

# God and Cosmos in Stoicism

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# Introduction: God and Cosmos in Stoicism

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Theology and cosmology are closely interrelated in Stoic philosophy. The present volume brings together in nine chapters papers offering an in-depth study of this connection and its consequences in practical ethics and religious cult and myth. I begin with some brief general remarks on these subjects and on the overall structure of the volume. Subsequently, a detailed description is offered of the contents of each of the individual chapters. To avoid repetition, the bibliographical references given in this introduction are all (with few exceptions) to the chapters in this volume.

The Stoics express the interrelation between god and cosmos through the idea that the current state of the cosmos, as well as its creation, and even its destruction, are fully rational in the sense of being intelligently organized. Its rationality derives from god's all pervading reason, which physically penetrates the cosmos through and through. In so doing, the Stoic god actively controls the behaviour of every existing body and is, therefore, responsible for everything it does and undergoes. In this respect, god is best described as the single active physical principle that governs the whole cosmos. He does so in exactly the same way living entities are governed by their soul and, especially, by its ruling part (*τὸ ἡγεμονικόν*). In consequence, the Stoics assumed that the cosmos itself was a living entity and that god was its soul. In fact, some sources even identify god with the cosmos itself insofar as the identity of a living entity is fixed primarily by its soul.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, given the control exerted by god over the whole cosmos and on everything there is in it, everything behaves coordinately and according to a single plan. For this reason, the Stoics identified fate, and ultimately god himself, with the single, overarching set of causal relations through which every body is connected to the cosmos as a whole and to other individual bodies in it. In this respect, their god is not only the cohesive, unifying power that holds together the whole cosmos and each of its individual bodies, but also the power through which these bodies may act upon one another through other, non-cohesive, kinds

<sup>1</sup> See notably Cicero, *ND* 29–30, commented on in Ch. 5 at pp. 121–4.

of causation. One further implication of everything's being planned is, of course, that the Stoic cosmos, unlike for example the Epicurean cosmos, is teleologically aimed at an end, even though the Stoics famously denied that ends could have in themselves a causal power.

God, however, is not the only principle (*ἀρχή*) in the cosmology of the Stoics. Their cosmos is the result of the action of god upon a certain passive principle, identified in some sources as the matter (*ὑλη*) that underlies the change undergone by the cosmos in its various phases. These two principles are irreducibly *two*. Thus, even though the Stoic cosmos is material in that its being involves matter as one of its physical constituents, the Stoics do not espouse materialist monism, the view that everything, including god, proceeds from, and is ultimately reducible to, matter as the sole basic constituent of reality. But, on the other hand, the Stoics are not strict dualists either. For they affirm that matter and god have in common crucial physical properties. Most notably, they both are bodies, and, hence, they both are entities that occupy space and are resistant to touch, which are two landmarks of corporeality.<sup>2</sup> The complexity of this ontological view leads to the metaphysical question of how the two principles are individuated. If both are bodies and, for this reason, corporeality cannot serve to distinguish them from each other, what is the basis of the distinction active/passive? Is it primitive (the two principles are individuated by the very fact that one is active and the other passive) or is one principle active and the other passive in virtue of other notions that the Stoics bring forward to establish the distinction?

In orthodox Stoicism, the single most distinctive feature of the cosmos is perhaps its cyclical nature and its infinite repetition. The present cosmos will totally burn up, but the substance left by this mighty conflagration will give rise to a new cosmogony. In orthodox Stoic philosophy, the cosmos that will be created in this way will be indiscernible from the present one. But it will itself burn up through a new conflagration and a new, identical, cosmos will rise, and so on *ad infinitum*. How the substance left by the conflagration gradually transforms itself into a new cosmos, and the exact mechanism by which the cosmos ends up being completely burnt up, were subjects of controversy within early Stoic philosophy. With the possible exception of Cleanthes, it was agreed by all parties that elemental reciprocal change—together with the transformation of the four elements into complex bodies by mixture (which are eventually dissolved back into the four elements)—was the key to understanding these two processes. In particular, the initial stages of the cosmogony were thought of as a change of fire into the other elements, and the last stages of the conflagration as a change of these other elements back into fire. The main controversy centred on the nature of this original and final fire: what kind of substance is it, what is its relation to ordinary fire, and what is exactly the process by which this fire is transformed into

<sup>2</sup> See DL 7. 135. (See also the power of acting and being acted upon in Plutarch, *CN* 1073E.) This issue is discussed in Chapters 2 and 4.

the other elements? There also was some dispute over the question of whether the cosmos is destroyed when it is consumed by it. According to Chrysippus, for instance, the conflagration is a positive phenomenon that does not really involve any substantial change. The initial and final fire of any cosmic cycle is nothing but god himself in a completely undifferentiated state.

The study of Stoic cosmo-theology requires paying close attention to its origins in earlier thinkers, as well as to its impact on, and sensitivity to, rival contemporary cosmological theories. Some parallels may be drawn between Stoic cosmologists and Heraclitus on fire, Anaximenes on elemental change, and the Pythagoreans on cosmic recurrence.<sup>3</sup> But the clearest antecedent of Stoic cosmology is no doubt Plato's *Timaeus*. The Stoics give the most prominent place in their cosmology to central notions in the cosmology of the *Timaeus*, notably, the concept of a benevolent cosmic demiurge, the idea that the cosmos is a living entity with soul and body, and the notion (more conspicuous in some interpretations of the *Timaeus* in the Old Academy and the Lyceum than in the *Timaeus* itself<sup>4</sup>) that cosmology is governed by two principles: one active and the other passive. At the same time, however, the Stoics adopt in their cosmo-theology a position diametrically opposed to Plato's regarding other equally fundamental issues in metaphysics such as paradigmaticism, divine transcendence, corporealism, and causation. This may lead us into thinking that Stoic cosmology is a conscious effort to adapt central notions of the cosmology of the *Timaeus* to a new, radically different, metaphysics. As for other influences on Stoicism, there is a notorious problem in the assumption that the early Stoics knew Aristotle's school treatises. Yet there are striking parallels between Stoic and Peripatetic cosmologies and one may wonder whether they reflect a strong mutual influence or are merely superficial similarities exaggerated by our sources. The final theme in the present volume is the practical consequences of Stoic cosmo-theology in the field of ethics and religion. Is our knowledge of cosmology required in order for us to lead a life that will give us happiness? If it is, how? And if not, why should we bother about cosmology? Similar questions may be raised in connection with religion. Given Stoic theology, should traditional religious myth and cult be adopted or rejected? Or is Stoic theology neutral with regard to religious belief and practice?

The volume is divided into three sections. Part I—'God, Providence, and Fate'—contains the first three chapters and covers three essential topics in Stoic theology: the active and demiurgical character of god, his corporeal nature and irreducibility to matter, and fate as the network of causes through which god acts upon the cosmos. Part II—'Elements, Cosmogony and Conflagration'—includes Chapters 4 to 6 and deals with these three special topics in Stoic

<sup>3</sup> See respectively DK 22 B 30–1, DK 13 A 5–7, and DK 58 B 34.

<sup>4</sup> For this interpretation of the *Timaeus*, see pp. 24, 49–51, and 52–3. However, the active–passive distinction is already present elsewhere in Plato: see *Theaetetus* 157A–B, *Sophist* 247D–E, and (in a cosmological context) *Philebus* 26B–27B.

cosmology and with how Stoic cosmology in general relates to contemporary Peripatetic cosmologies. Part III—‘The Ethics and Religion of Stoic Cosmo-Theology’—is composed of the final three chapters and closes the volume by addressing the problem mentioned above about the ethical and religious consequences of these Stoic theories.

## CHAPTER 1

The Stoic god is providential and benevolent in that he purposively acts on the cosmos and cares for it. This sharply differentiates Stoic theology from at least three other major ancient theologies: (a) that of Aristotle, according to which sole activity of the prime mover is self-intellection, (b) that of Epicurus and the Epicureans, who argue that god does not intervene in the cosmos—the cosmos cannot be accounted for by appeal to divine craftsmanship and teleology, and (c) that of Plato in the *Timaeus*, according to whom god is benevolent but transcendent in that he acts on the cosmos from outside.<sup>5</sup>

A central question concerning Stoic divine providence is its nature and scope. What kind of action is it? And which entities are affected by it? The latter issue is the main subject of Thomas Bénatouil’s ‘How Industrious can Zeus be?’ (Chapter 1). Sources hostile to the Stoics often report the *industriousness* of their god, i.e. his ceaseless activity upon absolutely everything there is in the cosmos. But is the Stoic god really industrious in this sense? Is not this feature of his an exaggeration resulting from biased critics whose ultimate purpose is to ridicule Stoic theology? In fact, five possible qualifications could be envisaged: (1) during the ordered phase of the cosmos, god is not always active insofar as his intervention is limited to cosmogony and zoogony; (2) at the end of the ordered phase, god is not active either, inasmuch as he does not act upon anything during the conflagration; (3) god’s agency is limited to the celestial region of the cosmos and only affects the earth in a secondary, indirect way, (4) god is not equally benevolent towards all individuals, some of whom are neglected by him, which implies that his action is not evenly distributed throughout the cosmos, and (5) there are petty affairs that are unworthy of god’s attention, a fact that would in itself justify a limitation of his cosmic activity.

According to Bénatouil, none of these qualifications is really envisaged by the Stoics themselves. As is proved by evidence independent from the sources hostile to Stoicism, god’s activity is not limited in any of these five senses. In the course of his argument, Bénatouil also provides a detailed analysis of what kind of action Stoic providence is. It is not merely (i) the action by which god creates the cosmos

<sup>5</sup> A fourth point of contrast is Gnosticism, with which, however, the Stoics were not in dialogue. See Mansfeld 1981 (for full bibliographical references, see the References of Ch. 5).

at the cosmogony, but also (ii) the continuous activity by which god brings about every single change that takes place in the cosmos once the cosmogony has been completed, and (iii) the sustaining or cohesive action by which god secures the endurance of every single entity that exists in the cosmos, but also of the cosmos itself as a whole before it is destroyed by the conflagration.<sup>6</sup> As Bénatouil observes, there is one source—Cicero, *ND* 3.92—that actually identifies providence with at least (i) and (ii) when it describes providence as ‘moulder and manipulator’ (*fictricem et moderatricem*).<sup>7</sup> A further activity that god performs in addition to (i)–(iii) is the production of the conflagration. According to the orthodox version of the doctrine, the conflagration is not due to something distinct and independent from god, but to god himself. It is, paradoxically, an inevitable by-product of his sustaining activity upon the cosmos.<sup>8</sup> I return to the theme of the conflagration—the main subject of Chapter 5—later on.

The analysis of providence in terms of (i)–(iii) brings out the specificity of the Stoic position within ancient providentialism and, notably, with respect to Plato’s providentialism in the *Timaeus*. The demiurge of the *Timaeus* is also a provident god, but his providence seems to be limited to the creation of the cosmos as a whole, i.e. of its general structure. In particular, Plato’s demiurge seems to leave to the soul of the cosmos the task of keeping the cosmos alive and changing.<sup>9</sup> In other words, in contrast with the Stoic god, the Platonic demiurge is not himself the agent of activities (ii) and (iii) mentioned above. In these two respects, Stoic providentialism is wider in range and more complex in nature than its Platonic counterpart. The principal difference between the Platonic demiurge and the Stoic god is perhaps the immanence of the latter: he exerts his providential activity from within the matter it moulds and manipulates. This is also brought out in some detail in Chapter 1, and I shall return to it below since it is also one of the main themes of Chapter 2, Jean-Baptiste Gourinat’s ‘The Stoics on Matter and Prime Matter’.

## CHAPTER 2

Given the immanence of the Stoic god in matter, the question arises of how god is to be distinguished from matter. The question is especially relevant if we look into the physical mechanism by which god is present in matter. According to our sources, he pervades matter by being mixed with it through and through in such a way as to be totally coextended with it. In consequence, god is present everywhere in this mixture.<sup>10</sup> But given the complete blending between god and

<sup>6</sup> See esp. pp. 27–8.

<sup>7</sup> Cited at pp. 26–7.

<sup>8</sup> See pp. 28–31.

<sup>9</sup> See Ch. 1 n. 4.

<sup>10</sup> See Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Mixtione* 225. 1–2 Todd and more generally 224. 32–225. 3, cited by Gourinat at p. 57. See also Ch. 5 (pp. 121 n. 6).



matter, how different can they be? As Gourinat points out, some critics of the Stoics argued that no substantive distinction of god and matter was really possible in this system and, in particular, that the Stoic god was bound to be material and to proceed from matter.<sup>11</sup> This reductive materialist view does not coincide with what the Stoics actually claim or with anything they are logically committed to. On their view, which is anti-materialist, both god and matter are bodies, but they form nevertheless an irreducible pair. In this vein, Gourinat provides in the first section of the chapter (48–58), a detailed analysis of why the Stoics reached this somewhat paradoxical position, which is neither a materialist monism nor, however, a strict dualism that totally distinguishes god from matter by setting them in two separate realms. For, as Calcidius rightly points out, in Stoicism ‘god is what matter is’ (*deum hoc esse quod silva sit*),<sup>12</sup> namely a body. The argument of Gourinat proceeds through a discussion of how this mixed conception reveals a reflection upon, but also a reaction to, other conceptions of the principles of the cosmos in earlier Greek philosophy, mainly Plato, the Old Academy, and Aristotle. In what follows, I focus on the former two.<sup>13</sup>

The idea that there are two cosmological principles and that these are god and matter seems to go back (a) to an interpretation of the *Timaeus* advanced by Theophrastus, and (b) to the Old Academy under Polemo according to a testimony of Antiochus.<sup>14</sup> But the *Stoic* version of this dualism, as defended by Zeno, differs greatly from its Academic version. In a close debate with David Sedley and Michael Frede on this topic,<sup>15</sup> Gourinat argues that there are two significant innovations of Zeno with respect to Polemo and the Old Academy: in the Stoic version, god is corporeal and his action upon matter is not guided by a model or paradigm. These two tenets of Zeno’s physics are closely linked to each other in that they are aspects of the Stoic rejection of Platonic paradigmaticism. The corporeality of god must be understood as a reaction to the Platonist belief in immaterial principles (principles cannot be immaterial if they are to possess causal efficacy). But the abandonment of an action-guiding model, Gourinat maintains, is a consequence of ‘Zeno’s most distinctive innovation’: the notion that god acts on matter from its interior and not from outside as an artisan in the production of artefacts.<sup>16</sup> The activity the Stoic god exerts upon the cosmos is in a way analogous to that performed by the semen upon the living entity that proceeds from it. Just as the growth and development of the living thing is predetermined by information contained in the semen, so too the cosmogony and development of the cosmos as a whole consists in a series of events whose sequence unfolds in an orderly fashion from ‘seminal reasons’

<sup>11</sup> The evidence is also cited below. <sup>12</sup> Cited by Gourinat at pp. 47 and 68.

<sup>13</sup> For the relation to Aristotle see pp. 49–50.

<sup>14</sup> Both cited by Gourinat. See also Diogenes Laertius 3. 69 and 3. 75 cited by Gourinat at p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Sedley 2002 and Frede 2005 in the References to Ch. 2. <sup>16</sup> See p. 50.

(σπερματικοὶ λόγοι) in which god is present.<sup>17</sup> This biological model departs sharply from the model of *Timaeus*, according to which the demiurge acts from without the matter that he uses to create the cosmos, in the same manner as an artisan relates to the artefact that he produces. By contrast, in the biological model, the natural objects created and sustained by god are acted upon inside out. To be sure, the idea of the cosmos as a living entity is already present in the *Timaeus* (notably at 30c6–9). But in the Stoic cosmos the changes that take place in it are themselves determined biologically rather than by an external demiurge. In sum, corporeality and immanence in matter are features of the Stoic god that have no clear trace in earlier Platonism. They are a reflective reaction to Platonism, and Stoic physics, rather than logic (or ontology), is where the main reasons lie for this reaction.

I leave for later the role of god in cosmogony, also studied by Gourinat, since it is a theme extensively studied in Chapter 4 (and so is the question of the nature of Stoic corporealism—in what sense both god and matter are *bodies*). Before I move on, let me simply mention how Gourinat explains why, contrary to what is alleged by one source hostile to Stoicism,<sup>18</sup> two central theses in Stoic physics—that (a) cosmic ‘breath’ (πνεῦμα) is the physical substrate through which god penetrates the cosmos (see Chapter 3 commented on below), and that (b) πνεῦμα in general is a composite of air and fire—do not jointly imply that the Stoic god is itself a composite of more basic material substances and, hence, a product of matter. In fact, contrary to the objection, these two theses entail at most that one of the forms adopted by god is composite. But the Stoic god is not reducible to any of the forms he adopts during the different phases of the cosmos. In particular, cosmic breath is an instrument or vehicle through which he acts upon the cosmos. As is explained later on in this volume (Chapter 4), it is ‘god or reason’s immediate vehicle for controlling the world’s constitution and behavior’.<sup>19</sup> In consequence, we cannot conclude that god is a composite entity—which is false in Stoic theory—merely from the fact that πνεῦμα is itself composite.<sup>20</sup>

## CHAPTER 3

As the chain of causes present throughout the cosmos, fate is the instrument by which the Stoic god exerts its providential activity. In fact, the Stoic god is often *identified* with fate understood as the chain of causes.<sup>21</sup> How is this chain of causes to be understood? Chapter 3, by Susan Sauvé Meyer, is devoted to

<sup>17</sup> See the evidence cited at pp. 54 and 60. See also pp. 64–5 and Ch. 4 n. 19.

<sup>18</sup> See Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Mixtione* 225. 11–12 Todd cited by Gourinat.

<sup>19</sup> See p. 103. <sup>20</sup> See the evidence cited at pp. 62–6.

<sup>21</sup> See the discussion in Ch. 3, sect. 4, and mentioned below.

this question. As she observes, the metaphor of a chain of causes is often used nowadays by causal theorists. But she rightly argues that the *Stoic* usage of this metaphor differs greatly from the modern one. In modern theory, a chain of causes is a sequence of events ordered in temporal succession, each of whose members is the cause of its successor and the effect of its predecessor. This conception evinces two assumptions about causation: first, that it is a relation in which causes and effects are not simultaneous (and as such they cannot influence each other reciprocally), and, secondly, that it is a relation holding between events. Neither of these assumptions is present in the Stoic notion of cause. On the contrary: Stoic causes are typically simultaneous with their effects (even the so-called ‘antecedent’ causes are),<sup>22</sup> and causation is not a relation between events, but between bodies. In Stoic theory, causal relations are best construed as the production by a body A of a certain effect on a body B. To take a classic example: the scalpel is cause to the flesh of the effect *being cut*.<sup>23</sup> This conception of cause, so fundamentally different from ours, is reflected in what the Stoics mean by the chain of causes in terms of which they define fate. As Meyer observes, it is a complex system of reciprocal influence between all the bodies that exist in the cosmos.<sup>24</sup>

What is the nature of this influence? For the reasons mentioned above, the influence is certainly not causal in a modern sense. In other words, the Stoic metaphor of the chain of causes as pervading the cosmos does not mean that there is single temporally ordered sequence of events such that every body in the cosmos is involved in some of these events. The Stoic idea of fate as a chain of causes does not *preclude* the existence of this sequence. In fact, as is pointed out in Chapters 2 and 4, Stoic cosmogony is, under some description, a sequence of this sort: each body in the cosmos is caused to exist by the activity of another, more basic, body until we reach the four elements and ultimately god himself who creates the four elements out of himself by acting upon some absolutely basic matter. (In this view, the *activity* of god is an event that causes the *coming into bodies* of other bodies, which is also an event, caused by the former.) But this, Meyer contends, certainly does not capture the essence of the chain of causes envisaged by the Stoics when they define fate. Its essence lies rather in the idea of cohesion between all bodies into a unified network of reciprocal influence.

One key to understanding the meaning of this system is the concept of cosmic breath or *πνεῦμα*, also referred to in Chapter 2: the physical substrate that pervades the cosmos through and through and that holds it together.<sup>25</sup> According to Meyer, the link between the causes of the chain in the doctrine of fate as a chain of causes is precisely this cohesive cosmic breath. Given this physical connection between all bodies and between each body and the cosmos as a whole, the affections experienced by one body may be transmitted, either directly

<sup>22</sup> See the evidence cited by Meyer at pp. 85–9, which I comment on below.

<sup>23</sup> Cited at p. 74.

<sup>24</sup> See pp. 78–80.

<sup>25</sup> See pp. 74 and 79–81.

or indirectly, to all the other bodies and to the cosmos as a whole. This takes us to the Stoic doctrine of cosmic sympathy (*συμπάθεια*). As Meyer indicates, there is a strong connection between this doctrine and the Stoic idea of fate as a chain of causes: given the idea that all the bodies in the cosmos are connected to each other and to the whole by a physical substrate—this is an essential part of what it is for them to be part of a chain of causes—each body may in principle affect all the other bodies and the whole. And this being jointly affected is exactly what cosmic sympathy is. According to the doctrine (attested for Chrysippus and nearly all the major Stoics),<sup>26</sup> the cosmos as a whole possesses the same kind of unity as living organisms. It is one in which, given the interaction between the whole and its parts, the affections of the parts may be transmitted to other parts or to the whole. To give an example from Sextus Empiricus cited by Meyer at p. 82, and which I believe is central to the theory: ‘in the case of unified things there is a kind of sympathy (*συμπάθειά τις*); for example, when the finger is cut, the whole body shares its condition. So the universe is a unified body.’ It is not clear from our sources whether in Stoic theory any body is always directly influenced by every other body through sympathy. But, as Meyer rightly points out,<sup>27</sup> the organic conception of the cosmos does not require that it should be. Some parts of an organism may be related to other parts only indirectly. What is important is that the whole be unified by a substrate that allows interactions between its different parts. More importantly, the idea of an indirect influence is built in the very notion of the chain of causes as construed by the Stoics. Just as in a necklace every bead is connected to all the others through a string, but none of them acts directly upon all the others (for none of them touches all others), so too in the Stoic cosmic chain of causes every body is connected to all the others by breath without, however, acting upon all of them directly.

Meyer’s argument involves an important reinterpretation of some central texts on Stoic cosmology. Before I turn to the next chapter, I should like briefly to refer to one especially striking claim in her account. If the chain of causes envisaged by the Stoics is a relation between bodies that act upon each other, ancient descriptions of this chain in terms of the idea that all things are brought about by ‘prior’ things, and bring about other things that ‘follow’ them, cannot mean a sequence of temporally ordered items in which each brings about its successor and is brought about by its predecessor. One case in point is the report given by Alexander of Aphrodisias in *De Fato* 192. 2–8 (cited by Meyer at p. 86). The notions of priority and posteriority used here correspond to the notion of antecedent causation attested elsewhere for the Stoics. But Stoic antecedent causation, she argues, is not essentially a relation of temporal succession. Something’s being antecedently caused means rather that its cause is part of fate understood as the whole set of mutual influence between bodies. As Meyer puts it: ‘[t]o claim that something has an antecedent cause is to affirm

<sup>26</sup> See pp. 80–5.

<sup>27</sup> Cited at pp. 87–8.

that its cause is part of the causal nexus'.<sup>28</sup> Evidence for this, she argues, is to be found in the account of antecedent causation in Chrysippus' cylinder analogy reported by Cicero at *De Fato* 41–4.

## CHAPTER 4

Chapters 1–3 were concerned with the general relation between god and the cosmos. In contrast, Chapters 4–6 focus on particular aspects of the Stoic cosmos: the doctrine of the four physical elements (4–6), cosmogony (4) and conflagration (5). As will be seen, Chapter 6 also deals with important parallels between Stoic and Peripatetic cosmologies.

The main purpose of Chapter 4, John Cooper's 'Chrysippus on Physical Elements', is to advance a new interpretation of what is perhaps our main source for Chrysippus' theory of physical elements (fire, air, water, and earth): a passage from Stobaeus' fifth-century AD anthology, *Eclogae Physicae et Ethicae*, at 1. 129–30 Wachsmuth. This chapter also sheds light on (a) the nature of the corporealism of the Stoics in connection with their theory of principles—what it is for both god and matter to be *bodies*—and (b) Chrysippus' conception of cosmogony as distinct from that of Zeno and that of Cleanthes.

In contrast with earlier commentators, notably Long and Sedley, Cooper argues that three usages distinguished by Chrysippus of the term element (*στοιχείον*) are divided into (a) one according to which the four elements of the actual cosmos are all elements on a par with one another, (b) one in which the term applies to a certain fiery substance—a 'proto-fire' in Cooper's terminology—out of which the four elements, including ordinary fire, are generated during the cosmogony, and (c) one in which the term denotes a certain substance out of which the proto-fire alluded to in (a) is itself generated. This absolutely originary substance is composed of god and qualityless prime matter, which are bodies. But, unlike proto-fire (and any other material substance), it possesses no qualification other than those that are intrinsic to any body, namely, three-dimensional extension and resistance to touch (which are qualifications that god and matter themselves possess qua bodies), and also the property of being an interblending of god and matter. Notice that neither god nor qualityless prime matter should be identified with this originary substance. They are just the two bodies that compose it by mixture.

Evidence for this originary substance comes in Diogenes Laertius 7. 136 and 137, where it is said that 'at the beginning' (*κατ' ἀρχάς*) god was 'by himself' (*καθ' αὐτόν*), 'having consumed all substance into himself' (*ἀναλίσκων εἰς ἑαυτὸν τὴν ἅπασαν οὐσίαν*). This refers to a pre-cosmic stage that comes immediately after the extinction of the fire of the conflagration

<sup>28</sup> Cited at p. 87.

of the previous cosmos. At this time, god has consumed all substance into himself, not in the sense that he has absorbed *prime matter* into himself and is now the only body in existence, but in the sense that, the conflagration having been completed, god has consumed all the *qualified* substances there existed in the previous cosmos. And he is ‘by himself’ because, even though he remains active in the sense that he keeps thinking to himself all there is to think about the design of the new cosmos, his activity is not yet directed at actually producing the new qualified substances required by the new cosmogony. As Cooper explains: ‘although he or it in his active nature retains and keeps on thinking to himself all the thoughts that in the actual world get put into effect in introducing all the qualifications of matter that constitute all the different sorts of substance that there actually are, he is not then using those thoughts to *act* in any differential way upon particular expanses of matter so as to endow substances with their particular characters; he is therefore not then affecting matter with any of those qualifications’.<sup>29</sup> The absolutely originary substance is nothing but god pervading prime matter at this pre-cosmic stage. In Cooper’s interpretation, the only qualification or character of this originary substance—in addition to three-dimensionality, resistance, and being a blend of god and matter—is one that god imposes on prime matter as a whole in virtue of pervading it at this non-productive stage. According to Chrysippus (*ap. Philo Judaeus, Aet.* 90), this character is a flash (*ἀύγη*), which is the flash of light left by the flame of the conflagration once it has been extinguished and the conflagration is *over* (as is implied by the aorist—*ἐκπυρωθέντα*—used by Philo). In consequence, this originary pre-cosmic substance is not to be identified with the fire of the conflagration. This, as Cooper explains, is an innovation in Stoic cosmology. For the originary substance had been problematically identified by Zeno with some form of fire, namely ‘designing fire’ or *πῦρ τεχνικόν*, and in particular with the fire of the conflagration by Cleanthes, namely flame or *φλόξ*.<sup>30</sup>

The first stage of the cosmogony occurs when the originary substance transforms itself into a fiery substance, which, in turn, transforms itself into an airy substance (proto-air) and, then, into a watery substance (proto-water).<sup>31</sup> The second stage of the cosmogony takes place when the four actual elements are generated from proto-water and then combined with each other by mixture to produce the other natural substances. Cooper’s reconstruction of the cosmogony differs in many respects from the one offered by Gourinat in Chapter 2.<sup>32</sup> But as Gourinat points out in the close discussion he offers of Cooper there is overall agreement. I believe that an issue that deserves further reflection is whether Stoic *zoogony* really occurs by a mixture of the elements, as is suggested in one source, of some other, radically different process, as some other source—not

<sup>29</sup> See pp. 102–3.

<sup>30</sup> See the evidence cited at p. 102 n. 20.

<sup>31</sup> See the evidence discussed at pp. 101–5.

<sup>32</sup> See Ch. 2, pp. 57, 60 nn. 68 and 69, 61–2, and 66 n. 88.

mentioned by Cooper and Gourinat—seems to imply (Galen, *Caus. Cont.* 1. 1–2. 4 = LS 55F).

## CHAPTER 5

Just as there is no uniform agreement within orthodox Stoicism about cosmogony, there is no uniform agreement either on the question of the conflagration. Some major Stoics suspended judgement about whether there will be a conflagration at all. But even among those who accepted that there will be one, there was no agreement as to its nature. In particular, Cleanthes and Chrysippus held different opinions on whether the conflagration entails a destruction of the cosmos. Both believed that it will be followed by a reconstitution of the cosmos. But is this reconstitution a reconstitution from a state of destruction caused by the conflagration? Cleanthes claimed that it is, and Chrysippus took issue with him on this question, as I try to establish in my own contribution to this volume, ‘Chrysippus on Conflagration and the Indestructibility of the Cosmos’.

This disagreement is not purely verbal. It is rooted in two different elemental theories. According to Chrysippus, fire is the thinnest of the four elements, the other three being transformed into it by rarefaction. On this view, earth, water, and air are nothing but condensed or compressed fire. Thus, air, water, and earth are not destroyed by the flame of the conflagration. They are merely transformed into what each of them really is: fire. The only change is one in density and this is a simple qualitative change. No substance is destroyed. In Cleanthes, by contrast, the four elements are presented as different substances acting upon each other. He recognizes that fire is more basic than the other three, but only in the sense that it acts on them as matter in order to give them cohesion. In this view, air, water and earth are not conceived as substances that are *made of* fire as in Chrysippus.<sup>33</sup> Cleanthes’ model is not necessarily incompatible with his. Think of the cohesive action of fire upon water. From a Chrysippean perspective, this is the action of a mass of uncompressed fire acting upon a mass of compressed fire. But none of this is suggested in the sources we have for Cleanthes or Chrysippus, who probably did not appreciate the compatibility between the two models.

As far as I can see, my interpretation of the conflagration is compatible with Cooper’s interpretation of the cosmogony. In Cooper’s reconstruction, the originary substance from which proto-fire is generated is a flash of light, an *ἀύγη*, subsequent to the extinction of the flame of the conflagration. In my interpretation, the flame of the conflagration does not last forever. Once complex substances are broken down into the elements, and these are totally transformed into flame by rarefaction, this flame is extinguished because there is nothing

<sup>33</sup> See the evidence examined at p. 129.

left for it to consume. In Chapter 5, I do not deal with what happens next. But the process I describe is compatible with Cooper's hypothesis that once the conflagration process is over, all that is left is an *ἀβύη* consisting in god's pervading prime matter and refraining from any substance-producing activity.

## CHAPTER 6

There are substantive parallels between the cosmology of the Stoics and that of rival schools such as the Academy and the Lyceum. In Chapter 6, 'Stoic Themes in Peripatetic Physics?', Inna Kupreeva enquires into whether these parallels are only superficial or may reveal genuinely shared positions. They emerge most in certain authors. Kupreeva focuses primarily on four particular cases: (a) the Academic Antiochus of Ascalon (c.130–68 BC) reported by Cicero in *Academica* 1. 6. 24–7. 29, (b) the Peripatetic Critolaus (c.200–118 BC), head of the Lyceum and a contemporary of Diogenes of Babylon—pupil of Chrysippus, (c) the Stoicizing Peripatetic Xenarchus of Seleucia (late first century BC), and finally (d) Alexander of Aphrodisias (late second century AD), head of the Peripatetic School in Athens, in his discussion of the physical elements, god and soul. Given that Antiochus is also extensively discussed in Chapter 2, I focus here on the other cases.

Do Critolaus' cosmological fragments (especially frs. 12, 13, 15–18 Wehrli) reveal a clear Stoic influence? Although some ideas in them are indeed quite distant from Aristotle's own cosmology and bear some resemblance to Stoic theses, they may be accounted for as developments *within* the Peripatos. The ideas in question, as Kupreeva explains, are the postulation of two principles, the existence of providence and the ethereal constitution of the soul. Consider the latter example. The idea that the soul is made of this celestial substance is present in the *Academica* passage (as she clearly brings out on pp. 136–42, devoted to Cicero) and attested for Critolaus in two sources (frs. 17–18 Wehrli). Even though this has been interpreted as a Stoicizing attitude,<sup>34</sup> there is evidence in the Aristotelian corpus for a divine element in us, which, as Kupreeva explains, is an idea that may bear some close affinity with that of an ethereal soul.<sup>35</sup> The question of the influence of Stoic physics and cosmology in the Peripatos may also be raised in connection with Xenarchus' criticisms of the fifth substance and of Aristotle's argument against extracosmic void. If his criticism was indeed largely influenced by Stoicism, as is claimed by scholars such as Moraux,<sup>36</sup> Xenarchus is not on his own evidence that Stoics and *Aristotelians* agreed on certain cosmological question. But as Kupreeva demonstrates there is strong evidence that Xenarchus' criticisms are the result of an inner evolution of Peripatetic thought, begun

<sup>34</sup> See Mansfeld 1992: 139–40 cited by Kupreeva (Ch. 6 n. 44).

<sup>35</sup> See pp. 149–50.

<sup>36</sup> See Moraux 1973: 203–4 (cf. Sharples 2002: 16–17) both cited by Kupreeva.



under Theophrastus and Strato, consisting in the critical analysis of Aristotle's treatises.<sup>37</sup> Analogous conclusions may be drawn in connection with the concept of prime matter as something formless and qualityless in Boethus of Sidon and Nicolas of Damascus.<sup>38</sup> In conclusion, some of the parallels between Stoic and Peripatetic cosmology reveal a genuine agreement between the two schools on central questions. More importantly, this agreement is ultimately explicable by a movement away from Aristotle begun in the earliest post-Aristotle Peripatos. But the critical attitude of these Peripatetics towards Aristotle's original system does not seem to amount to—and is not perceived by them as being—a Stoicizing rejection of the system. As Kupreeva herself explains: '[t]he critical tendencies within the school . . . do not necessarily amount to the rejection of the system, despite the fact that the system projected on the basis of criticisms, may be significantly (for some, perhaps irreconcilably) different from the criticized original'.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, a similar conclusion, Kupreeva contends, may be drawn in connection with Alexander of Aphrodisias. Her argument focuses upon his use of Stoic method and concepts in his discussion of the four elements in his treatise *De Anima* (and similar texts such as *Quaestio* 2. 3 and the last section of *De Intellectu* at *Mantissa* 112. 11–16 Bruns) and fr. 2 Vitelli reporting Alexander's criticism of a contemporary Stoic, Heraclides, in connection with the fifth element, and the nature of god and soul.<sup>40</sup> Both sets of texts seem to evince 'a common intellectual background with the Stoa', and one that goes much beyond the mere use of Stoic terminology and Stoic key concepts.<sup>41</sup> But if we look carefully at the place and function of this common background within each system, some deep differences emerge evincing that the two systems are in fact very different and stem from different origins. To conclude, Kupreeva's response to her original problem—to what extent these parallels may amount to a genuinely shared position' (p. 135)—seems to be largely negative.

## CHAPTERS 7 AND 8

The relation between cosmological and theological theory and practical ethics is the subject of the next two chapters (7 and 8): Marcelo Boeri's 'Does Cosmic Nature Matter?' and Brad Inwood's 'Why Physics?' The subject has been much debated in modern Stoic studies. As Boeri explains, some scholars and philosophers argue that in Stoicism cosmological knowledge is indeed required for leading our lives. This orthodox view has been called into question. The latest advocate of the alternative view is Julia Annas in her recent paper 'Ethics

<sup>37</sup> See the evidence on pp. 151–6.

<sup>38</sup> See the argument on pp. 156–9.

<sup>39</sup> See p. 165. <sup>40</sup> See respectively pp. 165–6.

<sup>41</sup> For this conclusion see pp. 135 and 165.

in Stoic Philosophy' (Annas 2007). According to Boeri, this heterodox view cannot be right given the overwhelming amount of textual evidence against it. Accordingly, a thorough discussion of Annas's views in this paper is provided at pp. 184–6.<sup>42</sup> But some radical versions of the orthodox view cannot be right either. For example, the thesis that for the Stoics ethics is somehow subordinate to cosmology, a thesis defended by A. A. Long,<sup>43</sup> needs qualification. In fact, Boeri argues that the right method for defining the position of the Stoics on this question is through an analysis of their conception of philosophy as a whole and of ethics and cosmology (or physics) as two of its parts. None of its parts is preferred over the other (*προκεκρίσθαι*), and in consequence none of them is in any sense superior to the others. But precisely because of this, Boeri explains, our knowledge of any of them must have an impact on, and be required for, our knowledge of the others. Another contribution of Boeri is his argument to the effect that some of the views upheld by late Stoics such as Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius on the close relation between each of us as individual persons and the cosmos as a whole,<sup>44</sup> are already detectable in sources referring to early Stoicism and, notably, in the key passage from Diogenes Laertius 7. 86–9.<sup>45</sup>

It is easy to see how *theoretical* ethics may depend on such knowledge. To give an example, Stoic virtues have a physical basis: they necessarily involve a state of the soul consisting in its undergoing a certain appropriate degree of physical tension (*εὐτονία*).<sup>46</sup> In consequence, a theory of virtue will have to include at least this particular truth of physics. (In fact, even the knowledge of physics is in itself a virtue because it involves a certain tension in the person who possesses it, similar to the tension characteristic of moral virtues.<sup>47</sup>) But it is not immediately clear how *practical* ethics may depend on physical-cosmological knowledge. Considerable space is given by Boeri to this issue. In fact, in section 4 of his chapter he studies how certain particular tenets of Stoic practical ethics may relate to our knowledge of cosmic nature. One case in point is found at Cicero, *De Finibus* 3. 73.<sup>48</sup> As Boeri explains, 'Cato [Cicero's Stoic spokesman] underlines that no one can judge truly (*vere iudicare*) about good and evil unless one has known the whole plan or purpose (*ratio*) of nature, and also the life of the gods, as well as whether human nature is or is not in agreement with that of the universe'.<sup>49</sup> Thus, although cosmological knowledge might not be sufficient for making true value judgements, it is nevertheless a necessary condition for doing so. But why? The reason is that full cosmological knowledge involves knowledge of god's overall plan and, therefore, knowledge of whether some particular state and event that we come across in a given situation contributes to this plan (in which case, it is good), is against it (in which case, it is bad), or

<sup>42</sup> See also pp. 181–2 and 189–90.

<sup>43</sup> Cited by Boeri at p. 176.

<sup>44</sup> See the evidence cited in sect. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in full by Boeri at pp. 176–7.

<sup>46</sup> See the evidence cited at pp. 189–90.

<sup>47</sup> See the argument developed at pp. 189–90.

<sup>48</sup> Examined at pp. 203–5.

<sup>49</sup> See at pp. 190–1.

is indifferent to bringing it about (in which case, it is neither good nor bad but indifferent). This is one possible reading of Chrysippus' famous foot-example (*ap. Epictetus, Diss. 2. 6. 9–10*).<sup>50</sup> The metaphysical basis of this conception is that our rationality—our means to achieve this knowledge—is part of, and the same in nature as, the physical principle that unifies everything there is into a coherent whole and, thus, gives rational cohesion to the cosmos as a whole. This chapter ends with a passage from Marcus Aurelius 7. 9 that clearly illustrates this idea and which I quote in full: 'All things are reciprocally interwoven . . . , everything is coordinated and confers order to the same cosmos. For the cosmos is a unity made up of all things, and god is one, pervading all things. And there is only one reality and only one law, i.e. universal reason of all the living beings that are intelligent, and there is only one truth, since perfection of the living beings that are alike in kind and that participate in the same reason is one, too' (tr. Boeri).

In Chapter 8 Inwood focuses on Seneca and attributes to him a set of positions that is similar to the one attributed by Boeri to the Stoics in general. As Inwood explains, Seneca offers in different places different reasons for studying physics. One reason, conspicuous in *Ep. 89–90* for example, is that all the disciplines constitutive of philosophy such as physics and ethics are indeed valuable subjects of study, even though they are most valuable not in isolation, but as parts of philosophy as an integrated body of knowledge, which is itself intrinsically valuable. Thus, a perfectly good reason for studying physics is that it is a necessary condition for studying philosophy as a whole (even if this latter study can never be completed in our lifetime). Another reason, provided in *De Providentia*, focuses on the relation between physics and ethics in particular. Although the answer to very specific ethical questions (e.g. why do bad things happen to good men if the world is governed by providence?) may not require demonstrative knowledge of certain truths of physics, the overall peace of mind and right attitude to life that ethics is supposed to provide does require extensive and comprehensive demonstrative knowledge of physics. It is important to notice that for Seneca knowledge of physics is a necessary, non-sufficient, condition for achieving the goal of Stoic ethics. In consequence, the objection that we could perhaps achieve this goal even without studying physics—an objection whose roots lie in Cynicism and in Aristonian Stoicism—is misguided. In fact, Inwood provides a careful analysis of Seneca's discussion of Demetrius the Cynic in *De Beneficiis 7. 1. 3* and shows that, despite one's first impression, the extent to which Seneca departs from Demetrius' conception of the place of physics in philosophy is great. Thirdly, the study of physics is worthwhile in itself because it suits our nature, which is designed for contemplation and theoretical knowledge in general.<sup>51</sup> According to Inwood, the present reason underlines the intrinsic value of this activity much more clearly than the other two motivations, which

<sup>50</sup> Quoted by Boeri at pp. 191–2.

<sup>51</sup> See the evidence from *NQ 6. 4. 2* and *De Otio 4* and 5 quoted on p. 213.

suggest, however differently, an instrumental motivation. It expresses an idea that we find in earlier Stoics—‘the rational animal was created by nature fit for action and contemplation’ (DL 7. 130)—and that appears prominently in other Roman Stoics, e.g. Epictetus (*Diss.* 1. 6. 19–22). One question that may be asked, however, is whether from this perspective the study of physics is really valuable in itself or just as a necessary means to behaving fully in accordance with human nature. In Epictetus at least, I believe, and, according to Inwood, in Seneca too, the former view is suggested. Given that theoretical knowledge in general is constitutive of human nature (because it is part of what marks off humans from the lower animal species), and given that human nature is an end intrinsically valuable that ought to be pursued, this sort of knowledge is intrinsically, not instrumentally or derivatively, valuable. In the Epictetus passage cited by Inwood this train of thought is implicit: ‘It is therefore shameful that man should begin and end where irrational creatures do. He ought rather to begin there, but to end where nature itself has fixed our end; and that is contemplation and understanding (*θεωρίαν καὶ παρακολούθησιν*) and a way of life in harmony with nature’ (*Diss.* 1. 6. 20–1; tr. Gill and Hard).

In sum, as Inwood explains: ‘Seneca recognizes two quite different reasons for studying physics and for attending to its doctrines, reasons which might well seem to be opposed to each other. Studying physics provides direct instrumental support to what we might call the enterprise of ethics, but it also fulfils something very important and fundamental in our natures, the built-in drive for contemplation of nature.’<sup>52</sup> This double motivation is most conspicuous in the two texts to which the final part of his chapter (pp. 215–22) are devoted: the *Natural Questions* as a whole and the later books of the *Letters to Lucilius*. As Inwood carefully brings out, these texts show how these apparently opposed motivations turn out to be complementary to each other. In particular, the study has an instrumental value for ethics insofar as it has an intrinsic value in the sense that if it were not valuable on its own, it would not be of any use for ethics. This complex account of the motivation for studying physics is indispensable for understanding Seneca’s position on this question.

## CHAPTER 9

In ‘Stoic Philosophical Theology and Graeco-Roman Religion’, Keimpe Algra carries out a thorough examination of early and late Stoic philosophical theology understood as the philosophical account of religious phenomena and its relation to traditional religious myth and cult. The project undertaken by Algra in connection is analogous to the one developed in Chapters 7 and 8 in connection

<sup>52</sup> See pp. 214–15.

with ethics. Just as our study of physics is essential to the conduct of our moral life, so too our philosophical knowledge of god is needed to clarify and articulate our natural preconception of him. Thereby, this knowledge will have an impact on our attitude towards traditional religious cult and myth (and hence on whether or not we accept traditional religious cult and myth in our *own* religious practice). Moreover, I should add, given the identity of god and cosmos, philosophical theology will ultimately have to help us to conduct our moral life, and the study of physics, in turn, will ultimately have to shape our natural preconception of god and to guide our religious life.

As Algra explains, the connection between Stoic philosophical theology and traditional religion is complex. Contrary to an interpretation recently advocated by Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé, according to which, Algra observes, Chrysippus espoused an ‘extremely conservative’ position concerning traditional religion in that he adopted at least large parts of it without any criticism (thus departing sharply from Cynicism),<sup>53</sup> Algra points out that even when the Stoics accepted important parts of traditional religion, such as certain myths about the nature of god and its relation to the cosmos, they sought to provide them with a detailed rational basis. However, the Stoics also rejected certain aspects of religious and cosmological traditional myths, arguing that even though they originally proceeded from our natural preconceptions about god, these preconceptions have been contaminated to some extent by additional conceptions that distort our view of the true nature of god and the cosmos.<sup>54</sup> In consequence, the Stoic attitude to traditional religion is mixed. It is one of acceptance and adaptation of some of its elements, on the one hand, and one of objection and rejection of other elements, on the other. And the function of philosophical theology is to offer the adequate grounds for performing this double task. As Algra himself points out: ‘mainstream Stoicism was committed to an interesting combination of primitivism (the “natural” world view of the people of old inevitably got corrupted), and progressivism (the subsequent development of philosophy can remedy this, and show us what can and cannot be salvaged)’.<sup>55</sup> Section 4 of this chapter is devoted to shedding light on various problems that arise in connection with this Stoic critical appropriation of traditional cosmo-theological myth. As for religious *cult* (sections 5 and 6), the role of philosophical theology in connection with it is analogous to its role in connection with myth. In myths, one central task of philosophical theology is eventually to lay out explicitly their implicit rational foundation. In cults, one of its tasks is to draw out and assess its conceptual content through a confrontation of this content with Stoic theological theory. As in the case of myth, there is no rejection of traditional cult *in toto*, but rather a complex combination of critique and adaptation of different parts and aspects of it. To take one of the five examples developed by Algra (Zeno on sanctuaries, Chrysippus, Diogenes of Babylon, Seneca, and Varro on the use of

<sup>53</sup> Cited by Algra at p. 213.

<sup>54</sup> See p. 233.

<sup>55</sup> See p. 234.

anthropomorphic images to represent god in religious rituals), Zeno was critical of the use of sanctuaries to worship the gods. But his point is probably not that, ideally, sanctuaries should be prohibited and removed from the cities. His concern is merely that they are superfluous and, in consequence, that one should not *promote* building them—the only proper way to honour the gods being ‘by our own spiritual attitude, i.e. by imitating them through becoming virtuous’.<sup>56</sup>

To conclude this introduction, let me take up an issue raised by Algra in the penultimate section of Chapter 9. Why did Stoics not absolutely reject the use of anthropomorphic images to represent god in traditional cult? Absolute rejection seems to be required by their pantheism: the Stoic god, as a physical substance that permeates the whole cosmos, cannot have the human shape attributed to the gods in traditional representations of them. This is relevant for understanding how the Stoics conceived the relation between god and cosmos. Apparently, there is a tension between, on the one hand, their pantheism, which reflects how god physically interacts with the cosmos, but seems to rule out anthropomorphism, and, on the other hand, their conception of god as a person, which seems to rule out pantheism, but is apparently required by his demiurgical nature and the purposiveness of his action. Pantheism and this ‘personalistic theism’, to use Algra’s expression, are two equally essential, but apparently incompatible, aspects of god’s relation to the cosmos. How can this tension be resolved and, in consequence, why are the Stoics justified in not rejecting totally anthropomorphic representations of god despite their pantheism? The tension disappears if personhood does not necessarily require a human shape. Certain traits of a human body may help to express some of the attributes—moral or intellectual—of god. This is something, Algra points out, that Epictetus, *Diss.* 2. 8. 25–7 sharply brings out.<sup>57</sup> But even though the Stoic god has these attributes without having a human body or shape, it is difficult for us to imagine him as possessing them in this disembodied state. Hence the need to represent god through anthropomorphic shapes. In other words, it may be epistemically necessary (for us) that god’s attributes be conveyed through human shape.<sup>58</sup> This fully justifies anthropomorphic representations of god in religious cult. But there is no metaphysical necessity in linking the concepts of person and of human shape, and therefore no contradiction between the two main theses of Stoic cosmo-theology: pantheism and personalistic theism.

<sup>56</sup> See p. 236.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted at p. 245.

<sup>58</sup> See the evidence from Dio Chrysostomus and Varro discussed by Algra at pp. 245–7. Algra also mentions in connection with Dio, *Or.* 12. 60 as a further justificatory element that ‘we want to conceive of [god] as an object of worship near to us (rather than as a remote astral or cosmic god) and as a father’ (p. 247).