensible philosophical attitude towards phenomena. Another example is the wide ranging scope the Stoics gave to their logical division; it covered logic as we think of it but also the areas we call epistemology and the philosophy of language. The twin threats to any account of Stoic *phusike*, then, are an uncertainty about how it is to be 'slotted in' to the system, and a certain inevitable mismatch between modern and ancient ways of describing the philosophical project.

But before we consider the Stoic contribution to the debates of their day, some background will be useful from their leading disputant, Epicurus.

*EPICUREAN ATOMISM AND ARGUMENTS AGAINST INFINITE**DIVISIBILITY*

In physics, the Epicureans disagreed with the Stoics on just about the most fundamental level imaginable, but it is clear they are talking about the same thing. It will be worth our while briefly explaining the position of Epicurus on physics, because it is easier to grasp than the Stoic position (less strange to our modern point of view) and provides a historical as well as a conceptual frame for our discussion of the Stoics.

“If, in some cataclysm, all of scientific knowledge were to be destroyed, and only one sentence passed on to the next generations of creatures, what statement would contain the most information in the fewest words? I believe it is the *atomic hypothesis* (or the *atomic fact*, or whatever you wish to call it) that *all things are made of atoms - little particles that move around in perpetual motion, attracting each other when they are a little distance apart, but repelling upon being squeezed into one another.*” (Feynmann 1963, 1-2)

Epicurus would smile at a true disciple if he read those words, which come from one of the foremost communicators of modern physics, Richard Feynmann. In fact, we can paste some Epicurean writing together which captures the sense of the above paragraph perfectly:

“The primary entities, then, must be atomic kinds of bodies⁶...The atoms move continuously forever⁷... and their own solidity causes them as a result of their knocking together to vibrate

⁶ Epicurus *Ep. Hdt.*, 57. LS 9, A2.

⁷ *op.cit.*, 43. LS 11, A1.

back, to whatever distance their interlinking allows them to recoil from the knock.”⁸

We could split hairs over the difference between Feynmann’s account of attraction and repulsion, against the more primitive Epicurean ‘knocking together’, but the accounts stand together with remarkable ease.⁹ The word atom means uncuttable, and Epicurus believed that observable phenomena at the macroscopic level - he mentions particularly the processes of growth and diminution, exchange of energy (e.g. when wood is burnt), the various properties we find in things (particularly densities) and motion - are best explained by the assumption of microscopic particles in constant motion, of various sizes, grouped together in interlinking matrices to form the objects of our senses. Epicurean atomism is a more sophisticated descendant of a theory which had been first promulgated in the fifth century BC by Leucippus and Democritus as a response to the paradoxes of Zeno of Elea. To this atomism is opposed the Stoics’ notion of continuity, which we shall be discussing shortly. The hostility of Epicurus to continuity is evident in the following passage from the *Letter to Herodotus*:

“Furthermore, we must not consider that the finite body contains an infinite number of bits, nor bits with no [lower] limit to size. Therefore not only must we deny *cutting* into smaller and smaller parts to infinity, so that we do not make everything weak and be compelled by our conceptions of complex entities to grind away existing things and waste them away to non-existence, but also we must not consider that in finite bodies there is *traversal* to infinity, not even through smaller and smaller parts. For, first, it is impossible to conceive how [there could be traversal], once someone says that something contains

⁸ op. cit. 44. LS 11, A3.

⁹ Although it is worth stating that what Feynmann means by atomism has a quantitative and experimental setting that Epicurus lacked.

an infinite number of bits or bits with no [lower] limit to size. Second, how could this magnitude still be finite? For obviously these infinitely many bits are themselves of some size, and however small they may be the magnitude consisting of them would also be infinite. And third, since the finite body has an extremity which is distinguishable, even if not imaginable as existing *per se*, one must inevitably think of what is in sequence to it as being of the same kind, and by thus proceeding forward in sequence it must be possible, to that extent, to reach infinity in thought.”¹⁰ (op.cit. 56-57. LS 9A, 1-6)

We can understand the concept of cutting quite easily: “What would we discover *if we had the technology to take stuff apart to discover its minimal constituents?*”. Epicurus was in no doubt that we would find his atoms. From this point of view, it is absurd for him to allow cutting to infinity. The concept of traversal is not so easy to see. The word translated as ‘traversal’ here, *metabasis*, means ‘moving over, shifting’. Here, Epicurus seems to be suggesting that it is incoherent to think, even theoretically or conceptually, that a body can *contain* an infinite number of parts, whether or not they are physically separable. To gain a purchase on this notion of traversal, it is perhaps helpful for us to imagine a ‘magic eye’ which could plunge into any object and work its way down through orders of magnitude. One of the questions which divided Hellenistic physics was whether the eye would ever come up against a smallest part, or whether it would carry on for ever. Epicurus gives three arguments against an infinite traversal.

Firstly, he says it is ‘impossible to conceive’ how such a traversal could take place. The logic of Epicurean atomism dictates that there is a minimal part, and that each atom is comprised of a finite number of minimal parts, and that each object is

comprised of a finite number of atoms. In effect, these are the 'zones of traversal' for an Epicurean, and the 'magic eye' would perceive first the finite body, then the atoms, then the limits of the atoms, which are the minimal parts. This scheme explains why infinite divisibility cannot be conceptualised by an Epicurean, since both the minima and the atoms have no place as destinations of traversal. The question being posed in this first objection is to do with the nature of the divisibility offered by the defender of continuity: in what sense can we move to a *smaller* level of magnitude, given that there are an infinite number of parts?

Secondly, Epicurus asks how we can conceive of bodies as being finite, if they contain an infinite number of parts, and he makes the point that if these infinitely many bits are of some size, then the total of them added together must be infinitely large. This excludes the possibility of some kind of 'indivisible infinitesimals', such as those suggested in relation to the Stoic continuum by Nicholas White (1982), but can be seen as a reasonable position in the context of the Epicurean notion of atoms of definite finite size which go together in certain amounts and configurations to make up the perceptible world.

Thirdly there is what we might call the 'Russian Doll' argument. Finite bodies have extremities, at least conceptually. Suppose we imagined the same shape, but a single atom taken off from each point, we would have a new extremity. Something like this is what I take Epicurus to mean when he talks of 'what is in sequence' to each extremity. The Epicurean would say that each extremity conceived of in this way would retain the shape of the body up to a point, and then collapse to a new shape until only an atom remained. But according to the continuum theorist, we should by this conceptual method, reach 'infinity in thought'. Again, the question is: how can this be?

Epicurus' rejection of infinite divisibility is the logical extension of his atomism, and his arguments, as Long and Sedley say, are reminiscent of Zeno of Elea:

“The Zenonian nature of the arguments [for the existence of minimal parts] is plain. If a magnitude contained an infinite number of parts, first traversal would become impossible, and second, the magnitude would be infinitely large... Third, by thinking your way along the magnitude you would, impossibly, ‘reach infinity in thought’ - complete an infinite series of mental operations.” (LS commentary. Vol. 1, p.42)

THE FOUR ELEMENT THEORY: ARISTOTLE AND THE STOICS

“Physics is practised whenever we investigate the world and its contents” according to a Stoic definition recorded by Aetius (1, Preface 2. LS 26A), a definition both standard and uncontroversial. The Stoic approach to this investigation resulted in a radically different point of view from Epicurean atomism. The Epicureans had no particular need of the traditional Greek division of the elements into fire, air, earth and water, but Aristotle had developed an analysis of this elemental scheme. The Stoic scheme is similar in certain structural respects. Both have places in their account for principles and elements, for example, but offer different stories for each.

Firstly, Aristotle's account of the ‘principles of the universe’:

“...we must say, concerning all generation alike, how many principles there are of it and what they are... We shall in this way be able more easily to study particular cases, namely, when we have first obtained a grasp of the things which are universal. The principles are equal in number and identical in kind to those which hold in the case of the eternal and primary beings: one of them is by way of matter, and one by way of form. And the third principle must also exist, for the

other two are not adequate for making things come to be any more than in the case of the primary beings.” (Aristotle, *De Gen. et Cor.* 335a, 25-31)

The first two principles here - the one pertaining to matter, the other to form, are readily understandable, but the third remains mysterious. Aristotle says a little later that the third principle is one which “every philosopher dreams of but none actually mentions.” And he goes on to criticise two views on what it may be - the one attributed to Socrates that “the nature of the forms is an adequate cause for coming to be”, and the other that “it was the matter which generated things on account of movement”. The only positive account Aristotle offers which might fit the bill of this third principle makes the cause of generation and corruption the sun’s movement ‘slantwise’¹¹. Notwithstanding the mysterious third principle, there is a clear similarity between Aristotle and the Stoics on the first two, which is evident from the following excerpt from Diogenes Laertius:

“They [the Stoics] think that there are two principles of the universe, that which acts and that which is acted upon. That which is acted upon is unqualified substance, i.e. matter; that which acts is the reason [*logos*] in it, i.e. god. For this, since it is everlasting, constructs every single thing throughout all matter...” (D.L. 7.134 LS 44 B1-2)

There is no surviving record of a Stoic belief in a third principle. The difference between the Aristotelian ‘form and matter’ and the Stoic ‘that which acts’ and ‘that which is acted upon’ is interesting for us here. The best way to describe this difference is in the different role the concepts have in the broader systems. For

¹¹ *De Gen. et Cor.* 336 a32 with ‘supporting’ evidence from sense-perception at 336 b17.

Aristotle, the distinction between form and matter is what enables him to discriminate between the intelligible and the sensible properties of bodies, and paring form from matter is the first conceptual step required to develop the doctrine of essences. We can see in this how the Platonic notion of Form has been transformed to meet Aristotle's more realistic ends. The residual part of the full-blown Platonic idea can perhaps be seen above where Aristotle talks of 'the eternal and primary bodies'. For the Stoics, on the other hand, these principles are intended to convey their deep belief in the immanence of the organising principle of the universe - the 'through and through' mixture with matter which goes to make up body. In a sense, Aristotle and the Stoics are describing the same feature of the world, but doing it in a radically different way. The excerpt from Diogenes above carries on:

"They [the Stoics] say there is a difference between principles and elements: the former are ungenerated and indestructible, whereas the elements pass away at the conflagration. The principles are also bodies and without form, but the elements are endowed with form."
(D.L. 7.134, LS 44 B3)

One key difference between the Stoic scheme and the Aristotelian is the extreme materialism of the Stoic world-view. Even the principles underlying the elements in the universe are corporeal, even though it has to be said of them that they are 'without form'. The description of these things as bodies is significant, since it forestalls any notion of an incorporeal, self-creating entity which sustains the world. The eternity of god was maintained by their belief in a periodic conflagration (see below), committing the stuff of the universe to a vast cycle of resolution and dissolution. The Stoic commitment to a materialist outlook, their refusal to picture human rationality as striving to conceive of an immaterial creator (in the religious

sense) or an immaterial perfection (in the Platonic sense), has proved historically disastrous. With the benefit of hindsight, we can understand how hard it was for a doctrine such as this to be propagated and survive through the Platonic and Aristotelian revivals which between them informed the philosophical and theological development of the Christian West. This gives us one of the factors which has led to the paucity of evidence which survives of Stoicism today.¹²

A side issue, which it is relevant to mention here, is that the Stoic belief in the corporeality of god also meant that they rejected the incorporeality of the soul. This, as well as providing another demonstration of their rigour, also begs the question of how different philosophy might be today if such a materialism had found better champions in the past two millennia. Some accounts of this debate about the soul have a familiar ring to us, in an era during which the 'interactionist problem' for mind/body dualists is once again to the fore, usually framed for us by a consideration of Descartes. From Cicero we read:

“[Speaker: the Antiochean Varro] Zeno also differed from the same philosophers [Platonists and Peripatetics] in thinking that it was totally impossible that something incorporeal (to which genus Xenocrates and his predecessors too had said the mind belonged) should be the agent of anything, and that only a body was capable of acting or being acted upon.” (Cicero *Acad.* 1.39, LS 45A)

On the question of the generation of the basic stuff of matter, the Stoics say that there are above all the twin principles which between them generate the elements. Aristotle, after laying out a number of logically unsatisfactory possibilities, concludes

¹² Another reason which has been given for why Stoicism was less well represented as time went on is stylistic: the Stoics were less concerned with persuasion and more concerned with precision. But what the Stoics called precision, their critics often called pedantry. Cf. Atherton (1988)

with the metaphysically unsatisfying one that “the only remaining possibility is that they [the elements] are generated from one another.” (Aristotle *On the Heavens*, iii, 6, 30)

The differences between the Stoics and Aristotle extend beyond the ‘pre-elemental’ parts of their theorising, and into how they viewed the elements themselves. It is important for us not to trivialise as naive or over-simplistic the four-element theory, even though it sounds primitive to modern ears. Here is an attempt to ‘think the thing out by itself’ which has considerable power to yield a coherent analysis, as well as some intuitive appeal.

Aristotle’s exposition comes from *De Generatione et Corruptione*, 330a:

“Since the elements are four in number, and of the four the pairings are six, but it is not in the nature of the contraries to be paired with one another (it is impossible for one and the same thing to be both hot and cold, or, again, wet and dry), obviously the pairings of the elements will be four in number: hot and dry, and wet and hot; and, again, cold and dry, and cold and wet. And they are attached correspondingly to the apparently simple bodies, fire, air, water and earth. For fire is hot and dry, air hot and wet (for air is something like steam), water cold and wet, and earth cold and dry. So it is in a rational way that the differentiae are allotted to the primary bodies, and the number of them corresponds.”

And about the question of how the four elements co-exist, Aristotle concludes:

“It is in fact clear that all [the simple bodies] are by nature able to change into each other. For generation is to contraries and from contraries, and the elements all have contrariety with each other on account of their differentiae being contraries...” (*De Generatione et Corruptione*, 331a, 13-16)

What is evident from this is the conceptual neatness of Aristotle's elemental scheme. One pair of contraries yields four possible combinations, the names of which provide the elements. The Stoics are similarly committed to the four-element theory:

“Chrysippus has the following views on the elements formed out of substance, following Zeno the leader of the school. He says that there are four elements fire, air, water and earth, out of which everything is composed -animals, plants, the whole world and its contents - and that they are dissolved into these.” (Stobaeus 1,130 1-13, LS 47A)

The first thing to note is a difference in terminology. Chrysippus calls fire, air, earth and water elements, whereas Aristotle uses the word for hot and cold, dry and moist. Whilst the Stoics use these primary characteristics they do not derive their elements in terms of the possible combinations of these. Instead, they have a story about the structure of the universe and the formation of the world which provides the basis for their speculation. This has already been alluded to by Diogenes above, when he wrote, “the elements pass away at the conflagration” - an idea inimical to Aristotle.

“At certain fated times the entire world is subject to conflagration and then is reconstituted afresh. But the primary fire is as it were a sperm which possesses the principles [*logoi*] of all things and the causes of past present and future events.” (Eusebius, *Pr. ev.* 15.14.2, LS 46G)

It is an historical curiosity that the Stoic fragments have been the object of so much interest during this recent period in which it is almost a matter of scientific consensus that the present world-order can be traced back to a primordial fireball and that the present world-order is temporary. It was just a few decades ago, after all, that the ‘Big Bang’ theory became a focus of scientific consensus, winning out over the

Steady State theory. Credit for this goes to the Catholic priest Georges Lemaitre, who convinced both Einstein and Hubble over an epoch-making lunch in 1931. In broad (and merely decorative) terms we could characterise Aristotle as a Steady State theorist, and the Stoics as more in the Big Bang school. Of course, the ancient and modern accounts share little beyond the sentences which express their basic ideas in the simplest terms. The Stoic doctrine was based on fairly straightforward reasoning:

“The argument of Zeno of Citium, who states that the ‘all’ will be subject to conflagration: ‘Everything which burns and has something to burn will burn it completely; now the sun is a fire and will it not burn what it has?’ From this he concluded, as he supposes, that the ‘all’ will be subject to conflagration.” (Alexander Lycopolis 19,2-4, LS 46 I)

“They [the Stoics] also suppose that the world is perishable, since it is generated on the same principle as perceptible objects, and anything whose parts are perishable is perishable as a whole; but the parts of the world are perishable, since they change into one another; therefore the world is perishable.” (D.L. 7.141, LS 46 J)

To return to the issue of the elements, at the hottest moment of the conflagration there is only one element - divine fire, and then:

“The world is created when the substance is turned from fire through air into moisture; then the thicker parts of the moisture condense and end up as earth, but the finer parts are thoroughly rarefied, and when they have been thinned still further, they produce fire. Thereafter by mixture plants and animals and the other natural kinds are produced out of these.” (D.L. 7.142, LS 46 C.)

So one reason that fire was known to the Stoics as the primary element was because at the peak of the conflagration it is the only one existing. In creating this

hierarchy of elements the Stoics were able to locate something in the world which they could also claim to be similar to that which generate the world, namely fire. This chain of reasoning culminates in the identification of the principle of 'that which acts' with a kind of fire:

"For there are two kinds of fire: one is undesigning and converts fuel into itself; the other is designing, causing growth and preservation, as is the case in plants and animals where it is physique and soul respectively." (Stobaeus 1.213, 17-21, LS 46 D2-3)

This mention of plants and animals is common in the fragments about the designing fire and is an example of a common feature of the Stoic approach to physical questions, which was to generalise to the universe from observations of living things. It is from this approach that we ought to understand their talk of the designing fire:

"It is a fact that all things which undergo nurture and growth contain within themselves a power of heat without which they could not be nurtured and grow. For everything which is hot and fiery is roused and activated by its own movement; but a thing which is nourished and grows has a definite and regular movement; as long as this remains in us, so long sensation and life remain, but when the heat has been chilled and extinguished, we ourselves die and are extinguished." (Cicero, *ND* 2.23, LS 47 C1)

So there was a simple algorithm operating in the Stoic system that whatever was hot was alive, and this went to its logical conclusion:

"He [Chrysippus] says that when conflagration has occurred through and through, the world is through and through alive and animal, but as it goes out again and condenses, it turns into water and earth and bodily nature." (Plutarch *St. rep.* 1053B, LS 46 F1)

And the intelligence of the designing fire was deduced from the intelligence of its products:

“From this it must be understood that the element heat has within itself a vital power which pervades the whole world... All parts of the world are supported and maintained by heat... It follows from this that, since all parts of the world are maintained by heat, the world itself too has been preserved over so long a time by a comparable and like element... There is therefore an element which sustains the whole world and protects it, and it certainly does not lack sensation and reason... Now we see that there are sensation and reason in the parts of the world (for there is nothing in all the world which is not a part of the whole world). Therefore they must be in that part which contains the world’s commanding-faculty.” (Cicero, *ND* 2.23-5, 28-30, LS 47C, various parts)

So we can see the development of the four element theory from Aristotle’s logical concept to the Stoics biological one, with fire as the dominant element in a universe filled with a divine and rational life. By also associating fire with heat, heat with animals, and animals with reason, they were able to put forward a systematic, physical theology. When this was combined with the doctrine of the conflagration it tells a complete story about the order of the world and man’s place in it without resorting to myth, or immaterialism of any kind.

A final summarising excerpt to mention regarding this elemental scheme is Chrysippus’ comment about the meaning of the word:

“Element, then, according to Chrysippus has three meanings. First, it means fire, because out of it the remaining elements are composed by alteration and into it they get their resolution. Secondly, it means the four elements, fire, air, water, earth, since all other things are composed by means of a particular one of these or all of these - all

four in the case of animals and all terrestrial compounds, two in the case of the moon, which is composed by means of fire and air, and just one, in the case of the sun, which is composed by means of fire; for the sun is pure fire. On the third account, element is said to be that which is primarily so composed that it causes generation from itself methodically up to a terminus and from that receives resolution into itself by the like method." (Stobaeus 1.130, LS 47 A6-9)

So in terms of what bodies consist of, the Stoics would say 'a combination': of organising principle, and matter. Chrysippus above seems to be alluding to three separate levels of explanation. On the first level, we are talking about 'that which is' in its most minimal expression - the divine fire which creates. On the second level, we are talking about the chosen scheme to represent the various phenomena which appear to us through the senses. On the third level, perhaps, we are talking about the same thing again, but now in terms of it as an organising principle - something we comprehend of, but do not perceive in, all the objects of experience.

The ground we have covered so far hardly explains why Stoicism gained such intellectual ground or why it became such a popular creed. I believe the reason for this was their ideas about the continuum, which we shall now go on to discuss.

PNEUMA, TONOS AND THE DYNAMIC CONTINUUM

Pneuma is probably the single most important concept in Stoic physics. It is the name they give to a special mixture of air and fire which acts as the binding agent for all matter, is responsible for the cohesion of all bodies and indeed that of the universe itself:

“The chief proponents of the sustaining power, such as the Stoics, make what sustains one thing, and what is sustained something different: the breathy substance (*pneuma*) is what sustains, and the material substance what is sustained. And so they say that air and fire sustain, and earth and water are sustained.” (Galen, *Plen.* 7.525, 9-14, LS 47F)

The main aspect of the *pneuma* which deserve our attention is its incessant motion. That everything moves all the time is accepted as fact by many Greek philosophers. It is given its most famous early exposition in Heraclitus and emerges in Epicurus in the eternal motion of the atoms. What is exciting about the Stoic notion is the nature of the movement, which is described in two ways - expanding and contracting, or moving simultaneously in opposite directions. The first account comes from Galen:

“Since they [the Stoics] would explain the reciprocal change of even the elements themselves by certain expansions and contractions, it was reasonable for them to make the hot and cold active principles.” (Galen, *Nat. Fac.* 106, 13-17, LS 47E)

This fragment reveals an innovative idea for at least three reasons. Firstly, the idea of a force which constantly expands and contracts and by this motion supports generation, seems to be novel. Secondly, the idea of the ‘cold’ being an active principle is unusual, since it is usually contrasted with fire and made passive. Thirdly, there is here the idea of ‘reciprocal change’ - change which does not take place within any body (much less as a result of the contraries applied to any body) but change by which all the entities involved in the change are in some way transformed. There is a suggestion here that nothing can change something else without itself being affected. The other way in which *pneuma* moves is described with some distaste by Alexander:

“What is the simultaneous movement of breath in opposite directions, by which it sustains everything in which it is present, since, in their own words, it is a breath which moves simultaneously out of itself and into itself? And by what form of movement does it take place?” (Alexander *On mixture* 224, 14-17, 23-6, LS 47I)

These questions provide the framework for our subsequent discussion. Further scepticism is voiced by the neo-Platonist Nemesius:

“For it has been proved that every body needs something to sustain it, which is an endless regress until we reach something incorporeal. If they should say, as the Stoics do, that there exists in bodies a kind of tensile movement which moves simultaneously inwards and outwards, the outward movement producing quantities and qualities and the inward one unity and substance, we must ask them (since every movement issues from some power), what this power is and in what substance it consists.” (Nemesius 70,6 - 71,4, LS 47 J)

The last two questions of Nemesius can be answered readily enough from the Stoic point of view. The power which causes *pneuma*-like motion is the active principle of the universe, and it consists in the substance arrived at when air and designing fire are in mixture. As for the description of the motion as being ‘simultaneously inwards and outwards’, this just sounds absurd.

But there is an explanation of the Stoic idea which satisfies this description, and explains the ‘expansion and contraction’ idea Galen records. Before we can make it clear, we need to briefly mention the Stoic attitude to the void, which can be usefully characterised by contrasting it with the Epicurean conception. Epicurus wrote:

“Moreover, the totality of things is bodies and void. That bodies exist is universally witnessed by sensation itself, in accordance

with which it is necessary to judge by reason that which is non-evident, as I said above; and if place, which we call 'void', 'room', and 'intangible substance', did not exist, bodies would not have anywhere to be or to move through in the way they are observed to move."

(Epicurus *Ep. Hdt.* 39-40, LS 5A)

This entirely intuitive conclusion of Epicurus uses the existence of perceived motion as the justification for the belief in the void. The Epicurean theory required void not only as a precondition of the motion of macroscopic bodies but also as the space in which atoms moved, and thus it posited void as being an ineliminable part of the perceptible world and the imperceptible substructure of matter. The Stoic view could hardly be more opposed, as they banished the void to beyond the edge of the universe, as two excerpts from Galen show:

"They [the stoicising Pneumatic doctors] think there is no such thing [as empty space] in the world, but that the whole substance is unified with itself." (Galen, *Diff.puls.* 8.674, 13-14, LS 49D)

"The Stoics are compelled to admit that extension in three dimensions is common to body and void and place, since they leave void in the nature of the existing things even if they deny its presence within the world." (Galen, *Qual. inc.* 19.464, 10-14, LS 49E)

It may be thought that these fragments point just to the theory that there is no void on the (as we say) planet Earth. But the Stoic use of the word 'world' never captures this modern sense:

"They [the Stoics] use 'world' (*kosmos*) in three ways: of god himself, the peculiarly qualified individual consisting of all substance, who is indestructible and ingenerable, since he is the manufacturer of the world-order, at set periods of time consuming all substance into

himself and reproducing it again from himself; they also describe the world-order as 'world'; and thirdly, what is composed out of both [i.e. god and world-order]." (D.L. 7.137, LS 44F)

None of these senses places the Stoic void in 'outer space' or anywhere similar. So when we see the English word 'world' in most of these contexts, we should imagine 'universe'. Where, then, is the Stoic void, and why do they have need of it at all? The location is clear - outside the universe:

"The Stoic philosophers suppose that there is a difference between the 'whole' and the 'all'. For they say that the world is whole, but the external void together with the world is all. For this reason they say the 'whole' is finite, since the world is finite, but the 'all' is infinite, since the void outside the world is such." (S.E. *M*, 9.332, LS 44A)

And as for their need of a concept of the void at all, this comes from a combination of their doctrine of the conflagration, with the intuition that when things are subject to burning, they expand:

"Even if the entire substance is resolved into fire, as the most refined of the natural philosophers [i.e. the Stoics] think, it must occupy a vastly greater place, just like the vaporizations of solid bodies into smoke. Therefore, the place occupied by substance flowing out during the conflagration is now void, since no body has filled it." (Cleomedes 6,11-17, LS 49G)

Motion in the Epicurean model (where it would be a function of microscopic motion) takes place through the void and affects the place of a body. As an idea conceived in the context of no void, the Stoic idea of motion can be better thought of

as some kind of wave through a unified field¹³, and the notion of discrete bodies as particular concentrations of an identical pneuma-like energy operating over a passive mass, rather than as things differentiated according to their own essences.

The only type of motion Epicurus was dealing with, whereby something moves from one place to another, was called by Philo *metabatikos kineisthai*, or 'translatory motion'. But there is another kind of motion at work in Stoic physics, that of *tonike kinesis*, or tensional motion, and it is this specifically which is being referred to as 'simultaneously backwards and forwards'. The tensional motion of pneuma in objects results in a 'tenor' (hexis), and it is this which yields properties:

"In his book *On Tenors*, he [Chrysippus] again says that tenors are nothing but currents of air: 'It is by these that bodies are sustained. The sustaining air is responsible for the quality of each of the bodies which are sustained by tenor; in iron this quality is called hardness, in stone density, and in silver whiteness.'" (Plutarch *St. rep.* 1053F-1054B, LS 47M)

"In stones, and logs which have been severed from their physical connection, he [God] created tenor which is the strongest bond. This is breath which turns back towards itself. It begins to extend itself from the centre to the extremities, and having made contact with the outer surfaces it bends back again until it returns to the same place from which it set out. This continuous double course of tenor is indestructible." (Philo, *God's immutability* 35-6, LS 47Q)

¹³ Although I realise this phrase has too many modern associations, I could not come up with a better one to capture the idea.

Sambursky comments on this:

“It should be noted here that as in Philo the expression “bond” (*desmos*) is used by Alexander Aphrodisiensis when he talks of *pneuma* as the cause of the unification of matter. Sextus emphasises that *hexis*¹⁴ ‘controls mainly the conditions of the bodies “related to expansion and contraction”, but it is clear from the context that what he has in mind are the specific physical states of bodies. In spite of the scarcity of extant sources which are relevant, the picture we get of the Stoic *hexis* is a fairly clear one. Physical bodies have coherence and definite properties by virtue of the everlasting movement of a very tenuous and elastic medium pervading them. Since matter is perceived as strictly continuous, the medium performs its tensional fluctuating motions within matter itself, being united with it in total mixture. The dynamic concept of *hexis* by which the physical state of a body is defined is thus akin to what we would call today a field of force.” (Sambursky 1959, p. 31)

Sambursky talks elsewhere in his book of the “transformation of the [Aristotelian] geometrical concept into a physical one” (p.5), and says that “Coherence thus appears here distinctly as a force, and the geometrical continuum of Aristotle is in this way transformed into a dynamic one.” (p.4) Time and again in Aristotle we get the form/matter distinction drawn in terms of geometrical concepts - e.g. the bronze sphere. It is as if Aristotle saw each of the shapes of the world as being instantiations of a pre-existing geometry. The Stoics invert this idea, and say that each of the shapes of the world results from the ongoing tension of force through matter, and that the forms we perceive are formed in our minds as a result of abstraction from repeatedly experienced, similar objects. The notion of a world constantly pulsating and vibrating

¹⁴ ‘Hexis’ is the term the Stoics used for the inherent stability of a body or structure.

with energy, which imbues even the most apparently static and immobile object is implicit also in the Epicurean doctrine of atomic motion, but the Stoic *pneuma* is more powerful analytically. Epicurean atomism led to the belief that the form of things arises as the result of atomic collisions and connections and comes about ultimately by accident. The most significant difference here is that there is no organising principle in Epicureanism which gathers atoms in this way rather than that.¹⁵ Stoic theology did not permit of a personal relationship with god (the organising power of the universe) but did claim that this organising power was moral, and provident. Because of this, they assumed that things were arranged in such a way which could result in the greatest benefit, and it was necessary for their account to posit a power which was responsible both for sustaining and organising the world at every level, from the minuscule to the cosmic. We can see its provenance once again in biological terms, specifically in the discussion of perception:

“From the commanding-faculty there are seven parts which grow out into the body like the tentacles of an octopus. Five of these are the senses, sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch. Sight is breath which extends from the commanding faculty to the eyes, hearing is breath which extends from the commanding-faculty to the ears...”
(Aetius 4.21.1-4, LS 53 H)

“For by stretching out and relaxing, the soul makes an impression on all the body’s parts, since it is blended with them all, and in making an impression it receives an impression in response.”
(Hierocles 4.40, LS 53 B 6)

¹⁵ Although this is not to say Epicureanism is fatalistic: “...Epicurus...modified the deterministic Democritean system by introducing a slight element of indeterminacy to atomic motion, the ‘swerve’...” (LS vol. 1, p.107 ff.)

“Sleep is caused, they say, by the slackening of the tension in our senses, which affects the ruling part of the soul.” (D.L. 7.158)

In some ways the argument so far has concentrated on the Stoic idea of bodies and the forces at work which sustain them and give them their qualities. Here we have seen the idea of the continuum most clearly outlined in the explanations of the *pneuma*. I have been at pains to make this aspect of the Stoic position clear because I think it explains in part their hostility to atomism. Where there is a universe conceived as comprising of only matter, or mainly matter, the atomic hypothesis can be sustained. The Stoic achievement is to incorporate energy into the scheme - something which is an integral part of the deep structure of matter and which is responsible for its organisation. And of course, energy cannot be divided in the same way as matter. So we might speculate that the Stoics rejected finite divisibility in favour of infinite divisibility partly because of their belief in this sustaining force. Since this force is imbued through all bodies, and cannot itself be conceived of as finitely divisible, neither then can the bodies be conceived of as finitely divisible.

The arguments considered so far could be described as the *physical* aspect of the Stoic continuum idea, in hostility to Epicurean atomism. We should expect a direct awareness in the Stoa of atomism and its way of arguing, since the record tells of an eclectic philosophical education enjoyed by Zeno, which was probably encouraged in later pupils. There is an amusing anecdote recorded in Diogenes Laertius which tells of this tendency:

“And when Zeno was making progress, he would enter Polemo’s school, so far from all self-conceit was he. In consequence Polemo is said to have addressed him thus: “You slip in, Zeno, by the

garden door - I'm quite aware of it - you filch my doctrines and give them a Phoenician make-up." (D.L. 7.25).

And direct evidence of Chrysippus' reply to the atomists is recorded by Plutarch:

"...how can it fail to be self-evident that man consists of more parts than man's finger, and the world than man? This is understood and appreciated by all, provided they have not become Stoics, but on becoming Stoics they say the opposite, and believe that man does not consist of more parts than his finger, nor the world than man. For division pulverises bodies to infinity, and among infinities there is no more or less.... Chrysippus says that when asked if we have parts and how many, and of what and how many parts *they* consist, we will operate a distinction. With regard to the inexact question we will reply that we consist of head, trunk and limbs - for that was all that the problem put to us amounted to. But if they extend their questioning to the *ultimate* parts, we must not, he says, in reply concede any such things, but must say neither of what parts we consist, nor, likewise, of how many, either infinite or finite." (Plutarch *Comm. not.*, 1078E-1080E, LS 50C2-3)

We will go on in a moment to look in a little more detail at the evidence for the more mathematical side to the Stoic idea of the continuum, but for now we can invoke the 'magic eye' once again. On the Stoics idea, there will be no point at which the eye comes up against anything which would be its final point of traversal. This strange point of view puts the Stoics radically at odds with our intuitive idea of substance, which is probably more inclined to accept some kind of atomic hypothesis. The point being made, I think, has to do with how we conceptualise division, and what this conceptualisation amounts to. In the natural world, things have limits according to

their organising principle (an adult human is such a size, a dog smaller, etc.). But these limits change for our perception according to how close we are to the object so that a 'small' object can at close enough range fill our field of vision to the same extent that a larger object could from a little further away. Because of this, there is no definitive account of 'how big' available to us from a perceptual point of view. If we were then to imagine a division in something, we would have to imagine half of that thing (or some other fraction).

Now, there are two further stages of this argument which bring us to Chrysippus' position above. First, we imagine the Stoics stipulating that all talk of ultimate magnitude is arbitrary, since in the first place each object divides to infinity and in the second place each object is formed from a unified substance and it is not possible to conceptualise objects in isolation from this substance. So neither 'objective quantification' nor 'objective reference to a given magnitude' are possible. The second stage maintains the rigours of the first, but allows that the language faculty has certain contingent properties of reference which permit what Quine calls 'middle-sized, middle distance' objects of the type which are naturally impressed upon our senses. These properties of reference are contingent upon assent for their success and do not reveal anything definitive or essential about the world. Chrysippus is quite clear on this point - we can answer questions about three-dimensional 'objects' with resistance since these are the appropriate subjects of truth-bearing discourse, based on assent. And we can accurately describe these 'objects' as being 'parts' of the 'world-whole'. But we cannot in turn assume that there are ultimate parts of these objects, since any 'final' division we might want to stipulate (such as the Epicurean minimal part) will itself be subject to another division.

Before we consider any wider implications of the Stoic attachment to continuity, we will next be concerned with shifting the focus from the phenomenological aspect of divisibility to the mathematical. The Stoics found here a further theoretical bulwark which supported their belief in infinite divisibility, the consideration of which will be the business of the next section.

CHRYSIPPUS' GLIMPSE OF THE INFINITE APPROACH TO A LIMIT

Mathematics was a central feature of the intellectual endeavour for the Greeks. The oldest recorded member of the philosophical tradition, Thales, is mentioned as having discovered the theorems that 'The circle is bisected by its diameter', 'The angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal', 'The vertical and opposite angles are equal', and that 'The angle in a semicircle is a right-angle' (although this last was more probably Pythagoras).¹⁶ And there is the story that Plato had the following motto inscribed above the Academy: "Let no-one unversed in geometry enter here." Whilst this story may be apocryphal¹⁷, there is no doubt that in common with the attitude of the time, Plato reserved a high regard for the study of number

By the time Zeno arrived in Athens, the debates in mathematics had touched on some fundamental points which are directly parallel to the debates in physics we have seen above. Instead of the macroscopic objects of sensory perception, the objects of enquiry were mathematical objects - the formalisable geometric solids. By

¹⁶ From Proclus and Diogenes Laertius, p. 164-167, *Greek Mathematical Works*, trans. I. Thomas, Loeb.

¹⁷ The source of this story is Johannes Tzetzes, (*Book of Histories* viii. 972-973). Ivor Thomas writes of him: "the Byzantine pedant who lived in the twelfth century A.D., is not the best of authorities, so this charming story must be accepted with caution." (Loeb *GMW*, p. 387, note b).

formalisable, we mean those forms whose shape can be described in a clear and unambiguous way. For example, the nobly succinct Euclidean definition of a circle:

“A circle is a plane figure contained by one line such that all the straight lines falling on it from one point among those lying within the figure are equal one to another.”¹⁸

One of the problems which had exercised the mathematical thinkers of Greece was: what is the best way to measure the area of a circle? The main method adopted to discover this was the exhaustion method, as Sambursky writes:

“Antiphon the Sophist, a contemporary of Socrates and of the mathematician Hippocrates of Chios, was apparently the first who used the process of exhaustion for the computation of the area of a circle. He started with an inscribed polygon, say a square, built isosceles triangles on each of its four sides, with their vertices on the circumference of the circle, then he built triangles on each side of the octagon thus defined, and continued this procedure on the sides of the sixteen-sided polygon, etc., till the whole arc of the circle was ‘used up’.” (Sambursky 1959, pp.89-90)

The idea behind the method of exhaustion was that the area under a curve can be completely filled up with a tessellation of squares and triangles. Formulae for working out the areas of regular shapes were well known to the Greeks by the fourth century BC, from the school of Pythagoras and others. So if the area under a curve could be filled in this way, its value could be discovered. Whilst this method was imperfect, it did come close enough to be used by Archimedes to derive an early approximation of π .¹⁹

¹⁸ Loeb *GMW*, p. 439.

¹⁹ The Bible has an earlier one - 3 - in 2 Chronicles 4,2.

The method of exhaustion was given theoretical support by Xenocrates, who succeeded Plato as the head of the Academy from 339-314. His connection with Stoicism is recorded by Diogenes Laertius - "[Zeno, founder of Stoicism] was a pupil of Crates... Next they say he attended the lectures of Stilpo and Xenocrates for ten years - so Timocrates says in his *Dion* - and Polemo as well." (D.L. 7.2)

In order to confront the paradoxes of division which the Eleatics had established, Aristotle tells us that "[Xenocrates] yielded to the argument from bisection by positing atomic magnitudes" (Aristotle *Physics*, 187 a 3). What this theory amounted to was a belief that the mathematical line was comprised of a finite, and in principle determinable, number of points, and that there was some unit of length which was not susceptible to further division. Sambursky provides the evidence:

"Some more information on this point is to be found in another passage of Simplicius [*De caelo*, 665, 5 f] ...Here Xenocrates is mentioned together with Democritus in a context which makes it plausible to assume that Xenocrates' hypothesis was induced directly by the atoms of Democritus. It was the main attributes of the atoms - their being impassive and without quality - which led Xenocrates to the assumption of an atomic length which is "insensitive" to further division." (Sambursky 1959, p.91)

We can see how this might have worked by imagining any of the variations of the Eleatic paradoxes - the no-motion paradox, for example. The formulation is familiar: in order to travel any distance, you have to pass the half-way stage; in order to do this, you have to pass the quarter-way, etc. Since there can be no 'first point' which does not have a halfway stage between itself and the origin, there can be no start to the journey and therefore no motion. In recommending atomic lengths, Xenocrates and his followers could answer the paradox by suggesting that motion takes place in a

series of 'quantum jumps' (in Sambursky's translation), from one minimal length to another.

So there is a structural (and perhaps also a historical) relationship between Democritus' atomism and Xenocrates' notion of atomic lengths. But Democritus also proposed the following dilemma, which is not solvable by reference to the atomic length strategy:

"If a cone were cut by a plane parallel to the base, what must we think of the surface of the sections? Are they equal or unequal? For, if they are unequal they will make the cone irregular, as having many indentations, like steps, and unevennesses; but if they are equal, the sections will be equal, and the cone will appear to have the property of the cylinder and to be made up of equal, not unequal circles, which is absurd." (Plutarch, *Comm. not.* 1080 E, LS 50 C5)

So we imagine a cone, and cut it horizontally into a base and a top. This gives us two circles - the one from the cut surface of the base, the other from the cut surface of the top. If we then imagine these circles placed side by side, we are asked the question "Are they equal or is one larger than the other?" Intuitively, we would respond by saying that the circle on the base is larger, but then we would have to sacrifice the regularity of the cone, by making it 'stepped'. And we cannot say they are identical, since this would result in a cylinder. This fascinating problem is recorded by Plutarch in a section which also records Chrysippus' apparently elliptical response:

"Well here Chrysippus declares Democritus to be ignorant, and says that the surfaces are neither equal nor unequal, while the bodies, thanks to the surfaces' being neither equal nor unequal, are unequal." (Plutarch, *Comm. not.* 1080E, LS 50D)

Since it is Sambursky who has most convincingly interpreted this Chrysippean response, it is as well to include his own words here:

“The first part of this sentence [Chrysippus’ reply above] refers to the process of convergence towards the limit. Characteristically, the statement is given in a form negating the law of excluded middle. Indeed, this law is violated if the essentially static notions of equal and unequal are applied to the conception of a dynamic approach to zero. The surface of any section of the cone is either unequal to that of a given section if the distance between both is unequal to zero, or both surfaces are equal if the distance between the sections is zero - *tertium non datur*. However, if we consider the infinite series of sections which is approaching the given section when the distance between each member of the series and the fixed section is approaching zero, we have to discard the static concept of equal and unequal, taking into account that for each given difference in surfaces one can determine a distance which will yield a still smaller difference. This is what Chrysippus intended to express by the formula ‘neither equal nor unequal.’”
(Sambursky 1959, pp.93-94)

This excerpt from Sambursky is extremely compact and bears some further explanation, since the idea it suggests, if true, could have a significant impact upon our interpretation of Stoic ontology and epistemology.

Let us imagine our cone whole again and this time imagine two planes running through the cone parallel to the base. How do we describe the difference in their areas? Sambursky is suggesting that Chrysippus’ objection to Democritus’ puzzle comes at the stage where he asks “Are they equal or unequal?” The very demand of the question assumes that the differentials in question are in principle determinable and comparable, and it rests on the belief that given two magnitudes, they must be only either equal or unequal. But this is to assume that there is something countable into

which a line (or the side of a geometrical figure) divides, and the question of equality or otherwise can be decided in terms of these countable divisions. This makes sense, as Democritus' atomism would have committed him to some such position on a physical level. No solution is presented from Democritus, which may lead us to think that it was a problem he himself never satisfactorily resolved. The principle which seems to be at work here 'that lines divide into divisions which are countable in principle' is what I take Sambursky to mean when he writes of "the essentially static notions of equal and unequal" - static in the sense that they derive our explanations of geometrical forms from our prior (and fixed and immutable) explanations of magnitude and number. If these prior explanations remain in place whilst we read Chrysippus' response 'neither equal nor unequal', we shall be unimpressed, as Plutarch was, and dismiss Chrysippus as a paradox-monger.

Sambursky suggests that Chrysippus is not using the words 'equal' and 'unequal' to describe separately determinable magnitudes (e.g. section x is 'smaller than' section y), but rather in the more conditional sense of how we describe two sections of the cone when we imagine the distance between them *approaching zero* - "we have to discard the static concept of equal and unequal, taking into account that for each given difference in surfaces one can determine a distance which will yield a still smaller difference". (p.94)

There is a similar dilemma to the cone, but instead using a pyramid, is mentioned in the same section of Plutarch as follows:

"On top of that, [Chrysippus] has the puerility to say that, given that the pyramid is compounded out of triangles, their sides, where they are adjacent as they incline apart, are unequal, yet are greater but not exceeding." (Plutarch, *Comm. not.* 1079, LS, 50C4)

The triangles which make up the outermost surface of a pyramid must have longer sides than the triangles nearer the middle, and again we see Chrysippus accounting for this in language which seems at first to be paradoxical. Sambursky comments:

“The apparent *contradictio in adjecto* involved in it finds its explanation in the fact that the common use of “exceed” refers to a *fixed* difference between two quantities, whereas Chrysippus actually transcribes in words the relation $b > a$, where $b = a + e$ and $\lim e \rightarrow 0$.”
(Sambursky 1959, p.94)

The great difference here between Chrysippus' account and the point of view of Plutarch which mocks it, is that on Plutarch's traditional account, forms such as circles are understood as discrete surfaces of determinate size to which the logic of finite magnitudes can apply, delivering the concepts of 'greater' and 'lesser' in a straightforward way. The problem is that this logic cannot handle the *functional* relationship between surfaces in a given system, and it is this functional relationship which Chrysippus is trying to describe. His point is that when we bisect the cone, we can imagine two circles, but we cannot imagine the difference in their sizes in terms of a fixed system of values against which the sizes can be measured. Instead, he asserts that the correct way to think of the relation between the circles is of one as a function of the other, as the distance between them approaches zero. And what is striking about this is the extent to which it embraces the Eleatic reduction, rather than seeking to find theoretical structures to confound it, such as Xenocrates' attempted with his atomic lengths. Chrysippus seems to have taken the basic principles of Eleatic metaphysics and attempted to pursue its conclusions into the area of physics.

Sambursky writes a little later of the language of the Chrysippus' formula:

“.. the verb “exceed” was used not only in the arithmetical sense but also in the sense of “protrude”, for instance in the description of the blade of a saw which is jagged, alternatively protruding and indented. Of two sections of a cone, between which the distance is approaching zero, one is admittedly greater than the other, but ‘it does not protrude’ as is the case with the fixed indentations of a saw.” (p.94)

The analysis of Chrysippus’ attitude towards mathematical objects rests on scanty evidence, (the relevant evidence consists of only a few fragments) but this has not prevented Sambursky from presenting us with a convincing picture. It has been the task of this section to make clear precisely what Sambursky was suggesting, which is that Chrysippus’ attitude is best explained by the assumption that he had some insight similar to that which in the seventeenth century led to the development of the infinitesimal calculus. If we accept this conclusion, it may have a profound effect on our understanding of early Stoicism.

In the previous section, we have seen how the Stoics opposed the Epicurean model consisting of minimal parts and atomic magnitudes. In this section we have seen them opposing the Xenocratic theory of infinitesimal magnitudes which comprise the mathematical line. In place of these theories, they had their own concepts of the nature and transformation of objects and number which replaced an essentially static ontology with a fluid and dynamic one. The philosophical consequences of this need not be thought of as stopping within the confines of physics. By the time of Zeno both physical and mathematical atomism had sophisticated, systematically-inclined exponents in Epicurus and Xenocrates. The ideas of these men cannot sit in a philosophical system as mere theoretical hypotheses - they were much more likely to have the role of ‘dominant modes of ultimate explanation’. That is, as a way of

thinking about the world of phenomena which involved an established set of allegories and images. The Stoics sought to replace these with ones more suited to their purpose: they took biological examples in place of geometrical ones as the *sine qua non* of their ideas; they sought to account for the emergence of form in bodies rather than the compatibility of form in bodies with preconceived ideas; and they cloaked their whole world-theory in an explicitly non-transcendental, non-idealistic garb. Given this context, it would seem more suitable to consider Stoic physical theory as something which had a direct impact on their ontology and epistemology. If there is any doubt left after the previous section that the Stoics believed that the actual stuff of the universe was susceptible of an infinite division, it is explicitly stated in the evidence:

“Chrysippus said that bodies are divided to infinity, and likewise things comparable to bodies, such as surface, line, place, void and time. But although these are divided to infinity, a body does not consist of infinitely many bodies, and the same applies to surface, line and place.”
(Stobaeus 1.142, 2-6, LS 50A)

CONCLUSION

As a final point in this exegesis, it should be recognised that the infinity Chrysippus refers to is not a destination point for some imagined division - not an excuse for letting idealism in through the back door, so to speak. Sambursky says that Chrysippus made the following distinction between ‘infinity’ as something we can work *towards*, and infinity as descriptive of the way of the world we work *in*, because he recognised its “ambiguous meaning”:

“Division is to infinity, or ‘infinite’ according to Chrysippus (for there is not some infinity which the division reaches, it is just unceasing).” (D.L. 7.150-1, LS 50B)

This consideration of the evidence about the Stoic attitude to the nature of the world and its contents raises an important issue. What impact does the dominant physical hypothesis of the Stoics (that nature is composed of infinitely divisible bodies), have on our interpretation of the other areas of Stoic philosophy? There are two options available. We can either limit their idea of strict continuity to a ‘localised’ area of the system - assume that it was active only when they were faced with physical questions. Or we can assume that it must have had some influence on Stoic logical and ontological theories as well. I believe that if we choose the latter path, we can suggest an interpretation of Stoic ontology which accords with the evidence and solves one or two previously intractable difficulties. And such an assumption will also, I believe, lead to a richer context within which to understand the Stoic system of logic. The consequences of assuming that the continuum lay at the core of Stoic philosophy, and not just their physics, will be the stuff of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE : THE CONTINUUM AND INDETERMINACY

INTRODUCTION

In the first two chapters, I have looked at the historical path of certain ideas which came to be used by the Stoics, and considered in some detail some of the points of contact and divergence between Aristotelian and Stoic physical notions. I now wish to turn my attention to isolating more clearly one of the broader philosophical issues at stake, which clusters around the notion of the continuum. This broader issue can be seen with reference to two specific problems, one spatial and one temporal. I will focus first, with reference to White (1992), on the problem of what it means to be a 'spatial magnitude' in a universe of a single, strictly continuous substance. Secondly, with reference to Schofield (1988), I will consider the problem of how to account for 'now'. White and Schofield offer reconstructions which show the Stoics attempting to produce a philosophy with an adequate response to these problems. When taken together, these reconstructions can be seen to suggest a more general problem of *indeterminacy*. At the end of the chapter, I will produce an argument which sums up this problem, which will provide the starting point (and target) for the following two chapters.

SPATIAL MAGNITUDES

Michael White, in a recent monograph (1992) draws a distinction between 'conservative' and 'radical' interpretations of Stoic physics. Conservative interpretations tend to see the Stoics as not much different from Aristotle, and explain away the evidence for some apparently strange doctrines as being the malicious or idle work of unsympathetic doxographers. Radical interpretations, on the other hand, seek to examine the textual evidence for the apparently strange doctrines at their 'face value', to see what they might yield. White comments:

“Particularly in view of the paucity and nature of the evidence, there is much that can be said in favour of each of the approaches, the conservative and the radical, to the interpretation of Stoic physics. The conservative approach exemplifies the virtues of prudence and common sense. And in circumstances of uncertainty – where we are dealing with little actual evidence and the motivation underlying some of the most important *testimonia* is suspect – the virtues of prudence, caution, and common sense should not casually be dismissed as pedestrian. However, conservative interpretation is apt to result in a short and not very interesting story about Stoic physics... In order to determine whether there is anything conceptually interesting about Stoic physics, it is, I think, necessary at least to explore some 'radical' hypotheses.” (p.284-5)

White's purpose in this section of his book is to “pursue a more radical line of interpretation by way of some hypothetical theses concerning the Stoic analysis of the physical world. This approach has the added virtue... of exploring some conceptual alternatives to the Aristotelian and quantum models of spatial magnitude, time, and

motion; and this exercise may help us to deepen our understanding of these models.” (p. 285)

In my discussion of White’s argument, I propose to concentrate on his ‘hypotheses’ concerning spatial magnitudes, since I wish to deal with the topic of time in the second section of this chapter. When I have examined this reconstruction of the Stoic position concerning spatial magnitudes, and the reconstruction of others concerning the Stoics on time, I will briefly indicate how certain features are common to both reconstructions. I will then argue that these common features point towards a more general philosophical problem.

Firstly, White discusses certain texts which imply that ‘limit entities’ were not thought by the Stoics to have an existence independently of the mind.¹ The main problem with these texts is that they leave the question open as to the precise ontological status these entities have:

“While Plutarch evidently interprets the Stoic denial of corporeal status to limit entities as implying that they are to be included (along with *lekta* or propositions, the void, place, and time) in the Stoic ontological class of *asómata* or incorporeals, Long and Sedley² suggest that the polemical context of Plutarch’s remark renders his account suspect. They think that it is more likely that the Stoics placed such limit entities (along with fictional entities) in a category of mental constructs that ‘fall[s] altogether outside the corporeal-incorporeal dichotomy’”. (p.286)

¹ The main texts are Galen On incorporeal qualities, 19.483, 13-16 (LS 45F); Proclus On Euclid’s Elements I, 89, 15-18 (LS 50D); D.L. 7.135. (LS 45E).

² LS (1987) Vol. 1, p. 301.

This placement of 'limit entities' puts them as 'not-somethings' in the Stoic scheme, and as an interpretative act has immediate epistemological consequences. It presents us with a world view which is radically counter-intuitive, since as far as physical bodies are concerned, it implies that such individuation as we claim for them is to be explained not as a 'property' of the bodies themselves. We cannot temper this conclusion very much, since the location of limits as 'not-somethings' puts them in a category not only with universals – about which the evidence is clear that they are 'figments' – but also with fictions. The only conclusion we are sanctioned to draw if we accept this interpretation, is that the Stoics believed that the 'ultimate reality' of the world was very different to the world of 'spatial particulars' we intuitively perceive. This interpretation gains further support from remarks made by Jacques Brunschwig:

“...finally, geometric limits could be considered as purely mental constructions with no objective reality, that is to say as not-somethings...[and this interpretation] seems the most plausible, bearing in mind the Stoics' fundamentally continuistic conception of the physical universe”.³

In White's text, the argument moves on to consider just what sort of epistemological consequences might flow from the 'removal of limit entities from the physical world':

“It is logically possible, of course, to maintain that, although surfaces and other limit entities are mental constructs (i.e. not corporeal), they none the less are mental constructs (a) which are essential to our

³ Brunschwig (1992), p.97. Cf. p.103 : “If challenged to do so, I would assign...geometrical limits – with a degree of hesitation – to the class of natural concepts”. But we should note that Brunschwig's hesitation here is not because he is unsure whether or not 'geometrical limits' ought to be thought of as 'not-somethings', but because he is not sure about *which type* of not-somethings they should go in with.

understanding of the physical reality and (b) which cannot correctly be said to misrepresent, falsify, or distort that physical reality. One might term this the Kantian sense of 'mental constructs'. On the other hand, it is easy to understand the notion of limit entities as mental constructs (particularly when limit entities are placed in the same category as fictional entities) as equivalent to the idea that such limit entities are geometers' fictions and, hence, involve a degree of misrepresentation." (p.286)

Once again, White's intention is to pursue the more 'radical' of the options, whereby the notion of 'limits' involves a *misrepresentation* of the world. An important assumption is made at this point of White's argument. He assimilates two notions of limits – one narrow, one more broad. The narrow notion only refers to limits as geometrical entities, whereas the broader notion refers to limits as the boundaries of perceptual objects. The evidence of Plutarch encourages this point of view, with talk of the parts of 'man' and 'his finger' immediately preceding a discussion of the paradoxes of the pyramid and the cone (*Comm. not.* 1078E - 1080E, LS 50C). But the evidence is not conclusive on this point, and is in general vague about the philosophical attitude of the Stoics towards mathematics.⁴

The issue underlying all this is whether it is reasonable to suggest that the Stoics generalised their thinking about *geometric* limits to a thesis about the *perception of bodies in general*. To explain this a little more, there are two possibilities in this whole

⁴ One example of a later mention of mathematics is Seneca, *Letters*, 88.25-28, (LS 26F), a text which implies that philosophy is independent of, and prior to, mathematics: "The philosopher will prove that the sun is large, the mathematician how large, advancing by experience and practice. But in order to advance, the mathematician must have certain principles granted to him; yet no expertise is autonomous whose foundation is a concession. Philosophy demands nothing from another."

area of interpretation, even after adopting White's 'radical' methodology of attempting to give credence to the stranger parts of the evidence. We could conclude that all the testimony concerning the novel approach the Stoics seem to have adopted towards limits was nothing more than a position constructed for the purpose of resolving some *mathematical* paradoxes – e.g. the cone. This conclusion would have the effect of making us think that the Stoic approach to limits was *defensive, limited, technical, and ontologically neutral*. Alternatively, we could conclude that this testimony is indicative of a position constructed as a result of reflection on the continuistic nature of matter, and the consequences this might hold for a theory of truth. Such a conclusion would make us think that the Stoic positions was *positive, general, philosophical, and ontologically significant*. The issue boils down to the question of whether the Stoics meant 'limits' to imply 'geometrical limits' only, or 'physical limits' as well (i.e. the boundaries of the objects of perception).

This question seems on the face of it difficult to resolve. It can be restated, however, so that a way forward opens up. The way we can do this is by asking not whether the Stoics applied their notion of limits to geometrical as well as perceptual bodies, but rather by asking whether they were likely to have been in a position to make this distinction meaningfully at all. Ian Mueller has suggested that they were not:

“...one might read this remark⁵ as indicating that the Stoics had failed to distinguish clearly between mathematical and physical body, perhaps considering the two definitions of body as alternative characterisations of the same thing. Sambursky has turned this apparent

⁵ The remark is at Plotinus vi. 1.26 : “If they say that what is common to body is the three-dimensional, they speak mathematically; but if they say it is the three-dimensional with resistance, they are not speaking of a single thing, since resistance is a quality or derived from (*para*) quality.”

failure to make a distinction into a virtue by arguing that the Stoics produced 'a physicalisation of geometry by endowing geometrical figures with the elastic properties of material bodies'(Sambursky 1959, p.86). However, the evidence is insufficient to support Sambursky's picture of the Stoics as proto-differential geometers... I am inclined, then, to think that the Stoics did not distinguish clearly between mathematical and physical body, but I doubt that anyone outside the Platonic tradition did so." (Mueller (1982), pp. 76-77.)

The indeterminate state of the evidence sanctions a wide range of interpretations.

We can conclude with Sambursky that the Stoics understood the relation between geometrical and physical bodies distinctly, and used the properties of the one to influence their account of the properties of the other. Or we can agree with Mueller that the distinction itself seems out of place in interpreting Stoicism. This difficulty is precisely why White uses the 'conservative/radical' distinction in his introductory remarks, in order to say clearly what he is doing.

We should recognise, then, as we proceed with White's interpretative strategy, that we do so not on the basis of direct evidence, but rather as a way of constructing an interesting account of some of the more exotic pieces of evidence which seems plausible in the light of Stoicism as a whole. The basic outline of White's position concerning spatial magnitudes can be given in two citations, the first giving a possible account of a position, the second giving more details of the proposed model. Firstly, then, we have a connection between infinite divisibility and fuzzy boundaries:

"Suppose that we regard all surfaces, edges, points, etc. as elements of a mental grid imposed on spatial extension and time. What do we have when we remove the grid? According to the picture I am

considering, we have infinitely divisible spatial magnitudes. But an infinite sequence of such nested intervals... does not converge to some limit entity or boundary – a surface, line or point. Rather, convergence is to some interval of indeterminacy or fuzziness. While such an interval is itself theoretically indivisible *ad infinitum*, there is a sense in which it represents an ontologically foundational level of physical reality. So, according to the picture I am attempting to describe, the indeterminacy or fuzziness is not merely an *epistemic* feature of our interaction with the world.” (White 1992, p.287)

The first important idea in this passage is that the notion that, for the Stoics, limits formed some sort of ‘mental grid’. This idea leads to the possibility that we can ‘remove’ the grid. Assuming we can achieve this removal, we are left with a picture of the world in which spatial magnitudes do not culminate at some clear and determinate point, but rather converge to ‘some interval of indeterminacy or fuzziness’. Two of White’s comments about this serve to make his idea clearer. On the one hand, he suggests that such intervals represent something ‘ontologically foundational’. On the other hand, it is suggested that indeterminacy is ‘not merely an epistemic feature of our interaction with the world’. What do these two suggestions amount to?

In philosophical terms, they suggest that the picture being considered is a picture of the ‘real’ - something mind-independent which we are somehow in contact with. This seems to be the meaning behind the description of the indeterminacy under consideration as ‘ontologically foundational’, which suggests that such an indeterminacy is the starting point for building an explanation of the world. Similarly, the claim that such an indeterminacy is not ‘merely an epistemic feature of our interaction with the world’, suggests that it is not something imposed *by us* – i.e. as some function of our perception.

We might paraphrase the thought as: '*Nature* is this way'. White goes on to describe his idea in more detail:

“As an illustration of this view, consider a three-dimensional body *A* surrounded by its spatial environment *B*. We consider a three-dimensional region *i* of spatial extension that clearly contains some of *A* and some of *B* and increasingly small regions *i'* nested in *i*. According to a doctrine of geometrical realism (shared, I believe, by Aristotle and, generally, the ancient mathematical tradition), there can be constructed a monotonic non-increasing sequence of such regions which converges to a two-dimensional limit entity, i.e. the (geometrical) surface of *A* or interface between *A* and its surrounding spatial environment. According to the present interpretation of the Stoic view, however, convergence is to a three-dimensional region of indeterminacy, which represents the merging of the corporeal body *A* into its corporeal spatial environment. Since this region is itself divisible *ad infinitum*, one could designate a two-dimensional limit within it as the surface of *A*. But such a designated surface would be entirely a (physical) geometer's artifice, having no more *ontological* claim to be the surface of *A* than any of the infinite other two-dimensional limits that might be so designated within the region of indeterminacy/fuzziness.” (p. 287-288)

Here, White draws a contrast between the interpretation he has presented for Stoicism, and the 'doctrine of geometrical realism', shared by Aristotle and the ancient geometrical tradition generally. For the geometrical realist, a sequence of regions 'belonging' to *A* will converge on the 'real' surface of *A*. According to this view, there is a clear sense in which such and such a region is *A* or not-*A*, the difference being marked by a determinate surface. On the proposed Stoic view, there is instead a region of 'merging' between *A* and its environment. Since this region is itself infinitely

divisible, there is no determinate 'cut off' point by A can be said to have a surface, and hence there is a region which is not determinately A or not- A . White leaves the possibility open that any surface within the indeterminate region *could* be designated as the surface of A , but says that such a region would have no *ontological* claim to being the 'real' surface of A . There is one part of White's interpretation which is particularly important for my overarching argument. It is stated at the end of the citation above when he describes any given surface for A as being, on the continuistic view, a 'geometer's artifice'. A little later on, White uses this notion of artifice to explain two arguments from Plutarch, taken from *De comm. Not.* 1078e-1079a (LS 50C, part):

"According to a more radical strategy of interpretation, the passage has two arguments to make concerning the Stoic removal of 'ultimate parts' – *in the sense of limits* – from physical reality. The first argument is that, without surfaces limiting a body, the body would be infinitely (*eis apeiron*) extended. This argument is easily answered by noting that a body or magnitude can be *bounded* and thus finite without having a *least bound*... The other argument in the passage is rather more interesting... I take the essence of Plutarch's other argument to be that, without limits of bodies (and, more generally, of magnitudes), there must be indeterminacy with respect to the issue of the equality of such magnitudes. What determines the equality, in the most strict theoretical sense of the term, of linear interval A and linear interval B ? A natural, intuitive answer is that they are equal... just in case one can be superimposed on the other in such a way that the two *terminii* or end-points of A coincide, respectively, with the two end-points of B . But without such end-points (or other limit entities such as linear edges and surfaces when we consider magnitudes of two and three dimensions), *this* particular theoretical sense of equality is untenable... To what do discriminable differences in magnitude, e.g. cases

where A projects beyond B , 'retrench' or converge?... A plausible hypothesis, which I shall adopt, is that discriminable differences in magnitude retrench to a lack of discriminable difference ϵ , which is regarded as itself an interval that is theoretically infinitely divisible."
(White 1992, pp. 291-292)

Thus we have White continuing along the road of radical interpretation, and leaving us with a position which introduces into Stoicism a large measure of indeterminacy concerning the limits of objects. The significance of this is brought out by the following comment:

"According to the interpretative hypothesis that I am considering, the interval ϵ has both ontological and epistemological significance. It is possible to 'precisify', by stipulation, the larger-than relation so that differences in the magnitudes A and B falling within the interval ϵ are significant – i.e. so that such a difference makes one magnitude larger (*meizon*) than the other. But, since such a difference is not discriminable, the larger magnitude cannot be said to 'project beyond' (*huperechei*) the other... [this is the result of introducing] the interpretative hypothesis of fuzzy topological regions and fuzzy metrical relations..." (p. 293)

If we now take a step back from this account and consider what its implications are, we need to ask a few further questions. Foremost amongst these for my argument are to do with what exactly the 'epistemological significance' is of this interpretative strategy. Let us assume that White's case is plausible as an account of the evidence, and therefore appropriate to include in a broader reconstruction of Stoicism. The main effect, it seems to me, is to qualify the nature of the type of thing that is 'given' by the senses. It is commonplace to characterise the Stoics as 'empiricists', and in the next chapter we will

go on to consider in what way this characterisation is justified. An empiricist philosophy, above all, will depend on the information given through the senses to moderate its world-view. If we follow White's interpretative strategy, we have to concede that the picture it provides undermines the message of our senses that the world consists of spatio-temporal particulars with determinate boundaries. Indeed, if we are to keep our notion that the Stoics were empiricists alongside the notion that the Stoics adhered to some idea of fuzziness, we are then presented with the image of a philosophy which we might call revisionary empiricism – i.e. dependent on the senses, but not limited by the world they seem to deliver. It is a commonplace of the secondary literature to refer to the Stoics as having a 'metaphysical commitment to particulars'. This commitment is derived from their apparent hostility to logical generalisations (as shown, e.g. by the not-someone argument) and their apparent espousal that no two things are identical. This has led most commentators to assume that the 'particulars' the Stoics were committed to were three-dimensional spatio-temporal particulars. If White is followed, this picture comes under threat, since these types of entity seem to collapse back into a continuous and infinitely divisible matter, leaving us with mere regions contained by some indeterminate boundary.

RETRENCHABILITY AND TIME

This might at first make us suspect the validity of White's claims, and suggest that all he has done is exploit certain idiosyncratic texts which cannot give us a purchase on Stoicism more generally. This suspicion, however, recedes if we pass from spatial

extension to temporal extension and see that there is a way to interpret the Stoic fragments about time which seems to result in an account compatible with White's. The account I have in mind is Schofield's application of the concept of 'retrenchability' to the problem of time (Schofield 1988).⁶ By way of introduction to the concept of retrenchability, Schofield cites G.E.L. Owen who first used it with reference to 'here':

"Suppose I tell you 'It's all public land here', and you ask 'What do you mean by *here*? Just this field, or more?'. Repeating 'here', with whatever emphasis and gestures, is useless. What will help will be to specify land and landmarks that lie inside and others that lie outside the border of whatever my spatial demonstrative was meant to cover. Given an interest in a smaller stretch of land or a different interest in this one (say, the placing of a rare plant), the cope of my 'here' could have been narrowed by counting more things into the surroundings, to left or right or beyond. There is no one reason for setting the frontier closer or farther; the demonstrative carries no privileged reference to a measure of ground that could not for another purpose be narrowed. Let us say, for short, that 'here' is retrenchable." (Owen 1979, pp. 148-9)

Schofield emphasises the key part of Owen's explanation:

" 'Now', similarly, can for isomorphic reasons pick out a month or an hour or a day – a stretch of time as short as the specious present...or as long as a year... The crucial point is that application of a retrenchable expression is always relative to some purpose or interest of the speaker,

⁶ The discussion of time in the philosophy of Aristotle and the Stoics has produced an extensive literature. The best introduction, giving an account of Aristotle's paradoxes of time in *Physics* 4.10, is Sorabji (1983), p. 7-16, also p. 21-27 for a critical account of the Stoic view. Two papers in *Articles on Aristotle III* (Barnes et al. 1979) provide a useful backdrop – G.E.L. Owen *Aristotle on Time* (p. 140-158), and Sorabji *Aristotle on the Instant of Change* (p. 159 – 177). Also cf. Sorabji (1982). White (1982) produces the suggestion that Chrysippus can be interpreted using 'the conceptual equipment of the nonstandard formulation of calculus, in particular the concept of 'nontrivial divisible infinitesimals' (p.239).

which need not remain the same from one occasion to the next.”
(Schofield 1988, p. 347)

To understand better the particular application of the notion of retrenchability to time, we can take another passage from Owen, which makes the connection directly:

“Consider what Chrysippus the Stoic is reported to have maintained about time present. According to Plutarch (*Comm. Not. 1081c-82a*), his contribution to the topic consisted chiefly in three theses. First, there is no such thing as a shortest time (1081c); secondly, the now is not something indivisible (*ibid.*); thirdly, any part of present time can equally be taken to be past or future (1081d-82a). Here, surely, is our retrenchable present.” (Owen 1979, p. 153)

What is being claimed by the use of this concept of retrenchability? What is being suggested is that Chrysippus adopted a certain *usage* of the dialectical materials available which philosophers had used to discuss time. Schofield shows how we can see Chrysippus' positions that “(a) no time is present as a whole, and (b) of present time part is future and part past” as developing in antagonism to Diodorus Cronus, but as using the same scheme:

“I offer a tentative proposal [to explain why Chrysippus' position need not be paradoxical]...If we compare T1 and T3⁷, we find at least two closely related differences in the way the idea that the present is divisible is handled. (i) Diodorus argues that the present is not present ; Chrysippus contends merely that no time is present “as a whole”. (ii) Diodorus infers

⁷ T1 is S.E. *M* 10. 119 – assumed in Schofield's paper (with Denyer 1981) to be an argument advanced by Diodorus in support of time atoms (pp. 332-333). T3 is Stobaeus 1.106. 13-18, which belongs to a text which “is not under suspicion of any particular bias or proneness to inaccuracy... [its] accuracy is borne out by the coherence of what he says about Chrysippus here with what he says about two other Stoics, Apollodorus and Posidonius...” (p.334)

that the present must therefore be partless; Chrysippus draws the much less radical conclusion that “the present” is not an exact expression, but one used ‘broadly’, since it is applied to periods which are not strictly speaking “just” present. Why the similarities? Because Chrysippus felt obliged to react to Diodorus’ paradox, which (if Denyer is right) underlies his whole atomistic approach to the philosophy of time, space and motion. Why the differences? Because he thinks that the continuum theorist need concede nothing which can justify radical conclusions about the existence or non-existence of time or the present, but only a point about the use of words. I.e. T3 ends (puzzlingly) with a discussion of usage because clarity on this point is in Chrysippus’ view all that is needed to save us from rash Diodoran claims about the nature and existence of the present.” (pp. 338-339)

Schofield later presents a contrast between the Stoic view and that of Aristotle:

“A Chrysippean Stoic, confronted with Aristotle’s *Physics*, could only have thought its attempt to explain time in terms of the advance of the durationless instant a disastrous mistake, not least because Aristotle offers his ‘now’ as an adequate account of the present: if you accept Aristotle’s theory of the ‘now’, you do not need the Stoic; and *vice versa*. If Chrysippus knew the theory underlying his use of ‘now’, he could not have regarded it as a mere matter of linguistic taste whether or not to recognise such a use. He would have had every reason to want to reclaim the word from Aristotle’s clutches, to perform the sole job of referring to the present as a time.” (p.365)

Here we have the differences between Aristotle, Diodorus and Chrysippus laid out clearly. What is striking is that Schofield offers us a reconstruction of this debate which shows Chrysippus using inexactitude as a means of avoiding certain conclusions. It is a



specifically 'broad' (i.e. inexact) notion of "the present" which enables Chrysippus to argue that its usage refers to an interval of time that is part past and part future. On the one hand, this inexactitude is employed to defuse the apparent paradox that leads to time atomism; on the other hand, it is employed to avoid the notion of 'now' as a durationless present.

Having laid out this much of Schofield's argument, we can move on to the main purpose of this section. I have above made the suggestion that there are structural similarities between White's reconstruction of the Stoic view about spatial magnitudes, and Schofield's reconstruction of the Stoic view about time. I have also made the suggestion that these reconstructions are 'compatible' in some way. The hope here is that, if we can see how these reconstructions are similar, we might be able to show how they can be understood as compatible. Given this, we might be in a position to proceed with a reconstruction of some other parts of Stoicism with this compatibility in mind.

We have seen how there is a certain inexactitude in Chrysippus' use of the 'present', and we have seen the repeated suggestion that this inexactitude was purposeful. Two separate passages in Schofield's paper rely on a particular understanding of just what Chrysippus might have had in mind for his inexact usage of the present. The first comes as part of a discussion on the divisibility of time:

"Very probably he [Chrysippus] advanced a rather more specific premiss... since time is infinitely divisible, any present – e.g. this afternoon – will consist of a part that is past and a part that is future... as well as a part that is on some narrower criterion present – e.g. the duration of my mid-afternoon stroll – which will in turn consist of a part that is past etc., *ad infinitum*. Because every present has parts that are not present,

none is ever present as a whole... nor by the same token exactly present.”
(p.336)

The second passage comes as Schofield considers how Chrysippus ought to reply to Plutarch's objection against the doctrine that 'only the present obtains'. How can this be, runs the objection, if the present is made up of past and future, and past and future do not 'obtain'⁸. As Plutarch has it:

“it turns out that he divides the constituents of time which obtains into components of what obtains which do not obtain – or rather, that he leaves nothing at all of time obtaining, if the present has no part which is not future and not past.”⁹

Schofield argues that:

“The final conclusion here is one Chrysippus must resist... He needs to exploit the relativisation of the present inherent in its retrenchability. We argued that it is relative to some smaller present segment of a present period that the period can be seen to be partly past and partly future: for example, at the present time I am walking the dog; but some of that present is future, some past, relative to the smaller present segment of the period during which I am blowing my nose. What counts as present or not present is determined by the identity of the action in question, i.e. of the predicate which belongs to me or obtains/ is the case for me. And so also for what counts as the present's being or not being the case. In the example, the longer present period is the case just insofar as my walking the dog is the case; the shorter present period is the case

⁸ I have left out the argumentation concerning the translational problems surrounding 'obtains', as they are not directly relevant here. See Schofield (1988), p. 352 n. 25 and Long (1969) pp 92-3, there cited.

⁹ Plutarch *comm. not.* 41, 1081F-1082A, part. This attempt to force the Stoic position into paradox seems analogous to the Aristotelian paradox at *Physics* 217b33 (in Sorabji (1983), p.8).

just insofar as my blowing my nose is the case. The means to dissolving the absurdity Plutarch alleges lie here, i.e. in the notion that the obtaining and non-obtaining of times are relativised.” (p.357)

What is the structural similarity between this account of time and White’s earlier account of spatial magnitudes? In the first citation, Schofield gives us two ‘present times’ – 1) this afternoon, and 2) the duration of my mid-afternoon stroll. In the second citation we have 1) the present time [during which] I am walking the dog, and 2) the period during which I am blowing my nose. In each of these cases, the second period is *nested* within the first. Thus we can see the similarity. The model White proposes for spatial magnitudes depends upon the notion of an ‘infinite sequence of nested intervals’. The model Schofield proposes for time depends on the notion of a ‘sequence of nested intervals’ viz. those smaller durations of ‘presentness’ which illuminate the past/future parts of larger durations of ‘presentness’. Schofield’s examples are designed to demonstrate the workings of retrenchability. We can, however, suggest that his account would have no problem created for it if it were suggested that ‘retrenchability’ can continue indefinitely. As he writes of the general case:

“Chrysippus takes for granted that all continua are infinitely divisible, and considers what follows for time, and so for any stretch of time, and so for any present stretch of time.” (p.336)

This structural similarity can be seen again in the notion of *arbitrariness* which is common to both accounts. In White, we remember, there was talk of surfaces being in a certain sense arbitrary - “But such a designated surface [purporting to be the surface of *A*] would be entirely a (physical) geometer’s artifice, having no more *ontological* claim to be

the surface of A than any of the infinite other two-dimensional limits that might be so designated within the region of indeterminacy/fuzziness.”

Similarly, in Schofield, there is the emphasis on relativisation – “The crucial point is that application of a retrenchable expression is always relative to some purpose or interest of the speaker, which need not remain the same from one occasion to the next.”

Even if it is accepted that there are structural similarities between the positions of Schofield on time and White on spatial magnitudes, this is not enough to justify the claim that they are in some sense *compatible*. In order to do this, we need to suggest a broader framework within which these positions *become* compatible. The suggestion I wish to make is that the positions are compatible as part of a wider philosophical position which recognises indeterminacy as a consequence of the acceptance of the continuum as an explanation for ultimate reality. In the case of spatial magnitudes, this indeterminacy is seen in respect of surfaces. In the case of time, this indeterminacy is seen in respect of the scope of ‘the present’.

But such a compatibility presents us with a problem. How can a philosophy whose theories seem to *embrace* indeterminacy, claim to have a dogmatic account of the truth? This problem can be expressed in the following brief argument:

- 1) Something is determinately communicable. (This is a Stoic assumption)
- 2) That which is subject to an infinite division is not determinately communicable.
- 3) Ultimate reality is subject to an infinite division.
- 4) Therefore, ultimate reality is not determinately communicable.

The one thing introduced into this argument which I have not touched on so far in this thesis is the notion that something is determinately communicable. As we will go on to show in greater detail in the next chapter, it was not only a Stoic position that true things could be said – it was a presupposition of all Greek philosophy. The claim that, for the Stoics, something is determinately communicable, is the claim that they understood knowing in such a way that they believed that it was possible in principle to determine whether or not something said was true. What I have tried to do in this chapter is present two reconstructions which, taken together, show that the question ‘What makes something true?’ is not necessarily the determinate state of reality.

The idea I wish pursue as this thesis develops will suggest that what is determinately communicable is not some aspect of ultimate reality, but rather some aspect of human conceptual structures. These conceptual structures in their turn are to be understood as connected to reality by causal means, and it is because of this that they can be depended on as reliable. But I will suggest that the answer to the question ‘What is determinately communicable?’ is not ‘The state of the world’, but rather ‘The state of my understanding with respect to the world’. Whether or not this turns out to be a philosophically significant distinction remains to be seen.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have considered theories about the Stoic approach to spatial magnitudes, and the Stoic approach to time. We have suggested that these theories are similar in that each uses notions of nested intervals and each suggests a certain measure of arbitrariness concerning the reference of the concepts 'surface' and 'the present'. We have further suggested that these theories can be seen as compatible if we understand the Stoics as faced by a common issue of indeterminacy as a consequence of their acceptance of the continuum. We have refined this issue of indeterminacy in an argument which presents a problem about communicable truth. In the following two chapters, we will see if an interpretation of Stoic epistemology can be constructed which deals with this problem, and presents a possible solution.

CHAPTER FOUR : CHARACTERISING STOIC EPISTEMOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

In what follows, I will assume that there is a specific epistemological problem for a philosophy that accepts the continuum as an explanation for ultimate reality. I recognise the ambiguities inherent in the phrase 'ultimate reality', but for the moment I am content to use it to allude to the basic realist assumption that there is some mind-independent way the world is which conditions the truth-value of statements made which pertain to the world.

The main aim of this and the subsequent chapters is to make clear a notion, novel in this context, which I will come to call *intersubjectivity*. Since the precise meaning of this notion will become clear as the argument progresses, I will not attempt a definition at the outset, save to say that it is intended to name a philosophical strategy which could be used to counter the epistemological problem arising from the consideration of the continuum in the previous chapter.

The argument of this and the following chapter will proceed through four stages –

i) A consideration of some generic methodological issues relating to the interpretation of ancient epistemology.

- ii) A consideration of some interpretations of the characterisation of Stoic epistemology and of the theory of impressions (*phantasiai*) leading to a revised account of Stoic epistemology.
- iii) A consideration of the Stoic distinction between the truth and the true and the implications of this for the nature of the knowing subject.
- iv) A brief discussion of ambiguity and etymology, and the significance of these for the Stoa.

Using the material thus gathered and discussed, a characterisation of intersubjectivity as it relates to the interpretation of Stoicism will be offered and critically evaluated. Finally, using the intersubjectivity hypothesis as a conjecture, further aspects of the evidence are examined, with a view to a claim that the notion of intersubjectivity is logically coherent, at least consistent with the evidence, and therefore plausible as part of one possible account of Stoic epistemology.

***OLD CABBAGE AND ANCIENT THINKING: REALISM IN GREEK
PHILOSOPHY***

Intersubjectivity - on any definition - presupposes subjects, and the suggestion that the Stoics had an active notion of dialectical participants as 'subjects' of a certain sort will be considered below, in relation to Sextus *PH* 2.81-3, LS 33P. For now, I would like to consider at length one quite recent discussion of ancient epistemology, which touches on a number of issues which will recur. The discussion is in Burnyeat (1982), and shows us how it is a mistake to view the *Theatetus* as advocating any

version of idealism. On the way to establishing this conclusion, Burnyeat develops the thought that 'realism' was an essential part of the Greek philosophical outlook. Along with this, from another of Burnyeat's papers, we will take a useful distinction between different types of the Protagorean thesis that man is the measure of all things. Following this, we consider a recent work of Denyer (1991), from which emerges a view that whereas modern philosophy considers it necessary to consider 'What makes something true?', the Greeks were faced with the different enquiry 'How can we say falsehoods?' Taken together, the complementary insights that a) the Greeks were unreflective realists, and b) that they had no corollary to the modern 'problems of truth', provide a useful boundary for the developing discussion. First, let us turn to Burnyeat:

"It is a standing temptation for philosophers to find anticipations of their own views in the great thinkers of the past, but few have been so bold in the search for precursors, and so utterly mistaken, as Berkeley when he claimed Plato and Aristotle as allies to his immaterialist idealism." (Burnyeat 1982, p.3)

So begins Burnyeat's 'Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes saw and Berkeley Missed'. The paper is a close consideration of the "superbly elaborate" argument attributed by Plato to Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*, (spanning roughly 151e – 183c), which is designed to "unravel the implications and commitments of Theaetetus' definition (151e) of knowledge as perception" (p.5).

What interests Burnyeat in the early part of this paper is the source of Berkeley's confusion – what could have led Berkeley to misread Plato as an idealist? One reason offered is that Berkeley mistakenly took the presentation by Socrates of Protagoras' position as a statement of Plato's own belief. In contrast, Burnyeat shows

that the Protagorean doctrine is presented as something quite different to a positive doctrine:

“The attempt comprises an epistemological component taken from Protagoras and an ontological component taken from Heraclitus, the two together being worked up into an account of the world and of our relation to it in perception on the strength of which it can be claimed that all perception is knowledge and all knowledge perception... It is then shown (160e ff.) that, when fully elaborated, the Protagorean-Heraclitean theory leads to multiple absurdities, culminating in a proof (179c-183c) that if the theory were correct it would make language impossible.

Thus the structure of the argument is that of a *reductio ad absurdum*. The theorizing which attracted Berkeley represents not Plato’s belief, but his spelling out of the meaning and presuppositions of the initial thesis that knowledge is perception. The theory cannot give Plato’s own view of perception and the sensible world if he thinks he has a good argument to show that it makes language impossible.” (p. 5-6).

Burnyeat’s quarry during this part of his argument is the notion that there was some form of idealism laid out as a respectable theory by some thinker in ancient Greece. He holds to the opinion (derived from Bernard Williams) that “Idealism, whether we mean by that Berkeley’s own doctrine that *esse est percipi* or a more vaguely conceived thesis to the effect that everything is in some substantial sense mental or spiritual, is one of the very few major philosophical positions which did *not*

receive its first formulation in antiquity.”(p.3-4)¹. He goes on to use his characterisation of the knowledge=perception argument of the *Theaetetus* as further confirmation of this view:

“But if Plato did not himself assent to the doctrine which Berkeley (not unfairly) formulates as a denial of ‘an absolute actual existence of sensible or corporeal things,’ it is reasonably clear that no one else did either. The elements of the theory come from Protagoras and Heraclitus, but there is every reason to doubt that either of these thinkers pushed the consequences of his views as far as Plato did. So, if there is a version of idealism to be discerned in the *Theaetetus* – and certainly, no other ancient text comes as near to Berkeley’s position – it is not an idealism that any Greek thinker ever propounded as his own. It is a dialectical construction, which anticipates idealism only to show that it would entail the impossibility of language and other absurdities.” (p.8)

These foundations serve as the basis for Burnyeat to expand his conclusions on to a more general footing. His reasoning is that since the Plato text cited by Berkeley is the best ‘evidence’ for some form of ancient idealism, and since this can be shown to be no such thing, the notion of such an idealism can be dismissed. One by one, Burnyeat rules out various candidates from the list of potential idealists: Aristotle (p. 14-15), Parmenides (p.15), Gorgias and Metrodorus of Chios (p.16), the Neoplatonists (p. 16-18) and finally a sequence of pre-Socratics, considered here more in their own right, rather than through Plato’s distorting lens – Heraclitus, the

¹ Although Sorabji makes an interesting case that Gregory of Nyssa (c. 331-396) should be considered as having developed a form of idealism: “[Burnyeat’s] thesis that idealism could not have arisen until [Descartes] depends on the assumption that it could only be motivated by the need to answer such scepticism. But idealism could arise from many motives.” (1983), p. 288 ff.

Eleatics, Protagoras and Democritus (p.18). In summing up this section, Burnyeat makes an impressive, and convincing, claim:

“...all these philosophers, however radical their scrutiny of ordinary belief, leave untouched – indeed they rely on – the notion that we are deceived or ignorant about *something*. There is a reality of some sort confronting us; we are in touch with something, even if this something, reality, is not at all what we think it to be. Greek philosophy does not know the problem of the external world. That problem is a modern invention... The problem which typifies ancient philosophical enquiry in a way that the external world problem has come to typify philosophical enquiry in modern times is quite the opposite. It is the problem of understanding how thought can be of nothing, or what is not, how our minds can be exercised on falsehoods, fictions and illusions. The characteristic worry, from Parmenides onwards, is not how the mind can be in touch with anything at all, but how it can fail to be.” (p.19)

The argument proceeds from here to a consideration of later Greek philosophy, primarily the Pyrrhonian scepticism of Sextus, and moves towards a consideration of the historical significance of Descartes' use of sceptical strategies in the first and second *Meditations*. The crux of the argument in this part of the paper comes when Augustine is considered as a precursor to Descartes, and is found to be no more than a limited precursor:

“Whatever hints Augustine may have furnished, it was Descartes who put subjective knowledge at the center of epistemology – and thereby made idealism a possible position for a modern philosopher to take. I mean by this that it is not until someone brings the question “Is there anything other than the mind?” into the center of philosophical attention that the replies to it – the affirmative reply of realism, and *a fortiori* the negative reply of idealism – will commend themselves as worthy of, and requiring, explicit defense. (What I have ascribed to antiquity is an unquestioned, unquestioning, *assumption* of

realism: something importantly different from an explicit philosophical thesis.)” (p.33)

This line of thinking is carried forward – with Descartes being shown as an essential forerunner to Berkeley, without whom immaterialism could not have been produced; as having used the sceptical strategies he did knowingly, and with an awareness of how much further he had gone than any ancient thinker could have done. All of which leads to the conclusion of the paper:

“Above all, Descartes’ hyperbolic doubt, going beyond all ancient precedent in its use of the idea of a powerful malignant deity, brought into the open and questioned for the first time the realist assumption, as I have called it, which Greek thought even at its most radical never quite managed to throw off. That was what Berkeley missed. He failed to see that Descartes had achieved a decisive shift of perspective without which no one, not even Berkeley, could have entertained the thought that *esse est percipi*.” (p.40).

The clarity of Burnyeat’s exposition, his analysis of Berkeley’s use of the *Theaetetus* and his consideration of such a wide range of thinkers all commend his conclusions. But most of all, it is his historical diagnosis of the roots of idealism and the problem of the external world as we know it – locating these with Descartes and showing how the strategies of the *Meditations* were conceived as being knowingly more radical than even the extremes of ancient scepticism – which render his account of the ‘realist assumption’ in Greek philosophy convincing. Having accepted this, we are precluded from using any notion of subjectivity in the analysis of Stoicism that might threaten this assumption. So whatever we go on to say, it will be in the context of subjects engaging in dialectic *on the assumption of the existence of the external world*. Given this, there is still the question: What kind of ‘subject’ might we

consider? Well, there is an interesting passage on p.29 of Burnyeat's paper about the notions of internal and external which could provide a label we might be able to work with:

"In the modern formulation "external" means external to the mind, but in Sextus it means simply external to oneself, the cognitive subject, i.e. a man (cf. *adv. Math.* VII 167) – and the question is, "What does that come to?" Sextus can contrast the external thing with the bodily humors which affect one's perception of it (*PH* I 102) or with the medium through which it is perceived (*ib.* 124-127), so it seems plain that the line is not drawn in Cartesian fashion between the mind and everything else outside it, including the skeptic's own body."

We can perhaps take this notion of "cognitive subject" forward into our discussion, stripped as it is of post-Cartesian connotations. So the subject we are after is not in any sense the type of 'thinking thing' which is left behind after a methodological doubt. Nor is it something that is presented as grasping subjective states as uniquely privileged on account of their being subjective. As Burnyeat points out, this innovation comes after the Stoics, with Augustine (p.28)². The notion of the subject which will be useful for interpreting Stoicism ought to be free from dualist connotations: the materialism of the Stoics (explicitly attested to in this context) rules out any notion of an incorporeal mind, or spirit. As far as the idea of a privileged position for the subject is concerned, the Stoic fragments do not supply evidence that such a privilege was significant in their theory.

² Burnyeat refers us to *Contra Academicos* III 26.

The reason I have spent so much time with Burnyeat's paper is that its method and argument are germane to what I wish to now do with the remainder of the opening section of this chapter. Let us, with Burnyeat, accept the realist assumption. What is the effect of so doing? Simply speaking: in accepting the realist assumption, we limit the range of alternatives we will permit when we are asking what such and such a part of the evidence for the Stoics might yield. In adopting the realist assumption, we cut a certain strain of interpretation off at source (we cannot in other words begin by imagining: "It is just possible that the Stoics developed some kind of idealism in their philosophy..."). Also, the realist assumption will help as we go along, since it provides a conceptual backdrop to the argument I intend to pursue. Shortly, we will move on to consider a further assumption which will assist our discussion in a similar way. Before we do this, however, there is a final point to be made. It comes once again from Burnyeat, although this time taken from an earlier paper. Here we find a distinction which reveals two versions of the Protagorean theory in antiquity:

"...Protagoras' position, according to Plato, is that, quite generally, the way a man takes things to be is the way they are for him, so that every judgment whatsoever is true for the person whose judgment it is.

After Plato, however, in Aristotle, Sextus Empiricus, and the later sources generally, Protagoras is understood rather differently: not as a relativist but as a subjectivist whose view is that every judgment is true *simpliciter* – true absolutely, not merely true for the person whose judgment it is. To illustrate the difference: the subjectivist version of the Measure doctrine is in clear violation of the law of contradiction, since it allows one person's judgment that something is so and another person's judgment that it is not so both to be true together; whereas the relativist version can plead that there is no contradiction in something

being so for one person and not so for another.” (Burnyeat 1976a, p.46)

It is clear which of these positions is the stronger. The subjectivist position is beset by problems on all sides – being vulnerable not only to Aristotle’s charge of violating the principle of non-contradiction, but also to the later attacks based on the charge that it is self-refuting (the topic of Burnyeat’s paper). The relativist position, on the other hand, is replete with possibilities. For now, it will suffice for me to make a suggestion that will be picked up and looked at in more detail later. It has been noted in the Platonic argument against Protagoras how the *reductio* comes to its absurd conclusion on the matter of the possibility of language. It is because Socrates believes he has demonstrated how the knowledge=perception theory leads to the impossibility of language that the theory gets finally destroyed. It is perhaps possible for a philosophical position to *begin* in the certainty of language, and yet find that when called upon to explain all manner of linguistic peculiarities, fallacies, paradox and false belief, that it works back to a position somewhat akin to Protagorean relativism – *to explain one stage of the knowing process*. This may sound perverse at this stage of the argument, and I do not have the materials in place to make the idea come any clearer at this stage of the thesis. But what I want to emphasise is Burnyeat’s distinction between subjectivism (where what is true for one is true *simpliciter*) and relativism (where what is true for one is incontestably true for that one). The move from Plato’s relativist interpretation of Protagoras to the later subjectivist interpretation is not well understood, as Burnyeat writes:

“[There is a] wider historical puzzle set by the transformation in the ancient tradition which left Protagoras with an arid subjectivist

viewpoint that no one is likely to defend in place of intriguing form of relativism which some think is still unrefuted.” (1976a, p.46)

It is the possibility of some kind of ‘intriguing form of relativism’ which I want to keep in mind as we move on in this chapter.

We can accept, then, that Greek philosophy was pursued on the assumption of the external world. More recently, Denyer (1991) has joined to that thought its companion: that Greek philosophy was pursued on the assumption that true statements were the norm, and falsehood was a problematic exception:

“...while modern philosophy does not have any problem of falsehood, it does have plenty of problems that one might sum up as ‘problems of truth’...There is the Problem of the External World...the Problem of Other Minds...the Problem of the Reality of the Past...and finally there is the Problem of Induction...The pattern is the same [in these four cases]...a whole set of beliefs, and a philosophical problem about what truth, if any, they have. The idea behind much modern philosophy is, in short, that beliefs are guilty until proved innocent, untrue until proved true.” (pp.1-3)

These introductory comments provide the contrast which Denyer wishes to make clear. He goes on:

“Ancient philosophy is different. You can read an awful lot of Plato and Aristotle without ever encountering any of our four Problems. But you cannot read far without encountering the twin prejudices that, to say the least, by and large our beliefs are true, and that falsehood is of necessity a rare and somewhat problematic occurrence...This contrast between ancient and modern prejudices about truth and falsehood has several consequences. One of the most interesting concerns Idealism and its opposite, Realism...Throughout much of ancient philosophy, Idealism is simply not an option. It is not

just that people do not defend Idealism. The point is rather that they do not even attack it. There is a tradition of intensive philosophical inquiry, which sometimes gives the impression of leaving no avenue unexplored, however unpromising. Ancient philosophers can be found to maintain that nothing moves, that planets are gods, that a virtuous man will be happy on the rack, that each human soul has existed for all eternity, and that the way to live a happy life is to live without believing anything at all, not even that this is the way to live a happy life. Ancient philosophers cannot be found who maintain, or even take trouble to deny, the doctrine of Idealism.” (p.3-4)

From this position, Denyer proceeds to provide an answer to the question of why did Plato, “an intelligent and hardworking philosopher take such efforts to show how, in spite of all, one can say and think falsehoods.” (p.5) This answer begins in the confusions of Plato’s contemporaries concerning being, contradiction, judgment and negation. It proceeds through a consideration of the pursuit of objective truth in the *Republic*, and an argument to the effect that “the final fate of the theory of forms turns out to be irrelevant to our problems about falsehood and the threat which they pose to objectivity” (p.66).

The argument then turns to ‘Naming in the *Cratylus*’, where we are shown conflicting accounts of falsehood based on a common presupposition: “Both the argument with Hermogenes and the argument with Cratylus cover ground familiar from the *Euthydemus*...[both] in its equations of speaking what is not with speaking falsely, and of speaking falsely with speaking of things as they are not... Furthermore, we suggested that the problems over false statement in the *Euthydemus* arose from a mistaken assimilation of stating to naming. Such assimilations are taking place here in the *Cratylus* as well...” (p.73) ‘Three routes to [an account of] falsehood’ are then

considered, with Denyer reaching the conclusion that “The explanation of falsehood offered at this stage of the *Cratylus* does not have the resources to draw the necessary distinctions between the details that must, and the details that need not, be represented in a sentence for that sentence to be true.” (p.82)

In the subsequent arguments drawn from, and concerning, the *Theaetetus*, Denyer presents the doctrine of ‘Protagorean subjectivism’ in a much more favourable light than Plato does – showing how Protagoras’ position is that of a ‘resolute realist’ (pp. 85-87), and how significant it is that Protagoras is made to talk of truth (in the dialogue) not in an absolute but in a qualified way, in terms of each true statement being true *for* someone or other. Having presented Plato’s refutation of the ‘Secret Doctrine’, Denyer concludes with an account of the ‘main thrust’ of Plato’s attack on the theory that knowledge=perception:

“...he attacks the slogan on the grounds that one can have knowledge only if one uses certain concepts, and that to use such concepts is not a matter of one’s sense-organs being stimulated...even when the knowledge concerns something perceptible, there must be more to knowledge than mere perception...you must yourself do something with those stimulations...Knowledge will be something to do so with the mind’s own activities; and what would those activities be, but judging and believing?” (pp.106-107)

After a further chapter on the *Theaetetus*, Denyer moves on to consider the *Sophist*, but before I outline his account of what Plato achieves in this dialogue, it would be as well to pause and consider what Denyer is suggesting ‘in the large’, and what relevance it has for us. As he notes in the introduction, Denyer is committed to exploring “how Plato solved, once and for all, the problem of how we can assert without paradox that someone has adopted a false belief or uttered a false statement”

(p.5) The significance of this for us, is that without this achievement, Stoicism could not have prospered as a truly dogmatic philosophy. The term 'dogmatic' retains for us some of the pejorative force consistently implied by the term in Sextus, but as far as the Stoics were concerned it was an appropriate term to describe the fact that their system was founded on the belief that knowledge was possible. Not just certainties about the perceptual world, but certainties about the end of life, the Good and the Bad, Virtue and Vice. It is hard for us to acknowledge the power of this attempt, since our modernism has instilled in us scepticism of every hue, and this scepticism means we have to make a 'leap of imagination' to wonder how such an attempt could be made. But one thing emerges clearly from Denyer's demonstration, which is that without the efforts of Plato to continually reconsider and explore the variety of epistemological avenues which had been opened up by the speculative Greek thinkers who formed the tradition Plato inherited, the attempt to build a dogmatic philosophy of the nature of a Stoicism would have been unthinkable.³ And if Plato had 'given up' on the question – if he had not pursued it to the settlement of the *Sophist*, the subtle tools we need to appreciate what it is to speak truly and falsely would not have been available to the Stoics. It is surely plausible to imagine that the Stoics took over this settlement in its outline and used it to construct their particular account of the world of knowledge: Brunschwig, for example has used the *Sophist* to give a persuasive account of how the Stoics might have arrived at their ontology in a systematic and reflective way⁴.

³ This gives us a nice analogy, following on from Burnyeat: if Berkeley could not have prospered without Descartes, so the Stoics could not have prospered without Plato. Albeit, of course, for different reasons in each case.

⁴ "In the field of ontology, the relationship between the Stoics and Plato should be described, not in terms of a direct influence, but rather in terms of a challenge to be taken up. It may be that the Stoics had noticed, in the *Sophist*, the passage (237D) in which Plato seems in advance to oppose their attempt

Denyer's account of the arguments about the role of 'the true' in the same dialogue provides us with the materials to suggest that the Stoics were also indebted to Plato epistemologically:

“[Early on in the *Sophist*] Plato has explained how we can negate both predications and identifications. He has explained how both those ways of speaking about what is not are perfectly legitimate and free from paradox. His explanations seemed plausible enough, so far as they went. But did they go far enough? In particular, did they go far enough to solve our problem about falsehood? Plato thought not...Why does Plato proceed in this way? Why does he not declare the problem of falsehood solved the moment he has given his account of negation? The answer is simple. As the problem was originally presented, the making of false statements would require more than just that there be some sense or other in which what is not is. It would require that such a thing be so in some very special sense. Making the false statement that Socrates is foolish would require both that there be such a thing as Socrates' folly (so that it can be stated) and also that there be no such thing (so that the statement of it is false). Now one might admit that making a false statement does indeed require some such thing, and then proceed to argue that in spite of its apparent inconsistency such a requirement can in fact be met. This would mean arguing that talk about existence is ambiguous...Plato adopts a different strategy for explaining how falsehood is possible. He admits that if stating a falsehood requires there to exist something which also does not exist, then false statements could not be made; for such a requirement could not be met. But rather than take this to imply that one cannot state falsehoods, Plato instead proceeds to show that stating

to dissociate the *ti* and the *on*...” (Brunschiwig 1992, p. 118) The argument comparing the *Sophist* and Stoic ontology runs from pp. 118-126.

a falsehood requires no such thing. This he does with his distinction between names, verbs and sentences.” (p.146-148)

The ‘new distinction’ we are presented with consists of three essentials:

- (1) Names alone do not state anything at all, and hence in particular do not state anything false. (p.149-150)
- (2) Verbs designate nothing, but can be true or false of objects. (pp.164-175)
- (3) The meaning of a sentence is wholly independent of anything that may make it true. (pp.179-182)

These essentials, particularly the second, are developed by Denyer from the Platonic distinction between *onomata*, *rhêmata*, and *logoi*. We are shown how the innovation of Plato is to use these terms in something like the correct relation to produce a theory which gives the *correct* account of true statements. It is only when we acknowledge the particular power of names and verbs to combine (or interweave) in the way they do to make statements that we realise the scope of the sayable. And it is only when we appreciate the difference in function between names and verbs that we can appreciate how it is that falsehoods arise – by applying verbs which are not true of objects, to objects. Further, it is only when we grasp how sentences function that we can understand the *notions* of true and false independently, as it were, of existential commitments. Denyer concludes with a comment about success and philosophy:

“The problem of falsehood is therefore solved. After all the exertions which we have made along with Plato, we come to a conclusion that is crashingly banal...The very success of Plato’s efforts is in a way self-effacing. I suspect the same moral can be drawn from other passages in the history of philosophy where we find

great minds belabouring the obvious, or in perplexity about what now seems pellucid: those passages too go to show how there can be great philosophical progress, and how in spite or because of its greatness, that progress can be ignored. Be that as it may, both the profundity of Plato's problem, and the power of his solution, are shown by the way that all his efforts about non-being and falsehood now seem, in more than one sense, much ado about nothing." (p.182)

That the Stoics inherited a stock of logical and epistemological ideas which owe a great deal to the Platonic enquiry that Denyer has outlined cannot be in doubt. Chrysippus' absolute insistence on the bivalence of *axiômata* is a testament to the confidence he felt in the nature of 'assertoric' propositions, and their appropriate status and role. Similarly, the definition of the *axiômata* as 'something true or false which, so far as itself is concerned, can be asserted' speaks of the clarity the Stoics inherited. The vocabulary – as a technical vocabulary – of *onomata* and *rhêmata* was used by the Stoics, and we can perhaps detect a legacy of Denyer's developed notion that verbs designate nothing in the Stoic doctrine of the incorporeality of the predicate (*kategorêma*), and the development by the Stoics of grammar as a formal discipline.

At this stage of our discussion, then, we have adopted two interpretative presuppositions. First, following Burnyeat, we have accepted that Greek philosophy was inherently realist in its outlook. Secondly, following Denyer, we have accepted that Greek philosophy was more engaged with a 'problem of falsehood', than with anything like the modern 'problems of truth'. With these notions in place, we now turn to consider in some detail the Stoic theory of knowledge.

***CONSIDERING THE EVIDENCE FOR A STOIC THEORY OF
KNOWLEDGE***

As a philosophy, Stoicism is characteristically systematic. This means that any interpretation of Stoic epistemology has to bear in mind the internal relationship between an interpretation of the theory of knowledge with other aspects of the philosophy. This issue is particularly acute when considering what the problem of knowledge was for the Stoics. The 'problem of knowledge', as we have already seen from considering the interpretations of Burnyeat and Denyer, has undergone a profound transformation in the history of philosophy, and faced with only a fragmentary record of the Stoics' thought about knowledge, as we are, it is by no means certain what motivated their reflections.

To make a general point here, there must be a great deal of difference between a philosophical point of view presenting its theories in the face of controversy, and a philosophical point of view presenting theories as it is attempting to construct its position. In controversy, a position has to trim its sails (typically concerning definitions) to adapt to hostile queries posed by thinkers who may not share an equivalent concern about the problems which brought a theory together in the first place. On the other hand, when it is attempting to construct its position, a philosophy can assume a shared problem (and probably many shared preconceptions) and use this common standpoint as the foundation from which to make progress. I mention this because a good deal of scholarly comment on Stoicism has been attracted to the controversies arising from their epistemological theories, most notably the cognitive impression. Whilst this is no bad thing, and perhaps inevitable given what survives, it also has dangers. Chief amongst these dangers, perhaps, is that in focussing on the

controversy, we may take as an assumption (for example) that the areas that became controversial were the ones that informed Stoicism during its conception and development *within* the school.

I have a different point of departure from this traditional 'controversy-based' approach, and my working assumption in what follows is that the key problem of knowledge faced by the Stoics arose from their belief in ultimate reality being a continuum, and the concomitant uncertainty which (I claim) this belief implies. The following argument will work on the basis that Stoic epistemology was faced by the problem of combining two doctrinal standpoints, which on the face of it do not come together easily. On the one hand the continuum leaves our judgements of reality underdetermined, and on the other hand the *logos* promises us revelation of (some kind of) objective truth. Our encounter with the continuum is through our faculty of perception, whereas our encounter with the *logos* is from reflection on the meanings represented by our language. I believe there is a way through to a theory that can successfully combine these aspects of reality, and to outline it there follows a consideration of the surviving evidence, and its corresponding scholarly interpretation.

Julia Annas, in the paper *Truth and Knowledge* (1980), has presented a fundamental problem concerning the investigation into Stoic epistemology. When presented with fragmentary evidence which seems to represent a fundamental philosophical problem, there are two basic attitudes one can take. Either one can decide that the philosophical problem is due to the sparse and disjointed nature of the sources, which generate the problem by providing an inadequate, biased or incomplete account. Alternatively, after due reflection, one can conclude that there is enough evidence available to state that the problem is inherent in the philosophy

itself, and represents a confusion or a lack of clarity on the part of the originators. In the paper now under discussion, Annas takes the second line regarding Stoic epistemology, and thus writes at the start:

“This discussion tries to bring out some ways in which the debates were clouded by the Stoic failure to distinguish clearly between questions about what we can know and questions about what is the case, and to realise that truth is a metaphysical notion, not an epistemological one.” (p.84)

And again in the conclusion:

“What I have tried to bring out is that there is an unavoidable unclarity in the Stoic views on these topics; but also the fact that this is not a fortuitous problem, but arises from deep sources of disunity within Stoicism itself.” (p.104)

I am less convinced that there is such a profound philosophical problem for the Stoics, and I think it can be shown that there is a way of reading the evidence which gives them a position not obviously arising from unclarity, nor flowing from a deep source of disunity. Whether this reading can be made to work remains to be seen. Now, let us look closely at the diagnosis Annas provides of the interpretative problem facing those approaching Stoic epistemology, which takes the form of a dilemma:

“The ancient evidence on this subject allows of widely differing interpretations. In what follows I shall try to sharpen our perception of the difficulties by bringing out the two lines into which the interpretations fall... I shall call the first line ‘the coherence interpretation’...Against this I set ‘the correspondence interpretation’.” (p.86-87)

THE COHERENCE INTERPRETATION

Annas begins her presentation with a general characterisation, saying that the coherence interpretation “stresses apprehension rather than the apprehensible presentation [*phantasia katalêptike*], and finds the criterion of truth in the way the particular apprehension fits into the body of rationally accepted beliefs...” (p.86)

She selects from the modern scholarly literature Watson’s *The Stoic Theory of Knowledge* (1966) and Rist’s *Stoic Philosophy* (1969) as exemplars of this approach : “... apprehension guarantees the apprehensibility of a presentation by fitting it into the system of concepts the perceiver has, where the determining factor is not their possibly varying and fortuitous content, but the rational structure of the system and the rationality of the testing procedures regarded as authoritative. This looks very like a coherence theory of truth, and this is indeed what we find in the expositions of Watson and Rist. Watson makes the claim about coherence most explicitly [1966, p.37] ‘... the new piece of information must fit into the so far established world picture, and *katalêpsis* cannot be separated from *logos*, the particular act from the general disposition. For truth, then, there must be coherence.’” (p.90)

Annas then presents a further aspect of the coherence interpretation she wishes to criticise, which is Rist’s additional role for the Stoic sage in determining the coherent truth of presentations:

“Like Watson, Rist links the percipient’s apprehension with the whole rational system of Logos which individuals may grasp and exemplify only to a very imperfect degree. This brings out clearly an implication of the coherence interpretation which has hitherto been missed, namely that since individuals partake of Logos to varying

degrees, it will be the wise man, and not just anybody, who will have properly used the correct rational procedures to test the credentials of a proffered presentation, and who will therefore be the one to certify it as being in fact an apprehensible one.” (p.91)

Following this set-up⁵, Annas moves on to three main criticisms of the notion that a coherentist interpretation of Stoicism is appropriate, which can be represented as follows:

1) “Firstly, there is the problem inevitable for any coherence theory, namely that if coherence is sufficient for truth (as it must be of the presentation has no intrinsic feature compelling our assent) then the world seems to drop out.” (p.93)

2) “A second objection is the absurdity of the result that the wise man is the authority and the norm on accepting presentations; for while he might well be the filter for moral views, how can he be the norm for the deliverances of *sensation*... Being wise and good may improve your judgment about many things, but it can’t do anything for your eyesight.” (p.93)

3) “Thirdly, this view can do nothing with important features of the apprehensible presentation as it is defined for us several times in the sources. We are told that it is something that comes from an existing object and that it is ‘stamped and sealed’ in accordance with the nature of the object. One is tempted by this language to think of it as a kind of mental picture or image, reflecting features of the object

⁵ Which also includes an absurd conclusion from Gould (p.89) [incidentally using an argument identical with Striker (1974 repr. 1996) p.60], a warning about the ‘Kantian tone’ of the coherentists (p.90), and a ‘strong objection’ to Rist in particular about the relations between apprehension and knowledge (p.92).

producing it. But whether or not it should be thought of as a picture, it is certainly a *representational* item. However, since on the coherence interpretation what are accepted or rejected are judgments which express the content of the presentation, there is no obvious way in which its representational features can be what makes it an apprehensible one." (p.93-94)

Annas' conclusion is that between them, these objections constitute a knock-down case against coherentism as a valid interpretation of Stoic epistemology: "We do, then, seem to be forced back on to some form of correspondence interpretation : there is something in the nature of the presentation itself which makes it apprehensible. We do not create the perceptible world as the coherence view is in danger of falling into holding; we face it, and it barrages us with presentations, some of which are veridical and some not." (p.94)

I would like to consider each of Annas' three arguments against coherentism, in order to examine whether or not coherence is as flawed as it is presented here.

Objection One : The world drops out

The first objection is that the 'world drops out' of a coherentist picture, and we can say that if this is an accurate characterisation of this approach, it would indeed be fatal. Since we have adopted the realist assumption, no interpretation which sanctions us carelessly losing the world in this way would be acceptable. But the notion of 'world' at work in this objection has a uniquely modern ring. I wonder if that modern ring comes from the fact that implicit in the notion of the 'world dropping out' is a particular pre-conceived configuration of self and world that would make such an

eventuality possible. In fact, to countenance the notion of the world dropping out (and thus to stand in the place from which this objection obtains) is to recognise at some level the possibility of solipsism, or idealistic subjectivity. If this is the charge levelled at the actual interpretations of Watson and Rist, it seems a little unfair, since neither of their positions seems to entail such a view.⁶ If, on the other hand, it is Annas' extrapolation from their view, then it runs the risk of caricature. We would perhaps do well to examine the discussion which accompanies this first objection, so we can judge it most fairly:

“Truth is assured by the way an individual bit of information fits, or fails to fit, into the coherent overall world-picture; but this idea has plausibility only for some types of statement, and is least plausible for the type that the Stoics were most interested in. Coherence has plausibility as a test only for highly abstract or theoretical statements, hardly for perceptual reports, which are the paradigm of statements whose truth-values can be established one by one, in a non-holistic way. This difficulty is sharpened by the fact that the Stoics give such ontological and logical prominence to particulars and to statements about them. On a coherence interpretation, since beliefs stand or fall as a body, this emphasis is odd, or just a mistake. Further, the sceptics attacked the doctrine of apprehensible presentations on the assumption

⁶ This sentence requires further clarification. Again from Burnyeat (1982) we can take a valuable distinction: “The idealism which has been most influential in modern times is the idealism which asserts, in one version or another, that the world is essentially structured by the categories of our thought.” (p.21) Watson certainly, and Rist, possibly along with Graeser, have sought to use such a version of idealism to explain particularly the Stoic theory of the *lekton*. But their position that the Stoics may have argued that our thought conditions the *categorisation* of reality remains consistent with our ‘realist assumption’, whereas the version implied by Annas does not. More recently, though slightly differently, Engberg-Pederson (1990) holds strongly to the view that some acknowledgement of the subjective is essential to understanding Stoicism. I will discuss an aspect of his argument in detail in the final chapter of this thesis.

that these could be tested individually, without going beyond the bounds of the particular experience. They have been criticised for doing this (by Watson, for example, p.68-69), but what they were doing was surely the natural, not the unnatural thing to do.” (p.93)

Annas begins by characterising the view she is considering by offering a putative definition of coherentism : Truth is assured by the way an individual bit of information fits, or fails to, into the coherent overall world-picture. What might this ‘individual bit of information’ be in this context? One might naturally assume it to be the content of a presentation, which is up for judgement as to its truth. But in her last line, Annas concedes that “... the sceptics attacked the doctrine of apprehensible presentations on the assumption that these could be tested individually, without going beyond the bounds of the original experience. They have been criticised for doing this (by Watson...) but what they were doing was surely the natural, not the unnatural thing to do.” Why does Watson criticise the sceptics for (as we might say) ‘atomising’ the problem of knowledge? For the simple reason that if one takes this step, and views truth as consisting of *discrete* items, then the holistic perspective is lost altogether. This is because the coherence position (at least in Watson and Rist) is predicated on the notion of the *totality* of language facing the *totality* of our perception. It is only in the contemplation of something like this totality that we can, for example, perceive the continuum. We can see from this analysis that the difference of opinion here is a difference of fundamental presuppositions – Annas is not arguing *against* the coherentists (on the same basis) but *past* them (with different

preconceptions).⁷ The definition Annas begins with is not a Stoic-type definition, but a sceptic-type. To present it as a 'summarising definition' is unfair to the position she criticises.

She also operates a distinction between 'highly abstract or theoretical statements' and 'perceptual reports', saying that coherence has plausibility for the first but not for the second. But in Rist's and Watson's account, there is a fully-realised notion of *logos* which acts as an epistemic guarantor, promising that the contents of perceptual reports will be subject to just the same rational and systematic logical conditions as the contents of abstract or theoretical statements. Annas may not like the way Rist and Watson utilise the Stoic concept of *logos*, but her argument does not show that it is internally inconsistent, merely that there is some other position which is logically incompatible with such a notion (viz. the position that argues that coherence is 'least plausible' where perceptual reports are concerned). Furthermore, one can detect a Platonic trace in the distinction itself: what might be the objects relating to 'highly abstract or theoretical statements'? Objects of pure mathematics, perhaps. Or Largeness itself? And perhaps there is a Platonic equivalent for the objects of 'perceptual reports': imperfect instantiations. In fact, Annas almost gives us the sense of 'instantiations' in her notion of 'individual bits of information'.⁸

⁷ Which is how Annas characterises the ongoing Stoic-Sceptic debate in antiquity, which she notes has a 'tendency to produce the frustrating feeling that each side was talking past the other'. (p.100)

⁸ And even if the accusation of latent Platonism fails to convince, there are independent philosophical reasons to be suspicious of such distinctions. Cf. Quine (1951) p.67: "The intuitions [of analyticity] are blameless in their way, but it would be a mistake to look to them for a sweeping epistemological distinctions between analytic truths as by-products of language and synthetic truths as reports on the world. I suspect that the notion of such a dichotomy only encourages confused impressions of how language relates to the world."

Annas then says that perceptual reports are ‘the paradigm of statements whose truth-values can be established one by one, in a non-holistic way’. But surely this raises the question of which paradigm we ought to be considering. Here, we should recall another plank of the Rist-Watson position: immanentism. If, as they hold, the *logos* is immanent in the structure of things, the structure of truth, and (by implication) the structure of man’s faculty to acknowledge the truth, then there just is no position from which one could recognise the ‘one-by-oneness’ which Annas takes as paradigmatic.

Next, there is the argument that the problem for coherentism which stems from the discrete verifiability of presentations ‘is sharpened by the fact that the Stoics give such ontological and logical prominence to particulars and to statements about them. On a coherence interpretation, since beliefs stand or fall as a body, this emphasis is odd, or just a mistake’. In the previous chapter I have tried to show that the ‘fact’ that the Stoics give such ontological and logical prominence to ‘particulars’ is not as simple as it seems on the face of it. I do not want to go into this argument in too much detail here, since the characterisation of what is to count as a particular will come to the fore when the problem emerges of combining a belief in the continuum with a belief in objective knowledge. I can perhaps say again that this is an objection based on a fundamentally different standpoint, rather than providing an argument against an alternative position based on shared propositions.

Against objection one, then, I would place two considerations. Firstly, relating to the main substance of the objection that ‘the world drops out’ of a coherentist interpretation of Stoicism, I would counter that the use of ‘world’ in the objection is different in kind to what Watson and Rist have in mind. Secondly, relating to the supporting arguments, that once again there is a difference in kind

between the preconceptions of Annas' attacks, and the preconceptions against which they are ranged. This produces cross-talk, but not a convincing argument against the position which interprets Stoicism as somehow coherentist, which I submit for now still hangs in the balance.

Objection Two : Wisdom does not go to the senses

I take it that the substance of the second objection is less serious as a general argument against the coherentists. This is mostly because it is aimed at a specific contention of Rist's that the wise man will be criterial for perceptual reports. Annas does not find specific support for this contention in Watson, because it is not there – "Rist stresses the role of apprehension and makes it, in so far as it expresses Logos, criterial for a presentations being apprehensible, because he wants to stress the role of the wise man in Stoic epistemology...he clearly wishes to bring the wise man's epistemological role more into line with his moral role. In doing so, Rist is led to bring out some extreme consequences of the coherence view, which are not so obvious in what Watson says (although they are, I think, implicit in it)." (p.91)

Unfortunately, this relationship of implication is not spelled out by Annas, which leaves us with a loose end. In considering objection two, this loose end causes Annas' argument against 'coherentism' to unravel a little. In the early part of the paper, she has identified both Watson and Rist with the coherence strand of interpretation. She has then identified in Rist what is claimed as an absurd result. But the connection between Rist and Watson on this point is not well made, so Annas' use of it as an objection to coherence in general is not made good. At best it is an argument against Rist.

But even in these terms, does it affect Rist's position? Again, if we look at the supporting argument for the objection, there does seem to be rather more assertion than argument:

"We cannot avoid this difficulty, because the empiricist cast of Stoicism demands that apprehensible presentations come through the senses. But if the wise man is the perceptual norm, then not only is he the only wise, beautiful, sane man, and so on, he is the only man with 20-20 vision, good hearing etc. What could 20-20 vision be, other than the state of the wise man's visual apparatus? But this is ridiculous. Being wise and good may improve your judgment about many things, but it can't do anything for your eyesight." (p.93)

This is a good joke at the end, but it would have been better if it accurately lampooned a position that Rist would have supported. As it stands, it seems to be a joke at the expense of nobody in particular. Nothing in Rist's account of Stoic epistemology presents the wise man's role as a *norm* in any sense. The crucial step in this objection of Annas comes when she characterises the role of the wise man, on a coherentist interpretation, as being the 'authority...on accepting presentations'. It can be argued - and I will attempt such an argument below - that it is a mistake to understand the wise man's assent as being merely to impressions *simpliciter*. The whole point of the Stoic doctrine, as I understand it, is to provide for a function of assent which is turned two ways - in one way as the type of assent Annas refers to as 'accepting presentations', but in another way as a 'reflective' assent based on the comparison between the content of a received impression and other conceptual contents arising from preconceptions and conceptions. Once this dual role of assent is understood, the wise man can indeed be thought of as an authority on the acceptance of presentations, but not on the basis of his sensory apparatus, but on the basis of his

ability to integrate the impressions he receives into a (perfectly secure) system of knowledge.

Objection Three : Coherence cannot explain the evidence

On the face of it, this is the most promising objection. It deals with the fact that the conceptual constraints of a coherence position can do nothing with repeated items of the evidence which stress the 'representative' nature of the relation between appearance and reality. As Annas has it:

“since on the coherence interpretation what are accepted or rejected are judgements which express the content of the presentation, there is no obvious way in which its representational features can be what make it an apprehensible one. But it is these features that are stressed in Zeno's definition and any variants on it; these do not even mention the proposition expressing the articulable content, but tell us that a presentation is apprehensible when it creates an impression which presents its object in such a way that it could not be confused with any other object whatsoever.” (p.94)

As it stands, this looks like a knock-down argument against coherentism as an interpretative strategy for Stoic epistemology. In order to function fully against the coherentist position, however, it has to be demonstrated that such a position is either unaware of, or aware of but incapable of handling, the representational features which make a presentation apprehensible. What we find reviewing Rist and Watson is an altogether more interesting picture.

Rist is clearly aware both of the aspect of the presentation which is 'representative' and the aspect which means its object 'could not be confused with any other object whatsoever':

"We know that all sensations are received by the mind as presentations. But these presentations are of different kinds. Only those which the Stoics call *katalêptikai* are relevant to the acquisition of knowledge. Fortunately our evidence about their definition of a 'recognisable presentation' is fairly clear. *It is a presentation caused by an existing object and imaged and stored in the perceiver in accordance with that existing object itself, and of such a kind as could not come from what is not an existing object...*"⁹ [Emphasis added]

Rist then goes on to explore further the translation of 'of such a kind as could not come from what is not an existing object'. Linking the definition to sceptical attacks¹⁰, he concludes (in harmony with Annas), that "...the Stoics must have argued - and there is evidence for this - that no two things are alike. Therefore, if a presentation is recognisable, it is not only recognisable as coming from an existent rather than a non-existent object... a presentation of such a kind ... must have been one which could not arise from any other existent object than the existent from which it did in fact arise." (Rist 1969, pp.137-8)

In fact, far from being unaware of the tension between the representational nature of the apprehensible presentation, and the requirement for cohesion between

⁹ Rist (1969) p.136-137, referring to S.E. M 402-11 etc., 426; PH 2.4, 3.242

¹⁰ There were two principal arguments the sceptics used against the apprehensible presentation. First, that it could arise from a non-existent, and second that it could arise from something which was indistinguishable from some other thing. Cf. S.E. M 7.402

truths assented to by the wise, Rist has a proposal to address exactly this problem, which cuts across Annas' dilemma:

“On the one hand there are texts which say that all *aisthêseis* (sense-perceptions) are true; on the other hand we have texts which say that every *aisthêsis* is an assent and an act of recognition (*katalêpsis*).”¹¹ We can see from this that Rist is sensitive to evidence on both sides of Annas' dilemma. His remedy is to read an ambiguity into the early Stoics' use of *aisthêsis*:

“The only possible way to resolve this is to assume that *aisthêsis* is used in two senses: that of bare sensations, and that of perception. Only on the basis of the first meaning of *aisthêsis* will it be proper to say ‘All *aisthêseis* are true’... The Stoics must have expunged all connection with any kind of mental activity from this meaning of the word. If seeing is an *aisthêsis* in this sense, *aisthêsis* means merely seeing as an animal would see¹², with no awareness of the fact that it sees. That a distinction between bare sensation and perception was current among the Stoics is borne out by a passage of Galen, who quotes a Stoic view that ‘it is possible to see and touch and hear without recognition (*me katalêpsis*), but it is not possible to perceive without recognition’.¹³ Thus seeing *qua* seeing does not involve recognition (or, presumably, assent in any human way), but seeing *qua* perceiving does.”¹⁴

¹¹ Rist (1969), p.135. For the evidence that all *aisthêseis* are true, see Aetius 4. 9.4 For the evidence that every *aisthêsis* is an assent and an act of recognition, D.L. 7.51-2 (LS 39A, 40Q).

¹²Cf. Sorabji (1993), esp. pp. 30-49 for more on this way of seeing.

¹³ Rist refers us to Galen, *In Hipp. De Medic. Off.* Vol 18B, p. 654 K.

¹⁴ Rist (1969) p.135-136. I will develop an interpretation of *phantasiai* later which owes much to the possibility Rist outlines here.

To sum up this brief review of Rist, my case is not that his account is without problems. I agree with Annas that there is a serious issue concerning the relationship between apprehension and knowledge in Rist. What I believe has been shown, however, is that Rist cannot in all fairness be used as an example of a 'coherence interpreter' where this comes with the suggestion that his position can, in Annas' words, "do nothing with important features of the apprehensible presentation as it is defined for us several times in the sources' (Annas 1980, p.93).

If Rist is not the coherence interpreter of Annas' argument, what of Watson? Since Annas has proved the case that Watson is an explicit defender of the coherence interpretation of Stoicism¹⁵, the only question we need to ask is concerning her charge that his position can "do nothing with important features of the evidence." Where Rist found a persistent ambiguity could explain certain tensions in the evidence, Watson uses an idiosyncratic interpretation of the *lekton* to explain why coherence is more important than, say, correspondence. His set up of the problem reflects his attitude:

"But now we are faced with a problem. If the soul is *tabula rasa*, the sense input is essential for knowledge: yet if this sense information is unreliable, the whole structure of our knowledge is undermined. How then are we to know that our sense information is genuine... the Stoics apparently accepted that, though people make mistakes, sense activity was reliable. How could they do this or what was their criterion of truth?" (Watson 1966, p. 30)

¹⁵ Via her citations of Watson on p.90, viz. Watson (1966) pp. 37, 51, 53.

Again, we can note a sensitivity to the problem not evident in the characterisation given by Annas of his interpretation. Again, we find a fair account of the evidence for a 'representative' aspect of impressions:

"When is a presentation *katalêptike*? It is called *katalêptike* because it permits *katalêpsis*, a real grasp of the object... To be acknowledged, the *phantasia* must be from an existing object, clear and distinct... We can see or touch or hear a thing without noticing it...Noticing involves checking (though we may not be aware of any formal process)... for every perception involves assent or agreement – and therefore some form of comparison¹⁶. Even to look at a thing and say simply "white" is a contracted statement of "This is white". Two elements, therefore, are involved : the instance and that to which it is referred." (Watson 1966, p.35)

Then, using a interpretation of *emmoêmata*, Watson goes on to state his version of the coherence interpretation:

"What grounds have we for maintaining that the model we form of reality and express through language is coherent in itself and in any way parallels reality... For language is only the physical externalisation of a capacity and tendency to link and classify reality. It represents a compromise on the way to the ideal when the mind is commensurate with reality; it is a deliberate linking in order to bring it to some extent within our control. But what is the guarantee of the utility of this control? If it is imposed by us and is not material in a universe which is only real in so far as it is material, is it not purely subjective and therefore unreliable?

¹⁶ See Watson (1966) p.35 for references to support each contention.

It is not purely subjective, because the limits or frames which are imposed have universal validity in the universe of discourse.”
(p.37-38)

Again, I do not intend to go into the details of Watson’s reasons for his views. As in the case of Rist, there are aspects of his reconstruction which I would not agree with (the persistent Whorfian talk of ‘us *imposing* language on reality’ being perhaps the most uncomfortable idea). But I hope I have cited enough for it to be clear that it is not the case with Watson that he can ‘do nothing’ with the representative aspect of the Stoic presentation. To be sure, he conceives of it as playing a subordinate role to coherence, but it is still there. It still has a significant function in his view of the system, indeed his whole work in explaining the beginning of the ‘knowing process’, involving *oikeiōsis*, *prolēpsis*, *koinai ennoiai*, and the way non-sensory ideas are formed (by way of transference – *kata metabasin*) is an effort to locate the ‘representative’ part of the impression in a full context (pp.22-27). It is indeed Watson’s case that coherence acts as a *guarantee* of the propositional character of our experience, but this is certainly not the same as doing without its non-propositional character.

In this section, we have considered Annas’ arguments against the ‘coherence interpretation’ of Stoic epistemology. We have found a mismatch between her characterisation of Watson and Rist, and the positions they take in the works Annas refers to. Since she uses Watson and Rist as exemplars of the coherence approach, this mismatch damages her argument. Let us briefly reconsider her conclusion to this section, which we have referred to already above:

“We do, then, seem to be forced back on to some form of the correspondence interpretation : there is something in the nature of the presentation itself which makes it apprehensible. We do not create the perceptible world, as the coherence view is in danger of falling into holding; we face it, and it barrages us with presentations, some of which are veridical and some not.” (Annas 1980, p.92)

If we dissect the conclusion in the light of our reconsideration of Annas' views, I believe the following emerges.

- 1) The sense of being 'forced back' to a correspondence theory is diminished.
- 2) The case that 'there is something in the nature of the presentation itself which makes it apprehensible' is not (as here suggested) unique to a correspondence view.
- 3) Whilst the coherence view may be in *danger* of falling into the notion that we somehow 'create the perceptible world' (and Rist and Watson can be shown to be falling in this regard), it has not been proved that there might not be a position both coherentist and rigidly realistic.
- 4) Indeed we face the world and are barraged, but it has not been shown that coherence is unnecessary to provide the Stoic response to the question “Which presentations are veridical?”

THE CORRESPONDENCE INTERPRETATION

“...from the philosophical point of view the representational nature of the Stoic presentation may be misleading. We grasp the real things they come from. Modern representational theories of this type

tend to regard themselves as being vulnerable to the sceptical challenge that perhaps all we can really know are the presentations; we can never penetrate through to the real things that cause them. Attempts to meet the sceptic tend to take the form of trying to show that there can be a convincing argument to bridge this gap; and since this endeavour has never prospered, it tends to be assumed that a representational theory is a mere half-way house, an unsatisfactory position that is already in pawn to the sceptic and already doomed. The Stoic theory, however, is philosophically much nearer to that familiar Aunt Sally, pre-sceptical naïve realism. For if a presentation is such that it cannot be false, it can be grasped as securely as the object itself can for a naïve realist.” (Annas 1980 pp. 94-95)

The distinction drawn here between the portrayal Annas intends for Stoicism and modern representative theories is important for the clarity of her position. It is the characterisation of Stoicism as pre-sceptically naïve that she intends to use as underwriting the ‘correspondence’ interpretation of Stoicism. Unlike the case of the coherence view, Annas does not provide a list of scholars to whom the ‘correspondence’ interpretation should be attributed, although she mentions Schofield (1982) in respect of the characterisation of the Stoics as naïve realists, and Sandbach (1971) in respect of the content of presentations, and in respect of associated problems with the role of assent. There are three objections to the correspondence approach considered by Annas. Since Annas deals with the correspondence interpretation more briefly than the coherence position, I shall be content to list her objections with brief support from her paper.

Objection One : Naïve realism is too naïve

“The first major objection to this interpretation is that it gives the Stoics a theory which is *too* naïve, disagreeably so. It is simply dogmatism to insist that some presentations just are apprehensible, announcing their own veridicality.” (p.95)

In discussing this objection, Annas makes reference to the ‘younger Stoics’ who amended the doctrine of the *phantasia katalêptike* to include cases where there is an ‘obstacle’ to apprehension, and also the “defence offered by Antiochus (*Acad.* II 17 ff.)... [which] has interesting affinities with modern holistic arguments which deny the need for foundations in epistemological enterprises.” (p.95)

She also alludes to a passage in Plutarch where “we are told that Chrysippus wrote in defence of ‘common sense and the senses’ (*Stoic. Rep.* 1036 cd)... it is not impossible that he may have held that the only philosophical defence possible, or needed, for the idea that apprehensible presentations are self-announcing, was a common-sense one.” (p.96)

It is not necessarily ‘simply dogmatism’ that might lead a philosophy to insist that certain presentations announce their own veridicality – perhaps a desire to root philosophy in common beliefs could lead that way. Also, the feeling that it is ‘disagreeably naïve’ for a philosophy to simply assert that some presentations are faithful only arises on the assumption that philosophy *ought* to produce an account of all conceptually basic perceptions. A philosophy could claim to avoid naivety because of how it *proceeds* from the assumption that some presentations are veridical, whilst maintaining that it neither has nor needs an account of basic perceptions.

Objection Two : Common sense is not in evidence in other parts of Stoicism

This objection begins with two questions: “Is a commonsense epistemology the *right* ‘praktisches Postulat’ [Pohlenz’s phrase] for a moral theory as revisionary as Zeno’s? Why is it all right to found all knowledge on the plain man’s beliefs about the world, when this very knowledge will overturn some of his most cherished beliefs in the spheres of morals, physics and logic? While the coherence interpretation falls into absurdity by making the wise man the perceptual norm, this view falls into the opposite error of being too determinedly commonsensical.” (p.97)

The main thing to emphasise with respect to this objection is the possibility that for the Stoics, human reason was in some way *transformative*. With this possibility in play, we can well imagine an epistemology both founded on common sense and leading to counter-intuitive conclusions. The Stoics want to make the good life like a finely-honed skill, or art, to mirror the artistry displayed in the construction of the universe of which we are a part. The perfection of this art, perhaps, is the goal of our transformative human reason.

Objection Three : Correspondence cannot explain the evidence

“Thirdly, just as the coherence interpretation could do little with the features of the apprehensible presentation that made it a representation of an object, so the correspondence interpretation can do little with the feature that plays a vital part in the coherence interpretation, namely the fact that the presentation receives assent and so must have an articulable content the expression of which is a proposition.” (p.97)

Annas' discussion of this objection breaks down into a consideration of two aspects of assent and its role. Firstly, our attention is drawn to the fact that this issue leaves Sandbach 'instructively embarrassed' when he argues that "the presentation gives information about the external object and that 'it is this information to which we can assent or refuse to assent'¹⁷". (p.97) Annas comments on this that if this attitude is taken, "then it is strictly speaking not the case that what we assent to is the *presentation*, and what the Stoics actually say has to be called misleading... if it suggests that assent is what is epistemologically basic, for on this view that cannot be so." (p.97-98) Secondly, she mentions Arcesilaus' objection that strictly speaking one assents to a proposition, not to a presentation. But this objection of Arcesilaus we will consider later in the chapter, for the moment let us turn to summing up what Annas has said.

SUMMING UP

Annas' presentation of the objections to the correspondence point of view complete the case for the main argument of this paper - that there is a basic and inherent confusion in Stoic epistemology:

"In fact there is a certain unavoidable tension in the apprehensible presentation and the way it has both representational features and an articulable content. Of course there is no conflict between these features as such, and on any account of truth it must be the case that what is assented to is a propositional item, so that the

¹⁷ Reference to Sandbach (1971a) p.13

presentation must have both kinds of features. The problem arises when we press the question, what makes the apprehensible presentation the criterion of truth; for it is hard to see how both sets of features can be essential to a presentation's being an apprehensible one. If it is our assent, backed up by Logos, which certifies the presentation as being apprehensible, then the accuracy with which it reflects or pictures its object seems to be dispensable – indeed, it can be overruled. And if what makes it apprehensible is just the utterly unmistakable and particular way it reflects its object, and we cannot resist this, then the fact of our assent registers this, but cannot be what makes the presentation apprehensible, and so appears redundant from the standpoint of its being the criteria of truth.” (p.98-99).

This is the point of the argument at which the dilemma is supposed to be seen in full force – representing the basic confusion Annas wishes to attribute to the original Stoics. However, two points could be made as we consider this summing up. First, as I have attempted to show, there is some doubt about the accuracy and ‘purchase’ of the reconstructions Annas offers when she argues against the interpretations which have been attempted of Stoic epistemology, particularly against those interpretations of a coherentist nature. Secondly, it remains undemonstrated that the confusion Annas finds in the interpretations should be located with the Stoics, rather than with the interpretations themselves (and, perhaps, their inevitable modern commitments).

The first two sentences of Annas’ summing up do not stand up to close scrutiny: “In fact there is a certain unavoidable tension in the apprehensible presentation and the way it has both representational features and an articulable content. Of course there is no conflict between these features as such...”. If there is no conflict as such, we might wonder, how is the tension ‘unavoidable’, especially

since the second sentence continues "... and on any account of truth it must be the case that what is assented to is a propositional item, so that the presentation must have both kinds of features"? The nub of the issue comes in the next sentence: "The problem arises when we press the question, what makes the apprehensible presentation the criterion of truth; for it is hard to see how both sets of features can be essential to a presentation's being an apprehensible one."

The consideration of this sentence is a key stage in my overarching argument, and I would like to now spend some time considering two issues in this sentence which are directly relevant to my enquiry. These issues can be represented by the following two questions:

- 1) What are we to think of when asked to think of the Stoic criterion of truth?
- 2) Must we limit the Stoics to a single criterion of truth?

WHAT ARE WE TO THINK OF WHEN ASKED TO THINK OF THE STOIC CRITERION OF TRUTH?

There is some scholarly agreement on the best way to understand the Stoic use of the 'criterion of truth', which is as some kind of *guarantee* for truth claims¹⁸. The thought here is that when some philosopher in Hellenistic times made a claim that such and such is true, it was thought necessary for him to also say what *makes* such and such true – in other words, what is the *basis* of knowledge, or knowledge-

¹⁸ See e.g. Schofield (1980) p.296; Striker (1974, repr. 1996) pp. 51-68 ; Striker (1990) pp. 151-152; Frede (1983, repr. 1987), pp.166-169.

claims.¹⁹ One interesting historical point, which dovetails neatly with our consideration of Protagorean relativism at the outset of this chapter, is revealed by Striker:

“The earliest passages in which *kritêrion* appears in the sense of “means of judgment” occur in Plato: *Rep.* IX 582a6 and *Tht.* 178b6... In the second passage Socrates interprets the famous “Protagorean thesis” [that ‘man is the measure of all things’]... We can infer from the context that the “criterion” which man has in himself is to be understood as the faculty of perception. Thus, in this passage as well, “criterion” designates that ability by which the truth and falsity of opinions are decided. Apart from these passages the word does not appear in this sense anywhere else in Plato. Aristotle seems to use it only once: *Met.* K6, 1063a3, in a section dealing with the “Protagorean thesis”, where it... obviously has the same meaning as the adjective *kritikos*, which Aristotle often uses. The expression might be translated: “the sense-organ which judges the aforementioned flavours”. Apart from these three passages the word cannot be documented prior to Epicurus and the Stoics.” (1974, p.26)

I do not wish to pursue this issue here, being content for the time being to leave it as little more than an historical curiosity. It does raise an interesting possibility, however. The notion of a criterion of truth, as is widely accepted, was a fundamental touchstone in the epistemological debates within and between the

¹⁹ The distinction between knowledge and knowledge-claims is particularly important for Frede: “For the Stoics also assume that there are no wise men or at least that not even the members of their own school have attained the blissful state of wisdom... It immediately follows that there is no knowledge or at least that the Stoics do not have any knowledge... The Stoic claim is not that they have attained the knowledge Socrates tried to find, but rather that the knowledge Socrates was after is attainable by human beings.” (1983, repr. 1987), p.170.

Hellenistic schools. Could it be that it became such a touchstone not merely as an accidental offshoot of the discussion of Protagoras, but *because* of the epistemological problems raised by Protagorean relativism (in some ‘intriguing’ form)? The state of the evidence leaves such a question unanswerable in historical terms, and any answer would have to be given rather in conceptual terms. Such an answer might be seen as useful if, for example, the assumption of a direct philosophical connection between the Protagorean thesis and subsequent epistemological developments provided an interesting explanation for some aspect of a later theory. As I have said, we will not pursue this for the present, but leave the last word to Striker:

“On the basis of our fragmentary sources we can no longer establish who introduced the expression *kritêrion* or *kritêrion tês alêtheias*, used as a technical term, into the philosophical debate. In later doxographers we find nothing whatever about the origin of the term, which is even used, in an obviously anachronistic way, in the presentation of the theories of the Presocratics. Plato and Aristotle, as we have seen, do not use it as a technical term. The fact that it appears in two of the three passages cited in connection with the “Protagorean thesis” might perhaps indicate that it was first employed in the discussion of this thesis. In Epicurus and the Stoics, at any rate, it already appears to be so common as to stand in need of no further introduction.” (1974, pp. 27-28).

To return to the issue at hand, let us remind ourselves of the problem raised by Annas, which provides the framework for this discussion:

“The problem arises when we press the question : what makes the apprehensible presentation the criterion of truth?”.

In beginning to unpack this question, we have started to look at the notion of the criterion of truth. We might perhaps again refer to Striker to provide a definition

of the Stoic criterion of truth as it relates to the 'apprehensible presentation'. This definition comes at the end of a detailed argument²⁰ considering various options as the meaning of the Stoic criterion:

"The Stoics had defined their criterion – *katalêptike phantasia* – in such a way that if it is established that someone has the *katalêptike phantasia* that *p*, it follows that *p* is true. If a *katalêptike phantasia* that *p* is given, then the truth-conditions for the proposition that *p* must be met, on logical grounds. The claim that *katalêptike phantasia* is the criterion of truth can be interpreted as the thesis that there are impressions from whose presence the existence of a state of affairs can be directly inferred." (Striker 1974, p. 57)

It is important for Annas' argument that she should succeed in imposing the following dilemma upon the Stoics: if we 'press' the question about the *katalêptike phantasia* being the criterion of truth, we will come to see that the representational and coherentist aspects of its role in Stoic epistemology are in certain ways irreconcilable. But Striker's approach shows how we can understand the Stoic doctrine of the apprehensible presentation in such a way that the dilemma is defused. The way this is achieved is quite simple : the apprehensible presentation, according to Striker, is *indirect* in that it does indeed provide a *representation* of states of affairs, but *direct* in that its very presence *logically* implies the existence of those states of affairs. There are two consequences of accepting this interpretation. Firstly, we no longer associate the apprehensible presentation *qua* criterion of truth with issues of coherence per se, since it functions as a criterion even in Annas' 'atomist' conception

²⁰ The argument runs from p.51-57, in Striker (1974).

of representational items. Secondly, and subsequently, we adopt an attitude to the whole issue of the criterion of truth which neutralises Annas' problem.

MUST WE LIMIT THE STOICS TO A SINGLE CRITERION OF TRUTH?

My purpose in asking this question is to probe the characterisation offered by Annas of the apprehensible presentation as the definitive Stoic criterion of truth. I do not intend to question the assumption that for the Stoics the apprehensible presentation was the *sine qua non* of their epistemology. However, it is worth demonstrating that the *critical* aspect of the apprehensible presentation is best seen when it can be understood as functioning in a system with the other criteria known to have been cited by the Stoics. This has been best explained by Frede (1983):

“First of all, cognitive impressions will directly guarantee only the truth of their own propositional content. And if it is true that cognitive impressions are perceptual, the only propositions whose truth they can guarantee directly are propositions that attribute a perceptual feature to a particular object. If they nevertheless are called *the* criterion of truth, it is because in an indirect way they also guarantee the truth of all other propositions that are known to be true by human beings. And they do this in the following way. They give rise to general ideas, the so-called common notions which the mind forms naturally on the basis of cognitive impressions and which in turn allow us to have further cognitive impressions. And since cognitive impressions do represent things as they are, the common notions based on them will represent things as they are... It is for this reason that Chrysippus sometimes can say that perceptions and common notions

constitute the criterion (DL 7.54). Cognitive impressions, then, are the criterion of truth in the sense that their truth guarantees the truth of whatever can be known by human beings. It is only through them that we have any knowledge of what is true and what is not true.” (p. 166)

What Frede suggests here is a role for cognitive impressions that retains its place at the core of Stoic epistemology but does not give it an exclusive claim to being the criterion of truth – or at least that when this exclusive claim is made it is only in the context of the other criteria, perception and common notions. The effect of this position is that it broadens the scope of the concept of the cognitive impression such that it can act as guarantee, not only for perceptual reports, but also for those propositions which include concepts connected to perceptual reports only in an ‘indirect’ way (cf. Imbert 1980). In this way, by introducing the indirect scope of the cognitive impression alongside its direct function, Frede presents it as an epistemological concept which acts as the *gateway* to certain knowledge, without unnecessarily limiting the scope of such knowledge. Frede gives a number of reasons for this attitude which are worth looking at since they provide a reading of the evidence which gives an alternative to reading made by Annas, and which if accepted could contribute further to disarming the dilemma at the heart of her paper.

“... we have to remember that there is no such thing as the impression that corresponds to a given proposition, and, therefore, when the truth of a proposition is in question, we may have to go through a number of impressions all of which have the proposition in question as their propositional content till we hit upon a cognitive impression. Thus we may not be certain of the color of an object we see in the distance. As we move nearer we have a series of different impressions that the object is blue. Similarly in the case of a theoretical problem our impression of the proposition in question will

change as we consider the matter. The impression we have when we have when we have a proof for a proposition is quite different from the impression that we had to start with. Thus cognitive impressions cannot be the criterion in the sense that we just have to look at our impressions to determine whether a proposition is true. It is, rather, by considering the proposition that we may get a clearer and clearer impression.” (p.166-167)

In a way, we can describe this move by Frede as an inversion of the priority in the relationship between impressions and propositions in Stoicism from a picture where we have impression \Rightarrow proposition to one where proposition \Rightarrow impression, in the relation of determining certainty. The first relationship we might describe as temporal, the second logical. Now, it is certainly true that the cognitive impression is temporally prior when it comes to *establishing* the concepts required for making determinate judgments (as Frede’s naturalistic argument in the first cited passage above clearly shows). Following from this, it is tempting to limit the relationship between impression and proposition to just this temporal relationship, thereby assuming that propositions are somehow continually derived from perceptual information. By his suggestion of the indirect power of cognitive impressions to establish certain common notions, (a process whereby the cognitive impression underwrites perception), Frede breaks the necessity of a generative relation from impression to proposition and allows for his final claim that it is by “considering the proposition that we may get a clearer and clearer impression”. The argument continues:

“Most important, though, we have to avoid thinking of Stoic impressions as pictures or images of the world which can be looked at introspectively, with the mind’s eye, as it were, to see whether they

have this feature that guarantees their truth. What we see and grasp, according to the Stoics, are objects in the world, and not pictures or images of them, though grasping objects does involve the awareness of their representations in the mind, just as it involves an awareness of the mind itself. For we have to take into account that impressions for the Stoics are mental states that are identified as highly complex physical states... It is, of course, true that the Stoics think that impressions reveal themselves along with the object they are impressions of (Aetius, *Plac.* IV 12.2). But all that this means is we can tell what our impressions are; after all, they are our thoughts. But we do not know our thoughts by introspection, nor is there any reason to believe the Stoics thought so.” (p.167)

At this point we can draw Frede’s argument directly alongside Annas’, since here we have an interpretation of Stoicism which undermines the characterisation of Stoic epistemology as being similar in significant respects to a ‘correspondence’ interpretation. We can recall how Annas writes: “...from the philosophical point of view the representational nature of the Stoic presentation may be misleading. We grasp the real things they [the presentations] come from. Modern representational theories of this type tend to regard themselves as being vulnerable to the sceptical challenge that perhaps all we can really know are the presentations; we can never penetrate through to the real things that cause them... The Stoic theory, however, is philosophically much nearer to that familiar Aunt Sally, pre-sceptical naïve realism...” (Annas 1980, p. 94). What Frede is pointing out is that the ‘representational’ aspect of Stoic presentations does not necessarily imply that there is a pictorial or imagistic stage to perception. The most telling line of his in this regard is his identification of impressions with thoughts – “But we do not know our thoughts by introspection, nor is there any reason to believe the Stoics thought so.” Generally,

if we accept with Frede that the Stoic impression does not provide us with the type of thing which we can directly introspect (nothing that could stand in place of e.g. a Russellian 'sense-datum') then the case for considering Stoic epistemology as similar to any correspondence theory is considerably diminished. If we combine such an acceptance with Frede's previous remarks about the cognitive impression acting as a (general) criterion of truth only in combination with other criteria, and his remarks concerning the relation between impressions and propositions, we do not get the sense of a theory which is realist in a pre-sceptically naïve way at all. We will return to the question of how to characterise Stoic epistemology later, but for now there are still important parts of Frede's account to consider. The point of his argument against the notion of impressions being appropriate objects for introspection is that it would leave the Stoics with an intolerable weakness in their epistemology:

“...if the Stoics thought that we could see by introspection whether an impression has the distinctive feature of a cognitive impression... they would have opened themselves to the charge of an infinite regress. For we would have to ask what is supposed to guarantee the truth of the impression that a given impression has this distinctive feature. Quite generally, the criterion will fulfill its role only if it does not require the judgment that an impression is of a certain kind. For this will always raise the question how this judgment is to be certified.” (p. 167)

Frede's ending comment here really represents for him the core of the issue of the cognitive impression as a criterion of truth. It is worth re-stating, since at first glance it can seem counter-intuitive: “Quite generally, the criterion will fulfill its role only if it does not require the judgment that an impression is of a certain kind.” We could perhaps gloss what Frede is saying here by the following thought. We take a

ruler and use it to measure a line of 15cm. This involves our comparing the ruler with the length of the line and reading off the value. The whole utility of the ruler would be lost, however, if it came unmarked and we had to *begin* by marking off arbitrary points. To paraphrase Frede, the ruler will fulfil its role only if it does not require the judgment that a length should have a certain value. But this presents a difficulty of how to account for the *nature* of the cognitive impression as a criterion of truth in Stoicism, since Frede is suggesting that there need be no awareness of the fact that a given impression is cognitive. The explanation he has for escaping this difficulty is philosophically brilliant, utilising as it does a causal as opposed to a phenomenological explanation for the cognitive impression's unique power:

“The Stoic theory, I want to suggest, escapes this difficulty because it assumes that the distinctive feature of cognitive impressions is a causal feature of impressions such that cognitive impressions play their criterial role not through our awareness of their distinctive feature, but through the causal effects they have on our minds in virtue of this feature. The word “to discriminate” is ambiguous. It is used in cases in which one recognises things to be of different kind and, in virtue of this awareness of the difference, treats them differently. But there are also cases in which somebody reacts differently to things of a different kind not in virtue of an awareness of their difference and perhaps even without knowing that there is such a kind of thing which he systematically reacts to in a distinctive manner; there is a causal link between a feature of the object and the behaviour of the person, but the awareness of the feature on the part of the person is not an essential part of the causal chain; and nevertheless such a person can be said to discriminate or to discern the feature... The suggestion, then, is that the distinctive mark of cognitive impressions is a causal feature in that it makes the mind react in a distinctive way and that it is in this sense

that the mind can discriminate cognitive and noncognitive impressions.” (p.167-168)

Using the notion of a ‘causal feature’ of impressions as opposed to a phenomenological one entails a striking reorientation of the evidence for what the Stoics held about epistemology. Firstly, it provides an answer to the challenge “How do we know which impressions are cognitive?”, although in doing so it does not provide an *a priori* method of sorting impressions. It also answers the question “What is the distinguishing mark of the cognitive impression?” by simply stating that there is not one, if by this is meant some phenomenological character available to introspection. Indeed, Frede’s account creates a shift which moves the cognitive impression entirely from being a part of the explanation of experience, and instead gives it a place as a theoretical entity which in combination with the other things cited as criteria of truth by the Stoics, provides a sophisticated and compelling theory of concept formation and knowledge acquisition.

This is acknowledged by Annas in a later paper, when she comments that “On Frede’s view the sceptical attack fails so completely that it is hard to see how the Stoics-sceptic debate lasted as long as it did.” (Annas 1990, p.195) But Frede succeeds by providing a convincing account of what might have been going on *within* the Stoic school – the *type* of theory which might have been developed – which would explain the otherwise inexplicable confidence the Stoics seem to have had in holding firmly to the belief that infallible knowledge was available, in principle, to normal people under normal circumstances. Without such a confidence, of course, the debate between the Stoics and the sceptics could not have carried on. And in any event, the debate was between schools which had such different opinions about the end of life,

and the purpose of philosophy, that a clear 'victory' on either side would be inconceivable.

In answer to the question at the start of this section, I would argue that we ought not to limit the Stoics to a single criterion of truth. The evidence clearly suggests that at least some Stoics, at least some of the time, cited various candidates for criteria of truth²¹, and it is Frede's insight which provides us with an explanation of this which does not look to decide on one criterion being the 'correct' Stoic one to the exclusion of the others, but enables us to see them side by side, as it were, and combining to provide an account of truth. A key stage in Annas' argument ran as follows: "The problem arises when we press the question, what makes the apprehensible presentation the criterion of truth; for it is hard to see how both sets of features can be essential to a presentation's being an apprehensible one." The 'sets of features' in question, we remember, are the 'representational' and the 'propositional'. Frede's account defuses this problem with the simple answer that "Neither the representational nor the propositional features are essential to an impressions being apprehensible. What makes it so is its causal history."

I have presented here certain aspects of the problem of "the criterion" which could lead to an argument against Annas. We might say, for example, that the dilemma she derives from her consideration of the cognitive impression is based on an inappropriate reduction of the notion of the criterion of truth. It is this excessively

²¹ e.g. D.L. 7.54, (LS 40A), mentions cognitive impression, intellect, sense-perception, scientific knowledge, preconception and right reason; Cicero Ac. 1.41-2 (LS 41B) implies that Zeno thought cognition (katalepsis) was a criterion 'because nature had given it as a standard of scientific truth'; cf. S.E. M 7. 150 – 157 (LS 41C).

narrow focus which creates the dilemma, and not necessarily what is contained in the evidence Annas cites.

Having considered Annas' arguments from *Truth and Knowledge* in some detail, it is now time to turn to the problems which arise when we try to gain a coherent positive characterisation of Stoic epistemology. This cannot be done without a careful look at their theory of impressions.

STOIC IMPRESSIONS

If we set out seeking to get a clear account of how the Stoics used the notion of impressions (*phantasiai*), we face a number of problems. The evidence permits of widely differing interpretations, and the modern scholarly commentary is not in agreement as to how it should be read. It is my purpose in the discussion which follows to attempt to construct a position which is coherent and at least consistent with the evidence. I use the expression 'minimally consistent' for the following reason. As I go along, I shall offer construals of this or that passage, and these in themselves have no greater claim to being right than alternative construals. There are two points that in my judgment need to be made about this. First, my interest is in combining a series of speculations about the evidence in such a way that a philosophically interesting picture emerges. Secondly, I do not think that any interpretation of such fragmentary evidence can lay claim to being, as the Stoics would have their knowledge, 'unoverturnable by argument'. But if each interpretation constructs its position carefully enough we shall in the end have an argument about possible versions of Stoicism rather than competing accounts of the 'historically true' Stoicism, which I believe is lost. Far from being a disadvantage, I

see the existence of more than one plausible and coherent account of the Stoic evidence as being a good thing, since it expands the interpretative space available for reflection on the meaning of the texts.

If there is a question in the mind of the reader about why I have spent so much time arguing against the dilemma between coherence and correspondence presented by Annas, it is because I believe that these two characterisations of an epistemological project are *each* inappropriate for the description of Stoicism. I am aware that Annas (1980) is aware of the inappropriateness of both terms of the distinction. My argument has been designed merely to deflect the position clearly stated by Annas that the problems associated with the inappropriateness can be laid at the door of the original Stoics, on the basis of the distinction between correspondence and coherence theories of truth. The detailed consideration of Annas' argument has been of great benefit in clarifying some of the issues which make these labels, to my mind, unsuccessful as a description of the Stoic enterprise. It is likely that no similar 'modern' labels will be successful simply because so many of the considerations which go to make up our 'problem of truth' were not shared by the philosophers of Hellenistic times or, as we have seen, by Greek thinkers generally.

The discussion in the previous section focussed predominantly on the 'cognitive impression' and in particular on its role as a criterion of truth for the Stoics. In what follows, I wish to consider the role of the more general conception of impressions in Stoicism, particularly with regard to the issue of *content*, and how this can be understood in the light of the evidence. Before that evidence is considered, however, we find further confirmation of an historical curiosity which has occurred already in the course of this chapter. As A.A. Long writes:

“The term *phantasia* makes its main historical entry as a platonic term of art with reference to Protagorean subjectivism. Plato uses *phantasia* to pick out the different ‘appearance’ or ‘perception’ that one and the same entity may generate in a pair of observers. It is important to keep this original sense in mind when considering subsequent uses of the term. *Phantasiai* are necessarily individual experiences, appearances to *individuals*... any post-Platonic philosopher who wished to refer to individual experience of any kind – the way things appear to the individual subject who experiences them – had *phantasia* available as the appropriate term.”²²

Without commenting on the Protagorean dimension, a striking feature of this part of Long’s introduction is its association of the philosophical use of the term *phantasia* with the notion of the *subject*. This is no accident, as the paper goes on to develop an idea of ‘self’ in Stoicism, and considers the relation of this idea with the known properties of Stoic epistemology. Long makes this point of view explicit early in his paper, when he explains the modern provenance of his choice of word – *representation* - to represent the Stoic term *phantasia*:

²² Long (1991) p.104. In the course of the citation, Long refers to a note in which he acknowledges an earlier occurrence of *phantasia* in Plato, viz.: Republic 382e ‘if those manuscripts...preserve the right reading’. If the Stoic sage shares divine properties, they would not on the face of it have agreed with the sentiment expressed at the end of 382e: “God...[does not] deceive others, awake or dreaming, with visions or signs or words.” Cf. S.E. M 7.44

“This term picks out the soul’s ‘commanding-part’, located in the heart, the centre of an animal’s body. What this part of the soul commands or governs is all that we would call today sentient, conscious and purposed life as distinct from automatic bodily processes. The ‘commanding part’ of the soul has distinct functions of its own, minimally the pair already mentioned, *phantasia* and impulse (*hormê*). What it does not have is distinct ‘parts’. In other words, that which is the subject of *phantasia* is also the subject of *hormê*. It is one thing, what we may call the animal’s self or mind, to which things appear and which responds to such appearances or representations with desire or aversion. *Phantasia* and *hormê* do not constitute a division of the soul into distinct parts, potentially capable of conflicting with one another. There is no subject or ego over and above the *hêgemonikon*, no place for a self that has separate, quasi-Platonic constituents, a desiring part and a cognitive part. The *hêgemonikon* provides the Stoics with the concept of a unitary self, actively engaged as a whole in all moments of an animal’s experience.” (p.107)

The theoretical bulwark which underpins my notion of subject is the Stoic *hêgemonikon*. It was clearly intended to be thought of as corporeal, rational, and unitary. One significant part of its analysis for the Stoics was the fact that it could be in different *dispositional* states. This fact, and its epistemological relevance, will be discussed later when we consider the content of another of Long’s papers, *The Stoic Distinction between the Truth and the True*. There is a question raised, however, by my associating with the Stoic notion of *hêgemonikon* some notion of ‘subject’ which could go into a definition of intersubjectivity. The question is this: Why should we introduce the further notion of ‘subject’, when the Stoics made do with *hêgemonikon*, why not just describe the *hêgemonikon*? The reason for this is simple, but fundamental. What I am seeking is a philosophical explanation of why the fragments

should appear as they do. In order to make this explanation effective, there is the need for extra concepts to be deployed that lie beyond the fragments. This need is particularly acute when the target of an inquiry is some explanation for why Stoicism might have laid claim to being systematic. What I hope to advance is an explanation for why Stoicism might have developed the way it did, and my concept of intersubjectivity is intended as a shorthand for a way of viewing the evidence which produces a particular result. It is difficult to imagine that the Stoics were not confident that they had reached a theoretical position that was, by certain lights, insurmountable. The tone of the evidence that remains – and the fame of the founders – is testament to the fact that they understood themselves as embarked on a project of high seriousness. This level of sincerity deserves to be taken seriously, perhaps most of all because of the moral force of many of the doctrines. It is not surprising that many have found the Stoics tendentious, but in a certain measure this is as much a sign of conviction as it is a stylistic flaw. What we should look for in the evidence is clues towards an attitude which may have engendered such a seriousness, and also clues to explain their belief in the interconnectedness of their doctrines.

Intersubjectivity, I hope it will be seen, provides such a link in that it connects the moral with the epistemic subject in a way hitherto unattempted. But in order that the argument can proceed towards a concept that can serve as such a link, certain issues regarding the Stoic theory of impressions need to be addressed.

In the argument which follows I will attempt to construe the Stoic theory of knowledge in a way which has proved unpopular in recent scholarly discussions. The crucial fact I will exploit is that the evidence for key aspects of the Stoic theory leaves the position *underdetermined*. Thus whilst I do not claim that my version is *more* consistent with the evidence than others, I think the claim can be made that it is just as

consistent, although of course how remains to be seen. Julia Annas brings out the basic point I wish to go on and discuss, and describes her point of view with customary force:

“By excluding factors such as assent at times, the Stoics are making the point that perception is not a two-stage process: reception of an uninterpreted sensory given *plus* a separable conceptualisation of it. There are no perceptions which do not involve conceptualisation and thinking: a Kantian kind of thesis, for which Kant was, again, to provide far more complex arguments.

It is central to the Stoic analysis that when I perceive an object, one and the same item, the appearance, is both a physical alteration of my soul-pneuma, and an item which can be assented to and produces a true or false belief. There have to be items with both these aspects; otherwise we could not give an adequate account of human, as opposed to animal, perception.” (Annas 1992, p.78)

I am curious about Annas' confidence that for the Stoics perception is not a two-stage process, and will later consider how such a two-stage interpretation could yield a richer picture of how Stoicism may have 'fitted together', which also has the benefit that it provides an epistemological reason for why the Stoics considered language so significant, and why *ambiguity* was seen as an issue of such philosophical importance. But there is no doubt that Annas is describing an orthodox position, and it will be time well spent if we can clearly explain the reasons which have been given for the commonly held opinion that the Stoics did not permit 'uninterpreted sensory givens' in their epistemology.

TWO PROBLEMS ABOUT IMPRESSIONS: CAN THEY BE TRUE OR FALSE? WHAT CONTENT DO THEY HAVE?

The debate about which things the Stoics described as true or false centres around the fact that in the sources, the words *alêthes* and *pseudos* are used in connection with three entities : *axiômata*, *phantasiai*, and *logoi*. Two of these three items sit together in a relatively uncontentious way – *axiômata* (propositions), and *logoi* (arguments made up of propositions) are true or false in the way natural to a system committed to bivalence.²³ An uncertainty hovers, however, in the case of true and false as they are applied to *phantasiai*.

As it turns out, the question about whether impressions ought properly to be called true or false is closely related to another topic which has received much scholarly attention in recent years. which concerns the extent to which the Stoics understood impressions to have ‘propositional content’. The debate has taken place around the issue of the relative properties of impressions had by mature, rational people and impressions had by infants and animals. But the debate also contains a great deal of interesting insight into the more general problem about the character of the Stoic impression.

²³ For Chrysippus’ commitment to bivalence, see Cic. *De fato* 38, LS 34C.

There are a variety of definitions offered for different types of impression in the evidence for what the Stoics held. Diogenes Laertius (7.50-51) lists cognitive/incognitive impressions, rational/non-rational impressions, sensory/non-sensory and expert/non-expert. If Sextus Empiricus is to be believed (although this part of his account has problems), there was also a Stoic distinction between convincing and unconvincing (cf. S.E. *M* 7.242-6, LS 39G).

The task of arriving at some story about the Stoic theory of impressions is in large part about making sense of these definitions in the light of the other relevant evidence, and of providing a philosophical rationale both for why the texts should be read in this way rather than that, and also of the benefits and problems which arise as the result of a certain reading. Let us turn, then, to the question of whether or not, for the Stoics, impressions are the kind of things that should be described as ‘true’ or ‘false’.

A key text in the story of how an attitude to this question has developed is Kerferd (1978). In this paper, he writes:

“The last sentence of this statement [S.E., *M* : 8, 12] when taken together with other passages, namely Sextus P.H. 2, 81, Adv. M. 7. 38, D.L. 7. 65-66... suggests the orthodox modern interpretation of the Stoic position, namely that for the Stoics only *axiōmata* were true or false (at least in the primary sense).

Doubts about the restriction of true and false to *axiōmata* have none the less been expressed by M. Frede, *Die Stoische Logik* (1974) p.41, and despite the apparently large number of passages just cited I am satisfied that the restriction is quite unjustified. It is, first of all, quite wrong in its unqualified form – for the Stoics *Phantasiai* also were true or false (Sextus 7.244, Aetius 4.9.4...) quite apart from the present passage in Sextus 8.10... and they were emphatically not *axiōmata*. Hence orthodoxy has always required the addition of the

words 'true or false in the primary sense' in the case of restriction to *axiômata*." (p.261)

As clarified by Kerferd, then, the question is one of whether to 'restrict' the usage of true and false to *axiômata* only. It is interesting to note in passing how Kerferd describes the idea that only *axiômata* are true or false as the 'orthodox modern interpretation'. This orthodoxy was established in part by the attitude expressed in the Kneales' *Development of Logic* (1975):

"The theory of presentations belongs to epistemology rather than to the logic of the Stoics. Roughly speaking, they seem to have meant by a presentation a sense-impression or a mental image. But they were very much exercised about the criterion of truth in presentations, and this fact makes it doubtful whether they were absolutely clear that the basic use of the word 'true' is its application to *axiômata*. They might consistently have held that for the purposes of definition the true proposition is basic, but epistemologically the true presentation. That is to say, they might have held that we can explain what is meant by 'true' only by explaining the truth of *axiômata*, but that we can recognise that a particular *axiôma* is true only in virtue of having a true presentation." (p.151)

The Kneales' argument continues as they cite the very passage which is under consideration by Kerferd (S.E. *M.* 8.10) about which they comment:

"The point of the passage seems to be that anything which can be called true or false must have a contradictory. For everything said to be true it is possible to indicate something which is false. This is the function of the particle 'not' in language. But sensibles as such have no contradictories, and sensibles include, of course, presentations and also the things described by Sextus in his discussion of the three views

as ‘movements of thought’... We have a reason, then... for the Stoic view that the truth of presentations is a derivative type of truth” (p.151)

The Kneales’ argument leads to a clear statement of what Kerferd calls the ‘orthodox modern interpretation’²⁴ :

“For the Stoics, then, the *axiōma* is true or false in the basic sense...” (p.152)

Since Kerferd provides a broad evidence-base for his conclusion, we would do well to consider each of the passages he cites, with a view to deciding what we can be certain of in an interpretation of this complex part of Stoic theory. I shall discuss, first, the evidence that Kerferd cites as being in favour of a ‘restricted’ interpretation whereby we limit true and false to propositions and only derivatively, if at all, to impressions. Secondly, I will consider the evidence which seems to point in favour of a ‘less restricted’ interpretation.

EVIDENCE IN FAVOUR OF A RESTRICTED INTERPRETATION

1) S.E. *M* 8.12 (end) (LS 33B)

“And of these²⁵, two are bodies – that is the sound and the existing thing – and one is incorporeal, namely the thing signified and expressible (*to sēmainomenon pragma, kai lekton*), and this too is true or false. But this is not all alike <true or false>, it being partly

²⁴ Kerferd’s use of ‘modern’ is of course circa. 1978, and his use of the term ‘orthodoxy’ is justified by reference to Rist (1969) p.147; and cf. Rist’s n. 2 of that page which lists: Mates (1953) p.34 ; Watson (1966), p.54 ; Kneale and Kneale (1975), p.156.

²⁵ cf. *M* 8.11, ‘these’ refers to the three things that justified the Stoics saying that truth and falsehood are to be placed ‘in the thing signified’.

incomplete and partly self-complete (*autoteles*). And of the self-complete that <part is true or false> which is termed “judgement” (*axiōma*), and which they describe by saying “A judgement is that which is true or false” (*axiōma estin ὃ estin alêthes ê pseudos*).²⁶ (trans. Bury)

2) S.E. *PH* 2.81 (LS 33P)

“True is said [by the Stoics] to differ from truth in three ways, substance, structure and function. In substance, since what is true is incorporeal, for it is a proposition and a sayable.”²⁷ (trans. LS (33P)).

3) S.E. *M* 7.38.

This is essentially a restatement of 2), and functions for the purpose of this argument in an identical way.

4) S.E. *M* 8.70 (part) (LS 33C)

²⁶ This text has been widely considered, e.g. Annas (1992) cautions that the last line “is not the Stoic definition of *axiōma*, which is that of a complete utterance” (p.77, n.14); Kerferd himself (1978) says that it is a ‘compressed and abbreviated’ form of S.E. *M* 8. 70-74. He concedes that the last line does formally “involve the unqualified assertion that only an *axiōma* is true or false” (p.262), but claims that the context at *M* 8.70-74 shows that the definition is only intended to separate *axiōmata* from the other non-truth-bearing complete lekta – questions, prayers etc.; for Atherton (1993) the passage serves as part of the attempt “to explain a person’s understanding what is said to them in their own language” (p.258), which it surely does; Verbeke (1978) p.421 n. 23, straightforwardly outlines the theory and points us to Rist (1969) p.149, “For it seems that in Stoicism we normally have to assume that true presentations are somehow related to true (that is, existent) things.”; Kidd (1989) argues in connection with *M* 8.10 and 12, that “Part of the problem lay in the persisting confusion in Greek philosophy between true and false with reference to things perceived (‘real’) and with reference to propositions. There are signs that the Stoics were shifting emphasis to the latter, while refusing to relinquish the former.” (p.146). See also Long (1971), pp. 76-77; Rist (1971) pp.38-39.

²⁷ This is the beginning of an excerpt which will be considered in more length and detail later, where it relates to a connected but separate topic. As with the previous excerpt, it has attracted a great deal of scholarly comment which will be mentioned in the extended discussion.

“Thus for instance... the Stoics maintained that truth and falsity exist in the “expression” (*lekton*).” (trans. Bury)

5) D.L. 7.65-66 (part) (LS 34A)

“A judgment (*axiōma*) is that which is either true or false, or a thing complete in itself (*pragma autoteles*) capable of being denied in and by itself, as Chrysippus says in his *Dialectical Definitions* : “A judgment is that which in and by itself can be denied or affirmed, e.g. “It is day”, “Dion is walking”... For a judgment is that which, when we set it forth in speech, becomes an assertion, and is either false or true.” (trans. Bury)

There are two aspects that arise from these citations which are directly relevant to our enquiry concerning the question of whether to think of Stoic impressions as the kind of things which can be described as ‘true’ or ‘false’. Firstly, there is a repeated assertion which seems unequivocal:

i) An *axiōma* is that which is true or false.

The Stoic commitment to bivalence is well established, and this is what we would expect them to say. But the definition as given in 1) gains extra force from its context, which concerns the distinction between the corporeal and the incorporeal, as given in the first line. This tells us that there is something which is incorporeal, expressible and true or false, namely the ‘thing signified’. Since we are told that the *axiōma* is (by definition) what is true or false, it is reasonable to put the qualities together and conclude that an *axiōma* is incorporeal and expressible. Again, this

produces part of standard Stoic theory. But these five passages taken together also seem to enable us to draw a conclusion about the nature of ‘that which is true or false’, which is to say that this is incorporeal (and expressible and an *axiōma*). This gives us:

- ii) That which is true or false is incorporeal.

From this proposition it is a short step to the conclusion “Since impressions are corporeal, they cannot be that which is true or false”. If we accept this conclusion, then talk of impressions being true or false is ruled out on the grounds of their corporeality. This list of passages mentioned by Kerferd, as he says, “suggests the... interpretation... that for the Stoics only *axiōmata* were true or false (at least in the primary sense).” (p.261)

EVIDENCE AGAINST A RESTRICTED INTERPRETATION

- 1) S.E. *M* 7.244 (LS 39G)

“And of the probable presentations (*pithanōn phantasiōn*), some are true, some false, some both true and false, some neither true nor false. True, then, are those about which it is possible to make a true affirmation (*katēgorian*), as, at the present moment, “it is day” or “it is light”; false are those about which it is possible to make a false affirmation, as that the oar under the water is bent or that the porch narrows to a point...” (trans. Bury)

2) Aetius IV.9.4

“The Stoics [say that] *aisthêseis* are true, but that of *phantasiai* some are true, some false.”²⁸

3) S.E. *M* 8.10

“The Stoics assert that some sensibles and some intelligibles are true, the sensibles, however, not directly so but by reference to the intelligibles associated with them. For according to them the True is “that which subsists and is opposed to something”, and the False “that which is not subsistent and is opposed to something”; and this being an incorporeal judgment is an intelligible.” (trans. Bury)

Of these three items of evidence, I will argue that the first is, for various reasons, unreliable and that the the second and third can be explained by positing an ambiguity between senses of the word *alêthes*. On this basis, I intend to argue that the evidence, presented by Kerferd, does not amount to a case strong enough to *compel* us to accept the view that the Stoics called impressions true or false. What I will not argue is that it is *unreasonable* to accept this view. Many current, and successful, interpretations of Stoic epistemology use such a view as a presupposition. It is not part of my goal to argue *against* these interpretations, all I will seek to do is open up some interpretative space in which to pursue a version of Stoic epistemology along different lines. The way I will do this is firstly by pointing out some issues about the text of passage 1, and secondly by discussing how these texts link with other texts about impressions (concerning the rational / irrational distinction at D.L. 7.51). As

²⁸ I am grateful to Dr. Fitzpatrick help with this short translation.

these arguments unfold, I hope it will also become clearer how the notion of ‘true or false impressions’ has had its impact on the reading of Stoic epistemology as a description of human perception more generally.

First, then, the textual problems surrounding S.E. *M* 7.244. I have cited above just what I take to be the relevant portion of this text that Kerferd will have had in mind when using it as evidence for the following position:

“Doubts about the restriction of true and false to axiomata have none the less been expressed by M. Frede [1974]... and despite the apparently large number of passages just cited [see ‘Evidence for the restricted interpretation’] I am satisfied that the restriction is quite unjustified. It is, first of all, quite wrong in its unqualified form – for the Stoics *phantasiai* also were true or false (Sextus 7.244 etc.)” (p.261)

The first thing for us to notice in Kerferd’s account is his admission that the opinion he is looking to justify must be held ‘despite’ the other evidence. As I have argued above, there is a direct way in which the other evidence leads us to exclude absolutely the notions of true and false from our talk of impressions, on the grounds of impressions being corporeal. This is where the tension is greatest in the evidence, which is why I am concerned with opening up an ‘interpretative space’ rather than with attempting to exclude one viewpoint by means of another. The second thing for us to notice in Kerferd’s case above is the claim that the ‘unqualified form’ of the restricted interpretation is ‘quite wrong’. The reason Kerferd gives is quite unequivocal:

(A) “For the Stoics *phantasiai* also were true or false”.

Now, what cannot be disputed is the following:

(B) “*Evidence associated with the Stoics* contains talk of impressions being true or false”

But this is a weaker claim, and leaves some room for manoeuvre in respect of S.E. *M* 7.244. We might suggest that if it could be shown that either i) the account given is internally incoherent, or ii) that it is doubtful whether or not it actually gives Stoic doctrine, or iii) that there is some other explanation about why Sextus constructs the division in the passage in the way that he does, then there would be some room for doubt about using this passage to securely ascribe a doctrinal position to the Stoics. If all three could be shown, I think that would constitute a knock-down case. I do not in fact think that any one of these three possibilities can be proved beyond doubt, but in the argument that follows I will gather some points which might cause us to think twice about the direct move from (B) to (A) which underwrites certain parts of popular modern interpretation of Stoic epistemology.

Before we begin a detailed look at this text, we should acknowledge what is going on in Sextus at this point, since contextual factors will play a major role in our discussion. The relevant portion of Sextus starts back at 7.227, where he begins to describe the Stoic position:

“These men, then, assert that the criterion of truth is the apprehensive presentation. What this is we shall understand when we have first learnt what, in their view, presentation is and what is its specific differences.” (Loeb p.123)

Sextus then runs through a series of topics:

a) The nature of impressions is discussed. We are told that the Stoics [probably Zeno's original definition] described 'presentation' (*phantasia*) as an impression on the soul (*typôsis en psychê*); that Cleanthes took this to imply that presentation made an 'imprint' on the soul 'just as the impression made in wax by signet-rings'; and Chrysippus disagrees with this and takes Zeno's definition to imply an 'alteration' (*eteroiôsis*) rather than an imprint. (227-231)

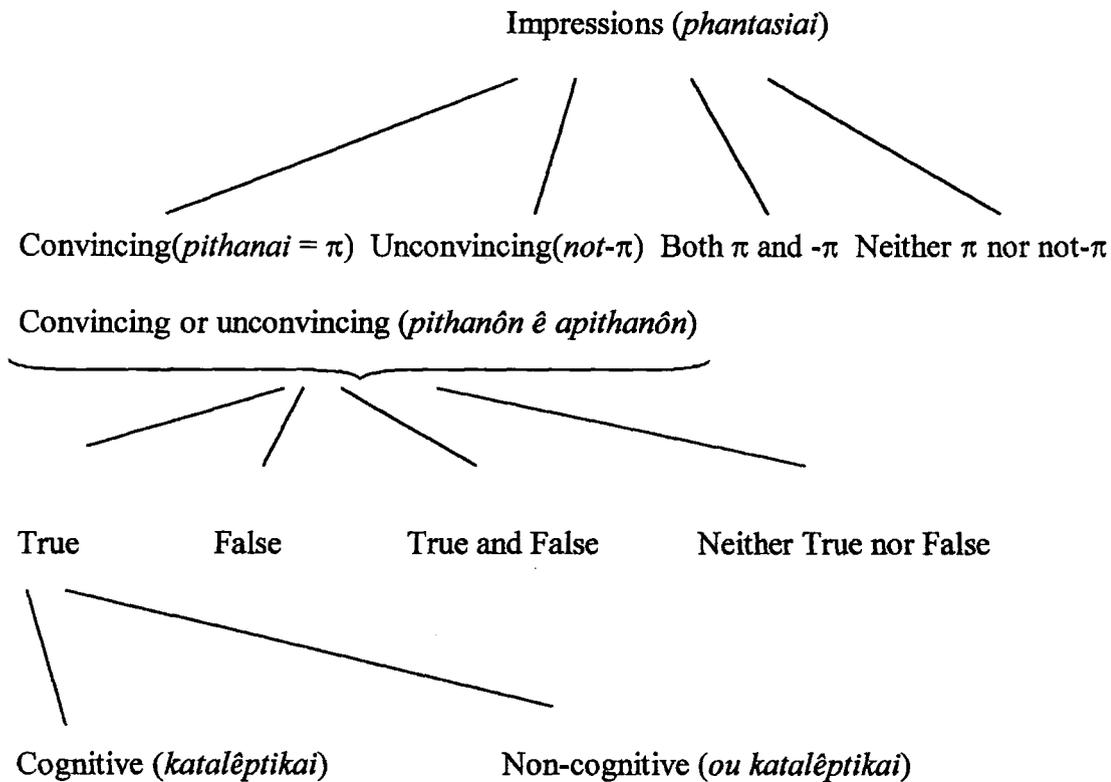
b) We are given a series of definitions to the effect that impressions only effect the *hêgemonikon*, (232-236)

c) Next there is a series of arguments concerning presentations as 'passive' alterations in the *hêgemonikon*, opposed to impulse, assent and apprehension which are active. (237-241)

d) Then there is the division with which we will be initially concerned, which Sextus introduces as a list of 'many and various' (*pollai... kai allai*) distinctions in the notion of presentations. (242-247)

e) Finally there is a section beginning with a basic Stoic tenet: "A cognitive impression is one caused by an existing object, and imaged and stamped in the subject in accordance with that existing object, of such a kind as could not be derived from a non-existent object." (248-262).

Having outlined the scheme of the text surrounding 7.244, let us now look in diagrammatic form at the division of which it is a part:



The problem with the internal coherence of the text can clearly be seen when it is graphically illustrated in this way, and is pointed out by Long and Sedley (1987):

“According to the transmitted text, true impressions are a subdivision of *pithanôn ê apithanôn*. Since the examples of *apithanai* [at 39 G3 in LS] are both of patent falsehoods while the examples [at 39 G 4-5 in LS] are all of *pithanai*, and since the inclusion of both disjuncts would violate the proper procedure for definition by diairesis... there are grounds for deleting *ê apithanôn*, as von Arnim proposed, followed by the Loeb and Teubner editions. However, the retention of *ê apithanôn* is prima facie justified by the subsequent inclusion in the same division (at LS 40 E2) of true and non-cognitive impressions which often are unconvincing (fail to gain assent).” (LS vol.2, p.242-243)

One interesting point we can mention straight away is that Kerferd's argument refers to the Loeb edition in which we find, as Long and Sedley point out, the excision of *ê apithanôn*.²⁹ Kerferd follows Bury's translation throughout his paper, and makes no comment about von Arnim's recommendation, but precisely this position in the text is the one cited first by Kerferd as evidence in favour of the less restricted interpretation.

The logical rule Sextus falls foul of is that you cannot construct a division on the basis of an either/or statement – since to do so results in something meaningless. Thus whilst it would have been acceptable for Sextus to write “Of the convincing, some are *A,B,C* and of the unconvincing some are *D,E,F*”, (since in this case he would simply be using a subdivision) he cannot say “Of the convincing *or unconvincing* some are *X,Y,Z*” since this does not result in a coherent analysis of the genus *phantasiai*, or certainly not according to Stoic principles. This is explicitly true for the Stoics, for whom the purpose of division is succinctly given by Long and Sedley:

“Definition and division are methods fundamental to Stoic dialectic...division... is the analysis of a genus into its constituent species, and of these into subspecies. Sometimes each branch of the division is subjected to subdivision, the eventual objective being a complete classification of the original genus.” (LS Vol. 1, 32 commentary, p.193)

These considerations explain more fully what is meant by Long and Sedley when they write of the Sextus text “the inclusion of both disjuncts would violate the

²⁹ Loeb Sextus Empiricus Vol. II, p. 130 n.1.

proper procedure for definition". It is also surely the principle reason – a purely logical reason - why von Arnim felt the need to cut *ê apithanôn*, why Bury followed suit and why Kerferd finds a coherent text.

But Long and Sedley want to keep *ê apithanôn*, saying its "retention is prima facie justified by the subsequent inclusion in the same division of true and non-cognitive impressions". So clearly we see the dilemma: either the text is unstable logically, or inconsistent with its own content. We can see the dilemma played out in the editorial aspect of Long and Sedley's translation, which runs as follows:

"Of the convincing (or unconvincing) [a misleading addition by Sextus or an interpolator], some are true, others false, others true and false, and others neither true nor false." (LS Vol.1 39G6)

As Long and Sedley have indicated, and I have tried to bring out, this division is subject to a logical instability. Whether or not this is a fatal instability or not remains a matter of judgment, but I think a consideration of this issue ought to result in some caution when treating the text as coherent evidence of a coherent theory. But this evidence has recently been used in this way by Annas (1990), without comment:

"If the [Stoic] theory is to be epistemologically interesting, then the Stoics should be able to tell us something about these appearances, assent to which constitutes one kind, at least, of knowledge, if not knowledge proper. And the Stoics do have a *precise* theory on the matter:

'There are many distinctions between appearances... Some are convincing, others unconvincing, some both, some neither... Of the convincing appearances some are true, some false, some both, some neither...'" (p. 198, emphasis added)

So much for the internal coherence of the text; let us proceed to the second category of concerns, which has to do with whether or not it can be taken as reflecting Stoic doctrine. Here, the case is much less clear cut, and proceeds by way of speculation rather than demonstration. This is because we are faced, in the evidence, with competing stories.

The main problem here is the point of appearance of the cognitive impression (*phantasia katalêptike*). That this was the *sine qua non* of Stoic epistemology is not a modern import, but is a fact acknowledged in the Sextus text (at 7.227, see above). However, in the division of 7.242 – 7.247, (which we have given in diagram form above), the cognitive impression appears as a subdivision of *phantasiai*, coming in below the adjectives *pithanai* and *alêtheis*. In general, can it be right to define *katalêpsis* in terms of convincingness and truth? We will consider the use of ‘true’ in this division as the next point, so for now the discussion will focus on the use of convincingness, *pithanai*.³⁰ Long and Sedley write:

“Clearly the Stoics thought that a cognitive impression is normally convincing... but there are good reasons for doubting whether this property was one that they wished to emphasise, since it never appears in their accounts of the attributes of a cognitive impression.” (LS Vol. 2, p. 242).

These ‘good reasons’ for doubting whether Sextus’ use of *pithanai* genuinely reflects Stoic doctrine are entirely to do with the other evidence available for how the

³⁰ Another use of *pithanôn* occurs at D.L. 7.75, although perhaps significantly here it refers to *axiômata* rather than to *phantasiai*.

Stoics defined their basic epistemological device, the cognitive impression³¹. To this evidence, we can add a further two considerations, the first conceptual, the second historical.

First, we can recall one aspect of Frede's argument discussed earlier.

"The Stoic theory, I want to suggest, escapes this difficulty [of how to 'certify' a given impression as cognitive] because it assumes that the distinctive feature of cognitive impressions is a causal feature of impressions such that cognitive impressions play their criterial role not through our awareness of their distinctive feature, but through the causal effects they have on our minds in virtue of this feature." (1984, p.167-168).

We saw in the previous discussion how effective Frede's solution is in accounting for the cognitive impression in such a way that many problems associated with the position are sidestepped. In accepting this account, we are compelled to dismiss 'convincingness' as an attribute since Frede explicitly rules out phenomenological characteristics as being significant in determining whether an impression is cognitive or not.

Secondly, and more historically, there arises the question of why Sextus might have included the notion of *pithanôn* in his division. Here again, the way is pointed by Long and Sedley:

"The importance of *pithanê phantasia* from Carneades onwards may have infected reports of the Stoics on which Sextus drew, reflecting modifications within the Stoa and Academic contributions.

³¹ See e.g. D.L. 7.46, 7.54, Cic. Ac., 1.40-41.

This would be all the more likely if Antiochus is Sextus' source here, as certainly elsewhere." (LS Vol.2, p. 242-3).

We are directed by Long and Sedley to consider the following text, from an earlier part of Sextus:

"These³² were the arguments which Carneades set out in full as a strategy against the other philosophers, to prove the non-existence of the criterion. But since he himself too has some criterion demanded of him for the conduct of life and the attainment of happiness, he is virtually compelled, as far as he himself is concerned, to adopt a position on this by taking as his criterion both the 'convincing' impression (*pithanên phantasia*) and that which is at once probable and irreversible and tested." (S.E. M 7.166, LS translation, 69D).³³

There are several things here that need to be discussed. There is the link between the division we primarily concerned with, and Carneades and Antiochus – this I will discuss in a moment. For now we can merely note that there is a non-Stoic precedent for the use of 'convincing impression', which is plausible as an alternative account of why Sextus uses it here. There is, however, another cause for concern in ~~the~~ ^{7. 244} Sextus ~~text~~, which concerns the way the concepts true and false are employed in this division discussing impressions.

We can note first of all how some impressions are true, some false, some true *and* false, and some *neither* true *nor* false. This usage is wholly inconsistent with the

³² 'These' refers to the arguments at S.E. M 7. 159-165.

³³ Carneades' reasons for adopting the convincing impression depend on his theory that each impression should be considered in a twofold way: relative to the object, and relative to the percipient. See LS Vol. 1 457-459. Also cf. S.E. M 7.401

bivalence accredited to Chrysippus concerning *axiômata*. Indeed the standard Stoic formula is ‘*either true or false*’ – which is the one formula which does not appear here (perhaps because an impression either true or false is difficult or impossible to conceptualise). What this points to is a different usage of true for *phantasiai* than that employed for *axiômata*. In fact, an ambiguity in the use of the word true is well-known, and well-known to be problematic. Thus we can return to Kerferd:

“But it is important to remember that almost throughout antiquity the terms *alêtheia* and *alêthes* are applied not only to statements but also to things, and when applied to things the meaning is (often) ‘real, genuine, authentic’.” (1978, p259.)

And also Kidd:

“Part of the problem lay in the persisting confusion in Greek philosophy between true and false with reference to things perceived (‘real’) and with reference to propositions. There are signs that the Stoics were shifting emphasis to the latter, while refusing to relinquish the former.” (1987, p.146)

Whatever the interpretative impact of this ambiguity – and we will discuss just this impact shortly – we are left with a simple position in respect of the Sextus text. Either he is not accurately representing Stoic doctrine (if the Stoics restricted their use of ‘true’ and ‘false’ to the sense it has for *axiômata*), or he is accurately representing part of Stoic doctrine (if the Stoics used true in more than one sense). This seems to go a long way towards clearing this issue up. We might imagine a rule such that each time we came across ‘true’ with regard to impressions we should think of ‘real, genuine, authentic’, and each time we come across it with regard to *axiômata* we should think of ‘true in the logical sense, contradictory with false’. But the problem

we *then* face is this: What is the difference between some true (real, genuine, authentic) impression and a 'cognitive impression'? And I think the answer is none - given the Stoic definition of cognitive impressions, interpreted using the notion of 'causal history' we have found in Frede. A consideration of how this might have an effect on the broader interpretation of Stoic epistemology will have its proper place below in the consideration of what impact talk of 'true and false' impressions has had on recent interpretations.

Since we have now gathered a significant amount of evidence, it is a good time to remind ourselves of the purpose of this enquiry. At present, we are investigating the *evidence base* for Kerferd's claim that for the Stoics *phantasiai* were considered true or false. To motivate this investigation, we asked three questions of the text of Sextus S.E. 7.244:

- 1) Is it internally coherent?
- 2) Does it certainly represent Stoic doctrine?
- 3) Is there an alternative explanation as to why Sextus produced what he did?

Following our discussion above, we are in a position to provide answers to these questions. The division is not internally coherent: it falls down where Sextus attempts to subdivide *phantasiai* into *either* convincing *or* unconvincing, and *then* into true, false, etc. Textual emendations (Loeb following von Arnim) have obscured this incoherence. On the question of whether it certainly represents Stoic doctrine, we can answer that on two counts we might argue that it does not. First, the appearance of the cognitive impression as a subdivision of convincing and true impressions conflicts with our favoured interpretation of the meaning of the doctrine of the cognitive impression. Secondly, the deployment of the concepts true and false is wholly inconsistent with known Stoic usage (with the proviso that this may be the

result of an ambiguity prevalent in Greek philosophical usage). The final question about some alternative explanation is well served by another quotation from Long and Sedley:

“Stoic interest in *pithanai phantasiai* concentrates on their speciousness... such consideration suggests that [the division at 7.242-252] may involve conflation of a Stoic classification of *phantasiai pithanai ê apithanai* with a separate one of *alêtheis* and *pseudeis*. Such a conflation could well account for the intrusive *ê apithanôn*...as a clumsy attempt to tie the two divisions together.” (LS Vol.2, p.242)

We have already noted that Carneades used the notion of convincingness as a criteria for impressions, so there must remain the possibility that what we have in our main division is not, as Long and Sedley suggest, a conflation between two Stoic classifications, but rather an eclectic account of impressions from non-Stoic or pseudo-Stoic sources. Some such move, from an account of impressions in Stoicism to a more general account is suggested in the text at 7.242:

“Thus presentation, *in the doctrine of the Stoics*, is hard to define. In presentations [in philosophy generally?], also, there are many and various distinctions, of which it will be enough to record the following.” (Text in square brackets and emphasis added as my interpretation).

I have noticed one last feature of the text that might suggest that there is some disparity between the section containing our main division and the other parts of this section. Sextus, according to the Loeb edition, divides nicely into sections. The whole argument concerning the Stoic doctrine on impressions runs from 227 – 261, a

total of 34 'verses'. Usually, these sections are five verses to a topic, which breaks down as follows:

- i) 227-231 Definitions of impression
- ii) 232-236 Nature of impression
- iii) 237-241 Activity/passivity
- iv) 242-247 Main division
- v) 248-252 Stoic criterion of truth
- vi) 253-257 'No obstacle' arguments
- vii) 258-262 'Clear and distinct' to end.

Not everyone may agree that this five-verse pattern is a significant factor to be taken into account. Once it is noticed, however, two things become apparent. Firstly, the section in which our main division occurs is the only one with six, rather than five, verses. Secondly, there is a marked change in style which overcomes the text in the section 242-247, in that apart from the first (clearly transitional) line, there is no mention of the names of Stoics, the word 'Stoics', relevant uses of 'he', 'they', 'according to them', 'in their view' etc. These (admittedly minor) irregularities might suggest either a different source was used, or we could suggest an alternative

conjecture that Sextus at this point decides to insert a general disquisition on impressions into his consideration of the Stoics.³⁴

Long and Sedley (1987, vol. 2, p. 242) write of this main division that it is possibly 'infected' by the 'importance of *pithanê phantasia* from Carneades onwards'. We may wonder whether this makes it possible that the talk of 'true and false' impressions in Sextus is the result of some such admixture. It has been argued that Sextus' source for the doxography in S.E. *M* 7.89-260 was the eclectic Antiochus³⁵, which if true would add further weight to the general claim that the material within is subject to many influences not committed to an historically accurate account of Stoicism. In a paper about late Hellenistic accounts of epistemology, A. A. Long issues a general caution this concerning this whole text of Sextus:

"In Hellenistic practice, as Gisela Striker has well observed, 'criterion of truth' was used to include both... an infallible means of establishing particular matters of fact, as with the Stoics' cognitive impression, and also, quite generally, the cognitive faculties men have at their disposal. In this latter sense of the term, most Greek philosophers could be said to have stated opinions on the criterion of truth, as Sextus Empiricus maintains that they did, even though they did not use the expression nor envisage anything comparable to its specific sense. Misrepresentation, however, could arise if the two senses were run together, so implying that an opinion on the value of

³⁴ The analysis was done using the Loeb edition, and yielded the following results. I counted as a 'mention' any of the following: Zeno, Chrysippus, Cleanthes, these men, in their view, according to them, they, and certain other cognates which show Sextus constantly alluding to the philosophers he is dealing with. Mentions per section: i) = 10, ii) = 6, iii) = 5, iv) = 1 (transitional), v) = 5, vi) = 3, vii) = 1 (concluding).

³⁵ Cf. Long (1989), p.177 n.42. Long and Sedley characterise Antiochus as follows: "Member of New Academy, who in 87 (BC) formed a breakaway movement, the 'Old Academy', claiming to revert to authentic Platonism". (1987 Vol. 1, p. 501).

our cognitive faculties committed its holder to an opinion about the infallible application of one or more of these... Sextus in the doxography and criticism of *Adv. Math. 7* does nothing explicitly to disambiguate these two concerns. To that extent his account of the views adopted on the criterion is misleadingly homogeneous as well as anachronistic." (1989), p. 157.

I have focussed on Sextus 7.242-247 to the exclusion of the other two texts since this is the one most often cited by scholars as the foundation of the belief that for the Stoics, impressions could be true or false. On the face of it, it is impressive evidence, but I think I have shown that under close scrutiny its claims are less convincing as a reliable sign that the Stoics held such a doctrine. In this respect, the above enquiry has functioned in a legalistic way – attempting to undermine an initially compelling witness. As in a court of law, a successful cross-examination (if the above enquiry is to be judged a success), does not demonstrate that the witness is lying, merely provides matter for reflection about the *reliability* of the evidence. The conclusion at the end of my enquiry is that S.E. *M* 7.244 is not a reliable witness to be presented in favour of Kerferd's claim that for the Stoics, *phantasiai* were considered true or false.

Before I continue with my argument, it is necessary to include a brief digression to consider some evidence from Cicero which might also be taken as persuasive evidence that the Stoics themselves called impressions true and false. The discussion concerning Carneades above left us with the possibility that there may have been a sceptical influence on the language used to report Stoic doctrine in the later doxographers. If this was the case, it is possible that the notions of 'true' and 'false' were applied to impressions by sceptics seeking to undermine the Stoic version

of knowledge and the criterion of truth. Such a possibility could be used to explain the talk of true and false impressions in the *Academica*, for example, although it occurs in other writings of Cicero. We can consider the following:

“[Speaker: Cicero on behalf of the New Academy] We may take him [Arcesilaus] to have asked Zeno what would happen if the wise man could not cognise anything and it was the mark of the wise man not to opine. Zeno, I imagine, replied that the wise man would not opine since there was something cognitive. What then was this? Zeno, I suppose, said: an impression. What kind of impression? Zeno then defined it as an impression stamped and reproduced from something which is, exactly as it is. Arcesilaus next asked whether this was still valid if a true impression was just like a false one. At this point Zeno was sharp enough to see that if in impression from what is were such that an impression from what is not could not be just like it, there was no cognitive impression.” (*Ac.* 2.77-8, LS 40D)

Certain stylistic properties of this passage strongly suggest that Cicero is here presenting a ‘reconstruction’ of the debate between Zeno and Arcesilaus – ‘we may take him’, ‘I imagine’, ‘I suppose’. Whilst not doubting that the positions attributed to Zeno are authentically Stoic, we can notice how the concepts of true and false impressions enter the debate exactly at the point where Arcesilaus tries to undermine Zeno’s position. It does not form any part of the definitional work Zeno is presented as doing. In other words, the entry into the debate of the notion that impressions *themselves* are true and false looks like a sceptical tactic. We might also consider:

“There are four headings to prove there is nothing which can be known, cognized or grasped, which is the subject of this whole controversy. The first of these is that some false impression does exist. The second, that it is not cognitive. The third, that impressions between which there is no difference cannot be such that some

are cognitive and others not. The fourth, that no true impression arises from sensation which does not have alongside it another impression no different from it which is not cognitive. Everyone accepts the second and third of these headings. Epicurus does not grant the first, but you [Stoics and sympathisers], with whom we are dealing, admit that one too. The entire battle is about the fourth.” (*Ac.* 2.83-5, LS 40J)

Here again we find talk of true and false impressions *associated* with the Stoics - in this case, in the context of sceptical arguments against the cognitive impression. Should this evidence lead us to give up the idea that the Stoics did not use true and false of impressions? Not necessarily, for two reasons.

First, Cicero makes clear the intention behind the ‘four headings’ – to prove that there is nothing that can be known. So in spite of the fact that he implies that the ‘Stoics and sympathisers’ *accept* the first three headings, this does not mean either that the headings were drawn from Stoic doctrine, nor that they represent how the Stoics would have put their case. Here is a nice example of a difference I pointed out earlier on in this chapter – between a philosophy trying to construct its position, and a philosophy defending itself in controversy. The ‘four headings’ we are offered are explicitly of sceptical origin, and moreover designed to go against the Stoic position. Because of this, we cannot take them to be a secure indication that the Stoics themselves used ‘true’ and ‘false’ in respect of impressions.

Secondly, we can use Frede’s ‘causal’ explanation for cognition to go against Cicero at this point, since the substance of the dispute about the ‘fourth heading’ reduces to a dispute about the ‘distinguishing mark’ of a cognitive impression. The

‘distinguishing mark’ is exactly the sort of phenomenological characteristic that, on Frede’s account, the Stoics can do without.³⁶

It is now time to summarise our position with respect to the overarching argument. We began with Kerferd, and his assertion that the Stoics held *phantasiai* to be true or false. We then decided to investigate this assertion in three ways - in relation to the texts it was directly based on, in its relevance to the interpretation of related texts, and in relation to its impact as an interpretative assumption used in the broader characterisation of Stoic epistemology. Having completed our discussion of the texts it was based upon, it is now time to move on to the next line of the enquiry, which relates to one particular text which outlines another division of impressions. It is my intention to show how recent interpretations depend (explicitly or implicitly) on a combination of readings of the evidence for what the Stoics thought. On the one hand, it seems widely accepted that the Stoics employed the notions of true and false to do with their classification of impressions. On the other hand, it has been equally widely accepted that *all* impressions that occur to humans, are ‘rational’, where the word rational is taken in a specific way. Again, we find an early, and forceful, expression of this viewpoint in Kerferd:

“The Stoic doxographic tradition makes a distinction between *phantasiai* called *logikai* and others which are *alogoi* (Diogenes VII,51... Aetius IV.11.4-5, Sextus 8.70, Galen, SVF II.89). Though

³⁶ Cicero’s text does strongly suggest that the idea of true and false impressions did enter the later debate amongst Stoics and sceptics – see e.g. Hankinson (1997). My argument is that this does not force us to believe that the early Stoics used ‘true’ and ‘false’ for impressions. This rests on two considerations – first, they had an incompatible doctrine of the true and false which says they refer to something incorporeal, and secondly that a perfectly consistent doctrine can be derived without using true and false impressions.

the doctrine has been the subject of some discussion there has been so far no agreement as to what is meant by the distinction. It has however been common to suppose that a *phantasia logikê* is in some sense a special and limited kind of *phantasia*. This is, I believe, an unwarranted modern importation. The doctrine as we receive it from the doxographic tradition does not suggest this at all. I believe that its nature is clear in the tradition, and that there is no reason not to accept the tradition., According to this tradition as given by Diogenes all *phantasia* fall into two classes, *logikai* in the case of rational animals (*zôa logika*) and *alogoi* in the case of animals which are without reason (*zôa aloga*). It is clearly implied that this distribution is complete – thus all human *phantasiai* are *logikai* (as against e.g. Long...) and as such are *noêseis*.” (Kerferd 1978, p. 252-253)

Once again, Kerferd lists a series of items of text evidence to support his contention, but in this case the type of investigation employed above on *M 7.244* is not appropriate, since in the texts cited there arise no particular issues concerning e.g. internal coherence. This means that in one way the evidence is clearer. But this has not prevented controversy over the meaning of this evidence, and there remains some uncertainty about what exactly is meant by the rational/ irrational distinction. The debate hinges on the meaning we give to the two principal pieces of evidence I will now discuss.

***PRINCIPAL EVIDENCE UNDERLYING THE DEBATE ABOUT
RATIONAL/IRRATIONAL IMPRESSIONS IN STOICISM***

i) D.L. 7.51 (part)

“Furthermore, some impressions are rational, and others non-rational. Those of rational animals are rational, while those of non-rational animals are non-rational. Rational impressions are thought processes, irrational ones are nameless.” (LS trans. 39A6)

ii) S.E. *M* 8.70 (part)

“They [the Stoics] say that a sayable (*lekton*) is what subsists in accordance with a rational impression, and a rational impression is one in which the content of the impression can be exhibited in language.” (LS trans. 33C)

There is other evidence cited by Kerferd, but it is to the above texts that most scholars refer in support of the various interpretations which have been offered to explain the character of the fragments which survive concerning Stoic epistemology. We will look some of those interpretations in some detail shortly, but for now we are concerned with the above excerpts to the extent that they have been associated with the previously cited texts concerning the concepts of true and false as they apply to impressions. The investigation we have followed concerning the concepts true and false as they apply to impressions was designed to ‘open up some interpretative space’. This would not require argument if there were no broad consensus about some of the basic propositions of the Stoic theory. My contention in what follows is that there is in fact such a consensus concerning two of the basic propositions of the Stoic theory. When taken together, these two propositions inevitably dictate a whole

line of possible interpretations, and rule out alternative lines of interpretation. When I say that I want to open up interpretative space, then, my justification for so doing is that the consensus is constructed on an evidence base which leaves its most basic suppositions *underdetermined*. For this reason, again, I wish to emphasise that I am not claiming to be ‘right’ where others are ‘wrong’, but merely suggesting another way the evidence can be viewed, without a significant compromise of consistency.

The first basic proposition of the consensus has been dealt with already and is, in Kerferd’s words:

- (1) “For the Stoics, *phantasiai* were true or false”.

The second basic proposition of the consensus is, as I will now show:

- (2) “For the Stoics, all human *phantasiai* are rational”

What is immediately obvious is why these two propositions should have been taken by some to be mutually supportive, consistent, and compelling. Obviously, the notions of true or false and the notion of rationality are complementary – they accompany one another in the same types of explanation. Humans are rational, and part of that rationality is the capacity to judge things (whatever things we permit in our story – objects, propositions, impulses etc.) as true or false. The intuitive sense that these propositions ‘fit’ together has no doubt contributed to their becoming assumptions underlying the contemporary debate, and the argument that follows will attempt to demonstrate the provenance and extent of this consensus, and consider its interpretative consequences.

Let us now turn our attention to proposition (2), which the consensus takes to be demonstrated *simpliciter* by D.L. 7.51, our principal evidence i) above. We can trace this interpretative trend through a number of influential writings. Let us first consider Striker from 1974³⁷:

“It might be objected [to Gould’s theory, see note] that *prolēpseis* must be an element of every human *phantasia*. According to Diogenes (VII.51), the Stoics distinguished between *logikai* and *alogoi phantasiai*. *Logikai* are those belonging to language-using beings – and so to humans – *alogoi* those belonging to *aloga zôa*. According to Sextus (*M VIII 70*), a *logikê phantasia* is one such that what is represented can be expressed in language (*kath’ên to phantasthen esti logô parastêsai*). Now the Stoics say that *logos* (language or thought) is formed from *prolēpseis*... Hence every *phantasia* must involve *prolēpseis* in some way. I cannot say for certain whether these considerations are correct; in any case they can only show that *prolēpseis* must be involved in the formation of all *phantasiai*, including the false ones. This, however, does not help explain their role as criteria.”

We will return to this excerpt later in our discussion of what impact talk of impressions as true or false has on contemporary interpretations. For now what is interesting is the argument connecting our two principal items of evidence together. It runs as follows:

- 1) The Stoics distinguished between *logikai* and *alogoi phantasiai*.

³⁷ Striker (1974) pp. 60-61. The context is Striker arguing against Gould (1970) that for the Stoics, it is ‘reason’ that determines whether or not an impression is cognitive (with respect to the accuracy with which it represents its object). Gould claims that reason does this by reference to *prolēpseis*.

2) A *logikê phantasia* is one such that what is represented can be expressed in language.

3) The Stoics say that *logos* (language or thought) is formed from *prolêpseis*.

Therefore:

a) Every *phantasia* must involve *prolêpseis*.

b) *Prolêpseis* must be involved in the formation of all *phantasiai*.

Firstly, we can notice the *priority* accorded to this pair of items of text evidence. Diogenes is seen as evidence for the distinction between *logikai* and *alogoi phantasiai*, and Sextus is seen as providing an elucidation of this distinction. This is entirely natural and appropriate. Secondly, we can notice the ambiguity in line (3) between ‘language’ and ‘thought’, which will prove central to a later part of this argument. Striker is highly sensitive to such ambiguities – indeed this whole paper, *Kritêrion tês alêtheias*, is an extraordinary piece of scholarship to unravel the various meanings of ‘the criterion’ in Hellenistic epistemology. The fundamental problem of ambiguity is that the *sense* of a proposition in which an ambiguous term occurs can be taken in more than one way. In D.L. 7.51, the terms used are *logikai* and *alogoi*, with no clear distinction available between the senses ‘rational/non-rational’ and ‘linguistic/ non-linguistic’. Luckily, Sextus *M* 8.70 provides the necessary additional evidence for us to decide that when Diogenes writes *logikai* with respect to impressions, he is probably talking about their capacity to ‘give rise to’³⁸ linguistic contents, i.e. *lekta*. But the ambiguity is still problematic in Diogenes’ text, since the

³⁸ The issue of how to understand a theory in which an impression can ‘give rise to’ a linguistic content is discussed shortly, in relation to Sorabji (1993).

adjective *logikai* is also used with respect to animals.³⁹ The problem of the ambiguity in 7.51 can be expressed as follows: is the meaning of *logikai* with respect to impressions the same as the meaning of *logikai* with respect to animals? And to refine the problem still further, we can question the *scope* of the concept in each case. The rational / non-rational distinction as it relates to animals is a complete distribution ('If this is an animal, it is either rational or non-rational'). Contemporary commentators have operated on the assumption that the rational /non-rational distinction has the same scope with respect to impressions.

Kerferd's argument cited above (pp. 193-194) makes his position perfectly clear, although there is a conspicuous lack of argument. Now, anyone who wishes to provide some kind of coherent account of Stoicism must frequently encounter positions which they need to take a view on, but which view to take is left underdetermined by the evidence. Kerferd's case is persuasive, but on rhetorical rather than analytic grounds. His reference to Long points us to the following passage from 1971, which gives an alternative view:

"To distinguish the mere presentations of sense from those also required for linguistic acts and discursive reason the Stoics appended to the latter set the adjective *logikai*. 'Rational presentations' are thoughts (*noeseis*) and peculiar to men, though it is not, I think, implied that every species of human *phantasia* is *logikē*."⁴⁰

³⁹ The expression 'rational animal' is so widely used in Greek philosophy to refer to humans that the intention behind it cannot be in doubt, which leads us to conclude that that the distinction between 'rational' and 'non-rational' animals is meant to point to some difference between humans and all other animals.

⁴⁰ Long (1971). P.83.

And other scholars have been less convinced than Kerferd that a case can be made with confidence about how to interpret Diogenes' distinction. Thus we have Schofield in 1980:

“... apprehensive presentations may vary in degree of conceptual richness and syntactical complexity. The Stoics appear to have noticed this consequence. We hear of a distinction, unfortunately obscure, between rational presentations, enjoyed by rational animals, and irrational, enjoyed by the irrational (D.L. 7.51, S.E. *M* 8.70).” (p.295)

We can notice Striker, too, urging caution in the above citation: “I cannot say for certain whether these considerations are correct.”

Despite the uncertainties of Striker, Long⁴¹ and Schofield, a strong and unequivocal opinion emerges in Frede (1983):

“Animals and human beings are constructed in such a way that their survival and well-being depends essentially on the adequacy of their cognitions. They have to be able to recognise and to shun what is bad for them, and they have to be in a position to realise and seek out what is conducive to their preservation and well-being. For this purpose they are equipped with a sensory apparatus and a soul which, via the senses, receives impressions of the outside world, and thus provides them with some kind of awareness of the world around them. There is a crucial difference, though, between the impressions of rational beings and the impressions of animals. The impressions of rational beings are called “rational impressions” (D.L. 7.51). Rational impressions have a propositional content, they are impressions to the

¹ Although Long has also published a contrary opinion: “... the Stoics treat *phantasiai* from sense-organs as rational (*logikai*)”. (1989, p.165)

effect that something is the case very much in the sense in which we might say ordinarily “the impression which one gets, if one looks at the evidence, is that...” Thus rational impressions are thoughts which present themselves to the mind and which the mind either accepts or refuses to accept.” (1983, repr. 1987, p.153)

What is of most relevance here for our discussion is the assumption in Frede’s argument that, in Kerferd’s phrase, ‘the distribution is complete’ between rational and non-rational impressions. Now we have seen what others have had to say, we can return to Striker’s argument at the beginning of this section and explain precisely her introduction of universal generalisations into the concluding propositions of her argument, which as we recall say:

- a) Every *phantasia* must involve *prolêpseis*.
- b) *Prolêpseis* must be involved in the formation of all *phantasiai*.

As Striker writes in her argument “*Logikai* are those belonging to language-using beings – and so to humans – *alogoi* those belonging to *aloga zôa*.” Thus it is implied, that for the purposes of her argument, the division rational / non-rational covers all impressions.

Supposing we accept for the moment that the text evidence leaves the question of the scope of the rational/ non-rational distinction *open* - that is the position of the Stoics is underdetermined with respect to the evidence - we still face an interesting question: why have contemporary scholars chosen to interpret D.L. 7.51 as clearly representing a complete division? The answer is that accepting Diogenes in this way opens up a fruitful line of enquiry, and enables a reconstruction of Stoicism to take place which seems coherent, consistent with the evidence, and plausible as a philosophy. The point I want to stress is that the reasons for reading D.L. 7.51 in the

way it is commonly read, are *extratextual* reasons. Again, there can be no problem with this, as we are often driven beyond the texts just because they are fragmentary. (My whole approach is conditioned by the need to go beyond the texts – for example, by introducing a notion such as ‘intersubjectivity’). One of the ‘extratextual’ factors concerned with D.L. 7. 51 has been the compatible belief that for the Stoics, *phantasiai* were true or false. These two interpretative initiatives have combined in the recent literature to conjure up a notion of ‘content’ in impressions which has formed the core of at least one interesting debate.⁴² I will look into the general question of content in impressions in more detail in a moment. For now, however, I wish to briefly discuss another way we could read D.L. 7.51, which requires different extratextual reasons for its support, but could be argued to be equivalently consistent with the evidence, given that the evidence underdetermines the case.

As we have noted, there is not very much explicit argument as to why the Diogenes excerpt should be read as representing a complete division. In cases where there is not much argument, an obvious reason would be that there is in fact only one way to read the evidence (and the ‘consensus’ position is certainly based on a natural reading of D.L. 7.51). Thus it is undisputed that, for the Stoics, the end for man is to ‘live in accordance with nature, or virtue’.⁴³ We might argue over the meanings of ‘in accordance with’, and the meanings associated with ‘nature’, but the formula is clear. In the case of rational impressions, I would argue, there is no such clarity. One of the things which underlies the common view is a reading of Diogenes such that there

⁴² We can follow this debate through in Frede (1983), Sorabji (1990), Lesses (1998).

⁴³ Cf. D.L. 7.87-9 (LS 63C), Stobaeus 2.77, 16-27 (LS 63A).

is something inherent in the impression which makes it rational. Without this assumption, there would be no point in looking for a theory which could explain the ‘propositional content’ of an impression. But an alternative reading could stress that what seems to emerge from various texts is a notion of impression which is *identical across all applications* – both human and animal. Thus, back at 7.50:

“An impression is different from a figment (*phantasma*). A figment is the kind of fanciful thought which occurs in dreams, whereas an impression is a printing in the soul: i.e. an alteration.”

This definition of impressions as a ‘printing in the soul’ (*typôsis en psychê*)⁴⁴ seems to have been common to the school, and the interest for us is that the same formula could equally apply to all animals. Thus Philo:

“The animal is superior to the non-animal in two respects, impression and impulse. An impression is formed by the approach of an external object which strikes the mind through sensation.” (Philo, *Allegories of the laws*, 1.30, LS 53P)

Now, if the Stoics had a view of impression (defined as a printing in the soul) which was common to both rational and non-rational animals, then the adjective *logikai* when applied to impressions is not differentiating between *impressions* as such, but pointing out the different *effects* of impressions, depending on where they occur. This way of seeing the problem utilises Frede’s emphasis on the position of impressions in a *causal* process of perception. If we think in this way, it is open to us

⁴⁴ Although this was taken to mean different things by Chrysippus and Cleanthes (cf. S.E. M 373). This difference of opinion forms part of the discussion in the next chapter.

to believe (with the contemporary consensus) that *all* impressions in rational animals are therefore rational. But it is also open for us to believe that impressions *themselves* are neither rational nor non-rational, and what is being differentiated by the Stoic use of *logikai* is some *additional capacity* in the nature of the rational animal over and above the non-rational. The idea of reason being an additional capacity is important, since it leaves open the possibility that at the level of impression itself, rational and non-rational animals are granted the same characteristic. Some evidence points to this view being tenable:

“Animals and plants have the cause of movement in themselves...Some things of this kind, they say, are moved ‘out of themselves, and others ‘by’ themselves: the former comprise soulless things, the latter ones which are ensouled. Ensouled things are moved ‘by’ themselves when an impression occurs within them which calls forth an impulse... A rational animal, however, in addition to its impressionistic nature, has reason which passes judgement on impressions, rejecting some of these and accepting others, in order that the animal may be guided accordingly.”⁴⁵

This changes our interpretation. We are now understanding ourselves as having impressions-which-we-share-with-animals, *some of which* can be called rational because and only because they give rise to language or thought, not because of any intrinsic characteristic. This is how we could understand, in Kerferd’s phrase, “that *logikai phantasiai* are in some sense a special and limited kind of *phantasia*.”

⁴⁵ Origen, *On Principles*, 3.1.2-2, LS 53A. cf. S.E. 8.275-6, “Nor is it by the merely simple impression that [man] differs [from animals] for they too receive impressions, but by impressions produced by inference and combination.” (LS 53T).

(1978, p.252). To summarise the alternative suggestion, we are suggesting that the evidence of D.L. 7. 51 leaves open the possibility that, for the Stoics, impressions *themselves* are non-rational entities, but some of them give rise to linguistic expressions (in rational animals). On this view, the Stoic position would be that animals and humans *share* the faculty of impression, the difference being that in humans, reason is an *additional* capacity which has the effect of changing the impact impressions have.

It might be objected that there is an insuperable problem with such an interpretation, which I think the contemporary consensus would frame as follows: The *hêgemonikon* is rational and unitary, and adopting a view of impressions as non-rational is therefore *prima facie* contradictory, since impressions clearly constitute part of the *hêgemonikon*. This is a worthwhile objection, and worthy of some consideration, especially so since it seems to gain support from parts of the evidence:

“The Stoics say that the commanding-faculty (*hêgemonikon*) is the soul’s highest part, which produces (*to poioun*) impressions, assents, perceptions and impulses. They also call it the reasoning faculty.” (Aetius 4.21.1, LS 53 A1)

The problem for the view I am putting forward is the active verb ‘produces’ which refers to the relationship between the rational, unitary *hêgemonikon* and impressions. If Aetius is accurate, any alternative reading of D.L. 7.51 cannot be correct, or at least not for the reasons given. But again there is a tension in the evidence, which is reflected by Sextus Empiricus who gives a different account concerning the Stoic view of activities and passivities of the *hêgemonikon*:

“Hence, when Zeno says that ‘presentation is an impression on the soul’, we must understand by ‘soul’ not the whole but that part of

it, so that the statement may be in this form, 'presentation is alteration of the regent part'. But even when put in this form some say that it is wrong again. For, in fact, impulse and assent and apprehension are alterations of the regent part, but are different from presentation. For whereas this is a passivity of ours and a condition, the former are much rather activities... Such being this further objection, the Stoics resort once again to their 'implications', saying that we must understand, as implied in the definition, the words 'by way of passivity'." (S.E. 7.237-239 (part), trans. Bury.)

If we accept Sextus' version, then it is still open to us to interpret the Stoics as holding that impressions qua impressions are non-rational, since they are 'passivities' of the *hêgemonikon* – i.e. that which it suffers by virtue of the nature of the world, rather than that which it forms by its own nature. It might be objected that some impressions spoken of in the evidence seem to be possible only as activities of the *hêgemonikon*, such as precisely those which differentiate humans and animals at Sextus 8.275. Here, we remember, man differs from non-rational animals because of 'impressions produced by inference and combination'. But we can accept this without disturbance, and be quite contented that man's rational faculty has impressions which non-rational animals cannot share – otherwise what would be the point of the distinction? These 'rational impressions' (i.e. those produced by inference and combination) could be described as 'higher-order' impressions, which only rational animals have. But this is not to say that rational and non-rational animals do not share an identical faculty of impressions of a lower order. I will amplify this notion of orders of impressions later (cf. p. 246). The main thrust of this part of my argument, then, is that a 'two-tier' theory of perception is not ruled out

prima facie by the evidence on rational impressions. Some other evidence, it seems to me, can be naturally read in support of a two-tier theory. Thus we have Cicero:

“[Speaker: the Antiochean Lucullus in defence of Stoic epistemology] Those characteristics which belong to the things we describe as being cognized by the senses are equally characteristic of that further set of things said to be cognised not by the senses directly but by them in a certain respect, e.g., ‘That is white, this is sweet, that is melodious, this is fragrant, this is bitter.’ Our cognition of these is secured by the mind, not the senses.”⁴⁶

And further Calcidius:

“The objects of sensation, as bodies, are composite, and the individual senses sense one definite thing, this one colours, another sounds... and in all cases of the present; no sense remembers what is past or foresees the future. It is the function of internal reflection and reasoning to understand each sense’s affection, and to infer from their reports what it [i.e. the object] is, and to accept it when present, remember it when absent, and foresee it when future.” (Calcidius 220, LS 53G)

A final strand to consider on the question of the rational/non-rational distinction is brought to light by Richard Sorabji:

“I think the Stoic texts show that a perceptual appearance which is propositional in the sense explained does not depend on being verbalised by its owner. For the texts repeatedly insist on using the

⁴⁶ Cic., Ac. 2.21. LS 39C. cf. S.E. 7.345 (although it has been doubted whether this latter passage can be attributed to Stoic theory, see Sorabji 1993, p.25)

modal idea that such propositional appearances are *verbalisable*, not that they are *verbalised*. If they are in fact verbalised, this is due to an independent operation of the mind. For example, the Stoics say not that perceptual appearance sets out in words what appears, but that it comes first (*proêgeitai*), and that subsequently (*eita*) thought (*dianoia*) sets out in words (*ekpherei logôî*) how one is affected by the perceptual appearance (D. L. 7.49). Similarly, perceptual appearance is something in accordance with which we are able to say (*eipein ekhomen*) – whether or not we do say – that there is a white subject acting on us (Aetius 4.12.1). Again, a true or false perceptual appearance is one of which it is *possible (esti)* to make, not one which itself makes, a true or false assertion (*katêgoria*)... Similarly, a rational perceptual appearance (*logikê phantasia*) is that in accordance with which it is *possible (esti)* to present in words (*parastêsai logoî*) what appears (*to phantasthen*). There are further related points: for example, things perceived (*aisthêta*) are true not directly (*ex eutheias*), but by reference to parallel (*parakeimena*) things thought (*noêta*).⁴⁷

Sorabji goes on to make use of this gathering of evidence, and his reading of

it:

“This is already enough to show that perceptual appearances *that* something is the case, or *as of* something being the case, do not depend on people putting into words the proposition which appears to

⁴⁷ Sorabji (1993), p.22. When, in the first sentence, Sorabji mentions ‘a perceptual appearance which is propositional in the sense explained’, he means a special sense of ‘propositional’, based on a special notion of ‘predicational’. Thus: “Typically, an animal that follows a scent does not merely perceive the scent in isolation, but perceives it as belonging to something, or at least as lying in a certain direction, and otherwise would not go in the right direction for it. But this already involves connecting the scent with a subject or a direction. I shall talk of this connecting as predicating the scent of a subject on direction, though I shall not mean anything extra by the word, and I shall describe the animal as perceiving that the scent comes from that direction, or perceiving it as coming from there. I shall not mean perceiving that to involve more than perceiving as, nor either of them to involve more than making the connection to which I have referred.” (p.12) Thus too : “There is not merely an

them. Nor presumably do they depend on people conceiving it is a thought, if the thought is merely “parallel” to the perception. It may be objected that his last testimony is isolated and that propositional appearances may therefore still depend on being *conceptualised*, even if they do not depend on being *verbalised*. But the Stoics do not draw attention to the possibility of conceptualisation without verbalisation – on one interpretation they even exclude it.” (p.22)

The main point of Sorabji’s that is significant for my argument is the recognition of what he calls the “*modal idea* that such propositional appearances are *verbalisable*, not that they are *verbalised*”. And that “If they are in fact verbalised, this is due to an independent operation of the mind.” Each text that Sorabji refers to contains something like this modal idea, which makes his suggestion really quite powerful. For Sorabji, this observation functions as a means by which he can rebut the notion that the evidence shows the Stoics rejecting (a special sort of) propositional content in the appearances of animals and infants: “I have been saying that propositional appearances are defined as verbalisable and conceptualisable, not as verbalised and conceptualised. But must they be verbalisable and conceptualisable *by their owners*, or is it enough that they should be in principle verbalisable and conceptualisable *by us*? The texts do not say directly, but the weaker requirement, that propositional appearances need only be verbalisable and conceptualisable *by us*, would allow animals and infants to have perceptual appearances of a propositional sort.” (p.23)

appearance of whiteness, but of whiteness as belonging to something or as being located somewhere. I shall call this, too, propositional, meaning no more than that it is predicational.” (p.19)

For us, the interest lies in a possible other use for Sorabji's modal distinction. It is suggested by his comment that "If they [perceptual appearances] are in fact verbalised, this is due to an independent operation of the mind." If, as we have just variously seen, such a verbalisation comes *subsequently* to the impression, or is something *in accordance with* the impression, or is *parallel* to the impression, then there arises the possibility that *impressions have no propositional content at all*, and what is instead suggested is precisely the kind of 'two tier' model of perception that Annas (1992, p.78), for example, is so explicit in ruling out as a possible interpretation of Stoic epistemology.

Perhaps this could lead us to formulate our idea in yet another way. There are various definitions and divisions the Stoics used in their attempt to describe the human faculty of impressions as it relates to perception and knowledge. In these division and definitions, it is possible that the Stoics are conceiving of *phantasiai* as a genus whose various classifications are spelled out not in terms of *numerical* identity at all, but rather in terms of *functional* identity. That is, there is not some theoretical quantity of impressions about which it is possible to say 'If this is an impression it must have characteristic *A* or characteristic *B*.' Rather, the Stoics understood there to be in nature a generic *faculty* of sense-perception, one aspect of which was the having of *phantasiai*. From this starting-point, they then offered a series of *functional* explanations for how this faculty explains certain natural facts. And we can see this analysis in the context of D.L. 7.51. There are three distinctions drawn here, sensory/non-sensory, rational/non-rational, expert/non-expert. In the first, the impressions are divided in terms of their *cause*. In the second and third the distinctions are contingent on distinctions drawn from their *effects*. But in neither case does the distinction necessarily point us towards a difference in the *intrinsic*

character of *phantasiai*, which I have argued can be understood as common to both humans, and non-human animals. Seen in this light, Kerferd's claim that the *logikai/alogoi* distribution is 'complete' becomes not wrong, but rather seen as aimed a different explanation, since the aim of a functional explanation is to posit entities to the extent that they are required to explain observable phenomena. A 'complete distribution' is a different kind of device, which seeks to logically exhaust a given class. Thus, we conjecture, the labels *logikai / alogoi* were not intended to act as an umbrella over all impressions but rather, as Long (1971) first suspected, as sortals determining a limited subset of the genus *phantasiai*.

At least I hope to have shown that the evidence can lead us in two directions on the question of the completeness of the distribution of the rational/non-rational distinction for impressions in Stoicism. In the end we have come back once more to my previous submission: It is extratextual factors which make one commentator decide this way, another that. Are there any 'extratextual' reasons for preferring *not* to agree with the consensus concerning D.L. 7.51? There is at least one, which I will now briefly present.

When we think that all human impressions are rational, and accompany this with the belief that all human impressions can be either true or false, we produce a further question: what is the nature of the 'rational content' of an impression? This is likely to be a vexed question. There is a similar question which is: what is the nature of the 'rational content' of a proposition, or judgment? This second question is answered straightforwardly by the Stoic evidence, albeit using problematic concepts.

An *axiôma* is incorporeal, expressible, and true or false.⁴⁸ There is no such clear statement in answer to the first question. But there is a reason from the history of philosophy which might urge caution on us wanting to seek such an answer. The reason is that by setting up an investigation into the evidence in this way, we could rapidly be led to a form of Kantianism, whereby the problem we have is one of *access*. But it strikes me that the one problem the Stoics did not face was the problem of *access*, the security of which is in any case assumed in the doctrine of the *phantasia katalêptike*. Or, to put it another way, the problem of access is not one the Stoics *themselves* would have worried about, given their doctrines, even if some others would impute it to them. A clear example of this tendency to see Kant in the Stoics⁴⁹ is given in two separate places by Annas (1992):

“All perceiving has a subject as well as an object; mentioning only the object leaves out part of what perceiving is. Thus all perceiving presupposes self-perception. This is a highly interesting point; Kant was later to produce a far more elaborate argument for this conclusion.” (p.58)

The ‘self-perception’ Annas refers to is derived from the evidence of Hierocles’ *Elements of Ethics*, which gives a number of Chrysippean arguments concerning this topic. But when Annas writes of Kant giving ‘a far more elaborate argument’ for the same conclusion, we might worry about anachronism. Annas is not

⁴⁸ cf. S.E. M, 7.38, 8.12 and 8.70; P.H. 2.81; D.L. 7.65-66.

⁴⁹ We can note an interesting shift of position in Annas on this point, since in *Truth and Knowledge* (1980), she seems suspicious of Kantian-type interpretations. Thus she criticises Watson’s interpretation of the Stoic theory of the lekton: “The Kantian tone of this may cause us some discomfort; I shall come back to this discomfort and try to make it more precise...” (p.90). Unfortunately, the promise to return to the topic is, as far as I can see, unfulfilled in the paper.

specific about which part of Kant she refers to, but assuming it is the *Critique of Pure Reason*, we would be left with the task of reconciling, say, the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories with the Stoic theory of *oikeiōsis*. We might be discouraged from the task, moreover, precisely because it falls foul of the requirement laid out earlier that the type of ‘subject of experience’ we are looking for in Stoicism – for good historical reasons – cannot be of the transcendental type Kant offers. A few pages later, Annas writes:

“By excluding factors such as assent at times, the Stoics are making the point that perception is not a two-stage process; reception of an uninterpreted sensory given *plus* a separable conceptualisation of it. There are no perceptions which do not involve conceptualisation and thinking: a Kantian kind of thesis, for which Kant was, again, to provide more complex arguments.” (p.78)

Sorabji has an interesting counter-argument against Annas’ main contention here. It is an argument from the modal character of the relevant evidence: “...what convinces me less is the view that an adult human’s perceptual appearance depends for its existence on the conceptualisation which it is given. The conceptualisation may be invariable, but, like the verbalisation, I think it may be a logically independent operation.” (1993, p.23).

Notwithstanding this objection, we can discuss the general anachronism which seems to be inherent in a characterisation associating the Stoics with Kant. At the outset of this chapter, we considered Burnyeat’s reasons for arguing against Berkeley that Plato was an idealist. We can use the same idea to argue against Annas that the Stoics were proto-Kantians. Kant’s project, like Berkeley’s, is literally inconceivable without the decisive shift in the problem of knowledge brought about by Descartes.

Thus for reasons totally independent of the text evidence for Stoicism – reasons to do with the history of philosophy – we can be wary of an interpretation which leads to such conclusions. Again, I am not arguing with the *reasonableness* of Annas' position – *given that we accept rational content in impressions* – but I am arguing that the types of conclusion it permits might make us think twice about adopting such an interpretative presupposition. Having said this, we can imagine someone holding to the position of accepting rational content in impressions without wanting to introduce Kant, but the fact that it opens up such a possibility should perhaps sound a cautionary note.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have considered two generic methodological issues to do with the interpretation of ancient epistemology. From this consideration, I have adopted two positions: that Greek philosophy is realist in outlook, and that it is concerned with the problem of falsehood, rather than with any version of 'the problem of truth'. I have considered in detail some of the arguments put forward by Julia Annas about the difficulties of characterising Stoic epistemology as either a 'correspondence' or a 'coherentist' theory. Focussing principally on one text from Sextus Empiricus (*M* 7.244) and one text from Diogenes Laertius (7.51), I have suggested that certain commonly held positions are underdetermined with respect to the evidence. Because of this underdetermination, I have suggested two alternative interpretations: that for the Stoics, impressions are neither true nor false, and that there is a faculty of impressions which humans share with animals and which is generically non-rational. The Stoic *logikê phantasia*, I have suggested, names a

limited subset of these impressions- namely those which can be expressed in language. The combination of these interpretative suppositions is to suggest that Stoic epistemology was a two-tier theory, whereby non-conceptual data is conceptualised by the action of the mind. The task of seeing whether such a theory might well describe Stoicism will be taken up in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE : CONSTRUCTING A TWO-TIER VIEW

INTRODUCTION

If we have succeeded in suggesting that Stoic epistemology might have been a ‘two-tier’ theory after all, what difference would this make to our characterisation of the theory? There is one complete but brief text which, although late, can serve to label such a two-tier interpretation. It is clearly Stoicising, if not explicitly drawn from Stoic texts. I refer to Ptolemy’s *On the Kriterion and Hegemonikon*.¹ Ptolemy has been introduced in a recent work in the following way:

“Claudius Ptolemaeus lived from about 100 to about 170 A.D., thus being a contemporary of Galen and Sextus Empiricus. We know little of his life, but he seems to have been born in Egypt and to have worked in Alexandria... The authenticity of the *On the Kriterion and Hegemonikon* has been doubted but on insufficient grounds.” (Huby and Neale 1989, p. 216)

I am not proposing using this text as direct evidence for my view on Stoic epistemology, since by these dates the processes of syncretism and eclecticism had muddied the historical waters. There is no evidence that Ptolemy called himself a Stoic, nor considered himself a spokesman for an orthodoxy. Nevertheless, in addition to the title, there is a strong flavour of Stoicism which

¹ The citation above is from “a new English translation prepared by the [Liverpool/Manchester Seminar on Ancient Philosophy]”. Huby and Neale (1989), p.179-215.

permeates the work, although in certain places also there is clear evidence of an admixture of other philosophical standpoints.² The most relevant section for us deals with the relation between sense perception and thought:

“Sense perception and thought are properties of soul, however, whether on this principle or that. And it is clear, as we have said, that the soul's sensory faculty first makes contact with the various objects of sense perception through the body's sense organs, then transmits the affections which arise in it to the intellect by means of *phantasia*, and then, like any messenger, interferes no further. It is the intellect which, on receiving the sensations from the sensory faculty, proceeds to apply to them the operation of thought and judgment.” (8.3, Huby and Neal (1989), p.197).

As I have said, and now wish to emphasise, I am not taking this as direct evidence of Stoic theory, since to do so would be anachronistic. There is no mention of *katalêpsis* in the relevant place, nor mention of the wise man and his role as a model for epistemic perfection. In the limited sense of a piece which advocates just this two-tier theory whereby *phantasiai* have no rational content, however, it provides a label for my characterisation of Stoic epistemology, which is to ascribe to them what we might call a ‘Ptolemaic’ theory of impressions, as opposed to the alternative notion of ‘rational content in impressions’. In a paper accompanying this translation, Long draws attention to similarities between Ptolemy and the Stoics with respect to *phantasiai*:

“On Ptolemy's scheme, intellect uses *logos* (its conceptual apparatus) as its mode of adjudicating complex or doubtful observations, which it cannot resolve just by sense perception. In Stoicism, sense perception or thought provides the mind with cognitive impressions, whose criterial power involves concepts that cause us to identify objects correctly. The principal differences over details are due to different

² Cf. Long (1989): “Scholars have rung the changes in their choice of Ptolemy's sources or philosophical forebears. Boll argued for a late Peripatetic compendium; Lammert opted for the Middle Stoa, and more especially Posidonius, who wrote a book *On the Criterion* (D.L. 7.54); Manuli, acknowledging ‘a massive Stoic-Peripatetic presence’, finds evidence in a number of cases to suggest ‘a more strict parallelism with Middle Platonism’, as in Albinus... None of these proposals is patently false.” (p.163)

models of mind: the Stoics treat *phantasiai* from sense organs as rational (*logikai*), while Ptolemy prefers the more familiar notion of a division, mediated by *phantasia*, between raw (i.e. non-rational) data and the intellect's interpretation of these. At the level which concerns Ptolemy, he would not be unreasonable in regarding the Stoic account as a fine divergence from his own, rather than a quite different treatment of knowledge." (Long 1989, p.164-165)

During this section of his description, Long points us to Frede and his account of the causal nature of impressions. Earlier in his paper there is another reference to Frede, and to D.L. 7.51. Here, Long discusses the epistemological debate at the time of Ptolemy, and offers a pithy characterisation of the Stoic position:

"For our understanding of Ptolemy and his milieu, we need to recognise that he is concerned both with the general and older question 'what are the respective contributions of sense perception and intellect to our knowledge of the world?', and with the more recent and specific question, 'what reliable criterion do we have for discriminating between particular truths and falsehoods?'. In orthodox Stoicism the first question had virtually been reduced to the second: 'cognitive impressions', as experiences of a mind that has no 'irrational' faculty, are themselves 'rational', and so transcend the old distinction between bare sensation and intellect." (p.161)

It is precisely this view of rational impressions 'transcending' the distinction between sensation and intellect that I now wish to focus on. I have examined the evidence, both for impressions being true and false and for the corollary belief that all human impressions are rational. I have argued that the position of the Stoics is underdetermined with respect to the evidence. It is now time to examine how this underdetermination has been 'fleshed out' by commentators looking to supply an interpretation of such evidence as is available.

INTERPRETING ZENO'S FIST

Returning to Frede's classic paper we can find a passage of argument which results in a position like that of Long which we have just seen:

“Human beings, according to the Stoics, start out as irrational animals. As such they have the impressions which animals have. But in the case of human beings these impressions give rise to concepts of very simple perceptual features like colors, shapes, tastes and the like, and thus reason slowly starts to grow. Once we have these simple concepts, we can have corresponding rational impressions and, what is more important, corresponding cognitive impressions. These will naturally give rise to more complex concepts, like that of a man or a tree, which in turn will enable us to have more complex rational and in particular cognitive impressions (cf. Cic. Acad. II 21). Thus these common notions that arise in us naturally on the basis of more primitive impressions turn out to be truly anticipations (Cic. Nd I 44; *prolēpseis*); for they are needed to form the impressions that afford us a grasp on things. Thus rational impressions and in particular cognitive impressions do presuppose concepts, but these arise from more primitive impressions that do not presuppose these concepts, and ultimately from sense-impressions that do not presuppose any concepts whatsoever but that are not rational either. Given this developmental account, it is easy to see how that Stoics can claim that concepts only arise from the appropriate impressions and nevertheless maintain that a rational impression involves the conceptualisation of the object.” (1983, p.154-155).

Frede's account is coherent and persuasive, and there are only two details that I wish to take issue with, although naturally I think they are very significant details. The details concern firstly

the business of the relation between the rational and the cognitive impression, and secondly the business of concepts being “needed to form the impressions that afford us a grasp on things”.

It seems from the above passage that Frede intends to view cognitive impressions as being a subset of rational impressions (“Thus rational impressions and in particular cognitive impressions”). This is the inevitable result of his reading of D.L. 7.51 from which comes the interpretation that, for the Stoics, all mature impressions are rational. This has been developed by Frede into a view of human development during which, at some point, we are transformed away from our childhoods and the irrational animals to become ‘beings of reason’.³

I am not disputing the evident truth of this transformation, but I would wish to limit its scope in one or two respects. My discussion earlier on mentioned the ambiguity between ‘reason’ and ‘language’ as a translation of *logikai*. Of course, all impressions of rational beings are rational, in the sense that they are ‘of reason’. But this is not the same things as to say that all impressions of rational beings are, or ought to be, ‘linguistic’. If we take D.L. 7. 51 as possibly meaning that only *some* impressions of rational beings are linguistic, then we escape the necessity that seems to underlie Frede's characterisation. Further, if we do this, we no longer have to look to impressions themselves for linguistic content, but merely accept the truism that certain things we say are linked in incontrovertible ways to certain things we perceive. This is the minimal theoretical claim the Stoics can be made to make. But just because this claim seems truistic and minimal, that is not to say that it lacks philosophical importance. I submit the importance is very great, and the reasons

³ This idea is attested to in other places in Frede's writings: “The Stoics believe that we are born as animals, except that we are constructed in such a way as to become perfectly rational beings, unless the natural process of maturation is interrupted... The fact, according to the Stoics, is that the irrational animal soul of the child has disappeared and turned into human reason. And with this change the functions of the soul have changed. Thus perception and impulse have become something radically different. Both have become judgments of a certain sort, namely a matter of assent to a certain kind of impression, here a perceptual impression, there an impulsive impression.” (1986, p.108). Also cf. “And the Stoics, as is well known, claim that children are irrational animals which only turn into rational beings, as their irrational soul in its entirety is converted into reason, when they acquire the stock of common notions, naturally shared by all human beings, whose possession for the Stoics constitutes reason (Galen *De dogm. Hipp. et Plat.* 5.3.1 = SVF ii. 841).” (1996, p.11)

for this will be discussed later. For the present, the suggestion I have made modifies Frede's model, since it removes the suggestion that cognitive impressions should be understood as a subset of rational impressions in the sense meant by Frede, and in fact suggests the reverse. We can instead understand cognitive impressions, and for that matter impressions that are non-cognitive, as a non-linguistic part of the process of perception. We can then use 'rational impressions' to indicate that subset of impressions which can subsequently be understood as that 'in accordance with which' we use language about the world.

This consideration leads us directly to our second detail, which concerns Frede's claim that concepts are "needed to form the impressions that afford us a grasp on things". If we are allowed to pursue our thought that impressions are non-linguistic, and if we accept (as we should) that 'concepts' (*ennoêmata*) in Stoicism are explicitly involved in the rational and linguistic processes of the mind, then we have an argument against Frede. We are able to say that instead of impressions needing concepts, the proper relationship between impressions (concerning 'things') and concepts remains the temporal sequence he outlines in the early part of the above citation, whereby impressions quite naturally form concepts. In fact, he anticipates just this sort of move:

"It may be objected that impressions are supposed to be passive affections of the mind, whereas the mind's conceptualisation of an object would be an active contribution of the mind to the impression. But it has to be kept in mind that the Stoics characterise an impression as a passive affection of the mind to contrast it with the act of assent and not to deny that the mind has any part in the formation of a thought." (1983, p.154)

My objection to Frede's position has precisely to do with the notion that impressions are passive affections of the mind, and as such can be thought of as non-rational. As Frede says, the position he holds which causes this objection is that 'the mind's conceptualisation of an object

would be an active contribution of the mind to the impression'. In contrast to this, my own position will be that the mind's conceptualisation of an impression is an active contribution of the mind to the grasp, or *katalêpsis* of the object, and that this depends on two things. First, it certainly requires no 'rational' component in the impression itself; secondly, it depends on the mind transforming the content of the impression into something like linguistic form, and in a determinate and reliable way. To see if this is defensible position we must consider some further evidence. We can begin with Cicero:

"Zeno used to clinch the wise man's sole possession of scientific knowledge with a gesture. He would spread out the fingers of one hand and display its open palm, saying 'An impression is like this'. Next he clenched his fingers a little and said, 'Assent is like this.' Then, pressing his fingers quite together, he made a fist, and said that this was cognition (and from this illustration he gave that mental state the name of *katalêpsis*, which it had not had before). Then he brought his left hand against his right fist and gripped it tightly and forcefully, and said that scientific knowledge was like this and possessed by none except the wise man."⁴ (Cic. Ac. 2.145, LS 41A).

The most concentrated interpretation of this passage has been the article by Arthur (1983).

In it, there is stated early on an assumption which guides his subsequent enquiry:

"Zeno is not saying that assent is followed by catalepsis which is, in turn, followed by *epistêmê*. Rather, he is saying that assent, catalepsis and *epistêmê* are alternative reactions to presentations. I would suggest that assent is a generic term, referring to the mind's acceptance of any presentation regardless of its epistemological worth. Catalepsis, on the other hand, arises only when the mind assents to a cataleptic presentation." (p.69)

⁴ For other comment on this passage, see Rist (1969), p.139; Kerferd (1978), p.254-255; Schofield (1980), p.286; Kidd (1989), p.148; Bobzien (1998), p.260.

While there can be no arguing with the last sentence (cf. S.E. M 7.151), I think two main considerations can be brought in which might question the general thrust of Arthur's opening, that 'Zeno is not saying that assent is followed by catalepsis which is, in turn, followed by epistêmê'.

The first has to do with the didactic nature of the image, and its role as an analogy. Bobzien has recently commented on such images in Stoicism generally:

"An explanatory analogy works from something taken as generally clear or uncontroversial and relatively easy to understand by the intended audience to something not so clear and easy. It usually serves to illustrate one or a small number of particular points. It would be wrong to expect that every detail on the explanandum level has a parallel on the explanans level or vice versa... This is a method which the Stoics, and especially Chrysippus, employed frequently in their psychology: compare Zeno's open and closed hand used for illustrating the acquisition of knowledge." (1998, p.260)

So whilst we should not look to interrogate every detail of the analogy ascribed to Zeno by Cicero, we should endeavour to understand something of how it was intended to function as a parallel. Now, clearly the parallel is between the open and closing fist and the acquisition of knowledge by humans. But more especially, as Bobzien writes in relation to this analogy, and others of the Stoics⁵, "in all these cases the subject is psychology. Chrysippus' concern is the elucidation of the motions of the mind, i.e. of certain causal processes in the mind." (p.260)

Given that it is the causal processes of the mind we are offered the analogy for, it seems *prima facie* reasonable to assume that there is some systematic similarity between the fist and

⁵ The main object of her discussion is the cylinder and cone analogy (cf. e.g. Cic. *NA* 7.2.11). She also mentions "Chrysippus use of running to illustrate impulse and emotions (Galen, *PHP* 4.2.14-18), and of scales and dice to explicate decision-making (Plut. *Stoic. rep.* 1045b-c, cf. 1.3.2)." (p. 259-260)

something psychological. This notion of systematic similarity would lead us to imagine, *contra* Arthur, that indeed Zeno is saying that there is some ordered sequence of impression⇒ assent⇒ cognition⇒knowledge. We can corroborate – and clarify - this idea by citing certain textual evidence suggesting that the fist is intended to represent the *hêgemonikon*:

“On the other hand, truth is a body in so far as it is held to be ‘knowledge declaratory of all true things,’ and all knowledge is ‘a particular state of the regent part (*hêgemonikon*)’ just as the fist is conceived as a particular state of the hand...” (S.E. M 7.38-39) [Emphasis added]

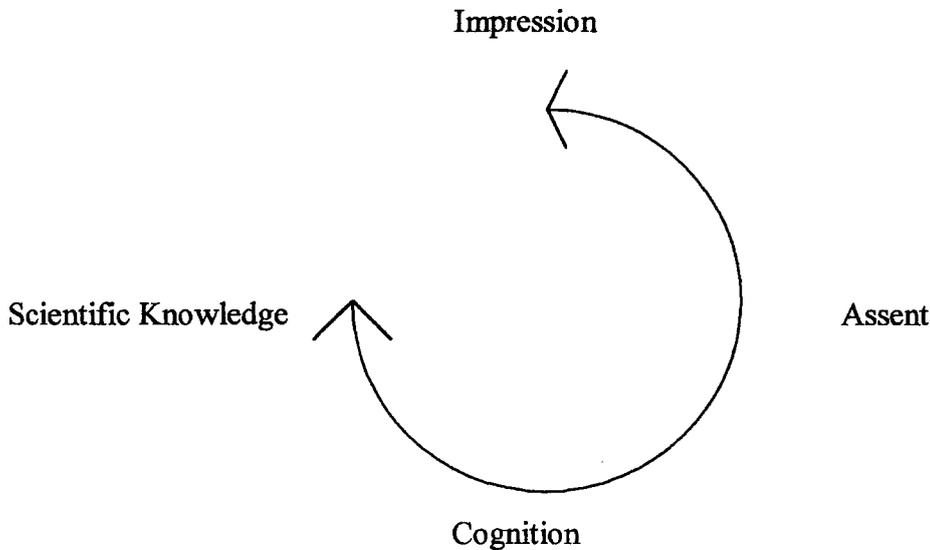
The consideration of the function of such analogies as used by the Stoics, and the corroborating association between fist and commanding-faculty that we find in Sextus are, I would argue, sufficient grounds for us to pursue a reading of this text along the lines explicitly ruled out by Arthur. And we can perhaps proceed to imagine that Zeno not only wanted to present a linear sequence, but also a dynamic sequence, with the fist opening, closing and being grasped by the other fist repeatedly. This is suggested by the description of the movement of the soul from Hierocles:

“For by stretching out and relaxing, the soul makes an impression on all the body’s parts, since it is blended with them all, and in making an impression it receives an impression in response. For the body, just like the soul, reacts to pressure; and the outcome is a state of their joint pressure upon, and resistance to, each other. From the outermost part inclining within, it travels... to the commanding-faculty, with the result that there is an awareness both of all the body’s parts and of the soul’s.” (LS 53 B6-8).

This ‘tensional motion’ is familiar from Stoic physics, and would be a wholly appropriate way for them to imagine the sensory function of the soul. If we do consider ‘Zeno’s fist’ to be a

dynamic as opposed to a static analogy, how does this effect what it gives us? The effect is twofold: firstly, it makes us think of the elements of Zeno's system as stages of a process, rather than as entities, and secondly, it enables us to see them in a certain relationship with one another.

Perhaps we could depict the simile as follows:



We can then imagine the tensional movement inwards and outwards as being movement clockwise and anti-clockwise on the diagram. Seen in this way, it becomes clear that in Zeno's analogy, with impression as the starting point and scientific knowledge as the end, the two stages in the middle (assent and cognition) have relationships two ways – assent is associated both with impressions and cognition, and cognition is associated with both assent and scientific knowledge. I believe this representation does justice to the evidence, as I will now attempt to show.

The first thing to mention in this discussion is that Zeno is attempting to 'clinch the wise man's sole possession of scientific knowledge'. Thus what we are offered is an idealised account

of perception and knowledge-formation. It is nevertheless an important ideal for the Stoics, since the wise man was used precisely as an exemplar for what could be achieved, if only humans could live virtuously. The significance of this is that what gets offered as being the case for the wise man is an account which we must accept if we are to become wise. Understanding that this is how perception works, in other words, is necessary before we can become wise (according to the Stoics), but it is not sufficient. It is necessary since, until we accept the Stoic account, we shall be vulnerable to confusion and uncertainty. It is not sufficient, since we also have to accept the correct end of life, and in so doing understand our nature as a part of cosmic nature, and live (and believe) accordingly.

The discussion below will challenge a commonly held view of *phantasiai*. The view I have in mind is taken up by Long (1989) in part of a passage cited above:

“‘cognitive impressions’, as experiences of a mind that has no ‘irrational’ faculty, are themselves ‘rational’, and so transcend the old distinction between bare sensation and intellect.” (p. 161)

We can see precisely the same idea in the following passage from Annas (1992):

“It is central to the Stoic analysis that when I perceive an object, one and the same item, the appearance, is both a physical alteration of my soul-pneuma and an item realising propositional content, which can be assented to and produces a true or false belief. There have to be items with both these aspects; otherwise we could not give an adequate account of human, as opposed to animal, perception.” (p. 78)

It would be widely agreed that there is an important distinction between perceiving qua sensory occurrence and perceiving qua propositional content. It is this that underwrites Sorabji's distinction between perceiving *as* and perceiving *that*. The model I propose challenges the

view of Long and Annas of the relation between sensory occurrence and propositions by shifting the focus of attention away from the *phantasiai*, and onto assent. This, I believe, relieves the concept of *phantasia*, and especially *katalêptike phantasia*, of a significant philosophical burden – that of having to do both representational and propositional duty.

We are trying to remove from the *phantasia* the burden of having to do propositional duty. But this raises the following question: how can we offer an alternative account of the Stoic position which can explain the mechanisms of perception in such a way that ‘rational content’ is not required of *phantasiai*? The story I want to tell about how the mechanisms of perception came to be understood in Stoicism depends for its success on certain developmental speculations. The attempt to read into the evidence differences of opinion between the early Stoics does not have a happy history, and a number of scholars have pointed out that, given the state of the evidence, it is impossible to reach secure conclusions this way. However, a developmental approach can be defended where there is clear evidence of a change of opinion, and where the developmental account focusses on this change of opinion. Let us, then, hold on to the idea that Zeno presented the ‘fist’ analogy as a model for the causal process of perception, and further that he intended his analogy to represent a dynamic, linear sequence. Using this idea as the foundation, we can then explore certain developments in thinking attributed to Chrysippus, and finally we can speculate that Chrysippus ‘revised’ Zeno’s model of perception – in such a way that he could claim it was faithful to the original, but better suited to a wider, and more systematic, philosophical purpose.

First of all, we could perhaps suggest the following as ‘Zeno’s model’. The commanding-faculty is in contact with the world via the faculty of sense-perception. The function of sense-

perception is entirely causal, *we do not choose our impressions*.⁶ The term impression refers to a stage of the perception process whereby either i) the *pneuma* of a corporeal entity causes the *pneuma* of the *psychê* to be changed in some way, or ii) processes within the *psychê* cause some kind of change (cf. D.L. 7.51). At this point, we can exercise the first level of assent, which amounts only to a judgment with respect to the clarity and distinctness of the impression.⁷ Should we assent at this level, we do not cause perception to happen, we simply do not prevent it. Having passed through assent, the process then reaches the stage of cognition, or grasp. We can speculate that this is the point at which the ‘imprinting’ of concepts, as originally conceived by Zeno, takes place, and if this is the case, since they are corporeal, that this is an entirely causal process – i.e. not subject to human control. From such a series of assented-to-impressions are formed our preconceptions and conceptions.⁸ From here, the process moves towards *epistêmê*, where we might imagine that the concept arising from the impression takes its place in a system alongside previously acquired concepts.⁹ Again, there is no requirement that this be anything but an involuntary causal process. Thus we can speculate that the epistemic function of the *hêgemonikon* is to *conceptualise on the basis of impressions*, not ‘acknowledge’ their conceptual content. The process then returns to the original cognition, but this cognition is now invincible since it is

⁶ This has been most explicitly emphasised recently by Bobzien (1998): “[Concerning perceptual impression] The impression is thus a function of the external object and the state of our soul. None the less, we have no direct control over which impressions we have or incur.” (p.240)

⁷ cf. S.E. *M* 7.248-250 (LS 40E), D.L. 7.46 (LS 40C), Cic. *Ac.* 2.77-8, (LS 40D).

⁸ cf. A) Cic. *Ac.* 1.141 (LS 40B): “He [Zeno] did not attach reliability to all impressions but only to those which have a peculiar power of revealing their objects. Since this impression is discerned just by itself, he called it ‘cognitive’ (*katalêpton*)... But once it had been received and accepted, he called it a ‘grasp’ [cognition], resembling things grasped by the hand.” B) Plutarch, *On common conceptions* 1084F-1085A (LS 39F): “Conception is a kind of impression, and impression is printing in the soul... They [the Stoics] define conceptions as a kind of stored thoughts, and memories as permanent and static printings.” C) Cic. *Ac.* 230-1 (LS 40N): “The mind itself...seizes some impressions in order to make immediate use of them, others, which are the source of memory, it stores away so to speak, while all the rest it arranges by their likenesses, and thereby conceptions of things are produced, which the Greeks call sometimes *ennoiai* and at other times *prolêpseis*... Since then the human mind is completely suited to the scientific knowledge of things... it embraces cognitions above all, and it loves that *katalêpsis* of yours... both for its own sake and also for its utility.”

⁹ Cf. A) Stobaeus 2.73, 16- 74,3 (LS41H): “[The Stoics say] Scientific knowledge is a cognition which is secure and unchangeable by reason. It is secondly a system of such *epistêmatai*, like the rational cognition of particulars which exists in the virtuous man. It is thirdly a system of expert *epistêmatai*, which has intrinsic stability, just as the virtues do.” B) Galen *Plac.* 5.2.49 and 5.3.1 (LS 53V): “Perhaps you [Chrysippus] are reminding us of what you wrote in your books *On Reason*: ‘Reason is a collection of certain conceptions and preconceptions’.”

‘understood’ both in itself, and in relation to that which is capable of speaking everything true¹⁰.

Thus we arrive back at the stage of assent, which is now transformed into assent to a concept-in-relation-to-other-concepts. Here we have the voluntary ability to suspend judgment if we wish. If assent is granted again at this stage, the process is complete and cognition has been secured.¹¹ If assent is denied, we either return to the impression and the cycle starts again, or we use our power of assent to suspend judgement. In the first case of assent, the sage is merely acknowledging normal conditions; in the second case of assent, the sage is giving assent based on conceptual comparisons. The main difference between these cases is that the second is open to questions of *justifiability*, whereas the first is not.

The most important feature of this interpretation that I wish to emphasise is the role of causation. The only stage of the perceptual process envisaged here which has any voluntary aspect is the stage of *assent*. This implies that, if assent is granted, *concepts will be ‘printed’ in a wholly determinate way according to the properties of the object*. Further, since the soul is corporeal, all the subsequent operations of the mind which depend on this or that assent will similarly unfold in a wholly determinate way. The upshot of this way of thinking, is that for the Stoics, we do not control our perceptions, or thoughts, or processes of reason. All we can do is ‘control our assents’.

I can imagine certain objections to this idea. Firstly, is the notion of assent being split into assent-to-impressions, and assent-to-cognitions justified by the evidence? There are suggestions of a twin role for assent, brought out by Rist from the following passage in Cicero:

¹⁰ We will discuss the *hégemonikon* of the sage as capable of stating everything true shortly, when we consider the distinction between ‘the true’ and ‘Truth’.

¹¹ Cf. A) Stobaeus 2.73, 16 – 74,3, (LS 41H): “Fourthly, it [*epistême*] is a tenor for the reception of impressions which is unchangeable by reason, and consisting, they say, in tension and power.” B) Stobaeus 2.111,18 – 112,8 (LS 41G): “For there are two kinds of opinion, assent to the incognitive, and weak supposition, and these are alien to the wise man’s disposition. So precipitancy and assent in advance of cognition are attributes of the precipitate inferior man, whereas they do not befall the man who is well-natured and perfect and virtuous.” C) Cic. *Ac.* 1.42 (LS 41B): “But from virtue and wisdom Zeno removed error, rashness, ignorance, opinion, conjecture, and in a word, everything foreign to firm and consistent assent.”

“[Speaker: the Antiochean Varro] What was grasped by sense-perception Zeno called itself a sense-perception, and if it had been so grasped that it could not be disrupted by reason, he called it scientific knowledge...”¹²

Commenting on this passage, Rist writes:

“The process of events, as given by Cicero, is as follows: first there is presentation; and let us assume the particular presentation is recognizable (*katalêptike*)... There are two stages further, both of which are kinds of ‘grasp’. First of all the object is grasped weakly: Cicero says that it is sensed (*sensum*). Let us call this stage the grasp of perception. As we should expect...a degree of assent is involved at this stage. After this, by a further act of assent, the presentation is grasped so firmly that it cannot be removed by reasoning. This stage is the grasp of knowledge. It is clear, then, that the word *comprehensio* (*katalêpsis*) has two senses: the grasp of perception and the grasp of knowledge.” (Rist 1969, p.139)

This is not to say that Rist would agree with each detail of my suggestion. His comments as cited refer to *Academica* 1.40-42, a text which he takes as having primary significance. My primary text is *Academica* 2.145, which differs as a ‘model’ in one main respect. As Rist writes of 2.145:

“Here there are four stages, whereas in the earlier account [1.40-2] Cicero only speaks of three. Although the four-stage picture was useful in teaching the theory, it is clear that, strictly speaking, stages two and three should be telescoped.” (1969, p.139)

Rist’s justification for saying that assent and cognition should be thought of as one stage has evidential support to back it up, most notably the formula: “cognition is assent to a cognitive

¹² Cic. *Ac.* 1.141. It should be noted, however, that Sextus does not mention this twofold idea of assent at *M* 8.396-399.

impression” (S.E. *M* 7.151-2, cf. 8.397). But this suggestion of an identity between the two states can equally well be seen as representing the position that, for example, ‘cognition arises *as a result of* assent to a cognitive impression’. It is this idea, strongly suggested by the stages of perception given at *Ac.* 2.145, which I am taking to be the case. Kerferd also draws our attention to alternative accounts of assent:

“[assent] is an activity and so an alteration in the *hêgemonikon*...in addition to the primary alteration which is the *phantasia* itself. The term is used in the literature both generically, in which case *katalêpsis* is one kind or species of assent... and specifically, when it is opposed to *katalêpsis*, as something weaker, for convenience on occasion referred to as ‘weak assent’ (S.E. 7.151).” (Kerferd 1978, p. 255)

The passage referred to here in Sextus gives us:

“The Stoics say there are three things which are linked together, scientific knowledge [*epistêmê*], opinion [*doxa*] and cognition [*katalêpsis*] stationed between them. Scientific knowledge is cognition which is secure and and firm and unchangeable by reason. Opinion is weak and false assent. Cognition in between these is assent belonging to a cognitive impression; and a cognitive impression, so they claim, is one which is true and of such a kind that it could not turn out false.”

What does it mean for ‘opinion’ to be characterised as ‘weak and false assent’? The Stoics seemed to have used the term opinion (*doxa*) in order to distinguish between the wise and the foolish: the wise do not have opinions since the disposition of their mind is always characterised by assent to the true. The foolish, on the other hand, do not share the security of the wise, and will vacillate, fall into contradiction, and assent to things either false or uncertain. But this use of assent is not directly relevant to the case I am making at present, which is concentrating on the *ideal* case

of perception. The association between assent and opinion here does not shed light on this ideal case, since there is no opinion in the wise man, about whom Zeno is speaking.

To make sense of the idea of a reasoning faculty in humans which is 'additional' to the perceptual apparatus of animals, the Stoics required their particular notion of 'assent'. I am suggesting, basing my suggestion on the texts from Cicero considered above, that this notion of assent must have a twofold character: on the one hand, assent to impressions, on the other hand, assent to some conceptual structure. In suggesting this (here I am in agreement with Rist), I am proposing an understanding of Stoic epistemology which takes into account the recent concentration by commentators of the difference between, in Annas' terms, the 'representative' requirement of the *katalêptike phantasia*, and the apparent need for 'coherence' which characterises the Stoic system (cf. Annas 1980). Since Kerferd (1978), there has been an approach suggesting that this divide in epistemological requirements is best resolved in the case of the Stoics by assuming some kind of 'propositional or conceptual content' located in the impressions themselves. This approach is best represented by Frede (1984). My argument so far has attempted to show that there is an alternative approach, which is to think of impressions themselves as empty of rational content, but to understand human reason as *conceptualising* what it receives by means of the impression. This may seem like a pedantic point, but its significance will I hope become clearer as we proceed. According to this approach, the division between representative and coherentist requirements is straddled by the notion of assent: assent as turned now to the impression, now to the cognition.

CHRYSIPPUS AND CLEANTHES: SYMBOLISM vs. MIMESIS

I have said that I wish to present a ‘developmental’ account of how the Stoics came to understand epistemology, and also that such an account must focus on a known change of doctrine. Two items of evidence point to such a known change of doctrine, and I will attempt to suggest a way in which this can be understood, which depends on us imagining that Zeno’s theory was taken over by Chrysippus, but developed in certain ways into a theory which remained entirely faithful in spirit to the original, but received an added level of sophistication. Let us examine these pieces of evidence. First, Sextus records a famous dispute between Cleanthes and Chrysippus:

‘Presentation then, according to the Stoics, is an impression on the soul (*typôsis en psychê*). But about this they at once began to quarrel; for whereas Cleanthes understood ‘impression’ as involving eminence and depression, just as does the impression made in wax by signet-rings, Chrysippus regarded such a thing as absurd. For in the first place, he says, when the mind imagines at one and the same moment a triangular object and a quadrangular, the same body must needs be circumscribed by different forms at the same time and become simultaneously both triangular and quadrangular or even circular, which is absurd; and further, when many presentations occur in us simultaneously, the soul will also receive innumerable formations, which result is worse than the former. He himself, therefore, suspected that the term ‘impression’ was used by Zeno in the sense of ‘alteration’ (*eteroiôseôs*), so that the definition runs like this – ‘presentation is an alteration of the soul’; for it is no longer absurd that, when many presentations co-exist in us at the same moment, the same body should admit of innumerable alterations; for just as the air, when many people are speaking simultaneously, receives in a single moment numberless and different impacts and at once undergoes many alterations also, so too when the regent part (*hêgemonikon*) is the subject of a

variety of images it will experience something analogous to this.”¹³ (S.E. *M* 7.228-231, trans. Bury)

What we are offered by Sextus is a disagreement between Chrysippus and Cleanthes on the meaning of *phantasia* as given by Zeno. This strongly suggests that Chrysippus was not seeking to be unorthodox, but to develop the orthodox position in such a way as to make it more defensible. It is this sort of development that I mean to indicate above when I said Chrysippus wished to remain true to the spirit of Zeno’s ideas. The second piece of evidence which justifies a developmental account is again from Sextus:

“Arcesilaus contradicted these statements of the Stoics [concerning cognition] by proving that cognition is no criterion in between scientific knowledge and opinion. For what they call cognition and assent to a cognitive impression occurs in either a wise or inferior man. But if it occurs in a wise man, it is scientific knowledge; and if in an inferior man, it is opinion; and there is no further variation except a purely verbal one. And if cognition is assent to a cognitive impression, it is non-existent: first, because assent occurs not in relation to an impression but in relation to language (for assents belong to propositions). Secondly, because no true impression is found to be of a kind such that it could not turn out false, as is attested by many different considerations.” (S.E. 7. 151-152)

An interesting part of this excerpt is that it again contains talk of impressions as true or false, but again we notice that this is in the context of Academic criticism, rather than of positive Stoic doctrine. Indeed, perhaps we can detect here one general way in which the Stoic and Academic positions were at odds terminologically. The Stoics principally speak of impressions as cognitive and incognitive, whereas the Academic positions frequently concern impressions as true

¹³ Cf D.L. 7.50 where the word for ‘alteration’ is *alloiōsis*, also cf. S.E. *M* 7.373.

or false. In a sense, this gives us two competing versions of the *value-standard* to be applied to impressions. If my earlier argument that the Stoics did not consider impressions true or false can bear any weight, it can bear the suggestion that the Stoics limited their consideration of impressions to those which were cognitive (i.e. clear and distinct), and those which were incognitive (those which are unclear). But the central point of interest here is that Arcesilaus argues that ‘assent occurs not in relation to an impression but in relation to language (for assents belong to propositions).’

In my representation of Zeno’s idea of perception, I spoke of assent being twofold: to impressions, and to cognitions. The speculation I wish to proceed with is that Chrysippus, partly in response to Arcesilaus’ attack, modified Zeno’s idea in order to incorporate the notion of assent to propositions as part of his scheme. What this involves is not any alteration to the *process* of perception, but an enriching of one of the stages, notably that of cognition. The enriching I propose sits well with the well-known change made by Chrysippus to Cleanthes’ interpretation of the impression. But what does this change in the interpretation of impressions amount to? An account of its significance is given in Mansfeld (1983). In this paper, Mansfeld is concerned with showing how a definition attributed to Zeno can be shown to demonstrate that Zeno’s position concerning geometry is “that the definition of geometry is a special case of knowledge, which...is formulated in a formalist way” (p.65). The fascinating conclusion of his paper is that:

“Presumably, to Zeno (as to Chrysippus) geometry was far less important than to Plato and Aristotle. This does not alter the fact that his epistemic definition of geometry is the first definition on record which has an ‘intuitionist’ aspect, in that it combines a formal criterium with the ‘intuitionist’ idea that geometry is a disposition concerned with the products of our minds.” (p.70)

Despite the fact that his central contention has been refuted (by Tarrant 1984), Mansfeld's consideration of the epistemological position of the early Stoics remains of interest for our argument:

“Obviously, Zeno's and Cleanthes' views of presentation *qua* impression derive from Plato's account of *memory*, *Tht.* 191 c-e, about the imprint-receiving piece of wax in our minds, which is the gift of Memory, the mother of the Muses... Chrysippus (*M* 7.373) rejected this and argued that it entails that each impression (in the 'wax') will obliterate its predecessor. For the purpose of his argument, he shows that Zeno's views of memory and *technê* are incompatible with the idea that an impression *qua typôsis* imitates, or mirrors, its object... Diocles (D.L. 7.50)...tells us where Chrysippus' argument against (Zeno's and Cleanthes') view of presentation as the stamp of a seal, or signet ring, in wax was to be found: in the second book of his treatise *Peri Psychês*... Both Sextus... and Diocles... give us Chrysippus' alternative: *phantasia* is not *typôsis en psychê* in the literal sense of the word, but *alloiôsis*, a change in the condition of the soul. In other words, according to Chrysippus, presentations are not mimetic, but symbolic: the 'picture' is not imprinted, but coded, or translated. In this way, the transition from presentation to (inner) speech can be better explained.” (p.67-68)

So what impact does it have on our interpretation if we take, with Mansfeld, the meaning of Chrysippus' innovation to mean that he understood epistemology to involve a *symbolic*, as opposed to a *mimetic* process? The main impact is suggested by Mansfeld in the last line of the quotation above, where he mentions the benefit of the innovation as being better able to explain the transition from presentation to inner speech. With Chrysippus' symbolism comes the opportunity to consider a *language of thought* as opposed to a mere collection of concepts. So we can retain the sequence that Zeno gives, but change the function of cognition so that it not only *conceptualises* impressions, but also *verbalises* them. Incidentally, this way of seeing things preserves the suggestion of Sorabji

(1990), that “The conceptualisation may be invariable, but, like the verbalisation...may be a logically independent operation.” (p.301)

We can also use this line of thinking to suggest that this innovation by Chrysippus may have been the source for Posidonius’ distinction between rational and non-rational impressions.

Mansfeld considers the position of the Sextus text (*M* 7.373) with respect to the association used there between impressions and cognition:

“We should not be worried by the fact that Chrysippus first speaks of *phantasiai*, then – without transition – of *katalêpseis*. On the one hand, Sextus abbreviates; on the other, from Cicero’s account of Zeno’s theory [*Ac.* 1.41] it appears that the extension of *visum* (*phantasia*) is wider than that of *comprehensio* (*katalêpsis*) and that only some *visa* are promoted to the rank of *comprehensiones*... [*D.L.* 7.49] gives, as the general Stoic view, that the criterium of truth is *kata genus phantasia*, and that *phantasia* is the necessary condition of assent, apprehension (*katalêpsis*), and thought. Presentation, then, is the genus of apprehension: every apprehension is a presentation, but not every presentation is an apprehension.” (p.68)

Again, since I prefer to separate out each element given in the fist analogy, I would put the last line a little differently. I would rather have it that “every apprehension arises (via assent) from a presentation, but not every presentation causes an apprehension to arise”. But the structural issue is the same, viz. that there is a wider extension to *phantasia* than the extension we should apply to *katalêpsis*. In a similar way, we might say, there is a wider extension to *phantasia* than there is to the *logikê* (qua linguistic) *phantasia* : every sayable arises from a presentation, but not every presentation gives rise to a sayable. And the picture this gives might shed some light on the analogy Chrysippus uses to justify his change of terminology. Let us consider again the end of the citation from Sextus given above:

“He himself, therefore, suspected that the term ‘impression’ was used by Zeno in the sense of ‘alteration’ (*eteroiôseôs*), so that the definition runs like this – ‘presentation is an alteration of the soul’; for it is no longer absurd that, when many presentations co-exist in us at the same moment, the same body should admit of innumerable alterations; for just as the air, when many people are speaking simultaneously, receives in a single moment numberless and different impacts and at once undergoes many alterations also, so too when the regent part (*hêgemonikon*) is the subject of a variety of images it will experience something analogous to this.”

What is interesting here is that Chrysippus seems to suggest that the *hêgemonikon* – like the air in the analogy – is subject to *innumerable* (*amuthêtos*) alterations. Another meaning of *amuthêtos* is ‘unspeakable, unspeakably great’ (LSJ, p.87), and we might wonder if a part of Chrysippus’ intention in using such an analogy was to present an idea of the *hêgemonikon* as something which undergoes an unspeakably great number of impressions, some of which – or some aspect of which - can be conceptualised and verbalised. We shall mention here, but return to later, the idea that this sort of picture fits in with the notion that what our sense-perception is in contact with is strictly continuous – such individuation as occurs, we might speculate, occurs on the basis of human conceptualisation.

But the main point I wish to focus on is the suggestion that there was a development in thinking in the Stoa between Zeno and Chrysippus. Zeno put forward a model for perception which remained the dominant idea. It suffered, however, from a lack of sophistication, a point brought out by Arcesilaus’ criticism about assent. Chrysippus took over the model, but modified it by enriching the picture. He did this as a result of his modification of the definition of impressions, and this had a knock-on effect. From these considerations arises the following conjecture: For Zeno, assent was a twofold activity of the soul – in one sense granted to impressions, in another

sense granted to cognitions understood as being part of some conceptual structure. Chrysippus retained the notion of a twofold assent, but modified its relation to cognition by expanding this stage of the process so that it not only described the *conceptualisation* of the impression, but also its *verbalisation*. This change in approach can be justified in a number of ways: i) the change in the definition of impressions brought Chrysippus to a *symbolic* as opposed to a *mimetic* understanding of knowledge-acquisition, ii) the initial position was vulnerable to attacks for its lack of sophistication, and iii) Chrysippus was a philosopher who was extremely sensitive to specifically linguistic matters.

These considerations enable me to clarify further a way in which this approach of mine to Stoic epistemology differs from certain contemporary positions. I take a passage from Annas:

“The Stoic position thus seems to be analogous to that of modern theories which hold that our ability to represent content to ourselves is not to be explained causally, but rests on a fact of a different kind. There is a basic isomorphism between two structures: the structure of causal interrelations, in which the physical states of the world and of the perceiver are embedded, and the structure of semantic interrelations, in which is embedded the signification of the content of the physical states. Thus our minds represent the content of the physical states involved in perception, but not because of causal interaction. Similarly, the Stoics say that our minds are affected “not by (*hupo*) *lekta* but in relation to (*epi*) them.” This is a highly important point, and it is a great pity that our extant sources are not more forthcoming on it; the Stoics themselves do not seem to have found the point as problematic as they should have.” (Annas 1992, p.80)

I shall return to the notion of *isomorphism* in a moment, but first let us consider this position as it relates to the one we are attempting to develop here. Once again, the difference comes down to a consideration of ‘content’ as it relates to impressions. Since Annas believes that impressions

themselves contain content – and rational content at that – she attempts here to use the Stoic notion of *lekta* to show how such a content could have been explained by the Stoics as being ‘represented to the self’. This touches on a fundamental difference between us, since in the picture I have offered, there is no need for a ‘self’ for the ‘content’ of such impressions to be represented to.¹⁴

Such *representation* as is involved in impressions occurs before assent, and is explained by the fact that an impression (itself) reveals itself and its cause. Once assent (the only voluntary stage of the process) is given, the forces of causal determinism take over and the associative relations between preconceptions, conceptions and (in the Chrysippean version) verbalisations ensue. These are the purely causal processes of reason as it is immanent in the human psyche. We can only control our assents, the Stoics insist, and this has epistemological consequences in that we cannot imagine the world in just any old way. We are given preconception via causal mechanisms which operate before reason comes to us (in fact, reason is defined in one place as ‘completed from our preconceptions during our first seven years’- Aetius 4.11.4, LS 39E4.) Once we become ‘rational beings’, we are in a position to control our assents in a logical way. We do this by observing the patterns of coherence our assents cause in our *hêgemonikon*. At no stage in this process is there a requirement for anything like the ‘representation of content’. Or at least we could say there is no such requirement if we understand content not as something extra we have to perceive (or something extra we are given to perceive *with*), but rather as what *emerges* from the non-rational, causal process of impression as it affects the human mind. Thus, in opposition to Annas, we could say that, ‘Our minds represent the content of the physical states involved in perception, *and only* because of causal interaction’. It is this that makes sense of the Stoics understanding of the

¹⁴ This is not to say there is no room in my story about Stoicism for the notion of ‘self’. The final chapter will be devoted to a notion of self-reflection. The difference is that for Annas, the notion of self stands in relation to the content of impressions, whereas in my account it does not.

hêgemonikon being corporeal – i.e. entirely subject to the processes of causation, and also this that explains their absolute confidence in the reliability of the cognitive impression, and the true statements which depend thereon. This is not to say that there are no problems with exactly what the *freedom* is that we are granted when Stoicism grants us freedom over our assents. For an excellent discussion of how this freedom is compatible with the causal determinism of the Stoics, see Bobzien (1998).

This way of looking at things demands some explanation of how we can ‘fit’ *lekta* into the picture. This has proved an extremely vexed question regarding the interpretation of Stoicism, but one which calls for an answer. I will postpone my consideration of it for a moment, however, to attempt to outline further my position concerning the Chrysippean understanding of the process of perception.

Impression, as it must, comes first. If assent is granted, we arrive at the stage of *katalêpsis*. At this stage, I would argue, conceptualisation occurs *as a transformative act of human reason*. This transformation results in an internalised version of the impression, which can then take its place among preconceptions, concepts and conceptions. So far this is the same as Zeno’s version. Chrysippus, we might conjecture, also places at this stage the connection between impression and language – the additional part of the process described by Mansfeld as instituting a *symbolic* as opposed to a *mimetic* representation. The benefit of this enrichment of the position is that we can then connect the processes of conceptualisation and verbalisation in a direct way. This in turn leads us to the position that a person’s verbal behaviour is directly related to the conceptual structure of his or her *hêgemonikon*.¹⁵ But when considering even *this* relationship, between conceptualisation

¹⁵ Here we might recall in a new way the young student who asked Zeno: ‘Why do you never correct me?’ To which he replied: ‘Because I do not trust you’. What Zeno may have been pointing out here is that if we are personally dishonest, we have breached a requirement of entering the community of reason. Why? Because we have broken the connection between our conceptualisation and our verbalisation. In other words, if we are dishonest, what we say no longer reflects *how we are*.

and verbalisation, we can legitimately wonder whether there is the necessity of an isomorphic relation. To expand on this, we have to reconsider the account of the *phantasia logikê* as we find it in Sextus (*M* 8.70). Kerferd provides an interesting gloss to this excerpt which is worth considering at some length:

“For this [i.e. *M* 8.70] Bury offers: And they say that ‘expression’ is ‘that which subsists in conformity with a rational presentation,’ and that a rational presentation is one in which it is possible to establish by reason the presented object.

Mates (*Stoic Logic* (1961) p.15), followed by W. and M. Kneale (*Development of Logic* 140) and Long (*Problems* p.82) has: a rational presentation is one in which *to phantasthen* (that which is presented) can be conveyed by discourse (*logô*).

The first point to be made is that the *phantasthen* here is not the *lekton* – it is what the *phantasia* reveals i.e. its content, namely a ‘thing’, so not normally a *lekton* as such at all (cf. Long, *Problems* 109 n.33). But Bury’s translation suggests that a rational presentation is one in which it is possible to establish by reason the existence of the presented object, as if the problem was to establish whether or not the external object of the *phantasia* was really present or not. But the context shows that this is not the problem with which Sextus is here concerned. What he is concerned with is the *lekton*. But the attempt to translate *logô* by ‘discourse’ must also be rejected. What we are concerned with here is not the *prophorikos logos*, but the *endiathetos logos*, or ‘reason within’ since it is the latter alone which differentiates man from animal and so makes possible the *phantasia logikê*. (cf. S.E. *M* 8.275). While the *endiathetos logos* may properly be said to include a kind of internal discourse, it is itself much wider – it is the Stoic ‘active principle’ operating within each individual person, and comprises all the internal operations of that principle... So we should translate rather as follows:

‘a rational presentation is one in which the object of the *phantasia* is to be (i.e. can be) presented rationally (i.e. in and for the reason).’ (Kerferd 1978, p.251-252)

We are only here really concerned with the definition of the *logikê phantasia*, and Kerferd presents three alternatives:

(A) Bury: ‘... a rational presentation is one in which it is possible to establish by reason the presented object’

(B) Mates, W. and M. Kneale, Long: ‘... a rational presentation is one in which *to phantasthen* (that which is presented) can conveyed by discourse’¹⁶

(C) Kerferd : ‘... a rational presentation is one in which the object of the *phantasia* is to be (i.e. can be) presented rationally (i.e. in and for the reason)

To this we can add Long and Sedley:

(D) “... a rational impression is one in which the content of the impression can be exhibited in language.” (LS 33C)

Kerferd dismisses Bury’s translation on the grounds that it twists the philosophical issue at stake. We can agree with this, since it would be strange for a philosophy such as Stoicism which depended so heavily on the senses to attempt to establish existence of the object by argument. What is more interesting for us is Kerferd’s reason for not wanting to see *logô* translated as ‘discourse’. This reason is related to the distinction Sextus gives us between *prophorikos logos* and *endiathetos logos*. To put these two evidential facts together, Kerferd uses the argument that if *endiathetos logos* is what distinguishes man from the animals – an additional capacity of reason which makes human talk meaningful as opposed to the ‘empty mimicry’ of animal verbalisation, then it is reasonable to suppose that it is linked to *logikai phantasiai*, which are in a similar way unique to rational animals. Given this connection, Kerferd suggests that the most appropriate

¹⁶ The actual position with regard to Long and the Kneales is slightly more diverse: Cf. Kneales (1962) “... a rational presentation is one in which what is presented can be conveyed in speech”, p.140; Long (1971) “... a rational presentation is one in which what is presented can be shown forth in speech”, p.82. But it is clear Kerferd has captured the *sense* of these translations by ‘discourse’, as is shown by the accompanying discussions.

translation for *logô* is ‘presented rationally’, to be understood as ‘in and for the reason’. However, a problem for Kerferd’s position is raised precisely by the contextual factors he himself claims as counting against the translation of *logô* as ‘discourse’. The idea of translating *logô* as ‘discourse’ (or, in LS, the less committed ‘language’), is attractive because of the interdefinable relationship the *logikê phantasia* enjoys with the *lepton* – which is the ‘sayable’. In Kerferd’s preferred translation, we find retained the ‘modal’ notion carefully noted by Sorabi – ‘...a rational presentation is one in which the object of the *phantasia* is to be (i.e. *can be*) presented rationally...’ – and this indeed permits the *possibility* that the Stoic definition of *logikai phantasiai* was intended to capture something not necessarily tied to public language practice, but the question remains: what would be the point of such a distinction? There is an ambiguity in this discussion between two senses of the word ‘rational’ (*logô*). One sense captures the idea ‘of or pertaining to thought’ and the other sense captures the idea ‘of or pertaining to language’. It is difficult to resolve this ambiguity since for the Stoics, both these faculties are uniquely human. One solution to this problem is canvassed by Kidd. He considers the text D.L. 7.49, a text in subject-matter closely related to S.E. *M* 8.70.

“For the impression arises first, and then thought (*dianoia*), which has the power of talking, expresses in language (*logô*) what it experiences by the agency of the impression.” (D.L. 7.49, LS trans. 33D)

Kidd’s comment comes in the midst of his rendering of the passage:

“For...*phantasia* leads the way...but then intelligence (*dianoia*), being capable of expression, brings out *logô* the affection from the presentation (admittedly *logô* is ambiguous: ‘by reason’?... ‘in speech’? Probably both: ‘in or by rational expression’).” (Kidd 1989, p. 146)

If we take Kidd's suggestion, we will no longer find the ambiguity troubling, since we can take it that for the Stoics, the *logikê phantasia* was a necessary part of their story linking human experience with human talking. For the question concerning whether conceptualisation and verbalisation share an isomorphic relation, Kidd's suggestion tends to suggest that we should think of them as so doing, since keeping both senses of *logô* in mind when reading the evidence seems to do no harm to our understanding of it.

A further issue which arises from Kerferd's presentation of S.E. *M* 8.70 has to do with *to phantasthen*. Concerning this, Kerferd is in agreement with Long as against Mates. As Long has it:

"I do not think Mates is right to equate *lekton* and *to phantasthen*, *Stoic Logic* p.22. 'The presented object' is what a *phantasia* reveals, a 'thing', not a *lekton*. If I see Cato walking I am presented with an object which can be denoted in a complete *lekton*." (Long (1971), p.109, n.33)

Whilst it seems that Long and Kerferd are right to conclude that *to phantasthen* is not a *lekton*, it is less certain that it must be an 'external thing', as is implied. There is another account from Aetius, which preserves a Stoic term for such an object as it relates to *phantasiai*:

"Chrysippus say that these four [i.e., impression (*phantasia*), impressor (*phantaston*), imagination (*phantastikon*), figment (*phantasma*)] are all different. An impression is an affection occurring in the soul, which reveals itself and its cause. Thus, when through sight we observe something white, the affection is what is engendered in the soul through vision; and it is this affection which enables us to say that there is a white object which activates us. Likewise when we perceive through touch and smell. The word impression [*phantasia*] is derived from light [*phôs*]; just as light reveals itself and whatever else it includes in its range, so impression reveals itself and its cause. The cause of an impression is an impressor: e.g., something white or cold or everything capable of activating the soul. Imagination

(*phantastikon*) is an empty attraction, an affection in the soul which arises from no impressor, as when someone shadow-boxes or strikes his hands against thin air; for an impression has some impressor as its object, but imagination has none. A figment (*phantasma*) is that to which we are attracted in the empty attraction of imagination; it occurs in people who are melancholic and mad.” (Aetius 4.12.1-5, LS 39B)

If Aetius’ report is correct, then the Chrysippean term for the idea Long is representing is *phantaston*, rather than *phantasthen*. Bearing in mind that *to phantasthen* occurs in relation to *logikê phantasia*, we might speculate that it relates to the impression-as-conceptualised, rather than to the necessary relation between the *phantasia* and the *phantaston*. How could this be accounted for as a part of Stoic terminology? It seems at least the distinction in Aetius between *phantaston* and *phantasma* is clear. The latter is called by Aetius, ‘that to which we are attracted in the empty attraction of imagination’ – i.e. a product of the imagination. But we can recall at this point another text by Aetius, cited by Kerferd, which he translates as:

“...a *phantasia* (*to phantasma*) when presented to the *logos* [here Kerferd proposes reading *prospiptê* as equivalent to the *paristatai* in S.E. *M* 8.70], and thereby being a *phantasia logikê*, constitutes an *ennoema*.” (Aetius 4.11.4, in Kerferd (1978), p.254 = SVF 2.83)

Kerferd here transliterates *to phantasma* as *phantasia*, which implies that each *impression* constitutes an *ennoema*, whereas if we substitute the previous definition from Aetius (cited previously), we gain the quite different picture that a *figment*, when presented to reason, constitutes an *ennoema*. This collection of terms provides us with an interesting possibility concerning the *to phantasthen* from S.E. *M* 8.70: that it indeed represents something like an impression-as-conceptualised, but perhaps that the ‘rational impressions’ (which contain such items) are

impressions of a higher order than both the sense-impressions and the non-sensory impressions. Perhaps rational impressions range over both impressions which contain items perceived through the senses (*to phantaston*, impressor) and impressions which contain items perceived through the operations of the mind (*to phantasma*, figment). The meaning of *to phantasthen*, then, could be 'thing presented to the reason, suitable for expression in language, either arising from something real, or arising from something specious'. The association with the sayable still works nicely, since the number of things expressible in language is certainly greater than the number of things which can be said to arise from experience.

So perhaps we have here a way of viewing the evidence which suggests that of impressions, there are both cognitive and non-cognitive, and that both are typically perceptual. These affect us before we have reason, and supply us with a stock of preconceptions. As we acquire reason, we add to these preconceptions some conceptions of our own making, produced by the processes of the mind operating on the preconceptions. These conceptions and preconceptions, it seems, can themselves produce impressions, and these are what are called rational impressions. We can now return to Frede and see our position in agreement with his *in a certain respect*. He writes:

"... Thus these common notions that arise in us naturally on the basis of more primitive impressions turn out to be truly anticipations... for they are needed to form the impressions that afford us a grasp on things; it is in terms of them that the mind has a grasp on things. Thus rational impressions and in particular cognitive impressions do presuppose concepts, but these arise from more primitive impressions that do not presuppose these concepts, and ultimately from sense-impressions that do not presuppose any concepts whatsoever but that are not rational either. Given this developmental account, it is easy to see how the Stoics can claim that concepts only arise from the appropriate impressions and nevertheless maintain that a rational impression involves the conceptualisation of the object." (1987, p.156)

The difference between Frede's position and mine is that he believes that the 'sense-impressions that do not presuppose concepts whatsoever but are not rational either' form no on-going part of the process of perception. For him, these impressions vanish when a human person becomes a 'being of reason'. This clear point of disagreement is emphasised with Frede's contention that 'cognitive impressions do presuppose concepts'. However, on the interpretation I am offering, cognitive impressions are the ongoing, reliable-because-causal, non-rational, point of contact between human reason and the world. They do not presuppose concepts because their cumulative effect is precisely what forms concepts. But these concepts, once formed, are then subject to the causal processes of the reasoning mind, where they themselves function as impressions and in this way give rise to rational impressions. For Frede, rational impressions are a part of the 'ground-level' of perception, and thus he makes coherent his position of our absolute transformation into beings of reason. On my interpretation, rational impressions are twice-removed from the ground level, indicating that, for Chrysippus at least, the rational impression presupposes both conceptualisation, and reflection on the conception as an impression.

As a means of using this insight to explain one curious part of the evidence, we could consider the following story recounted in Diogenes:

"Sphaerus...went to Ptolemy Philopator at Alexandria. One day a conversation took place on whether the wise man would opine, and Sphaerus said that he would not. Wishing to refute him, the king ordered wax pomegranates to be placed before him. Sphaerus was deceived and the king cried out that he had given assent to a false impression. Sphaerus gave him a shrewd answer, saying that his assent was not [to the impression] that they were pomegranates but [to the impression] that it was reasonable that they were pomegranates. He pointed out that the cognitive impression is different from the reasonable one... The former is

incapable of deceiving, but the reasonable impression can turn out otherwise.” (D.L. 7.177, LS 40F)

In my interpretation of this passage, I do not wish to simply conflate the notion used here by Sphaerus of a ‘reasonable’ (*eulogou*) impression, with the notion considered above of the ‘rational’ (*logikê*) impression. But it seems as if the sort of distinction Sphaerus is using, between cognitive and reasonable impressions, is suited to the type of theory I have suggested above. The reasonable impression can turn out to be wrong because it has been incorrectly assented to – *at the level of justification*. The cognitive impressions received by Sphaerus, we might argue, were perfectly accurate – the bare perception of a bowl-like region and some fruit-like regions (although the difficulties with the language here illustrate the problems of communicating what a bare perception can consist of). What has gone wrong is the assent to the proposition that ‘These are pomegranates’, with the implication that they are good to eat, nutritious, etc., which the wax lumps are clearly not. This story is often thought of as an embarrassment to Sphaerus, but in the case I am presenting his reply could have been quite sanguine, since the type of error revealed by the King’s surreptitious challenge can be analysed as a problem for Sphaerus’ lack of perfect wisdom (shown by his precipitate assent to the proposition ‘These are pomegranates’), but not a problem for the theory the Stoics had that perfect access to the world was possible in principle.

We can apply the idea of conceptions-as-impressions to the simile of Zeno’s fist as follows. First, we are aware of the conception (and the thing it is a conception of); second, we assent on the basis of its clarity and distinctness; thirdly, we grasp it in terms of its representing some quality about what it is a conception of; fourthly, we consider this quality as it relates to our other preconceptions and conceptions. This process of what we might call ‘reflective perception’

transforms the grasp of the wise man into the 'secure' grasp - and only becomes scientific knowledge when it is unoverturnable by reason.

BRUNSCHWIG AND NOOUMENA

It might be doubted whether we can look so closely as this into the products and processes of conceptualisation when attempting to understand Stoicism. Such an objection might point out that the various talk of concepts, conceptions and thought are part of a loose array of terms used in a quite generic way about the stuff of the mind. But there is a superb account of three terms in the evidence which has brought to light a complex and subtle theory. The three terms are *nooumenon*, *ennoia*, *ennoêma*, and the superb account forms part of Brunschwig's *The Supreme Genus and Platonic Ontology* (1992). I will present a small part of Brunschwig's argument, and consider one of his conclusions, with the aim of taking one result of his ontological enquiry, and using it to substantiate one part of my epistemological enquiry. Brunschwig begins:

"A number of texts are in agreement in attributing to the Stoics a doctrine which may be summarized by the following four theses:

(1) Something is an existent... if and only if it is a body. By the same token, something is a 'non-existent' if and only if it is not a body.

(2) The term *incorporeal* (*asômaton*) applies, not to any and every nameable item which is not a body, but only to a limited and determined group of such items, namely the void, place, time and the *lekta*. I shall hereafter refer to this list using the expression 'canonical incorporeals'.

(3) Only bodies and canonical incorporeals may be called *something* (*ti*)...

(4) The term *not something*...denotes the ontological status of concepts (*ennoêmata*).

The most striking feature of this doctrine, in the eyes of its ancient critics and modern commentators alike, is that it presents the *ti* as the supreme genus (*genikôtaton*), rather than the *on* (existent), which is relegated to a lower level of ontological classification.” (p.92).

The idea of ‘body’ at work here does not, I think, commit us at this stage to a notion of ‘three-dimensional spatial particulars’ – or things externally differentiated – although this remains a controversial point. For now, I want to introduce without further comment a continuistic notion in opposition to the three-dimensional particulars. This would be that we are in contact with a strictly continuous corporeal aspect of the universe – the passive principle of Stoic physics. But our encounter with this corporeal aspect is mediated through our participation in *logos* – the active principal of Stoic physics. Since, by virtue of our participation in *logos*, we share in reason, we are able to experience and describe the process of cause and effect – the unfolding of the *cosmos*. But it is also our nature to be partial, and to only perceive parts of the universe. These parts, in their articulated (and thus conceptualised) form, gain individuation. These individuated parts of the universe are what we call bodies¹⁷. In any event, the supreme genus covers both bodies and incorporeals, and what separates the two is that bodies can ‘act and be acted upon’ whereas incorporeals cannot interact with body in any way.¹⁸ The status and provenance of the canonical incorporeals has long been a source of dispute in the interpretation of Stoicism, but Brunschwig tells a story both enticing and convincing:

¹⁷ There is an argument in Brunschwig which might be taken in support of such an idea in general: “What is certain and is consistent with all this evidence is that, for the Stoics, limits were not bodies... But that negation is compatible with three different ontological statuses: (i) limits could have the same status as the canonical incorporeals... (ii) they might be somethings neither corporeal nor incorporeal... (iii) finally, geometric limits could be considered as purely mental constructions with no objective reality, that is to say as not-somethings... Solution (iii) is the one that seems most plausible, bearing in mind the Stoics’ fundamentally continuistic conception of the physical universe.” (p.97) Of course there is a limitation here to *geometric* limits, but the sources are ambiguous cf. Plutarch 1080e (LS 50C).

¹⁸ For relevant texts, see LS 45 ‘Body’.

“Even amongst historians who accept the antiquity of the Stoics’ TSG [Brunschwig’s acronym for ‘*ti* as the Supreme Genus’] doctrine, one often comes across the idea that they only adopted that doctrine under constraint, to some extent forced to do so by (as Aristotle would have said) ‘the pressure of things’.

In opposition to this image, I would like to try to show that the TSG doctrine is an essential element in the Stoic philosophy, maturely elaborated in the crucible of their critical thought on Platonic ontology. The central concept of the doctrine, namely that of NEST [Non Existent SomeThings – i.e. the incorporeals], does not appear to me to be one that could possibly have been constructed using the inductive method, that is to say by collecting the properties common to a certain number of items which could only be grouped together by virtue of denying them some kind of reality. In my view, it is possible to suggest that this concept was constructed on the basis of theoretical considerations, within the framework of a general and abstract ontology, without paying any particular attention to the items (canonical incorporeals) which were to constitute its extension. The critical analysis of Platonism seems to have led the Stoics to discern two distinct ontological criteria: the one a strong criterion...in the name of which, in opposition to Plato, the existent was held to be whatever is corporeal; the other a weak criterion...in the name of which the Platonic Forms were denied any extra-mental reality. The relative independence of these two criteria (all that satisfies the strong criterion also satisfies the weak one, but the converse does not apply) leaves room for a perfectly well-determined theoretical position for items (if any such there be) which satisfy the weak criterion without satisfying the strong one, in other words for ‘realities’ without ‘existence’. This theoretical position is that of the NESTs.” (p.94-95)

All this gives one some discomfort if we imagine the Stoic reply to the question ‘What are incorporeal entities?’, since on Brunschwig’s argument the reply could only be ‘Well, they are real, but they don’t exist’. We will not consider further the problems associated with this doctrine here,

since the outline we have given is intended only to provide the introduction to the first main statement of Brunschwig's argument, which I now quote:

"...there undeniably were some items that the Stoics called 'neither bodies nor incorporeals' but it is certain...that they did not count as somethings... it is certain in respect of concepts (*ennoêmata*). They are neither bodies nor incorporeals, but not-somethings."¹⁹

Here we have our first term persuasively given its ontological status by the Stoics.

Concepts are neither body nor incorporeal, since they are 'not-somethings'. What does it mean to be a not-something? The best way to explain this strange idea is back in relation to Brunschwig's account of the Stoic criticism of Platonic ontology. We remember his weak criterion was one 'in the name of which the Platonic Forms were denied any extra-mental reality'.

We find in Aetius a clear statement of this doctrine, and its intention, attributed to Zeno:

"The Stoics of Zeno's school said that the Ideas were our own concepts (*ennoêmata*)." (Aetius 1.10.5, LS 30B)

Long and Sedley give an account of the difference between a conception (*ennoia*) and a concept:

"...one's generic thought of man is, in Stoic terminology, a 'conception' (*ennoia*). This, being a psychological state, is simply a body – the (corporeal) soul somehow disposed... However the universal man is not identical with this conception, he is its intentional object, that which I am thinking *about* when I entertain the conception 'man'. This distinction is represented by a change of grammatical termination. He is not the conception (*ennoia*) itself, but the corresponding 'concept' (*ennoêma*). However, he is the object of the conception

¹⁹ Alongside concepts, Brunschwig considers the ontological status of 'the all', and concludes that it probably did belong to the genus 'not-something'.

not, as Platonism holds, because he pre-exists and somehow causes it. He is just the mental construct generated by the conception.” (LS Vol. 1, p.182).

To this pair of mental items, comes a third, *nooumenon*, which Brunschwig introduces as follows:

“We possess several texts which provide a classification for *nooumena* (a term which might be translated, in the most neutral way possible, by the expression ‘items conceived’), a classification which is based on the mode of their formation. The texts vary in their value and credibility: D.L. 7.52-3...is particularly disorganised; S.E. *M* 8.56ff...is incomplete; *M* 3.40²⁰, which is well-organised and complete, is not to be found in either *SVF* or *FDS*²¹; *M* 9.393-5, which is very close to the latter, is no more than mentioned in *SVF* 2.88.

By and large, what all these various texts say is that items that are conceived include some that stem directly from sensible experience (*apo aisthêseôs*, *apo periptôseôs*), whilst others are produced by a number of different mental operations...carried out on the material constituted by those ‘conceived items’.²²...

It is...worth noting that, amongst the various operations that produce non-immediate *nooumena*, no mention is made of any that relate in some way to a generalisation or abstraction: that remarkable absence perhaps supports the idea that, at least in its original sense, the Stoic notion of the *nooumenon* is not that of a universal.

This conclusion, reached through an analysis of fabricated or fictitious *nooumena*, may perhaps be retrospectively extended to cover *nooumena* that are produced immediately by sensible experience, those which constitute the primary

²⁰ S.E. *M* 3.40 reads: “In general, also, everything conceived (*pan to nooumenon*) is conceived in two main ways, either by way of clear impression or by way of transference (*metabasin*) from things clear, and this way is threefold, - by similarity, or by composition, or by analogy. Thus, by clear impression are conceived the white, the black, the sweet and the bitter, and by transference from things clear are concepts (*noettai*) due to similarity - such as Socrates himself from a likeness of Socrates, and those due to composition, - such as the hippocentaur from horse and man.” (Trans. Bury)

²¹ = Hulser, K. (ed.) (1987-8) *Die Fragmente zur Dialektik der Stoiker*, 4 vols. (Stuttgart).

²² Brunschwig has an interesting footnote here: “It is in the first of the texts cited by Sextus Empiricus that the following sentence appears: *ouden estin eurein kat’epinoian o mê exei tis autô kata periptôsin egnôsmenon*. It is clearly the source of the famous *Nihil est in intellectu, quod non fuerit primum in sensu*.” (p.100, n.15)

material for the various operations of fiction: if the initial *nooumena* were not particulars, it is hard to see how derived *nooumena* could be.” (p.99-100)

I am conscious at this stage of quoting extensively from Brunschwig, and I wish to do so again in a moment. But it might be worthwhile to clarify what Brunschwig has established by this point in his argument. We remember he is concerned with Stoic ontology, and further in suggesting that their ontology arose from a critical and systematic reflection on Platonism, particularly the theory of Forms. Connected to this thesis, Brunschwig has detected a terminology we can draw out from the texts. This terminology has a core of three terms:

(A) Concepts (*ennoêmata*), which are neither corporeal nor incorporeal – not-somethings.

(B) Conceptions (*ennoiai*), which are corporeal, dispositions of the soul, existents

(C) Items conceived (*nooumena*), which seem to range across the corporeal/incorporeal distinction.

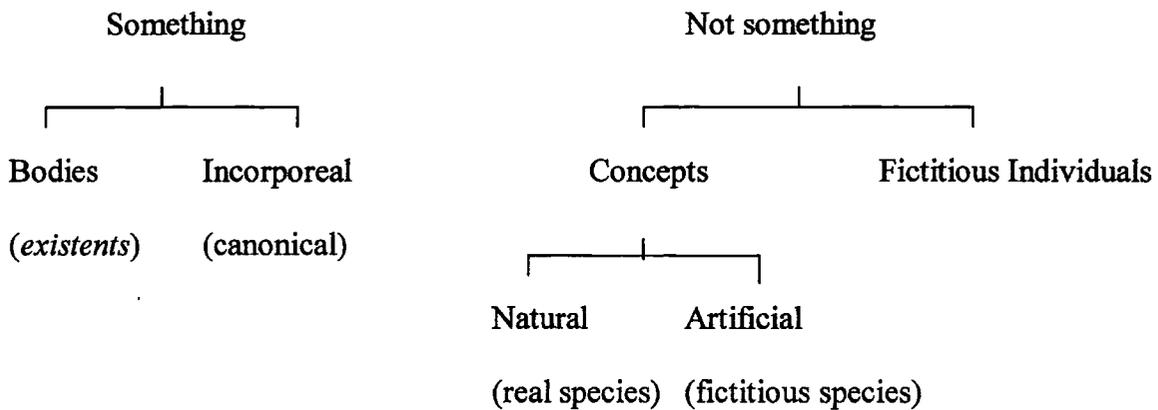
The question thus raised about the ontological status of *nooumena* is dealt with equivocally by Brunschwig. His translation of the term as ‘items conceived’ is explicitly undertaken with the caution that this must be taken ‘in the most neutral way possible’. But before I consider this there is another extended citation from Brunschwig which deals with the ontological relation between these three terms, and bears repetition. We need to bear in mind that one of the main points of Brunschwig’s argument here is to sort out the ontological status of fictional entities:

“Conceptions (*ennoiai*) differ both from *nooumena* and from *ennoêmata*. I think that they differ from *nooumena* in that they possess a universal character that *nooumena* lack: the prefix *en-* seems to serve to indicate that they are somehow stored *in* the soul, starting from a multiplicity of individual *nooumena*; Also, they differ from *ennoêmata* in that they constitute a species of *phantasia*, not a species of *phantasma*; on that account, they are corporeal modifications of the corporeal soul.

They are not the inert contents of thought, but rather constitute dispositions for thinking and speaking correctly. As A.A. Long so nicely puts it, 'to have the *ennoia* of man is to be able to complete a statement of the following form correctly: 'if something is a man, then it is...'. On this level, there is a perfectly clear difference between conceptions that correspond to real species and conceptions that correspond to fictitious species. The type of ability to which A.A. Long's statement refers can no doubt be acquired where it is a matter of dealing with centaurs, just as it can where it is a matter of dealing with men, but not in the same fashion: the *ennoia* of a man is formed in the rational soul as a result of one's living in the natural world, that of a centaur as a result of one's reading myths and looking at paintings. The difference that, at the level of *nooumena*, distinguishes items that are conceived through direct experience (*kata periptôsin*) from those that are not is, at the level of *ennoia*, mirrored in the difference that distinguishes between conceptions formed naturally in us without the intervention of any artifice (*physikôs kai anepitechnêtôs*) and those that are due to teaching and culture (*di'êmeteras didaskalias kai epimeleias*). This difference suffices to explain how it is that the Stoics gave a special name, to wit *prolēpseis*, to the former type of conceptions and ascribed to them an epistemological value of the highest grade." (p.102)

This argument of Brunschwig leads to the completion of a table given in part at the outset of his paper. His ontological account, thus complete, looks like this²³:

²³ A table which it is interesting to compare with the one in LS Vol 1., p.163.



To complete this section of his argument, Brunschwig moves on to consider whether or not there is another stage to the Stoic ontological scheme:

“It would be quite natural to seek also to complete our table at the top, by ascribing a common genus to somethings and not-somethings. Although some thinkers, both ancient and modern, have been swayed by the temptation to do so, I believe it better to resist it. No text tries to subsume somethings and not-somethings into a common genus, nor does any propose a name for such a common genus. On the contrary, by insistently presenting the *ti* as the supreme genus (*genikôtaton*), the texts implicitly reject the idea of a genus which, incorporating both somethings and not-somethings, would be superior even to the *ti* and would alone merit the name of supreme genus... The Stoics, much to the horror of some of their opponents, thought that incorporeals and bodies shared enough in common to be subsumed into a single genus, that of somethings; however, they appear to have rejected the idea that somethings and not-somethings shared correspondingly common properties. It will be easier to understand the reasons for that rejection if we examine the candidates that have been suggested as occupants of the position of a common genus to include both somethings and not-somethings.

Some modern commentators have put forward the idea of the *nooumenon*, giving this word the extremely wide sense of a possible object for thought and, accordingly, also for discourse: somethings and not-somethings are both conceivable and nameable. However, if my remarks about the Stoic notion of the *nooumenon*

are correct, it is immediately possible to see why that suggestion is not acceptable: given that this notion, in the first instance at least, applies only to items that are really or fictionally individual, it could not subsume not-somethings of a universal type (*ennoêmata*).” (p.103-104)

This brings us to the point where we can make use of the extended line of argument Brunschwig puts forward. He is quite right to suggest that *nooumena* cannot *ontologically* subsume *ennoêmata*²⁴, but this is not the same thing as to say they could not *epistemologically* subsume *ennoêmata*. The essence of my claim here is that for the Stoics, there is an epistemological item – the *nooumenon* – which took the ‘extremely wide sense’ of ‘a possible object for thought and, accordingly, also for discourse: somethings and not-somethings are both conceivable and nameable.’ (Brunschwig 1992, p.104) In the light of the comments I made earlier regarding the distinction between *to phantasthen*, *to phantaston* and *to phantasma*, it is possible to tie Brunschwig’s argument to mine in the following way: ‘items conceived through direct experience’ arise from an impressor (*phantaston*); ‘items conceived not through direct experience’ arise from no impressor (*phantasma*), but each is conceptualisable in a rational impression as *to phantasthen*, and this ‘conceptualised thing’, is a *nooumenon*.

A final point of interest here, is the support given by Brunschwig’s interpretation to the idea that this terminology might have a Chrysippean origin. Having used his interpretation of the three linked terms to show why *prolêpseis* were seen as so important, he notes:

“Chrysippus, assailed by the polemics of his opponents, had especially devoted his attention to this question [concerning conceptions and preconceptions]

²⁴ Brunschwig makes this point as follows: “...this notion, [*nooumenon*], in the first instance at least, applies only to items that are really or fictionally individual, [thus] it could not subsume NSTs of a universal type (*ennoêmata*).” The difference between this claim – which is surely correct – and mine concerning *nooumena* as epistemologically supreme, is that a *nooumenon* could ‘subsume’ the universal not-somethings by referring to the *class* in the singular: ‘The class of all men’.

(cf. Plutarch *Comm. Not.* 1059B...); he had promoted the *prolēpseis* to the rank of criterion of truth (cf. D.L. 7.54)." (p.102, n.23)

The Plutarch Brunschwig points us to tells us that:

"One Stoic said that in his opinion it was not by chance but by divine providence that Chrysippus came after Arcesilaus and before Carneades, the former of whom initiated the violence and offence against common sense, while the latter was the most productive of the Academics. For by coming between them, Chrysippus with his rejoinders to Arcesilaus also fenced in the cleverness of Carneades; he left sense-perception many reinforcements, for it to stand siege as it were, and entirely removed the confusion regarding preconceptions and conceptions by articulating each one and assigning it to its appropriate place." (Plutarch, *Comm. not.* 1059B-C, LS 40G)

In their commentary to this text, Long and Sedley write:

"This is not the claim that Chrysippus removed confusion surrounding the *ideas* of *ennoia* and *prolēpsis*...but merely that he clarified individual concepts by 'articulating' them, i.e. by framing their definitions." (Vol. 2, p.247)

If Brunschwig's argument is sound, then it would seem that Chrysippus devoted himself exactly to the task of removing the confusion surrounded by the *ideas* of conceptions and preconceptions.

Where has all this brought us to, in the overall scheme of my argument? We have arrived at a point where we can begin to draw some strands together. By purely causal means, we acquire conceptions before we have reason. As we acquire reason, we acquire the faculties of assent and cognition. Assent and cognition take their place in a perceptual scheme in which, as represented by the analogy of Zeno's fist, they play a dual role. One might characterise this role as 'cognitive' (as

we pursue the model from the impression towards knowledge), and 'reflective' (as we pursue the model from knowledge towards the impression). We have proposed that in place of the idea that impressions themselves have rational content, rational content emerges as a consequence of the *transformative* process of reason in cognition. We have suggested that Chrysippus developed Zeno's scheme, and enriched the stage of cognition to incorporate a notion of *verbalisation* to go alongside Zeno's process of *conceptualisation*. This notion is given a precise meaning by contemplating the differences between types of objects of impressions (*phantaston, phantasma, phantasthen*) and types of 'mental entity', (*ennoia, ennoêma, nooumenon*). Arising from this contemplation is the possibility that *to phantasthen* (the 'content' of a rational impression), is equivalent to the psychological concept *nooumenon*. If this case is plausible, it provides us with an account of what language is about - it is about *nooumena*. Thus when we are talking about things, we are talking about 'items conceived'.

To expand on the epistemological interpretation we have pursued – and to provide it with some philosophical context – we must next consider what the Stoics had to say about truth. Having done this, we can use the Stoic notion of truth alongside the notion of perception we have tried to develop, and propose a picture whereby these Stoic theories led to a *diagnosis* of certain epistemological problems which had been evident in the philosophical culture for at least three generations before Zeno arrived in Athens.

THE TRUTH AND THE TRUE

The following discussion will concentrate on A.A. Long's paper *The Stoic distinction between Truth (ê alêtheia) and the True (to alêthes)*. I am in agreement with almost all of the positions in this paper. In my view, it constitutes an argument against the contention of Annas, seen by us earlier, which says:

“[There are] some ways in which the debates [on epistemology in Hellenistic times] were clouded by the Stoic failure to distinguish clearly between questions about what we can know and questions about what is the case, and to realise that truth is a metaphysical notion, not an epistemological one.” (1980, p.85)

Against this we shall see that, for the Stoics, truth was *not* a metaphysical notion but a physical one - and a very specific physical one at that. Long's paper opens with a consideration of the two passages in Sextus Empiricus that record the Stoic distinction between truth and the true. They are very similar passages although Long points out:

“Both the content of passage B (S.E. 7.38-45) and its position in Sextus' narrative raise greater problems than passage A (*PH* 2.80-83), which is probably closer than passage B to the words of Sextus' sources. Unlike von Arnim I propose to take passage A as the basis for discussing the Stoic distinction between the truth and the true, supplementing it, where appropriate, from passage B.” (p.299)

For the purposes of the following argument, it would be as well to reproduce Long's favoured passage, *PH* 2. 81-83:

“True is said [by the Stoics] to differ from truth in three ways, substance (*ousia*), structure (*systasei*), and function (*dynamei*). In substance, since what is true is incorporeal, for it is a proposition and sayable; but truth is a body, for it is scientific knowledge capable of stating everything true; and scientific knowledge is the commanding-faculty (*hêgemonikon*) disposed in a certain way, just as the fist is the hand disposed in a certain way; and the commanding-faculty is a body, being a breath in their view. In structure, since what is true is something simple, e.g. ‘I am conversing’, but truth consists of the knowledge of many true things. In function, since truth pertains to scientific knowledge but what is true does not do so at all. Hence they say that truth is only in a virtuous man, but what is true is also in an inferior man; for the inferior man can say something true.” (LS trans. 33P)

So in Sextus’ evidence, there are three aspects of the distinction between the truth and the true, and in Long’s paper each is interpreted in a particular, and I believe convincing, way. Firstly, the difference between the truth and the true in respect of ‘substance’ (*ousia*)²⁵:

“More interesting... is the corporeal nature of truth. We should notice how carefully this point is established. Three premises are used: 1, truth is knowledge capable of stating everything true; 2, knowledge is a certain state of the *hêgemonikon*; 3, the *hêgemonikon* is a body. Strictly a fourth premise is needed to complete the inference – all certain states of a body are bodies – but the analogy of the fist as a certain state of the hand helps to do duty for this...

In our passage of Sextus *to alêthes* must refer to a single *lekton apophantikon*, that is, a particular true statement. But *ê alêtheia* is ‘knowledge capable of stating everything true’. This sentence is ambiguous. It can mean either ‘knowledge of everything true and the capacity to state it’, or ‘knowledge of how to make statements such that all of the statements one makes are true’. According to the first alternative there is no true statement which the possessor of truth could not

²⁵ Long mentions that the term *ousia* is the only term which ‘raises any problems of translation’. The problem it raises is resolved by reference to the ‘*ti*’ (something) ontological doctrine we have discussed above.

make, since he knows everything true. The second alternative does not contradict this, but nor does it imply it. What it does imply is not omniscience but infallibility with respect to the truth of any statement which is the object of *epistêmê apophantikê* [knowledge capable of being stated].” (p.301-302)

To be clear about what Long is proposing here, it is necessary for us to emphasise the difference between ‘omniscience’ and ‘limited infallibility’ which is here proposed. The sage need not know ‘every detail of the universe’ (p.302), but rather to properly understand a) what it is to make a true statement, and b) to always speak within the limitations of what can be rationally defended. A number of other items of evidence support Long’s contention that the ‘limited infallibility’ idea is the one the Stoics proposed for the sage. Firstly, it is known that the Stoics said the sage would suspend judgment about matters which were unclear²⁶, which leaves only the ‘clear and distinct’ impressions and conceptions-as-impressions we have spoken of earlier (and simultaneously ‘filters out’ swathes of speculation the sage would not concern himself with). Secondly, it seemed to have been a part of the Stoic notion of the sage that he would always be a dialectician²⁷ – that is, he would engage in question and answer discourse where the faculty of assent is most rigorously tested (especially if we incorporate into this notion of dialectic the kind of ‘heuristic’ purpose which, for example, Socrates so forcefully represented)²⁸. Thirdly, the Stoic claim that knowledge is ‘unoverturnable by reason’²⁹ seems to imply that the state of the *hêgemonikon* obtained by the sage need not involve a claim to ‘direct objectivity’ – i.e. to represent things as they ‘really’ are, but rather the lesser claim of representing things in such a way that they

²⁶ Cf. e.g. S.E. M 7.246 (LS 37F), Cic. *Ac.* 2.92-6.

²⁷ Cf. D.L. 7.83 (LS 31C), Alex., *In Ar. Top.*, 1, 8-14 (LS 31D).

²⁸ cf. Atherton (1993) pp. 42-55, esp. “His [Seneca’s] definition [of dialectic cf. LS 66J] is not a radical departure from the past; he is merely emphasising dialectic’s already central heuristic and diagnostic role” (p.54); in general, cf. A.A. Long, ‘Socrates in Hellenistic Philosophy’, C.Q. 38 (1988), pp.150-171, repr. Long (1996), pp. 1-34.

²⁹ Cf. e.g. D.L. 7.47 (LS 31B, part)

are certain within the confines of human rationality. We will return to each of these claims again in our attempt to define intersubjectivity.

The second way truth differs from the true according to the Stoics, is in respect of 'structure' (*systasei*). Long comments on this as follows:

"How are we to picture the knowledge of 'many true things' of which truth consists?...All men have the power to assent correctly to *katalêptikai phantasiai* but that is not a sufficient condition of knowledge. A man may exercise such assent correctly, but the valid evidence about the world which he thereby obtains could be vulnerable to the arguments of a skilful debater unless it is placed within a conceptual structure which, in turn, sanctions the formulation of other true propositions that can be used in its defence. The knowledge of many true things which constitutes truth might thus be conceived as valid general concepts which are combined with *katalêptikai phantasiai* as criteria of truth... These [valid general concepts] do not breach the first distinction between truth and the true. For general concepts in Stoicism are not propositions but physical dispositions or activities of the *hêgemonikon*...I have discussed the 'structure' of truth before dealing with that of the true since Sextus' examples of the latter...seem to be fairly straightforward. What is unitary or simple about 'the true' is presumably its being one *lekton* or *axiôma*." (p.304-305).

The similarity between Long's account of the ingredients of Stoic epistemology, and my interpretation as given above become clear when we make one slight adjustment to his terms. By 'valid general concepts', Long is clearly referring to *ennoiai*, which I have above discussed as 'conceptions' (in common with Long and Sedley 1987). Also, Long's characterisation of truth as a system of such conceptions ties in with my reading of Zeno's fist analogy, and the twofold notion of assent there proposed, in common with Rist. My understanding of the issue here only differs

from Long in one respect. If the ‘developmental account’ I have offered is correct, and Chrysippus ‘enriched’ Zeno’s model of perception with sensitivity to the linguistic aspect, we can incorporate propositions into the scheme. To be sure, with Long, there is an ontological difference between conceptions and propositions, but we could argue that the knowledge *of* many true things is *realised* in conceptions, but the many true things this knowledge is the knowledge of, are propositions. This distinction will be important in a moment, when the promise to discuss isomorphism and *lekta* is fulfilled.

Finally, we can agree with Long that the account of the simplicity of ‘the true’ (qua *lekton* or *axiōma*) is unproblematic. Long’s argument concerning the interpretation of the Stoic doctrine reaches its third stage as follows:

“This third differentia informs us that the relation of the true to knowledge is contingent upon the cognitive state of the person who asserts the true. Truths uttered by a wise man imply that he speaks on the basis of knowledge; those uttered by other kinds of persons do not carry this implication. Thus the utterance of a true statement is not a sufficient condition for knowledge. This doctrine is clearly acceptable on general philosophical grounds and appropriate to what has already been said about the systematic character of knowledge and truth. It may also remind us of the Stoic distinction between *kathêkonta* [appropriate acts], which inferior as well as wise men perform, and *katorthômata* [‘complete’ or ‘perfect’ appropriate acts] which are peculiar to the wise man.” (p. 305)

I consider this third aspect to be as Long describes it, drawing our attention to the context of a true statement in the psychology of the person who asserts it. It ties in with the Stoics’ saying that knowledge must be unoverturnable by reason, and the notion that knowledge is the sole province of the sage. I have included Long’s comment about what we might call the ‘structural similarity’ between ‘the true said by the fool and the true said by the sage’ and ‘the appropriate act

performed by the fool and the appropriate act performed by the sage' since I believe this provides a clue to how the Stoics understood – and articulated – a philosophical *method*, as well as a series of conclusions. We might also think of the distinction between the *katalêpsis* of the fool and the sage: in the former case this is 'mere opinion', whereas in the latter case it is 'scientific knowledge'. I will discuss the possibility of outlining this method shortly before the conclusion to this thesis. Having thus completed his interpretation of the Stoic distinction between the truth and the true, Long goes on to discuss the relationship between 'cosmic truth' and the knowledge of the sage, and a possible Platonic antecedent to some aspects of the distinction. In his conclusion, he considers the significance of the doctrine:

"The principal purpose of the distinction, as I interpret it, is to clarify the difference and also the connexion between epistemological criteria for the correct usage of all declarative sentences and the assertion of a truth by any particular sentence of this kind." (p.310)

This may be technically correct – the difference Long cites *is* clarified by this distinction, but its philosophical significance seems to me to be a great deal wider than that. Considering the colossal status of the concept of truth in philosophy generally, it is a breathtaking claim to locate this concept entirely within the human psyche. There seem to be a number of inescapable consequences of so doing. First, on some level at least, it seems to *relativise* truth, if it is to consist *within* people with their inevitable perceptual limitations. Secondly, it quite clearly *corporealises* truth, and thus places it entirely in the hands of Fate via causal determinism. Thus the wise man is accepting of *his* truth – the world as it (inevitably) appears to him. Thirdly, and most notably, this doctrine seems to re-orientate entirely the meaning of what it is to do philosophy – or at least transforms the metaphors we should use to describe the process. Instead of *seeking* the truth, or

coming to understand the truth, or *coming to know* the truth, it very much seems as if the Stoic injunction is demanding of us that we attempt to *become* the truth, which is a striking (and alarming) requirement.

There is some further work to do in clarifying the epistemological role of *lekta*, before we can concentrate on locating the Stoic notion of Truth in its full context. For now, I wish to emphasise the *relativisation* of Truth which this doctrine seems to demand. If it is a disposition of the corporeal *hêgemonikon*, it can be nothing other than ‘internal’ to the sage. And this doctrine also goes a long way towards explaining how the Stoics understood the sage as an *exemplar* of humanity in its highest perfection. The sage, in word and deed, *is* the truth – the human truth – and thus the only appropriate model for the Stoics to adopt.

ISOMORPHISM AND LEKTA

But let us finish the task we set ourselves a few pages ago, to provide some account of the *lekton* and its role, which might provide an alternative to the suggestion offered by Annas which was, as we recall:

“The Stoic position thus seems to be analogous to that of modern theories which hold that our ability to represent content to ourselves is not to be explained causally, but rests on a fact of a different kind. There is a basic isomorphism between two structures: the structure of causal interrelations, in which the physical states of the world and of the perceiver are embedded, and the structure of semantic interrelations, in which is embedded the signification of the content of the physical states. Thus our minds represent the content of the physical states involved in perception, but not because of causal interaction. Similarly, the Stoics say that our

minds are affected “not by (*hupo*) *lekta* but in relation to (*epi*) them.” This is a highly important point, and it is a great pity that our extant sources are not more forthcoming on it; the Stoics themselves do not seem to have found the point as problematic as they should have.” (Annas 1992, p.80)

I have argued that there is no ‘content’ to speak of in the Stoic scheme, and such ‘grasp’ as we have is formed entirely from causal processes, albeit with one voluntary stage of the process in ‘assent’. If the *endiathetos logos* is formed in this causal way (where such a ‘self’ as there may be can only be conceived of in a gatekeeping role via its control of assent), then it seems to follow that the *prophorikos logos* is similarly devoid of any volitional aspect (save, again, for the role of assent). This alters our view of language, and the language function. We no longer see ourselves as speaking the ‘contents’ of our mind, but see our speaking as itself a part of a causal process largely outside of our control. I have argued that it is the enormous role the Stoics granted to causation which provided them with their confidence in the human ability to understand nature (a point first fully appreciated by Frede 1984). But with so much ‘automatic’ as it were, even concerning the internal processes of our reason, how can we account for meaning? We can return to Brunschwig for an answer, which again correlates well with the epistemological picture I have presented. In the midst of a discussion about the similarities and differences between the position of the Stoics concerning ontology, and the various positions taken up in the *Sophist* at 245E-249D, Brunschwig constructs the following argument concerning *lekta*:

“the Stoics...envisage the process of knowledge...as a process in which the subject with knowledge is passive in that he is affected by a representation, and the object that is known is active in that it produces that representation. That is an effect of the sensualist model which dominates their theory of knowledge...But... the general problem is identical: namely, is it possible to maintain both that incorporeals are knowable and, at the same time, that they are inactive and impassive?...

“To extricate themselves from that difficulty the Stoics replied that ‘the incorporeals do nothing and do not impress us; it is we who are impressed on the occasion of their occurrence’...That is quite an acrobatic reply; it seems to imply that the *hêgemonikon* can be affected of its own accord, if not in an entirely spontaneous fashion, at least on the occasion of an external stimulus; certainly, when representing proof to itself, it is passive...and all passivity in principle presupposes an agent. If that agent is not the external incorporeal, it can only be the *hêgemonikon* itself. Sextus’ criticisms [S.E. *M* 8.406-8] certainly presuppose the Stoics’ acceptance of the notion of auto-affection. To strengthen their reply, they had resorted to some quite carefully chosen images. The gymnastic trainer can teach his pupil a movement by taking hold of his hands and impressing the movement upon them, a procedure which illustrates a case where an external body affects the *hêgemonikon* physically. But the gymnastic trainer can also himself make the movement that he wishes to teach his pupil, at a distance, presenting himself as a model to be imitated; and it is this procedure that is regarded as illustrating what happens when the *hêgemonikon* apprehends a proof, which is a complex of incorporeal *lekta*.” (Brunschwig 1992, p.124-125)

Referring back to the model of perception I have offered, there is a stage of the process which answers to this theoretical need for the *hêgemonikon* to effect itself – which is when conceptions themselves take on the role of impressions to form *logikai phantasiai*. Thus when we acknowledge the true, we are *responding* to a non-perceptible, incorporeal fact in the world, which we are *brought to perceive* by the workings of our inner reason. The way we can reject the

'isomorphism hypothesis' put forward by Annas is by pointing out that there is possibly nothing in Stoicism which answers to the type of thing offered as the alternative to 'causal interrelations', which Annas suggests are 'semantic interrelations'. I am not saying that there is nothing in Stoicism which we cannot usefully use the modern term 'semantics' for – their decompositional theory of language seems well suited to the label – but I am suggesting that we can get by in our interpretation of Stoic epistemology without 'semantics' in this strong, theory-of-meaning, quasi-metaphysical sense. What is suggested instead is a picture whereby the gift of reason enables us to have direct access to a completely different level of being than the purely causal, and it is this direct access – via language – to the true and the false as they subsist as *lekta*, that justifies us calling ourselves 'beings of reason'. As a corollary to this way of thinking, it also seems on my interpretation that we are not forced into thinking of the relation between the 'world' and 'our account of the world' as being isomorphic. If my position is defensible that the power of reason in us *transforms* our experience, then it is possible that it transforms it away from being isomorphically related to that experience, and thus to the world.

Here we have arrived at the point where I can propose the solution to the epistemological problem which I outlined at the end of the third chapter, and have been pursuing in this and the previous chapters. That problem was stated as follows:

- 1) Something is determinately communicable.
- 2) That which is subject to an infinite division is not determinately communicable.
- 3) Ultimate reality is subject to an infinite division.
- 4) Therefore, ultimate reality is not determinately communicable.

This problem leaves us with a single, pivotal question: What is it that is determinately communicable? And the answer comes back straight away – the only possible answer – that it is

the truth that is determinately communicable. Communicable because it is knowledge capable of stating everything true (*epistême apophantikê pantôn alêthôn*)³⁰, determinate because it is unoverturnable by reason (*ametaptôton hypo logou*)³¹.

But what is the truth? It is a disposition of the *hêgemonikon*. And not just any disposition, “For as, they say, a stick must be either straight or crooked, so a man must be either just or unjust [tertium non datur].”³² But now we do have a ‘problem of access’, but not a Kantian one where the problem lies between our perceptions and the ‘real’ nature of the object, but rather a problem of access to each other. Let us imagine listening to the sage, as he reveals the truth. How are we to know *what he is talking about*? Is it possible for us to fully understand one another, to know what aspect of ‘the truth’ is being mentioned? In order to contemplate this problem as it might have appeared for the Stoics, we need to turn the question around. The philosophy of Hellenistic times was predicated on the assumption of the *real*, as we have already seen established by Burnyeat. But we have also taken from Denyer the interpretative presupposition that the dogmatic philosophies of the time were also predicated on the assumption of the *true*. Their question was not, ‘How can we be sure we are right?’, but rather (and unsurprisingly, given their causal theories of perception) ‘How could it be possible for us to go wrong?’ And it seems as if part of the Stoic answer to that question lay in a specific understanding of our language-use and its constraints.

³⁰ S.E. *PH* 2.81-3 (LS 33P)

³¹ D.L. 7.46-8 (LS 31B)

³² D.L. 7.127, (LS 61 I)

AMBIGUITY AND ETYMOLOGY

If we consider for a moment the epistemological position, we will see how this problem of language might have been understood. We have causal perception and a material soul. There are two basic types of psychological items which arise from this causal process: preconceptions and conceptions. Of these, conceptions can arise from the operations of the mind, and form the basis of new conceptions, to an extent limited only by the imagination. The preconceptions, on the other hand, arise ‘automatically’ – we have no influence over the basic stock of ideas which we ‘find’ in ourselves at the onset of our reason. But a problem arises at the linguistic level with the *labelling* of these preconceptions – how are we to know of one another that what we say refers to just *that* preconception. These problems are all the more acute the further we move from perceptual issues and towards such supposedly preconceived ideas as the notion of the good, or the nature of god. It is possible to construe the Stoics as having identified two such problems of ‘labelling’ – the first to do with ambiguity, the second to do with etymology. A disagreement concerning ambiguity between Chrysippus and Diodorus is preserved by Gellius:

“Chrysippus said that every word is ambiguous by nature, since two or more meanings can be understood from it. But Diodorus Cronus said: ‘No word is ambiguous. No one says or things anything ambiguous, and nothing should be held to be being said beyond what the speaker thinks he is saying. When you have understood something other than what I had in mind, I should be held to have spoken obscurely, rather than ambiguously. For the characteristic of an ambiguous word would have had to be that whoever said it was saying two or more things. But no-one is saying two or more things if he thinks he is saying one.’” (Gellius 11.12.1-3 (LS 37N))

In considering this passage, it must be admitted that the meaning of the saying attributed to Chrysippus is not clear. Atherton (1993) claims that “autonymy can explain Chrysippean universal ambiguity on two assumptions: that Chrysippus was talking about single terms, and that all single terms are non-autonymously significant in some appropriate way” (p.298-299)³³. Denyer (1985b) uses the text in relation to Cicero’s case that some omens are ambiguous – two conflicting interpretations could be given of the same omen. “But it is alas exactly what we must expect from signs used as means of communication. For, as Chrysippus pointed out, no communicative sign has any one meaning intrinsic to it.” (p.9) The second approach seems to be favoured by the following evidence:

“In his *On good things* book 1 he [Chrysippus] concedes in a sense and gives way to those who wish to call the preferred things good and their opposites bad, in the following words: ‘If someone in accordance with such differences [i.e. between the preferred and dispreferred] wishes to call the one class of them good and the other bad, and he is referring to these things [i.e. the preferred or the dispreferred] and not committing an idle aberration, his usage must be accepted on the grounds that he is not wrong in the matter of meanings and in other respects is aiming at the normal use of terms.’ (Plutarch *St. rep.* 1048A, LS 58H)

It appears from this that Chrysippus at least recognised some problem with ‘labelling’ in the sense I have for it above. In the case of the person who calls the preferred ‘good’, the position presumably is that if this change in terminology does not result in a misunderstanding or misapplication of the doctrine, then there is nothing to quibble about. It is an interesting idea that

³³ The notion of autonymy used here is the idea that a name can refer to itself and the things it ‘naturally signifies’. Atherton cites an example from Augustine: ‘Is a man a name?’. ‘Yes.’ ‘What? When I see you, do I see a name?’ (p. 294)

someone's language-use should be 'accepted on the grounds that he is not wrong in the matter of meanings'. What might these meanings, ultimately, be? There is an interpretation that would fit well with what we have said above about language-use revealing the conceptual configuration of our *hêgemonikon*? What Chrysippus is pointing out, on this reading, is the fact that even though a person might use various terms, it is the state of his or her conceptions and preconceptions which is important in the final analysis, since this is what will be the determining factor in enabling him to live well. If we accept this reading, we find in the above passages a suggestion that, even though our language-use reveals our conceptions, there is no necessary connection between the terms we use in language and the conceptions they are the terms for. This 'distance' is what explains the problem of access to each other, at the level of preconception or conceptions. This distance, I would also argue, explains the philosophical importance the Stoics attached to ambiguity.

A second problem with regard to 'labelling' conceptions – and particularly preconceptions – may have been identified by the Stoics at the level of their 'linguistic community'. This intriguing possibility is presented by Frede in his paper 'The Principles of Stoic Grammar':

"There is yet another possibility, though admittedly a rather speculative and obscure one, by which we may explain the relevance of the doctrine of the parts of speech and their syntax to the correctness of reason. It may have been assumed that ordinary language, at least in its basic structure, is a reflection of the rationality and common sense of human beings. And it may have been assumed that this rationality is reflected in particular by the kinds of units from which speech is composed and by the laws of its composition. Hence one might hope that an investigation of the parts of speech and their syntax would reveal aspects of rationality to the extent that a linguistic community had achieved it." (Frede 1978 (repr. 1987), p.328)

Frede's speculation needs modifying slightly to fit my idea here. His concern is to account for the Stoic interest in the formal principles of grammar, but there is much I can take over. The

assumption that ordinary language may reflect ‘the rationality and common sense of human beings’ can be made relevant to my case since I have proposed that the ‘subject-term’ of a rational impression is precisely the kind of psychological item which ties language-use to conceptions. I would thus modify the last sentence of this citation in the following way: ‘It might have been hoped that an investigation of the terms of speech as understood to reflect conceptual structures would reveal aspects of common rationality to the extent that the philosophical community (viz. the doctrines of Stoicism as they were conceived internally to the school) had achieved it’.

Earlier, Frede discusses the position of etymology in Stoicism:

“In the old controversy whether names are significant by nature or convention, the Stoics took the view that the relations between names and what they signify is natural... That immediately raised the objection that, if this were so, we should expect all human beings to use basically the same language. But the Stoics clarified their thesis by saying, it seems, that names are not formed by nature; they are not, for example, fully determined by the nature of human beings and the nature of things; rather they are formed by human imposition... To bring about such an imposition it took wise men who had grasped the nature of things and who knew how best to impose names... Hence the wise man puts down a certain number of basic, primitive names, and then has everything systematically related to what is named by the primitive words. The original imposition of names is at first accepted by the whole community. For at this early, incorrupt stage of society its members are at least reasonable enough to recognise the superiority of the wise, who, for this reason, will also be kings. This would seem to answer the Epicurean objection as to how the mysterious name-giver could be supposed to make his fellow human beings adopt his names.” (p.333-334)

Again, it seems to me that this hypothesis tallies with my previous interpretation of Stoic epistemology. How could names be ‘not fully determined by the nature of human beings and the

nature of things'? One explanation would be some 'transformative' power of reason which 'disconnects' any necessary relationship between things and their names. Frede links his speculations with some textual evidence as follows:

"That Stoic etymology did not find general acceptance... meant, of course, that attempts along these lines to establish criteria for the "Hellenicity" of words did not result in a generally recognised *technê*. Given the lack of satisfactory criteria, the Stoics seem to have taken a conservative attitude toward ordinary language, which would be reinforced by their notion of style. Hence the notion underlying their definition of barbarism [D.L. 7.59] may be more representative of their position than it first seemed: in the choice of words and their forms we have to follow the usage of good authors." (p.337)

What is interesting for us in Frede's story is chiefly the notion that human rationality and common sense might have been perceived by the Stoics as revealed in a 'linguistic community'. The suggestion that they sought to establish a 'proper' way of speaking and writing – a *technê* – points towards some acknowledgement that language somehow had to be 'brought under control'. If the Stoics did have some belief about an initial namegiver in an ideal society, this would explain their interest in etymology without making it necessary for them to hold an unacceptable belief about names being dictated entirely by nature. They further may well have considered themselves confronted by a 'degenerate' state of society which had 'lost touch' with the ultimate appropriateness of the name-givers' baptisms. Imagining that the Stoics held beliefs such as these, aligned with a general belief in ambiguity, allows us to understand their interest in etymology as a discipline. But it does more than that, since it also allows us to consider that they might have been keen to construct a 'way of doing dialectic' which could cut through both (communal) etymological degeneration and (personal) ambiguity to arrive at a secure 'sign' for each pertinent concept. This

speculation provides a rationale for the pursuit of a *technê* – ‘a proper way of speaking and writing’.

Thinking this way, we can understand how the Stoics may have come to a *diagnosis* of the problem of knowledge. Cognition, via the cognitive impression, guarantees that we perceive the world in regular ways. The causal nature of the process of perception guarantees the accurate formation of our conceptions of the world. Language, to be successful, would merely need to reflect these conceptions – since if we all have reliable ‘cognitive access’ to the world, we should have harmonious language-use (i.e. agreement) and thus could live untroubled ‘in accordance with (our rational) nature’. But this does not happen. Each stage of this process is self-validating because causal, except that pertaining to the faculty of assent. The faculty of assent, I have suggested, is a twofold process, and both of these aspects of assent are relevant to concept-formation, and thus to the production of both inner and expressible reason. When we assent at the level of impressions, we are ‘yielding’ to causal processes which (in an ongoing way) generate and modify our concepts. When we assent at the level of reflection, we are yielding to conceptions-in-relation-to-conceptual-structures (Zeno), or propositions in relation to proofs (Chrysippus). Thus assent is the only part of the process that could disrupt the otherwise inevitable acquisition of appropriate and correct conceptions. Since it is language which emerges from assents, language is simultaneously the problem and the solution. It is the problem since it can cause ‘iterated certainties’ to develop. These can be thought of as bad ways of thinking which become conceptually fixed by repetition. Or it can cause confusion by ambiguity, or uncertainty by paradox and solecism. It is the solution because it provides us with the possibility of understanding one another’s conceptual scheme, and thus provides the minimum requirement for discovering human truth – of preconceptions, that they are preconceptions (e.g. of the fact and nature of god);

of conceptions, how best they can be ordered; of knowledge, how it can be demonstrated to be unoverturnable by reason; of opinions, how they can be exposed as vacillating.

We find some further support for the idea that there is some kind of direct link between language and conceptual structure from one stage of an argument in Schofield (1980). He mentions a passage in Cicero³⁴, and draws our attention there to an ‘explicit application of the theory of preconceptions to the formal proofs for which the Stoics were famous’ (p.301). He then goes on to cite a further passage, from earlier in the Cicero text:

“If there is something in the nature of things which the mind of man and human reason, strength and power cannot produce, that which produces it is surely better than man. But the heavenly bodies and all those things whose order is sempiternal cannot be brought about by man. Therefore that through which they are brought about is better than man. But what name could you prefer to give this than ‘God’.” (ND II, 16, LS 54E)

About this passage, Schofield writes:

“It would have been satisfying and appropriate had Chrysippus written a different final sentence: ‘But our preconception of God is of a productive agent better than man’. He was content, however, to appeal to our intuitions about the propriety of the use of the word ‘god’. Yet that appeal may very easily be read as tantamount to an invitation to consider our preconception of God, particularly in the light of Epicurus’ association of preconceptions with the commonly accepted meanings of words. And, more generally, all Stoic arguments purporting to prove that the universe or the mind which they take to govern it is divine depend on agreement by language users on what attributes are to *count* as divine. Surely the

³⁴ “Since we preconceive by a definite notion of the mind (‘*certa notione animi praesentiamus*’) that God is such as to be, first, a living being, and, second, unsurpassed in excellence by anything in the whole of nature, I can see nothing which I would rather fit (‘*accommodem*’) to this preconception or notion of ours than the first of all candidates: this very universe, which as unsurpassable in excellence I hold to be a living being and God.” (ND II, 45)

Stoics will have seen that they must hold that such agreement is the consequence of agreement in our preconceptions?" (p.302)

Schofield's suggestion in the last line here is that the Stoics must have recognised the connection between agreement at the level of language and agreement in our preconceptions. The suggestions I have made above depend on just this sort of connection, although in the account I have given, the connection must be understood as having a broader scope: not just between language and preconceptions, but also between language and conceptions. This enables us to see the Stoic dialectical enterprise in a new light, since we understand it now as being concerned first and foremost with the relationship between the conceptual structures of the interlocutors. We can perhaps bring in reference also to Barnes (1980) and his idea that Stoic proof is not properly speaking deductive at all – rather it is “in the modern jargon, an inference to the best explanation” (p.181). We can find a rationale for this character of Stoic proof in the suggestion made by Schofield above. If language-use reveals our conceptual structures, and (if we are wise) our conceptual structures are stable and secure, then the formal proofs we will require will function to represent the stability and security of our conceptions. Thus the *explanatory* role of proof will be to *reveal* the concepts the inference depends upon, in as clear a way as possible, to pave the way for secure agreement to follow.

EVIDENCE FOR INTERSUBJECTIVITY

These considerations bring me towards the notion of intersubjectivity. One of Heraclitus' recorded writings was “Therefore it is necessary to follow the common; but although the Logos is

common the many live as though they had a private understanding” (KRS, fr.195) In order to ‘follow the common’, the Stoics required an understanding of dialectic that could convert the private understanding into a comprehensive grasp of the common Logos, and for this they required a linguistic community. We can speculate that the doctrine of the cognitive impression, the belief in the ambiguity of language, the ‘degeneration’ of language as they found it and the indeterminacy of the physical world, combined to produce a requirement that successful dialectical practice must entail the *harmonisation* of individual conceptual schemes into a unified, common whole. This, I would propose, was the driving force behind the clear Stoic intention to produce a scheme of definitions and modes of inference which would be coherent, universally applicable and unassailable by rational argument. Until and unless a successful common language can be developed with which to explore the possibilities of human truth, such a project cannot get off the ground. Intersubjectivity, then, is the necessary precondition of successful dialectic. To add to our assumptions of the real, and the true, we could add in the case of the Stoics, the assumption of a community of reason, committed to the common cause of becoming the truth.

This notion of intersubjectivity might be given some credibility by a reconsideration of certain parts of the evidence:

(A) It is well-known that the Stoics had certain ‘canonical ambiguities’ (cf. Atherton 1993, pp. 69-71ff.). These were terms which were understood to have more than one ‘official usage’ and were accepted as having distinct senses. It is possible to speculate about such a role for the term *homologoumenôs*, ‘in agreement’. This term takes its place at the core of Stoicism in the injunction to live in ‘agreement’ with nature. But we might also detect a meaning whereby it is important to strive to live in agreement with *each other*. This makes sense where we are committed to the

'common logos' since discord can be analysed as the result of people living with their own understanding. This sense seems to be uppermost in the following from Plutarch:

"He [Chrysippus] says he does not completely disapprove of arguing the opposite case, but he recommends that it be used cautiously, as in the courtroom...He says 'This practice is proper to those who suspend judgment about everything and it serves their purpose; those, on the contrary, who seek to engender scientific knowledge which will enable us to live in agreement should provide their pupils with basic principles and fixed positions from beginning to end...' (Plutarch *St. rep.* 1035F-1037B, LS 31P, part)

It may be possible to detect a similar idea in the notion of proof at S.E. *PH* 2.135, which Brunschwig (1980, pp. 155-160) tentatively attributes to Zeno:

"A demonstration, they say, is an argument which through agreed premises by means of a deduction reveals a non-evident conclusion... What they call its premises are the propositions adopted *by agreement* for the establishment of a conclusion." (LS 36B)

(B) Contextual Factors about Stoicism – *homonioia*.

"Anxiety about *stasis* in Athens at the end of the Peloponnesian War seems to have been the catalyst which made of *homonioia*, concord, a key word in the vocabulary of politics and political philosophy, employed initially and fundamentally to formulate a precondition of the internal stability of the state...concord is knowledge of common goods... I guess that a *full* definition of concord would have read: 'shared belief about the affairs of life, brought about by knowledge of common goods'. The short formula 'knowledge of common goods' simply picks out that element in the full definition which *distinguishes* concord from harmony, neglecting to specify e.g. the requirement that concord be shared between persons (it is not credible that such a requirement was not accepted by the Stoics)." (Schofield 1991, pp. 46-48)

(C) Suggestion of something like intersubjectivity in the tradition:

i) Cicero *Leg. I* 23

“Since nothing is better than reason, and this exists in both man and god, man’s first association with god is in reason. But those who have reason in common also have right reason in common. Since that is law, we men must also be reckoned to be associated with the gods in law. But further, those who have law in common have justice in common. But those who have these things in common must be held to belong to the same state (*civitas*).” (In Schofield 1991, pp. 67-68)

ii) Marcus Aurelius

“If mind is common to us, so also is reason, in virtue of which we are rational. If that is so, the reason which prescribes what is and is not to be done is also common. If that is so, law also is common; if that is so, we are citizens; if that is so, we partake in a kind of political system; if that is so, the universe is as it were a city. For what other common political system will anyone say the whole race of men partakes in? And if mind and our capacities for reason and law do not come from this common city, where do they come from.” (Schofield 1991, p.68 note)

(D) The fact that the Wise Man is always a dialectician suggests that the Truth he has attained retains a communitarian function. He is impelled, we presume, by virtue of his nature, to continue to engage in discourse. We can understand this as the compulsion to bring others to Truth – the Wise Man acts in this way as a ‘calibration’ between man and god.

(E) The *standard* of proof as not overturnable by reason raises some interesting questions.

If the distinction between the Truth and the true in some way *relativises* Truth, this requirement *communalises* it. Presumably when interlocutors arrive at a system of definition and theorems

which attains this level of security, they are both compelled to adopt it (presuming they begin and proceed in good faith). Such a compulsion would explain why it would have seemed so urgent to satisfactorily resolve paradoxes such as the Sorites.

(F) There is a possible interpretation of *koinai ennoiai* whereby they are understood as providing a 'conceptual label guarantee' for the purposes of demonstration. If 'common' is taken to mean 'shared by interlocutors' in this way, then this is a doctrine which presupposes intersubjectivity for its success. This consideration could be joined by a reflection on the significance of the deictic proposition in Stoic logic. The aspect of the proposition which envisages some kind of demonstrative reference clearly establishes a moment in which the causal perceptual processes of each interlocutor cannot but reliably fix on the referent. Given the theory of perception we have outlined, deictic propositions become 'mechanisms of conceptual fixing' by which not only particular conceptions can be fully reliably introduced, but also a means by which the processes of conceptualisation (and intersubjective assent) can be observed and understood.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have developed a way of viewing the evidence for the Stoics which accords with the suggestion made in the previous chapter that Stoic epistemology could have been a 'two-tier' model. I have interpreted the Stoic account of knowledge-acquisition as undergoing a development between the original formulation of Zeno to the re-interpretation by Chrysippus, during which moved it from being a mimetic to a symbolic theory. I have suggested a way in which Stoic terminology relating to impressions (*phantasma*, *phantaston*, *phantasthen*) could be

seen as related to Stoic terminology relating to psychological items (*ennoêma*, *ennoia*, *nooumena*) to produce an alternative account of the content of a rational impression. I have considered the distinction between the Truth and the True, and concluded that it seems to involve a relativisation of the truth. Finally, I have suggested that the Stoics diagnosed the problem of knowledge as lying in our use of language, and shown how this suggestion fits some of their concerns with ambiguity and etymology.

But taking a step back, there is a larger philosophical problem for this line of interpretation which remains unaddressed. It is all very well to present intersubjectivity as an epistemological strategy which we can detect by default, as it were, in a certain construal of the evidence combined with certain contextual factors. But how could a philosophy which proceeded along such lines be a properly *dogmatic* philosophy? Is it not the case that the Stoics, on this reading, leave the notion of objective truth behind as they adopt the concept of a personalised Truth, understood as a disposition of the *hêgemonikon*? It is this problem which will provide the focus of the final chapter of this thesis, in which I will use one aspect of a recent interpretation of Stoicism to show how objectivity can emerge *through*, and not in spite of, subjectivity.

CHAPTER SIX: INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND OBJECTIVITY

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Three, it was suggested that we could see the common philosophical problem of indeterminacy emerge from separate accounts of Stoicism. In Chapters Four and Five, we have looked at various attempts to characterise Stoic epistemology. We have suggested that a picture of ‘robust conceptualism’, based on a two-tier model of perception, is useful in thinking of Stoicism as engaged in developing an epistemology engaged with the problem of indeterminacy, since it locates determinacy in our conceptualisation of the world and explains this conceptualisation as a *transformation* of the world as received through the senses. In this chapter, I wish to pick up a problem of truth which arises from the discussion so far, which can be framed as follows: If we are locating Truth as a property of the psyche, and hence as having a personal dimension, how can this be reconciled with the pursuit of an objective account of reality? At least one other problem lies closely alongside this one: If we are suggesting that language-use is somehow directly tied to concepts, and that concepts are directly and indirectly derived from experience, how do we explain what the ‘transformative’ action of reason amounts to?

I wish to focus on these two questions during the discussion which follows. In doing so, I wish to tackle head on the issue of how to offer a philosophical account of intersubjectivity. The key relationship to get clear here is the one between

intersubjectivity and objectivity that I am suggesting might be relevant to Stoicism. This is necessary to answer the objection some might advance that intersubjectivity and objectivity are mutually exclusive epistemological strategies. To get something like a decent picture, we will also consider the relationship between the subject and intersubjectivity.

We should remember that these considerations will take place in a particular context. Because we have adopted the realist assumption, and the assumption that in general the problems of language tackled in Greek philosophy are the problems of falsehood, not of truth, we are in a position to narrow down the range of options. For example, given these presuppositions we could not agree that a picture that seemed to *compromise* objectivity would be acceptable. The real is as it is, and we do speak truly or falsely about it. But the problem of 'speaking truly' is that it implies some harmony between the statement and the world and the speaker. In Annas, we were offered a picture in which there were two competing accounts of Stoicism – the correspondence interpretation and the coherentist interpretation. The correspondence interpretation defines the primary criterion of truth (for the Stoics, the cognitive impression) in terms of the relationship between perception and perceived. The coherence interpretation defines the primary criterion of truth (for the Stoics, Right Reason, or some cognate) in terms of the relationship between perception and perceiver. This scheme is quite proper by its own lights, but we have suggested that it may not capture the whole story. Nor would it be the whole story to think of Stoicism in terms of a correspondence interpretation and a coherence interpretation *and everything in between*. This would give us more options – to produce some 'hybrid' characterisations, or a model combining aspects of each. But it

would still constrain us, by permitting us only to think about Stoicism using the models of correspondence and coherence. If we are considering rejecting these labels as a *scheme*, we need to suggest something to go in place. This is what I will now go on and try to do.

What the correspondence – coherentist opposition cannot describe is any notion that *levels of consciousness* are somehow significant. Now, the idea of ‘levels of consciousness’ being significant in a story about Stoic epistemology is not an obvious one, and I shall now proceed to attempt to make it clearer. To do so, I will use a recent account of the significance of the ‘subjective viewpoint’ in Stoic epistemology, taken from Engberg-Pederson (1990). Then I will identify a similar idea in the contemporary philosophical debate about objectivity with reference to Nagel (1986) – a similarity to which Engberg-Pederson himself makes reference. After I have gathered these materials, I will be in a position to show how a philosophy such as Stoicism could accept continuum-type indeterminacy yet not compromise on the realist claim that the true is true because of how the world is. I will conclude this chapter and this thesis with one or two remarks about how such an intersubjective viewpoint could function in the ‘community of the wise’.

ARISTOTELIAN HAPPINESS AND OIKEIOSIS

In this section, I will present a single idea contained in a recent monograph by Troels Engberg-Pederson. This idea is that we can take from Cicero the suggestion that

the Stoics had a notion of self-reflection (*parakolouthesis*) which was instrumental in explaining their ‘moral epistemology’. I will then take this idea and give it a more general application, and see how it fits some of the problems that have been raised in the preceding three chapters. Finally, I will consider what implications there might be for the notions of intersubjectivity and objectivity we are hoping to use in our interpretation of Stoicism.

The concept of *oikeiôsis* has been treated variously by scholars in recent years, as Engberg-Pederson informs us in his introduction¹. For an initial introduction to the significance of the term for the Stoics, we can turn to the commentary in LS vol. 1:

“‘Alienation’ and ‘appropriation’ are literal translations of the Greek terms *allotriôsis* and *oikeiôsis*. Their English associations with property ownership capture the main force of the Stoic concepts here, though any translation will miss something of the original... Chrysippus uses the concept of ‘appropriation’ to establish causal links between the creative organisation of nature, the first impulses of animals, and the empirical fact that animals have an innate capacity to behave discriminatingly towards their external environment.” (p. 351)

The text referred to in the second part of this excerpt from LS is D.L. 7.85:

“They [the Stoics] say that an animal has self-preservation as the object of its first impulse, since nature from the beginning appropriates it, as Chrysippus says in his *On ends* book 1. The first thing appropriate to

¹ “Fifty years ago Max Pohlenz placed *oikeiôsis* firmly on the map as the centre-piece of Stoic ethics, but he did not go very far in determining its exact sense (Pohlenz 1940). With the rejuvenation of the study of Hellenistic philosophy from around 1970 onwards, steps have been taken to make up for this deficiency (Long 1970-1, Pembroke 1971, Kerferd 1972, Graeser 1972, White 1979, again Long 1983).”

every animal, he says, is its own constitution and the consciousness (*syneidêsin*) of this.”

It is important to notice that the translation of *syneidêsin* as ‘consciousness’ does not presuppose rationality in this part of the account of Diogenes. The reason for this is that it is used here to refer to ‘every animal’, and so is not limited to rational animals.

Long and Sedley are keen to downplay the significance of the term:

“Stoics may have defined ‘appropriation’ as ‘perception of what is appropriate’... Why this should be thought to require *self*-consciousness, however rudimentary... may seem inadequately explained in their reasoning. But not too much weight need or should be attached to the term ‘consciousness’. It is an attempt, and an interesting one, to do justice to data which would now be explained by reference to natural selection and genetic coding.” (ibid., p. 351)

Engberg-Pederson explains his response to the text at this point in a note which also refers to some recent interpretative history:

“The note of ‘explicit’ consciousness in *syneidêsis* (in the transmitted text) is perhaps so strong (when speaking of animals and infants) that the emendation to *synaisthêsis* is to be preferred. Cf. Inwood (1985) p.313 n.42 and S.G. Pembroke, ‘Oikeiosis’, in Long (1971) pp. 119 and 142 n.25 with references. – The idea itself that an animal will be ‘oriented’ towards an *awareness* of itself, i.e. will see *this* as belonging to itself is distinctly peculiar... This is one point where Cicero’s account² is superior.” (p. 240, n.3)

² The Cicero text referred to here is *De Finibus III* 16.

We can see how the notion of *oikeiōsis* was used by the Stoics as a starting point in their ethics by considering the text of Diogenes cited above. We can also see how it was employed as a general explanation for certain facts in nature – that animals are instinctively attracted by what is good for them and repelled by what harms them. I do not intend to go into the details of the various controversies around this part of Stoicism in the argument below, but this brief introduction to the notion is essential to provide the context within which Engberg-Pederson introduces his idea of self-reflection in Stoicism.

THE SUBJECTIVE AND THE NORMATIVE

There are two connected parts of Engberg-Pederson's argument with which I am in full agreement. The first is that the idea of subjectivity can be seen to be actively 'in play' in the evidence for what the Stoics thought. The second is that it is not necessary for us to have a traditional, normative notion of nature providing an objective 'standard of value' in order to explain Stoic epistemology. That traditional view has it that to 'live in accordance with nature' is for the wise man to correctly perceive that which lies externally to him, and to adjust his cognitive and moral behaviour accordingly. Whereas the alternative view, which I will now go on to explain, has it that the correct perception required for wisdom, and advocated by the Stoics, crucially involves the wise man in understanding himself as a part of the system which generates value in the world. The connectedness of these two views will, I hope, become clearer as they unfold.

In a discussion about Aristotle's notion of happiness (as given in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1), Engberg-Pederson introduces the definitions he will use for subjectivity and objectivity. Specifically, the argument focusses on the middle of EN I vii where, as Engberg-Pederson describes it:

“[Aristotle] leaves the formal account of *eudaimonia*, which has engaged him up to that point, and introduces his idea that man too (like the flute-player, the sculptor and every craftsman) has a certain ‘function’. Aristotle’s line of thought here may be understood in a number of ways, but in the context of Stoic ethics it is the least refined sense that seems immediately relevant. Thus Aristotle may be taken to say, rather crudely, that human beings have been *designed* by nature in such a way that there is a special activity which is their proper function... we may conclude that Aristotle’s theory in EN I may be called teleological in two very different senses. In one way it is teleological in that it operates centrally with the formal notion of *eudaimonia* as the end of all acts (no matter which), in another it is teleological in that once it turns to consider the substantive content of the happy life, it builds (more or less crudely) on the idea of a determinate natural function of a human being.” (pp. 20-21)

This distinction between the different senses in which Aristotle’s theory may be called teleological is crucial for the next step of the argument, which asks:

“how should one explain (as it seems one must if one adopts Aristotle’s position) that there may in fact be those many views [on the substantive content of the happy life] contrasting with the single correct one: How are the many views *related* to the single one and to each other? And is it somehow possible to explain why each of them should at all arise? Aristotle himself was not genuinely interested in these questions. The substantive views of the many were just false..” (p. 21)

The argumentative strategy pursued by Engberg-Pederson becomes clear at this point. Firstly, he analyses Book 1 of the Nicomachean Ethics as containing two distinct senses of 'teleological' – the formal and the substantive. The quotation given on the previous page explains what these are. The formal notion of eudaimonia as the end of all acts, and the substantive notion of teleology as being the content of a happy life. Next, we are invited to consider that this distinction raises a series of philosophical questions about how these two senses are to be combined a single explanation, given that the answers to the substantive question may be many and various. It is suggested (reasonably) that Aristotle was not interested in these questions, since in his view there is a single way of life conducive to happiness, and the many are simply wrong. Having raised these questions, the argument proceeds to its definitions of subjectivity and objectivity:

“...if, while keeping [these] questions in mind, one were to adopt something like the Aristotelian position on the substantive view of the good, one might be tempted to rephrase the contrast between the many incorrect views of the good and the single correct one in such a way as to focus squarely on the question of their relationship. One possible, and by now traditional, way to do this... is to call the supposed single correct view an 'objective' one. Stated in modern terminology this will mean, first that there is a fact of the matter as to what is good for human beings as such (or 'by nature') no matter how it may appear to each individual, secondly that individuals may grasp what this fact is by, as it were, transcending their respective individual viewpoints, and thirdly that it should be possible to explain the existence of the many contrasting views by attending to the specific content of the individual experience

underlying them...Correspondingly,one may call the many contrasting views 'subjective', meaning thereby that they lack those three implications and instead reflect directly and unadornedly what seen from an objective perspective is *just* an individual perspective." (p. 22)

It is no part of Engberg-Pederson's case that Aristotle had any such distinction between subjective and objective in mind. It is his view, however, that such a distinction is useful in understanding the significance of Stoic ethical theory, and how it can be seen as a development of Aristotle's:

"The Stoics took over both Aristotle's formal determination of the end as the single end of all action and also his turn to human nature for discovering how to fill in the end. But... they did considerably more by fixing on the distinction between a subjective and an objective approach to the substantive question about happiness (though not in those very terms) and by constructing a theory in which the *interplay* of these two approaches is central – as it was not in Aristotle." (p.22)

So, an objective view has three characteristics, on the argument presented above. First, it means there is a fact of the matter, secondly that individuals may grasp this by transcending their individual viewpoints and thirdly many contrasting views can be explained by attending to the specific content of individual experiences and 'noting how each informs the specific correlated [objective] view'. In contrast, the subjective view lacks these characteristics, and is 'just' an individual perspective. This is the first idea I wish to take from the text of Engberg-Pederson quoted on p.291.

The second, and related, idea concerns the determination of value:

“Is it the case, in Stoicism, that nature (whether external to man or internal to him) *confers* value on certain states or types of behaviour in such a way that mere external observation of nature (and again external *or* internal nature) may tell a human being what is good for him and what, consequently, he should make his own goal in an act of “following” nature so as to submit to it? I shall argue for a negative answer. Rather, it is the other way round. Baldly stated: It is because human beings (and animals too) see certain things as valuable that these things are valuable.

“Such an idea may seem counter-intuitive in a number of respects. First, is the suggestion the modern one that human beings (whether as individuals or as groups) *produce* value with no objective grounding in the nature of things and so as to become the final arbiters of value? Certainly not. For even though statements about value reflect what human beings take to be valuable, it remains possible, on the Stoic view, that human beings may err in their value judgements. But then, what is it that provides the criterion of falsity here? Is that not a certain notion of ‘nature’ – and one that we should therefore understand as introducing a *normative* notion of nature? Again I shall argue for a negative answer. For on the Stoic theory it can be plausibly shown that what the Stoics themselves took to be objectively valuable for human beings is identical with what human beings in general *take* to be valuable – once allowance is made for the crucial *metabasis* that the whole theory of *oikeiosis* is about. And so it is both the case that individual value claims can be dismissed as false and also that the criterion for doing this is not to be found in a reference to nature which introduces considerations that lie outside human value claims in general.” (p.40)

There are a number of aspects of this argument that deserve further comment.

First, the idea that nature ‘confers’ value in such a way that it tells people what is good

for them by 'external observation'. This point of view would sit well with believing that impressions themselves had rational content, and were true or false. Thus if the wise man says 'Virtue is good' it is because Nature has set things up this way, and he has 'read' the structure of nature correctly. But the 'negative answer' argued for above would rather have it that it is because the wise man has a notion of goodness arising from his experience, and because he can perceive within himself the attraction towards virtue, that he is able to make the claim – and that others can understand it. It is *human* nature that reveals cosmic nature, we might say, as it is *human* reason that reveals cosmic reason. But does this not lead us to the position where we 'produce' value, and become its final arbiter? No, the argument goes, since it is possible for us to be wrong. But what makes it possible to declare something wrong? Here, I think, we reach the nub of what Engberg-Pederson is driving at – "the criterion for doing this is not to be found in a reference to nature which introduces considerations that lie outside human value claims in general." The idea being pursued here is that the notion of 'nature', in the Stoic sense, ought not to be automatically construed as normative in the sense that it can deliver constraints on thinking which can be used as a criterion of falsehood. As we shall see, the alternative suggestion is to understand human rationality attaining objectivity as the result of its growing awareness of *itself*, not of a certain appreciation of its environment.

When Engberg-Pederson speaks of the idea that nature *confers* value he is talking about the value of what is good, but I think the argument can be generalised. That is to say I want to suggest that a parallel argument to the one above can be constructed about the question of whether nature confers the value of what is true or false. In this parallel argument, the bald case would be made that it is because rational animals see certain

things as true, that they are true. This argument raises a parallel question to the one above: Is the claim being made that rational animals *produce* truth with no objective grounding in the nature of things? The reply to this question contains an enigmatic element, in the same way as there is an enigmatic element in the argument above: We reply that on the Stoic theory it can be plausibly shown that what the Stoics themselves took to be objectively true for human beings is identical with what human beings in general *take* to be true – once allowance is made for the crucial *metabasis* that the whole theory of *oikeiôsis* is about.

The enigmatic ‘crucial metabasis’ is the description of self-reflection that Engberg-Pederson develops from a reading of Cicero. I will make the suggestion below that the account of self-reflection offered is as relevant to for the consideration of truth as Engberg-Pederson takes it to be for goodness. But before I go on to look at this idea, there are a few comments that can be made about the wider interpretative significance of this angle of approach.

It is in one sense controversial in that it challenges some of the assumptions which often underly the debate about Stoicism. Usually, it is assumed that the perfection of the wise man will be to correctly perceive the world as it is externally to him, and adjust his perceptions accordingly. On this assumption, ‘Nature’ takes the role as guarantor of normative standards. Thus the project to try and ‘live in accordance with nature’ is characterised by the attempt to understand *which* standards are ‘normative’, and the live in accordance with them. On this usual assumption, the Stoics are empiricist *simpliciter*, using the information of the senses as a reliable guide to the world. Engberg-Pederson, as I understand him, is trying to recognise a different possibility. This possibility is that

the notion of *homology* – agreement with nature – is best understood as demanding an agreement *between* natures – the nature of man and the nature of the cosmos. For our purpose, we can extend this notion to include agreement between *arguers*. Dialectic, for the Stoics, is not just recreational – but is one of the ways in which we do in practise become conscious of a wider world. It is these accords, we can go on to argue, that will characterise wisdom. But in making this proposal, an entirely new ‘conceptual space’ opens up, because we are suggesting that the Stoics understood themselves as engaged in a theory to account for a three-fold relation: first, between the subject and the world; secondly between the subject and itself and thirdly between the subject and other subjects. I wish to develop this case one stage further

THE STOICS AND SELF-REFLECTION

The Cicero text that Engberg-Pederson uses as evidence for his claim that the Stoics had a theory of structured self-perception, is *De Finibus III.17, 20-21* (LS 59D 4-5):

“For man’s first attachment (*conciliatio: oikeiōsis*) is to the things in accordance with nature. But as soon as he acquires understanding (*intelligentia*) or rather, perhaps, the capacity to form concepts (*notio*), i.e. what the Stoics call *ennoia*, and sees the order (*ordo*) and so to speak harmony (*concordia*) of acts (*rerum agendarum*), he values this (viz. order and harmony) far more highly than all those earlier objects of his love, and he concludes by rational argument (*cognitione et ratione colligere*) that in

this (viz. in this order and harmony) lies that something which is praiseworthy and choiceworthy for its own sake – the good for man...”

Engberg-Pederson then subjects this text to a close reading, which involves him drawing out ‘three steps to self-reflection’. These three steps can be summarised as follows:

The first step (as someone ‘acquires understanding’) is to notice the order of those acts they undertook as an infant – i.e. those acts undertaken without understanding.

“...surely the most obviously orderly feature about [these acts] is that they all fall under the description of the agent’s trying to preserve himself. By seeing this, our individual will by a single stroke have imposed an order on a hitherto completely unstructured set of things.” (Engberg-Pederson (1990), p. 84)

The second step (as someone *values* this order and harmony) is to understand that the reflection which takes place in the first step is taking place in a particular context:

“That context may be described as the one of asking ‘the practical question’, What shall I do?... Note in addition that in its ancient formulation, and most clearly so in Stoicism...the practical question will... be specifically tied to the individual who is asking the question. So the question will be this, What is my telos? or What is the telos of (the whole of) my life?...So in the present passage we should take it that adult reflection on one’s earlier acts takes place within the context of asking the question of the telos of the whole of one’s life.” (p. 85)

The third step (as someone concludes by rational argument that in order and harmony lies the good for man) is to see oneself as a rational agent who is noticing these

things: “At the same time as one engages in reflection on one’s earlier acts and becomes aware of the context... in which one’s reflection is being conducted , one also becomes self-reflectively aware of *oneself as* being engaged in that kind of activity. This means that one becomes aware of oneself *as rational*, and aware also that the propriety of acts one is looking for is *rational justifiability*.” (p.87)

My suggestion concerns a generalisation of this viewpoint. I want to suggest that we can also construct a parallel case for this three-stage process to be applied to more general epistemological concerns. We can do this by substituting ‘assents’ for ‘acts’. Thus at the first level, we become aware of a certain order and harmony in our assents. But what would these assents be assents to, at this rudimentary level? A candidate would be assents to preconceptions, or propositions based upon them, since these arise ‘naturally... and undesignedly’. The second step in self-reflection arises when we become aware of the context in which the question ‘What is true?’ is being asked – viz. ‘What is true for me?’ And since this is ‘specifically tied to the individual who is asking the question’ the questions become ‘What is my Truth?’, ‘What is the Truth of the whole of my life?’. The third step of self-reflection is when we become ‘self-reflectively aware of ourselves as engaged in this activity’. The implication is that we see ourselves as rational, and understand the propriety of truths one is looking for as *rational justifiability*.

Such, then, is the idea put forward by Engberg-Pederson about how we can read a passage in Cicero in such a way that a picture of structured self-reflection appears as part of an account of how value emerges in the world picture of rational animals: “What the Ciceronian passage is doing, then, is trying to make plausible this crucial change of attitude...” (p.83). It is this change of attitude that he has earlier referred to as the

'crucial metabasis that the theory of *oikeiōsis* is all about'. What I am further suggesting is that we can adopt this change of attitude, or way of seeing, as a part of a general story about the Stoics and how they understood rational animals as coming to understand the truth about nature. If we do adopt Engberg-Pederson's model, what is the consequence? Well, it enables us to answer one of the problems of truth at the outset of this chapter. That problem, we recall, was about how to reconcile the 'personal' aspect of Truth (as a property of the psyche) with the claim to objective knowledge. According to the view put forward here, and as a result of a certain understanding of self-awareness, objective knowledge is gained *through* a subjective view of the world. It would be as well to shine another light on this matter, since it is central to my purpose. We can do this since this idea of objectivity arising from subjectivity is also the point at which, I believe, there is a philosophical convergence between Engberg-Pederson and certain of the ideas put forward by Nagel (1986). For Engberg-Pederson, the objectivity he is after (and which we defined earlier above) comes into play at the third stage of self-reflection. Let us consider what he says:

“...One was using one's reason at level 2 for answering a question pertaining to oneself. One continues to accept the argument as leading to an answer to that question. But one also comes to see that trying to answer that question by rational means, as one did, implies the acceptance of rational canons for answering such a question which have nothing to do with the fact that it is oneself, i.e. just this man rather than that, who asks the question.

So seeing the argument of level 2 from the self-reflective third level will have as its two consequences that one understands and accepts, first that one's reasoning will be just as valid when applied to somebody

else and, secondly, that the question to whom it applies is in a sense immaterial, since the point of engaging in reasoning of the level 2 type lies in discovering *the truth irrespective of where it has application.*" (p. 92)

Thus the third level of self-reflection, as described by Engberg-Pederson, gives us a way of explaining how objectivity can emerge from subjectivity – by making the subject self-aware in a certain way such that the *individuality* of their viewpoint diminishes. Before we turn to Nagel's text, we should acknowledge that Engberg-Pederson is aware of similarities between his position and that of Nagel. He writes in his introduction that the recent interpretation of Stoicism has been informed by a "growing interest...in some of the ideas that received their first clear articulation in Stoic philosophy":

"...As a representative of [this] one may think of Thomas Nagel's recent book *The View from Nowhere*...which focusses on an exploration of two viewpoints (the objective and the subjective), the interplay of which is central, on the account presented here, to Stoic ethics. (But I had reached my own understanding of the Stoics before reading Nagel's book.)" (p.10)

The conceptual connection between Engberg-Pederson and Nagel can be seen if we bear the above account of self-reflection with the following passage from *The View from Nowhere*:

"As things are, the objective self is only part if the point of view of an ordinary person, and its objectivity is developed to different degrees... The basic step which brings it to life is not complicated and does not require advanced scientific theories: it is simply the step of conceiving the

world as a place that includes the person I am within it, as just another of its contents – conceiving myself from the outside, in other words.” (p.63)

We are now in a position where we have gathered a number of materials. We have suggested that the Stoics were sensitive to the role of the ‘subject’ in their philosophy. We have seen how a passage from Cicero might be read to reveal the presence of some kind of systematic self-awareness which was significant for the Stoics in their moral theory. We have gone on to suggest that such a process might also be seen as appropriate when considering epistemological matters. The reason that epistemology and morality can be seen coming under the same process is that they are both concerned with the determination of value – for morality the value concerns what is good, for epistemology, the value concerns what is true. I will now attempt to describe further the philosophical picture that emerges if we take this idea of self-reflection seriously.

INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND SELF-REFLECTION

As a philosophical strategy, ‘conceiving myself from the outside’ (Nagel) is identical with ‘discovering the truth irrespective of where it has application’ (Engberg-Pederson). Of further interest to my argument is how Nagel pursues the point:

“Because a centreless view of the world is one on which different persons can converge, there is a close connection between objectivity and intersubjectivity...At the first stage the intersubjectivity is still entirely human, and the objectivity is correspondingly limited. The conception is

one that only other humans can share. But if the general human perspective is then placed in the same position as part of the world, the point of view from which this is done must be far more abstract, so it requires that we find within ourselves the capacity to view the world in some sense as very different creatures also might view it when abstracting from the specifics of their type of perspective. The pursuit of objectivity requires the cultivation of a rather austere universal objective self.” (p. 63)

The key thing about this passage is how it requires that the movement towards an objective viewpoint must arise from within each individual – ‘it requires that we find within ourselves the capacity to view the world’ in a certain way. This certain way requires that we leave behind a commitment to the individualistic part of our experience, and move towards a universal conception of the world. This move away from ourselves as individuals depends on us understanding ourselves as being rational. But it is not a rationality that is best explained ‘at the ground level’, in the way that Frede (1983) suggests, as being a description of the very impressions we receive. Rather, it is a rationality which emerges reflectively on the basis of the correct understanding of our relationship to the cosmos: an ongoing non-rational contact with the world, ‘transformed’ into a communicable, rational content by the processes of conceptualisation. This gives us the material to progress towards a perfection of our reason, but does not automatically confer that perfection.

Perhaps we can read a notion of the Stoic sage into Nagel’s comment that ‘The pursuit of objectivity requires the cultivation of a rather austere universal objective self.’ If we remember that the move towards objectivity on Nagel’s (and Engberg-Pederson’s) account requires that the subject becomes aware of himself *as rational*, then we see an

association between objectivity and rationality. The conclusion here is that the more we understand our nature as a rational nature – the more aware we become that this is our defining feature – the closer we come to an objective, universal viewpoint. Objectivity and rationality sit side by side, as it were, and the perfection of one is intermingled with the perfection of the other.

I hope I have done enough to show how it is possible to have a philosophy in which the subjective is theoretically central, yet which does not compromise a claim to an objective truth, although it is perhaps a non-traditional form of objectivity. It is achieved by understanding the role of *levels of consciousness* and by understanding that at ‘higher’ levels, the perspectives of the subject lose their individualistic quality and attain the status of objectivity in virtue of being the thoughts of something which defines itself in terms of rationality – and thus the thoughts of any rational being whatsoever. The further introduction of intersubjectivity draws attention to the possibility that a dialectic which takes place between subjects at the level of objective self-awareness, will have the potential to reflect a universal truth. And the extent to which subjects attain the level of objective self-awareness, they will be better capable of an accurate reflection of the universal truth. We might go on to suggest that the universal truth is essentially bound up with the community of arguers we have got. We can find just such a possibility suggested in Nagel:

“It turns out that the human mind is much larger than it needs to be merely to accommodate the perspective of an individual human perceiver and agent within the world. Not only can it form the conception of a more objective reality, but it can fill this out in a progression of objective steps that has already led far beyond the appearances. And it enables different

individuals, starting from divergent viewpoints, to converge on conceptions that can be universally shared.” (p .66)

Let us say that we can accept that an account involving levels of consciousness (in the sense of levels of self-reflection or self-awareness described by Engberg-Pederson and Nagel) can arrive at an account of objective truth *through* the subjective point of view. And let us say that we acknowledge this as a legitimate philosophical strategy. One question immediately arises: how does this account fit with the account of knowledge-acquisition we have pursued in the previous chapters?

The citation from Cicero that Engberg-Pederson bases his interpretation on, concerns the psychological developments that occur in the rational mind at the onset of reason – they are developments which are dependent on the presence of concepts. Similarly, in the account of Zeno’s fist simile, which we have earlier developed, the particular functioning of assent, the faculty of grasp and so the possession of secure knowledge are each dependent on rationality. What I would like to suggest is that the theory of ‘self-reflection’ suggested by Engberg-Pederson, can be seen as providing the *question* for Stoic epistemology, viz. “Given that we are self-consciously aware in this way, how do we arrive at secure knowledge?” And to this question, Zeno’s fist supplies the answer. And only once the question has been asked in this way, and the answer accepted (i.e. only between Stoics, as I am suggesting) can a genuinely intersubjective dialectic take place. In trying to explain this idea, I will bring in once again a thought I have left hanging throughout this enquiry – that somehow an intriguing form of

Protagorean relativism was a feature of the Hellenistic debate, and thus of Stoic philosophy.

We can first of all recall two interesting details which came to light in the argument of the preceding chapters. First, there is Striker (1974):

“The fact that [the word *kritêrion*] appears in two of the three passages cited in connection with the “Protagorean thesis” might perhaps indicate that it was first employed in the discussion of this thesis. In Epicurus and the Stoics, at any rate, it already appears to be so common as to stand in need of no further introduction.” (pp. 27-28)

Secondly, there is Long (1991):

“The term *phantasia* makes its main historical entry as a platonic term of art with reference to Protagorean subjectivism. Plato uses *phantasia* to pick out the different ‘appearance’ or ‘perception’ that one and the same entity may generate in a pair of observers. It is important to keep this original sense in mind when considering subsequent uses of the term.” (p.104)

Placing these two excerpts side by side in this way enables us to speculate that two of the terminological mainstays of the epistemological debate in Hellenistic philosophy, *kritêrion* and *phantasia*, arose from an older debate about the Protagorean thesis. To develop this idea, we can use Burnyeat’s distinction between two versions of the thesis:

“To illustrate the difference [between the versions]: the subjectivist version of the the Measure doctrine is in clear violation of the law of contradiction, since it allows one person’s judgment that something is so

and another person's judgment that it is not so both to be true together; whereas the relativist version can plead that there is no contradiction in something being so for one person and not so for another." (Burnyeat (1976), p. 46)

It is perhaps open to us to suggest that the doctrine of the cognitive impression leaves the Stoics with some form of the Protagorean thesis. If these impressions combine the properties of being necessarily authentic by virtue of their causal history (as Frede has it), or necessarily authentic because of how they relate logically to propositions (as Striker has it), and if Long is right that the term *phantasia* carries some sense in which what is presented is unique to the perceiver, then we seem to have a picture in Stoicism of a perceiver receiving something (in some way necessarily authentic and which can act as a reliable foundation for truth-claims) that is unique to that perspective. Thus, there is a sense in which the *elements* of Stoic epistemology incline us to think that as we receive cognitive impressions, we are receiving a picture of the world which is incontestably *true for us, in our viewpoint*.

But which version of the Protagorean doctrine are we suggesting might have been involved as the Stoics developed their epistemology – the subjectivist, or the relativist? I would argue that it has to be the relativist version, since the claim to *knowledge* does not depend solely on impressions. In any account of Stoicism, it depends crucially on the further and specifically rational notions of preconceptions, conceptions, assent and grasp. What I am suggesting is that the Stoic theory develops its notion of impressions from the debate about Protagorean relativism. So 'at the level of impressions', it is a relativistic theory. But the claim can be made that in their understanding of the 'levels of

consciousness' required for objectivity to be attained, they *subsumed* the relativist position into a model that utilises the individual (and veridical) properties of sensory perception to transcend towards a model of the perfect 'rather austere' objective persona of the sage. It is by understanding the epistemological *method* of the Stoics in this way that the self-reflection argument can be seen to complement the interpretation of Zeno's fist I have earlier presented.

The point can be made in the following way. The story about levels of consciousness is a story to explain *rationality at all* in humans – that is, it is because of the capacity of certain animals to understand the objectivity of their perspective that both permits and requires the positing of a universal reason. The story given in the simile of the fist, on the other hand, is a story to explain how this objectivity can be understood *in its perfection*. The suggestion, then, is that the Stoics used the notion of self-reflection (derived perhaps from the theory of *oikeiosis*) to explain how rational animals come to acquire their reason. Having done this, they used the model of the sage to explain how they might come to perfect it.

A final problem for this interpretation arises as we remember certain of the limits we placed on our argument in the previous chapters. We said that we could not permit an account of the subject which was (ontologically) transcendent – in the sense that it exists 'over and above' the subject of experience. Are we trying to have our cake and eat it by using Engberg-Pederson's notion of self-reflection? I would reply that for this objection to prove fatal, it would require that we accept that the notion of a subject taking a 'transcendent' step towards knowledge necessitates that the subject is 'transcendental' in some ontological, perhaps Kantian, sense. I do not believe, however, that this necessity

holds. In my account, it does necessarily involve the existence of other subjects, with their views of the world. In other words, that which Protagoras thought of as being a fatal objection to conventional accounts of the truth, became for the Stoics the starting point for something better. In dialectic, we can elaborate, argue, see how far a view can carry us. We can use transcendental arguments to the effect that there are different levels of knowledge without any particular commitment to an ontological thesis about the self. It is just this sense of 'transcendental' in respect to the arguments the Stoics used to defend common sense that we see in Schofield (1980):

"No doubt Chrysippus and Antipater wrote... from a growing interest in problems of justification. It was presumably they and other later Stoics who worked out the lines of argument which underlie the defence of the doctrine of apprehensive presentation attributed to Antiochus in Book Two of Cicero's *Academica*. Pride of place must go (as Cicero indicates, 18 *ad fin.*) to the series of transcendental arguments which launch the sequence: if there is no such thing as apprehensive presentation in Zeno's sense, then it would be impossible to perceive anything (18) or remember anything (22) or have technical understanding of anything (22) or discover anything (26) or give credence to a proof (27) or act with the consistency required of the sage (23-5). Notice how the readily the Stoics turned to their theory of the conditions of understanding (for all of these items in one way or another constitute such conditions) in order to support their account of what justifies an assertion about the real world." (p. 288)

I would similarly like to characterise my presentation of self-reflection as part of a transcendental strategy to explain justification. But as I have said, this need not commit the Stoics to the position that the 'self' is a transcendental entity. Rather, the story about

self-reflection is part of a theory of knowing which provides an *account* of how the *hêgemonikon* functions – and I submit this can still be the unitary, rational, corporeal *hêgemonikon* we are told of in the sources. To see this clearly, however, requires that we adopt a certain position towards what the Stoics were about in their philosophical explanations. The position I am recommending is well put by Engberg-Pederson:

“...there is in fact an argument proper embedded in the move from the subjective views... to the objective one, but one that can only be seen (and seen as at all plausible) once it has become clear that... both subjective and objective views...are...at a deeper level, purely descriptive. For they are views about human ‘identity’ in the sense of a human understanding of men’s own selves, of what they themselves are. Correspondingly the argument for the view of the good [to which I add the view of the true] that the Stoics intended to construct is an argument concerning a *factual* development in such self-understanding... For then the account of the move from the subjective views... to the objective one is not just an account of a development in *seeing* something which is the case *anyway*. Rather, it is about something which in itself and necessarily is a form of seeing, viz. understanding one’s own self in this or the other way.” (1990, pp. 34-35)

In something like this manner, I would say that the Stoics’ version of self-reflection is a *descriptive* account of the operation of human reason as it tends towards objectivity (and hence towards being ‘unoverturnable by argument’), rather than an account which posits some transcendental self which is somehow a precondition for objective knowing. We might characterise such a philosophical strategy as *transcendental means without transcendental ends*.

CONCLUSION

The intersubjectivity I wish to put forward in this context is of a special and limited kind. It is intended to point to the space of agreement in the dialectic of the wise. It is further intended to focus our attention on the conditions of such a dialectic. The true, as understood by the Stoics, is the incorporeal correlate of true statements. To remember Brunschwig, it can be argued that we become aware of incorporeals because of the mind's action on itself. True statements depend upon *nooumena*, preconceptions and conceptions – these are the psychological items that underlie our language-use. In order to 'be capable of saying everything true' the sage must have unperverted preconceptions (i.e. derived faithfully from nature), and rationally ordered conceptions. But, following Kerferd and Long, the Truth which is the perfect disposition of the commanding-faculty of the sage is not 'omniscience' but 'limited infallibility' (a suggestion bolstered by the Chrysippean recommendation of *hêzuchazein* – quietism – as the best response to Sorites arguments). Thus the link between 'items conceived' and 'the real' is direct and causal, since it is causal processes which dictate the relationship between them. But the process of reason which forms the preconceptions and conceptions that underlie language-use can be seen as *transformative* of what is received by impressions. Further, we can see a 'naturally true' language-use as threatened by a degenerate common language (seen in the problems of etymology) and a problem of access to the preconceptions and conceptions of one another (seen in the problems of ambiguity). But it is language which expresses the true.

Thus the dialectic of the wise will have a limited scope. It will be limited by their awareness of what they can say with certainty – that which is unoverturnable by

argument. But crucially, such a dialectic would also involve the interlocutors having also understood their own condition as knowers. This would involve them *understanding* that the things they claim arise from a causal relationship to external circumstances, which is transformed into a conceptualisation, which is itself subject to the laws of reason. These laws are themselves apparent once the individual has seen himself as dependent on justification. Thus the 'intersubjective space of agreement' is dependent on each of the interlocutors *seeing the same way*: that their impressions are causally derived, that their preconceptions are naturally formed and that their status as knowers depends on the embrace of universal reason and not the particularities of their individual perspective. To this extent, the dialectic of the wise results in an objective picture of the world - objective not in the sense that it conforms to something entirely external to each interlocutor, but rather in the sense in which it accurately reflects the objective Truth capable of being seen by each of the participants. Such a Truth, and each true statement that emerges from it, is arrived at by a combination of self-reflection, and a clear understanding of the causal history of the concepts employed.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

SUMMARY

In the first chapter of this thesis, we looked some of the thoughts of the pre-Socratics. In an experimental spirit, we compared them with known Stoic doctrines. We concluded that the Stoics produced a philosophy which in certain respects built on doctrines of those that had gone before them. This has the air of a truism, but it is nonetheless interesting to have asked the question: 'In what particular ways did the Stoics owe their ideas to their philosophical heritage?'. For example, we saw three ideas in Heraclitus which surface together in Stoicism: the commitment to a theory of the *logos* as a general, law-like level of explanation; the notion of an interplay between 'common knowledge' and the private understanding, and a privileging of fire as the fundamental element. These three ideas combined to determine the scope of the thesis – it became an enquiry into the relationship between 'rationality' (*logos*) and the fundamental element.

Chapter Two looked in more detail at some of the ideas of the Stoics concerning physics, and introduced the notion of the continuum in opposition to atomistic theories. In the fragments that survive, we can see evidence that the Stoics employed continuistic arguments against their atomist opponents both in devising solutions to mathematical riddles, and also in providing an explanation for the character of the 'passive principle' - the unified, infinitely divisible stuff that is 'formed' by an immanent *logos* – the 'active principle'.

The third chapter takes the notion of the continuum and considers its broader philosophical implications. It outlines two recent interpretations of parts of Stoicism – one to do with spatial magnitudes, the other to do with time. These interpretations are shown as being structurally similar to one another, in that they both involve the notion of ‘nested intervals’. Also in each case a certain arbitrariness is shown to enter important concepts: ‘surface’, in the case of spatial magnitudes and ‘the present’ in the case of time. Taken together, these interpretations permit the suggestion that Stoicism is a philosophical position which encounters *indeterminacy* as a result of its commitment to a continuistic explanation.

Chapter four begins with a consideration of some generic issues facing the interpretation of ancient epistemology. Using recent discussions, two principles are adopted: first, that Greek philosophy is fundamentally *realist*, and secondly that it is more concerned with the ‘problem of falsehood’ than the more modern concern with various ‘problems of truth’. It then moves on to consider recent attempts to characterise Stoic epistemology, and concludes that neither ‘coherence’ nor ‘correspondence’ functions well as a label. After considering the position of the Stoics with regard to the criterion of truth, the chapter goes on to consider whether the surviving evidence justifies the claim that, for the Stoics, impressions had ‘rational content’, and were considered as themselves ‘true or false’. Despite the evidence of a number of passages which can be taken to imply this, the suggestion is made that the position is inconclusive. Overall, the claim is made that the position of the Stoics is underdetermined with respect to the evidence. Because of this, runs the argument, there is some ‘interpretative space’ to suggest that perhaps Stoic epistemology was a ‘two-tier’ theory after all, with non-rational impressions being *transformed* into conceptual items by the processes of human reason.

Chapter five carries on with this idea, and attempts to understand certain items of the evidence as arising from it. The celebrated simile of the fist, attributed to Zeno by Cicero, is considered as representing a dynamic model of the relation between the rational *hêgemonikon* and the world. A modification of this idea by Chrysippus is shown to be compatible with the idea that he was more sensitive to linguistic matters – and Arcesilaus' criticisms. A recent theory about Stoic ontology is interwoven with the proposed two-tier system, and the claim is made that we can understand parts of the surviving evidence as a technical terminology, compatible with both ontological and epistemological interpretations. The distinction between the Truth and the true is considered, and understood as being indicative of an epistemology which in some respects *relativised* the Truth by explaining it as being a disposition of the *hêgemonikon*. Using evidence of Stoic interest in etymology and ambiguity, a suggestion is made about how the Stoics might have come to a diagnosis of the problem of falsehood, which involved them coping with the notion of a *relativised* Truth, by *communalising* it. Finally, the chapter undertakes a brief reconsideration of certain parts of the evidence and certain contextual factors with a view to making clearer the notion of *intersubjectivity*.

Chapter Six tackles a basic philosophical problem for the account so far offered of Stoicism: if we are talking of a philosophy which acknowledges indeterminacy and arbitrariness and in certain crucial ways relativises Truth, how can this be called a properly *dogmatic* philosophy – as Stoicism surely was. To counter this difficulty, an interpretation is presented which finds in Cicero evidence that the Stoics had a particular understanding of objectivity. According to this interpretation, objectivity arises from a process of structured self-reflection, which leads to the 'knower' perceiving order in themselves, and associating that order with *rational*

justifiability. With this idea in place, the chapter concludes with a definition of intersubjectivity – that it refers to the space of agreement in the dialectic of the wise.

CONCLUSION : THE STOICS ON NATURE AND TRUTH

On the understanding that it is in a certain measure speculative, the conclusion of this thesis is that the Stoics had two particular notions of nature. Of what we would call the ‘physical world’, they claimed that at its fundamental level it is continuistic. Examination of this continuistic notion led them to conclude that arising from it was an issue of *indeterminacy*. We have suggested that as a result of this indeterminacy, the Stoics developed a ‘robust conceptualism’ which locates the properties of individuation and the determination of value ‘within’ the knower. This connection between internal states and language is also strongly suggested by the appeal to such items as preconceptions in certain Stoic arguments. Of what we would call the ‘mental world’, they claimed that we properly understand the Truth when we can see that our conceptions are structured in *rational* ways – i.e. open to questions of justification. This dependence on justifiability leads us to see ourselves as rational beings, in causal contact with the world. The extent to which we turn from the particularities of our individual experience and turn towards the common view is the same extent to which we achieve objectivity. It is this objectivity which represents Truth for the Stoics, and can only be achieved once the rational animal can see its own rationality as part of the nature of the cosmos, and live accordingly.

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