The Early Stoics

Reading 7 – Stoic Natural Philosophy or Physics in Other Ancient Authors

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The Best of the Early Stoics: The Lives, Writings & Teachings of the Early Stoics.

Stoic Natural Philosophy or Physics

in Other Ancient Authors

Eusebius of Caesarea
Preparation for the Gospel 15.15, 18, 20

Eusebius reports the teachings of Stoicism given by the first century BC Stoic Arius Didymus. Included are points about the cosmos as a whole, the beneficent care of God for humans, and the origin and nature of the soul.

The Stoics call the whole cosmos with all its parts God. They furthermore say that God alone is one, finite, living, eternal, and divine. All bodies are contained in God, and in him there is no void. . . .

They say that the cosmos is eternal, but its orderly arrangement is produced and subject to change at infinite periods, both in the past and in the future. . . . The term "cosmos" also means the system consisting of heaven and the air and earth and sea and the natures contained in these. Again, the term "cosmos"

means the dwelling place of the gods and men and of all things made for their sake. . . .

There is a community that exists between the gods and men since they participate in reason, which is the law of nature. . . .

We must suppose that the God who manages the whole takes into consideration humankind, being beneficent, kind, and friendly to humans, as well as being just and possessing all virtues. Indeed, it is for this reason that the cosmos is also called "Zeus" since he is the cause of our life. And insofar as from eternity he manages all things unchangeably by connected reason, he is also called fate. . . .

Cleanthes thinks the sun is the leading power of the cosmos since it is the greatest of the heavenly bodies and contributes most to the management of the whole by making the day and the year and the other seasons. Some Stoic philosophers, however, think the earth is the ruling power of the cosmos. But Chrysippus thinks it is the aether, which is the clearest and purest as the most mobile of all things, carrying around the whole course of the cosmos. . . .

[18] The oldest members of the Stoic school hold that all things are changed into aether when at certain very long periods all things are resolved into an aethereal fire. . . . This is the great destruction of the cosmos that takes place after long periods . . . the doctrine of the dissolution of the cosmos into fire, which they call "conflagration." . . . For it is held by the Stoic philosophers that the universal substance changes into fire, as into a seed. And coming back again, from this seed it completes its organization such as it was before. And this is the doctrine that was accepted by the first and oldest leaders of the school—Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus. But they say that Zeno [of Tarsus], who was the student and successor of Chrysippus, had doubts regarding the conflagration of the cosmos. . . .

[20] Zeno says that the seed man emits is breath combined with moisture, a portion and fragment of the soul, and a blending of the parents' seed, and a concrete mixture of the various parts of the soul. For this seed, having the same laws as the cosmos, when emitted into the womb, is caught up by another breath and made a portion of the female's soul and grows into a unity with it. And being stirred and kindled there, it grows in secret, continually receiving additions to the moisture and increasing itself. . . .

Regarding the soul, Cleanthes, in presenting the teachings of Zeno for comparison with other natural philosophers, says that Zeno calls the soul an exhalation with sensation. . . . So, then, like Heraclitus, Zeno represents the soul as an exhalation. And he says that it is sensitive for the reason that the leading part is capable of being impressed through the senses by real and substantial objects and receiving their impressions. . . .

They say that the soul is generated and perishable. But it does not perish immediately when freed from the body but abides for some time by itself—the soul of the good until the resolution of all things into fire, but the soul of the foolish merely for certain periods of time. . . . The souls of the foolish and of irrational animals perish together with their bodies.

Such are the doctrines of the Stoic philosophy collected out of the *Epitomes* of Arius Didymus.

Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 1.18

Hippolytus reports Stoic views regarding God, the "originating principle of all things," fate, and the conflagration or purification of the cosmos.

The Stoics suppose that God is the one originating principle of all things. He is a body of the utmost refinement. His providential care pervades everything.

These thinkers are certain about the existence of fate everywhere. Accordingly, they employ the following kinds of illustration. Suppose a dog is attached to a wagon. If, in fact, he is disposed to follow along, he is both drawn along and follows voluntarily, making an exercise of free power in combination with necessity, that is, fate. But if he is not disposed in this way to follow, he will wholly be coerced to do so. The same, of course, holds true in the case of human beings. For even though they may not be willing to follow, they will wholly be coerced to engage in what has been decreed. . . .

The Stoics accept the teaching that there will be a conflagration or purification of the cosmos. Some say

this conflagration will happen to the whole cosmos; others say it will only happen to a portion.

Aetius 1.3 (Pseudo-Plutarch 878b-c)

Aetius reports Zeno's view on the two principles of the cosmos.

Zeno of Citium, the son of Mnaseas, says the [two] principles are God and matter, the one being responsible for acting, whereas the other is acted upon—including the four elements.

Aetius 1.6 (Pseudo-Plutarch 879c-880d)

After offering the Stoic definition of the substance of God—"an intelligent and fiery breath," Aetius explains how the Stoics came to their notion of God from the ordered beauty of the cosmos, including the regular movement of the stars in the sky that serve as regulators of everything else.

The Stoics define the substance of God this way: it is an intelligent and fiery breath that has no shape but changes into whatever it wishes, becoming like all things. They first obtained the concept of this God from the beauty of the things that appeared to them. For beautiful things do not come into being without a plan and by chance but only by the art and skill of someone working at it. But the cosmos is beautiful as is clear from its shape and its color and its magnitude and also from the diverse stars around the cosmos. And the cosmos is spherical, the first of all shapes. . . .

It is from [*the stars and the heavenly constellations*] that we grasp the concept of God—for the sun and the moon and the rest of the stars go beneath the earth and always rise up bearing the same colors and sizes and in the same places and at the same times.

Therefore, those who by tradition delivered to us the reverence for and worship of the gods did so in three ways: first, from nature; second, from stories and myths; and third, from the testimony of custom and laws. The philosophers taught the way according to nature, the poets according to myth, and the constitution of each city according to custom and laws.

The whole teaching of the Stoics is divided into seven kinds. The first is based on those things that appear high in the sky. It is from the appearance of the stars that we have a concept of God, when we see that they are responsible for the great celestial harmony, and by their rising and setting they order both days and nights, winter and summer, and—of those things on the earth—animals that produce offspring and plants that bear fruit. For this reason they thought the sky was a father who began these things and that the earth was a mother. Of these, the one is father since the outflow of rain functions as seed whereas the other is mother since she receives the seed and produces offspring. And seeing that the stars are always moving and make it possible for us to see things, they addressed the sun and the moon as gods.

***Plutarch**, On Common Conceptions (Against the Stoics)* 1076a-b

Chrysippus asserts similarity between the gods and human beings in terms of happiness and virtue.

According to Chrysippus, the gods do not differ from human beings in terms of happiness and virtue. . . . The Stoics say that if a human is not missing anything of virtue, then he will not be lacking anything of happiness.

Plutarch, *On Common Conceptions (Against the Stoics)* 1085c-d

Plutarch identifies some of the qualities of what the Stoics identify as the primary elements—fire, air, earth, and water.

The Stoics call the four bodies—earth and water, air and fire—primary elements. . . . They make part of them simple and pure, and part of them compounded and mixed. For they teach that earth and water are neither themselves cohesive nor make others so, but that they preserve their unity by sharing a breath-like and fiery force. Air and fire, however, preserve there own tension through their elasticity and, mixed with the other two, give them tension and

permanence and substantiality.

Nemesios, *On the Nature of Man* 2

Nemesios relates the Stoic idea of tensional motion.

There are those like the Stoics who say that there is a tensional motion in bodies that moves simultaneously inward and outward. The outward movement gives rise to quantities and qualities, while the inward movement produces unity and essence.[1]

Johannes Stobaeus, *Eclogues* 1.104, 106

Johannes Stobaeus presents Zeno's and Chrysippus' notions of time.

[1.104] Zeno said that time is the interval of movement that holds the measure and standard of swiftness and slowness. . . . [1.106] Chrysippus defined time as the interval of movement that sometimes is also called the measure of swiftness and slowness, or the interval proper to the movement of the cosmos. And it is in time that everything moves and exists. It seems that time is to be taken in two senses, just like the earth and the sea and the void, namely in the sense of the whole and its parts. In the same way as the void is all-infinite everywhere, so time is all-infinite in both directions, indeed, past and future are both infinite. And he states most clearly that no time is entirely present. For the division of continua goes on infinitely, and by this distinction time, too, is infinitely divisible. Therefore, no time is strictly present, but it is defined only loosely.

Plutarch, *On Common Conceptions (Against the Stoics)* 1081c-d

Plutarch reports the Stoic understanding of "the now," the present moment, that it does not really exist but is part past and part future.

The Stoics do not admit the existence of the shortest element of time, nor do they concede that the now is indivisible, but that which someone might assume and think of as present is, according to them, partly future and partly past. Therefore, nothing remains of the now, nor is there left any part of the present time, but what is said to exist now is partly spread over the future and partly over the past. . . . In the third, fourth, and fifth books of his *On Parts*, Chrysippus declares that part of the present time is future and part is past.

Origen, *On Principles* 3.1.2

Origen presents Stoic thinking on the cause of a thing's motion.

[2] Of things that move, some have the cause of their motion within themselves, while others are set in motion from the outside alone. So it is that things that are carried are set in motion from the outside alone, things such as pieces of wood and stones and everything that is held together by means of the constitution of their matter alone. . . . Animals and plants, and generally things held together by means of nature and soul, have the cause of their motion within themselves. . . . The Stoics say that fire is the cause of its own motion, and perhaps also springs of water.

And of those things that have the causes of their motion within themselves, the Stoics say that some are moved from themselves, while others are moved by means of themselves. They say "from themselves" of things without a soul, while of those with a soul they say "by means of themselves." Things with a soul move by means of themselves when a presentation occurs that rouses an impulse. In some animals presentations occur that urge them on by a kind of natural impulse to an orderly and regular motion. We see this in the case of spiders when a presentation occurs that rouses an impulse in them to weave webs. . . . And likewise in bees that are roused to form honeycombs.

Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On Mixture*

Alexander explains the nature of the breath that unites and pervades substance and holds the cosmos together.

The whole substance is united by a breath pervading

all of it, and by which the cosmos is being held and kept together and is in sympathy with itself. . . . The Stoics attribute its unity to certain bonds and material causes and a certain breath[2] pervading the whole substance. . . . The breath, which consists of fire and air, roams through all the bodies and mixes with all of them, and the existence of each depends on that.

Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On Mixture*

Alexander presents Chrysippus' theory of mixture, including the nature of different kinds of mixture.

Chrysippus' theory of mixture is as follows: he assumes that the whole material cosmos is unified by a breath that wholly pervades it, and by which the cosmos is made coherent and kept together and is made intercommunicating.

And of the compounded bodies some become mixed by juxtaposition when two or more substances are put together in the same place and placed side by side, joining each other, as he says, and preserving in this juxtaposition their proper essence and quality according to their individuality, as happens, for instance, when beans and grains of wheat get mixed with one another.

Some bodies are destroyed together through a complete fusion of their substances and their respective qualities. Such is the case with drugs whose components undergo simultaneous destruction, and, as a result of it, another body emerges.

Certain mixtures, he says, result in a total interpenetration of substances and their qualities, the original substances and qualities being preserved in this mixture. This he calls specifically a mixing of the mixed components. It is characteristic of the mixed substances that they can again be separated, which is only possible if the components preserve their properties in the mixture. . . . This interpenetration of the components he assumes to happen in that the substances mixed together interpenetrate one another such that there is not a particle among them that does not contain a share of all the rest. If this were not the case, the result would not be mixing but juxtaposition.

The supporters of this theory adduce evidence for their belief from the fact that many bodies preserve their qualities whether they are present in smaller or in larger quantities, as can be seen in the case of frankincense. When burned, it becomes greatly rarefied, but for all that it preserves its quality. Further, there are many substances, which, when assisted by others, expand to an extent which they could not do by themselves. Gold, for instance, when mixed with certain drugs, can be spread and rarefied to an extent that is not possible if it is beaten out by itself. Similarly, there are cases where we can be effective together with others, while we cannot when we are alone. And grapevine tendrils that cannot stand up by themselves can do so if they are entangled with one another. Therefore, he says, we should not be surprised that certain substances assist each other by forming a complete union such as to preserve their own qualities while totally interpermeating each other, even if the mass of one is so slight that by itself it could not preserve its quality if spread to such an extent. Thus the ladle of wine mixes with a large amount of water, being assisted by the latter to spread throughout a great volume.

To prove this assertion, the Stoics adduce as clear evidence the fact that the soul has substantiality of its own as has the body containing it. By totally pervading the body it preserves in this mixture its own essence—there is no part of the living body that does not have its share in the soul. And the same holds for the nature of plants and for the physical structure of those things held together by a state or condition.

Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On Fate*

Alexander presents the Stoic theory of "the possible."

The Stoic theory is that "the possible" does not exclude that everything will happen according to fate. And they define the possible event as something that is not prevented by anything from happening even if it does not happen. "There is nothing to prevent the occurrence even of the opposite of what happens through fate. For even though it does not occur, it is still possible." And the fact that the preventing causes are not known to us

is the reason for the assumption that there was no hindrance for the things to happen. For these things that are the causes for the opposite things to happen according to fate are also the causes for the non-happening of things themselves, if, as they say, it really is impossible that under the same circumstances the opposite should happen. But because we have no knowledge of things that happen, therefore, so they say, things that do not happen seem possible to us.

Plutarch, *On Stoic Self-Contradictions* 1052c; 1053b-c

Plutarch reports the Stoic view of the development of the cosmos.

[1052c] In the first part of his work *On Providence*, Chrysippus says, "Zeus grows until he consumes everything. As death is the separation of soul from body, and as the soul of the cosmos does not leave it but is growing continuously until it has consumed all matter, one cannot say that the cosmos is mortal." . . . [1053b-c] In the first book of his work *On Providence*, Chrysippus says, "When the cosmos is completely in the fiery state, so, at the same time, are its soul and its leading part. But if what is left over of the soul is changing into the humid state, the cosmos is in a certain way transformed into body and soul, and, therefore, it is composed of both, thus exhibiting another order."

Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 3.218

Sextus gives the Stoic teaching that God pervades all.

[218] The Stoics say that God is a pervading breath that pervades even ugly or putrid things.

Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Physicists*
1.11, 60-65, 75-79, 88-94, 101-114, 123-126, 131-135, 137, 211, 332, 336; 2.3, 142, 218, 234[3]
(*with a summary of the surrounding text given in italics*)

In Against the Physicists, *Sextus presents what natural philosophers have thought about the two basic principles of everything—the active and the passive principles. In so doing, he explores arguments for and against God or the gods and the notion of cause.*

Book 1

1-10 *"Those natural philosophers who seem to have classified most exactly the principles of everything declare that some of these are active and some are material [or passive]." Beginning with Homer, Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, and Empedocles of Acragas, Sextus offers examples of such thinkers who identified both an active or efficient principle and one passive or material.*

[11] When the Stoics declare that there are two principles, God and matter without quality, they assume that God acts and that matter is passive and changed.

12-59 *Sextus goes on to explore both kinds of principles, beginning first with the active principle or God and "how we humans acquired the notion of God." After reporting a number of reasons why humans have come to believe in God or the gods, Sextus moves on to the question of whether God or the gods exist. "That God exists is the view of most of the dogmatists and the common preconception of ordinary people." By contrast "that God does not exist is the view of those who are called 'atheists.'"*

[60] Those who claim that the gods exist endeavor to support their thesis in four ways.[4] First, they argue from the agreement that exists among all human beings. Second, from the orderly arrangement of the cosmos. Third, from the absurd consequences of the denial of the divine. Fourth and last, by refuting the opposing arguments.

[61] Arguing from the common notion of God or the gods, they say that practically all men, both Greeks and non-Greeks, believe in the existence of the divine. And for this reason they are one in sacrificing and in praying and in dedicating lands and temples to the gods. Some humans do this in one way, some in another way, as though all of them trusted in and relied on the existence of some God but did not possess the same preconception about its nature. But if this preconception had been false, they

would not have agreed in this way. Therefore, gods exist.

[62] Moreover, false opinions and extraordinary assertions do not survive longer than those people for whom they were maintained; rather; they come to an end with them. For example, men honor kings with sacrifices and the other rituals by which they approach and pray to the gods. Yet they observe these practices only as long as the kings themselves are alive. And when they are dead, they give them up as though contrary to custom and impious. But the concept of the gods persists from eternity into eternity—a likely view arising from the evidence of what takes place in the cosmos.

[63] Beyond this, even if one should pass over the conjecture of the ordinary individual and trust in those men who are intelligent and endowed with genius, one may see how poetry produces no great or brilliant work in which God is not the one who possesses authority and power over whatever happens—as in the war between the Greeks and the non-Greeks described by the poet Homer. [64] One can see that the majority of natural philosophers are in agreement with the poets. For Pythagoras and Empedocles and the Ionians and Socrates and Plato and Aristotle and the Stoics and perhaps "the philosophers of the garden" too—as the declarations of Epicurus testify—allow for the existence of God. [65] Therefore, just as if we were investigating something that is seen, it would be reasonable for us to trust those with the sharpest sight, and if something that is heard, those with the sharpest hearing, so when we are looking into something contemplated by reason, we should trust no one except those sharpest in mind and reason, such as were any of these philosophers.

66-74 *Sextus next conveys a reply from the opposing side having to do with the common notions all men and poets have about what goes on in Hades. The Stoics concede the point but argue that the notion of the gods is different. "Such, then, is the argument from the common and agreed on opinion about God."*

[75] Let us also examine the argument that is based on the orderly arrangement of the cosmos. The material substance of existing things, they say, in itself without motion and without form, is bound to be moved and given form by some cause. Accordingly, just as when we behold a very beautiful work in bronze we long to learn who the craftsman is since the bronze material itself is without motion, so when we contemplate the matter of the whole cosmos moving and existing in form and orderly arrangement, we reasonably look for the cause that moves it and gives it many forms.

[76] It is plausible that this cause is nothing other than some power that pervades the whole even as our soul pervades us. This power, then, is either self-moving or moved by some other power. And if it is moved by another power, then that other power is also unable to move unless it is moved by another power. But this is absurd. There exists, therefore, a power that is of itself self-moving, and this power is divine and everlasting. For this power is either in motion from eternity or from some definite point in time. But it is not in motion from a point in time since no cause of its motion exists from a given point in time. So then, eternal is the power that moves matter and arranges it, leading it into births and changes. Consequently, this power is God.

[77] Moreover, that which generates what is rational and wise is certainly itself rational and wise. But the aforementioned power is of such a nature that it makes human beings; therefore, it is rational and wise, which is, in fact, the very nature of the divine. Gods, therefore, exist.

[78] Turning to bodies, some are unified, while some are formed from conjoined things and some from separate things. Unified bodies are those that are controlled by a single state or condition, such as plants and animals. Those formed of conjoined things are such as those that are composed of adjacent things that tend to combine into one main structure—things such as chains and city walls and ships. Those formed of separate things are such as those that are compounded of things that are disjoined and isolated and existing by themselves—things such as armies and flocks and choruses.

[79] Since, then, the cosmos also is a body, it is either a unified body or one formed from conjoined things or from separate things. But it is neither from

conjoined nor separate things. . . . These points establish that the cosmos is a unified body.

80-87 *The cosmos is shown to be a unified body since it exhibits certain sympathies. Moreover, the nature that manages the cosmos is the best—it is "intelligent, good, and immortal." Such is God; therefore, gods exist.*

[88] Cleanthes established the point in this way: "If one nature is stronger or better than another nature, there will be some strongest or best nature. If one soul is better than another soul, there will be some best soul. Accordingly, if one animal is stronger than another animal, there is some strongest animal. For such things will not go on without limit. So then, as a nature is not capable of infinite growth in terms of being stronger or better, neither is a soul nor an animal capable of the same. [89] One animal, however, is stronger than another animal. A horse, for instance, is stronger than a tortoise, a bull is stronger than an ass, and a lion is stronger than a bull. And of all the animals on earth, the human being excels and is the best in terms of bodily disposition and that of the soul.

[90] Yet a human being cannot be the very best animal because, for example, he is bad all of the time, and if not all, then most—for even if he attains virtue, he attains it late and at the setting of life's sun. And human beings are subject to death, and weak, and require countless forms of assistance, such as food and coverings and all the other attention given to the body, which stands over us like some cruel tyrant, demanding its daily tribute and threatening us with disease and death unless we provide for its washing and anointing and clothing and feeding. So it is that a human being is not a perfect animal but imperfect and far removed from the perfect.

[91] But that which is perfect and best will be better than a human being, complete with every virtue and refusing every vice. And this animal will not differ from God. God, therefore, exists."

Such, then, is the view of Cleanthes.

[92] The Socratic philosopher Xenophon[5] also offered an argument for the existence of the gods, though he attributed the proof to Socrates in conversation with Aristodemus.

"Tell me, Aristodemus, are there any people you have admired for their wisdom?"

"Yes," he said.

"And who are they?"

"I have admired Homer for his poetry, Polycleitus for his sculpture, and Zeuxis for his painting."

[93] "Then is it not because of the extraordinary craftsmanship of their productions that you are satisfied with them?"

"Yes, it is," he said.

"If, then, Polycleitus' statue of a man were to come to life, would you not be satisfied with the artist even more?"

"Very much so!"

"So then, if when you saw a statue of a man, you said that it had been fashioned by some artist, when you see a human being well-disposed in soul and well-equipped in body, do you not think that he has been fashioned by some extraordinary mind? [94] And when you further observe the arrangement and function of his parts? For instance, that he has made humans upright. Or that he has given them eyes to see what is visible and ears to hear what is audible. And what use would smell have been if he had not also supplied them with nostrils? Or flavors if he had not made within them a tongue that judges them? And you know that you have in your body a small portion of earth from the great amount of earth that exists, and a little moisture from the great amount of water that exists, and the same with fire and air. But from what source do you suppose you happened to snatch a mind if it alone exists nowhere else?"

Such, then, is Xenophon's argument.

95-100 *Sextus reports how some counter Xenophon's argument, and then he puts it in an alternative form, finishing with: "If there had not been some mind in the cosmos, there would not have been some mind in you. But there is some mind in you. And because of this the cosmos is intelligent. And being intelligent, it is also God."*

[101] And Zeno of Citium, taking Xenophon as his starting point, argues this way: "The thing that emits

the seed of something rational is itself also rational. But the cosmos emits the seed of something rational. Therefore, the cosmos is rational." . . .

[102] The plausibility of this argument is manifest. For the origin of motion in every nature and soul seems to come from the leading part. And all the powers that are sent out into the parts of the whole are sent out from the leading part as from a fount or spring, so that every power that exists in the part also exists in the whole because it is distributed from its leading part. Therefore, whatever the part is in terms of power, so the whole must be first. [103] For this reason, if the cosmos emits the seed of a rational animal, it does not do so by agitation as with humans, but by containing the seeds of rational animals. But it does not contain them in the same way that we might speak of the vine containing its grapes, that is, by way of inclusion. Rather, it does so because the generative seeds or principles of rational animals are contained within it. So then, the argument is this: "The cosmos contains the generative seeds or principles of rational animals; therefore, the cosmos is rational."

[104] Once again, Zeno says, "The rational is better than the non-rational. But nothing is better than the cosmos. Therefore, the cosmos is rational. Likewise with the intelligent and that which participates in life and has a soul. For the intelligent is better than the non-intelligent, and that with life is better than that without life. But nothing is better than the cosmos; therefore, the cosmos is intelligent and alive."

[105] Another argument such as this is given by Plato. He writes it this way: "Let us declare the cause by which the framer organized this production and this all. The framer was good, and in the good there is no envy concerning anything. And being like this, he wished that all things would become like him as much as possible. We will be right, then, in accepting from men of wisdom this which is the most powerful principle of generation and order." [106] Then, after going through a few more points, he says, "So it was because of this consideration that he framed mind within soul and soul within body as he organized the all, so that the work he was completing might in its nature be the most beautiful and the best. So then, in accord with the likely account,[6] we must declare that this cosmos is in truth a living animal with a soul and mind because it has come into existence through the providence of God."

[107] So then, Plato expounded the same argument as Zeno. For this one also says that the all is most beautiful, a work completed in accord with nature, and, in accord with the likely account, it is a living animal with a soul both intelligent and rational.

[108] But Alexinus[7] twisted Zeno's argument in this manner: "The poetical is better than that which is not poetical. And the grammatical is better than that which is not grammatical. And that which is observed in accord with the other arts is better than that which is not. But nothing is better than the cosmos; therefore, the cosmos is poetical and grammatical."

[109] But in reply to this parallel argument, the Stoics say that Zeno has chosen what is absolutely better—that is, the rational is better than the non-rational, the intelligent than the non-intelligent, and the living than the non-living. By contrast, Alexinus has not. [110] For the poetical is not absolutely better than that which is not poetical, and the grammatical is not absolutely better than the non-grammatical. So we observe a great difference between the arguments. For see how a poetical Archilochus is not better than a non-poetical Socrates, and how a grammatical Aristarchus[8] is not better than the non-grammatical Plato.

[111] The Stoics and those who agree with them also endeavor to build an argument for the existence of the gods from the motion of the cosmos. For thanks to many points of observation, everyone agrees that the cosmos is in motion. [112] It is moved, then, by nature or by choice or by a necessary whirling movement. But that it is moved by a necessary whirling movement is not reasonable. For a whirling motion is either disordered or ordered. And if it is disordered, it is not able to move something in an orderly manner. But if it moves something in an orderly and harmonious manner, that thing will be divine and excellent. [113] For it never would have moved the whole in an orderly manner that conserves it if it had not been intelligent and divine. And if it is such, it cannot be a whirling motion—for a whirling motion is

disordered and brief in duration. So, as Democritus and those around him said, the cosmos is not moved by a necessary whirling movement. [114] Neither is it moved by a non-perceptive nature insofar as the intelligent nature is better than this. And we see that these kinds of natures are contained in the cosmos. By necessity, therefore, the cosmos itself must possess an intelligent nature by which it is moved in an orderly manner. And this is doubtlessly God.

115-122 *After expounding a few more arguments for the existence of God, Sextus moves on to explore the third way by which those who "maintain that the gods exist try to establish their thesis"—that is, the argument "from the absurd consequences of the denial of the divine."*

[123] Next, let us examine the nature of the absurd consequences of denying the divine. If gods do not exist, then piety is non-existent. For piety is the knowledge of service to the gods, and there cannot be any service of things non-existent, nor will any knowledge about this service come to be. Just as there cannot be any knowledge of service to hippocentaurs since they are non-existent, so there cannot be any knowledge of service to the gods if they are non-existent. So it is that if the gods do not exist, then piety is non-existent. But piety exists. Therefore, we must say that gods exist.

[124] Again, if gods do not exist, then holiness is non-existent since it is a kind of justice toward the gods. But according to the common conceptions and preconceptions of all human beings, holiness exists. And, accordingly, something holy exists. And so the divine exists.

[125] If, however, gods do not exist, wisdom is done away with since it is "the knowledge of divine and human matters." And just as there is no knowledge of both human and hippocentuarean matters given the fact that humans exist while hippocentaurs do not, so too there will be no knowledge of divine and human matters if humans exist but gods do not. But it is absurd to say that wisdom does not exist. Consequently, it is absurd to think that the gods are non-existent.

[126] And if justice too has been introduced because of the interaction of humans with one another and with the gods, then if gods do not exist, neither will justice unite the two. But the very thought is absurd.

127-130 *Sextus discusses the Pythagorean position that humans share fellowship not only with gods but also with irrational animals since one spirit pervades the whole cosmos like a soul. Hence the Pythagorean counsel against slaying and eating animals. He counters the argument by suggesting that, if true, then we likewise cannot eat plants or chisel stones.*

[131] Why, then, do the Stoics say that humans have a certain just relation and interaction with one another and with the gods? It is not because of the spirit[9] that moves through all things—otherwise there would be some observance of justice between us and non-rational animals. Rather, it is because we possess reason, which extends to one another and the gods. By contrast, the irrational animals have no relation of justice toward us since they have no share in reason. So then, if we perceive justice thanks to the partnership we humans have with one another and we humans have with gods, then if gods do not exist, neither does justice exist. But justice exists. We must say, then, that gods exist.

[132] More: if gods do not exist, neither does prophecy exist since it is the knowledge that observes and interprets the signs given by gods to men. Nor yet do inspiration and astrology, nor divination, nor prediction by means of dreams exist. But it is absurd to do away with so many things already believed in by all men. Therefore, gods exist.

[133] Zeno offered this argument also: "One may reasonably honor the gods. But one may not reasonably honor those who are non-existent. Therefore, gods exist."

Some reply with this parallel argument, saying, "One may reasonably honor wise men. But one may not reasonably honor those who are non-existent. Therefore, wise men exist." But this conclusion was not pleasing to the Stoics since they have never been able to find what they would call a wise man.

[134] In reply to the parallel argument, Diogenes the Babylonian says that the meaning of the second premise in Zeno's argument is this: "But one may not reasonably honor those who are not of such a nature as to exist." For when this premise is accepted, it is clear that the gods are of such a nature as to exist. [135] But if this is so, then they do now actually exist. For if they had existed at any time, they also exist now, just as, if atoms had existed, they also exist now. For according to the notion of such bodies, they are imperishable and without beginning. . . . But the wise do not have such a nature."[10] . . .

[137] Such, then, are the typical arguments made by the Stoics . . . in favor of the existence of gods.

138-210 *In the sections that follow, Sextus presents the arguments of those who do not believe in the existence of gods. In conclusion, he suggests that one is better off suspending judgment relative to their existence since some argue for and some against their existence, and since the beliefs of ordinary people differ regarding gods.*

He moves on to passive matter and the notion of cause—whether cause exists or not. He explores the arguments of those who argue for its existence and of those who doubt it. While discussing the latter, he observes that . . .

[211] The Stoics declare that "every cause is a body that causes something incorporeal in a body." For example, "the scalpel" is a body, and "the flesh" is a body, and the predicate "being cut" is incorporeal. Again, "the fire" is a body, and "the wood" is a body, and the predicate "being burned" is incorporeal.

212-331 *Sextus describes other arguments regarding cause, including the point that "if there is something that is affected, it is affected either through addition or through subtraction or through alteration and change." Connected to this point, he observes, is "the difficulty concerning the whole and the part." Consequently, he goes on to explore notions of "the whole" and "the part" and "the all."*

[332] Now the philosophers of the Stoic school assume that "the whole" differs from "the all." For they say that the whole is the cosmos, whereas the all is the external void together with the cosmos. In this way, the whole is limited (for the cosmos is limited), but the all is unlimited (for the void outside the cosmos is so). . . .

[336] The Stoics declare that the part is neither other than the whole nor the same. For the hand is neither the same as the human (for it is not a human) nor other than the human (for it is included in the thought of the human as human).

337-440 *Sextus completes his discussion of "efficient principles of the cosmos." He turns his attention next to views about "the primary and most fundamental elements." Some take the view that bodily things are the most fundamental. For instance, Empedocles and the Stoics both hold that there are four elements, "earth and water and air and fire." Others identify incorporeal principles. In the remainder of Book 1, Sextus discusses other ideas and problems, including "the difficulties about bodies."*

Book 2

1-2 *Sextus proceeds to the "incorporeals" or "intangibles" (as Epicurus calls them) in Book 2, beginning with an investigation of "place" and the related notions of "void" and "room."*

[3] The Stoics declare that "void is that which is capable of being occupied by something that exists but is not so occupied. Or it is an interval void of body—or one unoccupied by body. And place is that which is occupied by something that exists and made equal to that which occupies it"—now calling body "something that exists," as is evident from the interchange of the names. And "room," they say, is "an interval partly occupied by body and partly unoccupied."[11]

4-351 *In the remainder of Book 2, Sextus presents various arguments regarding the notions of place, motion (about which the Stoics affirm it exists), time (about which the Stoics declare it is "the interval of the motion of the cosmos"), number, and coming into being and perishing. The following are some of the Stoic considerations he reports about these and other points (all in Book 2).*

[142] The Stoics . . . say that bodies and places and times are divisible without limit or to infinity. . . .

[218] The Stoic philosophers think that time is incorporeal. For they declare that of the "somethings," some are corporeal or bodies, and others are incorporeals. They count four kinds of incorporeals, namely, "a thing said" or "a sayable" and void and place and time. And from this it is clear that, in addition to assuming that time is something incorporeal, they also regard it as a thing thought about as self-evident.

[234] The Stoics . . . declare that, of the "somethings," some are corporeal or bodies, and other are incorporeals. They think that time is a certain kind of incorporeal that is thought about as self-evident.

So ends Reading 7. **See you in Reading 8**, which is on the way.

NOTES

[1] It may be useful to think of something like tug of war. When a team pulls the rope toward their side, they are simultaneously pulling outward (toward themselves) and inward (away from—which is also in or inward from—the other team).
[2] "Breath" (*pneuma*) may also be given as "spirit." Thus, where you see "breath" in the following texts, you may also wish to read "spirit."
[3] The same as *Against the Mathematicians* 9.11, 60-65, 75-79, 88-94, 101-114, 123-126, 131-135, 137, 211, 332, 336; 10.3, 142, 218, 234.
[4] Sextus shifts between the singular (God) and plural (gods) as if they are interchangeable.
[5] Though it is Xenophon's argument, the Stoics would have used it. Indeed, Zeno of Citium did apparently build on the argument (see 1.101 below). Xenophon (c. 430-354 BC) was a statesman and historian from Athens. Drawing on his experience with the philosopher Socrates, he wrote the *Apology* recounting Socrates' defense, and the *Memorabilia*, *Oeconomicus*, and *Symposium*, works also centered on Socrates and his conversations with others. He also wrote non-Socratic works.
[6] The *eikos logos*, the likely account—that is, the most probable, reasonable account. For the passage, see Plato, Timaeus 29d ff.
[7] Alexinus was a Megarian philosopher. His life coincided with Zeno's.
[8] Archilochus (fl. seventh century BC) was a Greek iambic and elegiac poet. The content of his poems was, to many in the ancient world, morally repugnant. As for Aristarchus (fl. second century BC), the point seems to be that, as head of the Alexandrian Library, he focused on purely literary or grammatical matters whereas Plato was concerned with the soul and virtue in his writings.
[9] Or breath (*pneuma*).
[10] There is an interesting parallel here (relative to the notion or concept of both gods and atoms) to Anselm of Canterbury's much later (eleventh century AD) ontological argument for the existence of God.
[11] Compare to Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 3.124.