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WHY A PHILOSOPHER NEEDS OTHERS

PLATONIC AND STOIC MODELS OF FRIENDSHIP AND SELF-UNDERSTANDING

Waarom een filosoof anderen nodig heeft

Platonische en Stoïsche modellen van vriendschap en zelfbegrip

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

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INTRODUCTION

This book is about two models. I have called them models of friendship and self-understanding because each of them allocates to friendship a particular role in relation to self-understanding. They are two different models because that role differs markedly in each of them, and that has to do with the nature of self-understanding, in each of them.

According to the model that I call Platonic, self-understanding is possible only through and in friendship. ‘Friendship’, in this model, is the cooperation by which two intellects aim to comprehend each other and so themselves. The second, Stoic, model, allows the self-understanding mind such intrinsic completion that it constitutes all that is valuable, including even the primary case of what they call ‘friendship’.

My description of these models does not say everything there is to be said about the topic of self-understanding and the topic of friendship in Platonic dialogues and in Stoic philosophy. Part of the reason why I call these ‘models’ is that I focus on particular aspects of self-understanding and friendship, as these are conceived in the texts I discuss, and in particular on the relation between them.

I preface my discussion of the models with a few comments on why, what, and how.

1. CONCEPTS AND MODELS

1 PHILOSOPHICAL REVISION AND ORDINARY FRIENDSHIP

‘Friendship’, in this book, refers to something that we may not recognise as friendship as we ordinarily speak of it. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, as I use the word, it stands for the whole field of human relationships (excluding negative ones like hate &c.). As such, it is a rough equivalent of the Greek word «φιλία». In speaking in terms of the latter, Greek philosophers do not mean specifically to pick out the voluntary bond between individuals from among all more or less affective, more or less formalised relations between individuals and groups of people.¹ This is not to say that some philosophers did not indeed speak of relations based on character, marked by commitment and love, as definitive of what human relationships are. Such sentiments, however, are the conclusions of investigations about human relationships, rather than their starting points.² In this book, therefore, when we examine the role of friendship in good lives, and specifically its relation to self-understanding, we are examining the role of any meaningful relationship at all. The question of friendship is the question of the place of others in your good life.

¹ On the subject in general, see Konstan 1997, with whose stance on the range of the word «φίλος» Adkins 1963 may be compared.

² An overview of ancient philosophical views on friendship is offered in Fraisse 1974.

While that question is very general, it receives a very particular sort of answer from the philosophers whose thought we are hoping to reconstruct. So strong was their commitment to a particular form (a very philosophical form) of the good life that they reinterpreted common notions to make them agree with it, including that of friendship. While therefore the scope of the theories they propose is universal, we may find their contents overly specific. This is the second reason why we may not recognise as friendships what the thinkers we examine in this book classify as such. This book is less about friendship than about ‘friendship’, i.e. about the place and role of this notion in ancient philosophies. If we expect to learn about friendship and self-understanding as it actually functions in our everyday lives, we should not read these philosophers, unless we are as committed as they are to a very specific, intellectualist vision of the good life. The subject of this book is not what the Greeks can teach us about friendship; it is better described as ancient philosophers’ reinterpretation of the notions of friendship and self-understanding. These models are revisions, not common denominators of what most of us think.

Yet, despite these two factors that make friendship, as discussed in this book, something very different from what we normally consider friendships to be, it is useful to keep speaking of ‘friendship’ with regard to them. Firstly, this is because the philosophers in question would claim that their revisions are truest to what we all think deep down inside, or at least preserve what is worth preserving in our confused everyday thinking about friendship. Secondly, we can recognise the friendships that these philosophers speak of as friendships because they do not merely pertain, more or less, to the field of human relations, but do so in a way that involves what is central to our human existence, in the view of these same philosophers.

2 *SELF-UNDERSTANDING*

We use the term ‘self-understanding’ for many things, including, for instance, someone’s appreciation of what her motives are, or someone’s grasp of her limits, of what she needs and does not need.³ The dominant concern of this book, however, is not with these senses of ‘self-understanding’, but rather with a much more strictly epistemological idea: the understanding that (the human power of) understanding has of itself. In other words, we will be concerned with a self-understanding that one might also call ‘itself-understanding’. There are many things that we may understand; the question that many philosophers have asked themselves is whether understanding may also understand itself.

However, this specific epistemological sense of ‘self-understanding’ does have an important wider role, as I also attempt to show in this book. In both the Platonic and the Stoic texts that we will examine, our power to understand is thought of as a ruling ingredient of who we are. In other words, when we ask who we are, the answer that these texts give or imply centrally involves our power to understand. The question how understanding understands itself, therefore, is at least an important part of the

³ Wilkins 1917 offers an overview of the many senses in which the Delphic motto ‘Know yourself’ is used in ancient literature.

question how we understand ourselves. To some extent, then, what self-understanding is in the strict sense also tells us much about self-understanding in another sense, i.e. self-understanding as our understanding of who we are. Our dominant concern in this book is with self-understanding as understanding's understanding of itself; and insofar as this is conceived to be essential to who we are, with self-understanding as our understanding of who we are.

I use 'understanding' roughly as the English equivalent of Greek «ἐπιστήμη».⁴ The choice for this English word rather than for, e.g., 'knowledge', is motivated in part by the consideration that 'understanding' seems best able to preserve for our ears something of the combination of practical and theoretical aspects that «ἐπιστήμη» seems to have had in ancient Greek.⁵ This blend of knowing-how and knowing-that, as a modern distinction has it, pervades most Greek discourse on forms of cognition. It is also very much present in the texts we will examine. In analysing these and other Greek philosophical texts, we should sustain this combination as much as possible; my choice of 'understanding' is an attempt to do so.

Having said that, my use of 'understanding' rather than 'knowledge' is not meant to preempt any particular questions about what ἐπιστήμη is, nor to take up any substantive position about its role in Platonic and Stoic philosophy. Moreover, apart from general considerations like the above, I do not offer much theoretical reflection on what understanding is, or on what self-understanding is, in abstraction from, and prior to, my reading of the ancient texts. My use of 'understanding' may consequently seem very broad. Nevertheless, I think this price worth paying for an interpretative language that is flexible enough to follow the conceptual moves of the ancient texts. It is perhaps worth mentioning the wide range of «ἐπιστήμη» itself in ancient philosophical texts. In one context it serves as a genus term for various more specific cognitive words. In another, it refers to the highest level of cognitive stringency.⁶ I would like to leave open, as much as is possible, the question of what understanding is, and of what self-understanding is, so as not to impose unnecessary external constraints on the texts we examine.

A final point that deserves some emphasis is that self-understanding, as conceived here, is not inherently a purely contemplative affair. I have just drawn attention to the union of practical and theoretical aspects in understanding. Likewise, when understanding understands itself there may also be room for both aspects, so that self-understanding, too, may be considered a combination of practical and theoretical intelligence. Indeed, as we will see in chapter three, a philosopher like Epictetus invokes it in contexts in which his concern is with the regulation of skills, with the practical sort of question of when it is proper to use them. While, therefore, understanding of understanding may sound very contemplative and purely theoretical, it need not be only that at all.

⁴ On 'understanding' for «ἐπιστήμη» in the context of Aristotle's thought see Kosman 1973; Burnyeat 1981.

⁵ Cf. the still valuable discussion in Snell 1924: 81-96.

⁶ On «ἐπιστήμη» as a cognitive genus word in Plato see Lyons 1963: 139-228; in Aristotle and the Stoics, «ἐπιστήμη» seems the word of choice if one wants to emphasise how demanding a type of cognition is.

3 QUESTIONS AND EVIDENCE

When we take friendship and self-understanding in these respective forms as the objects of our inquiry, we are asking particular questions when we inquire about the relation between them. We are concerned with a very particular form of the broad question whether there is a place for others in your good life. In the first place, these ‘others’ must be taken to be other people insofar as they are beings that understand. Secondly, our examination ranges over the good life to the extent that the strictly epistemological issue of self-understanding is central to it. Consequently, an important question in what follows is whether we are able to develop self-understanding on our own, or whether we need others to do so. If we are, we may ask next whether there is a role for friendship in relation to self-understanding at all. If we are not, we may ask how others will help us attain self-understanding. The first and third of these questions are central to part I; the first and second to part II.

We should note that the relation between friendship and self-understanding is thematised in so many words only in *Alcibiades*,⁷ the text we look at in chapter 2. The concern of the central text of chapter 1, *Charmides*, is with self-understanding. The use of speaking of a model of friendship and self-understanding in relation to these dialogues in tandem, however, is that the construal of friendship in *Alcibiades* serves to offer a solution to the problem about self-understanding that *Charmides* develops. The Stoic texts of chapters 3 and 4 bear upon the relation between friendship and self-understanding in two ways: by denial, on the one hand, and by means of the intermediary concept of understanding, on the other. When the Stoics say that you can reach self-understanding on your own, they thereby deny that you need others to do so. We may thus take our evidence for Stoic thought to provide an answer to the question about the relation between friendship and self-understanding, even if our evidence itself does not pose that question in so many words. In other contexts, Stoic thought has something to say about the relation between friendship and self-understanding *via* what it has to say about how self-understanding relates to understanding, and about how friendship relates to understanding. As I explain in section 3 of this introduction, we sometimes have to move beyond what our evidence attests in so many words in order to arrive at the best interpretation of Stoic thought as a whole.

4 CHOICE OF TEXTS

In the first part of this book, I discuss the Platonic dialogues *Charmides* and *Alcibiades*. This will seem a surprising choice. The Platonic dialogues we typically turn to when we are interested in Plato’s thought on friendship, in particular, are different ones: *Lysis*, *Phaedrus*, and *Symposium*. In choosing to focus on *Charmides* and *Alcibiades*, I do not mean to deny the relevance of these other dialogues for a full

⁷ I refer to what is also called *Alcibiades I* or the *Greater Alcibiades*, to distinguish it from the other dialogue called *Alcibiades* in the Platonic corpus, which is less controversially not by Plato. Since the latter does not figure here, I simplify the reference to *Alcibiades I* by calling it *Alcibiades*.

account of what Plato, or even the Platonic corpus, has to say about friendship (and the same applies to self-understanding). My limited aim here is to try to show that there is a philosophical account to be found in the combination of *Charmides* and *Alcibiades* about the relation between friendship and self-understanding. *Lysis*, *Phaedrus*, and *Symposium* have been analysed often.⁸ I do not contribute to the debate about how we should interpret these dialogues. Rather, I describe a view that we find in dialogues that are not often invoked in this context. In doing so, moreover, I abstract from the question whether this is a model to which the historical Plato subscribed, or whether it wholly agrees with other Platonic dialogues.

Similar things apply to my discussion of Stoic thought about the relation between self-understanding and friendship. I do not offer a representative overview of Stoic physics and ethics; my report, e.g., of what Stoic sources say about understanding is incomplete, while I have little to say about the role of wisdom as knowledge of how to act in the world in which we find ourselves. I discuss a selection of texts to draw out particular philosophical connections and arguments. More specifically, when I try to show that understanding is inherently something that understands itself, I do not mean to deny that understanding also understands many other things, and has a relevant theoretical role in other contexts than that of self-understanding. Similarly, when I emphasise the role of understanding in Stoic thought on friendship and sexual love, I do not mean to imply that understanding is the only aspect worth mentioning in a complete overview of Stoic thought on these topics.

In the case of both the Platonic and the Stoic model, therefore, I should warn the reader that this book is not meant as a full treatment of self-understanding and friendship; she will find something that is, one might say, skewed towards the relation between these two topics.

5 CONTRASTING MODELS WITH A COMMON BACKGROUND

As I noted, the two models that we consider are highly intellectualist models of friendship. In spite of their shared intellectualism, however, I think they form two opposite extremes in the spectrum of ancient explanations of the proper role of friendship in human life. On the one hand, the Platonic model insists that the core of human life is found *among* people, and that an isolated individual lacks what is essential to her being. The Stoic model, on the other hand, identifies with the consummate individual herself even the relations that others may consider important additions to her life. In the Platonic model, an individual is emphatically not sufficient to herself with regard to what matters most; in the Stoic, she emphatically is self-sufficient.

Yet these divergences have their place against a background of substantial agreement about the nature of the world and of human beings. To mention just some topics of agreement that are of particular relevance to our theme, in both models the world is assumed to be fundamentally intelligible, and our identity is located in our

⁸ See for a recent study Nichols 2009; *Lysis* is the concern of the important treatment of Penner and Rowe 2005.

capacity for understanding and thought. Recent scholarship has come to emphasise the links between Stoic doctrine and Platonic writings.⁹ Still, such links make the differences between Platonic and Stoic approaches all the more significant and worth examining.

The two central differences that will occupy us in this book are 1) individual human beings' ontological and ethical dependence in the Platonic model versus their ontological and ethical self-sufficiency in the Stoic model; and 2) friendship as the way towards wisdom in the Platonic model versus friendship as a disposition of the wise mind in the Stoic one. These differences are brought into relief against the shared ideas that we are to be identified principally with our minds, that the good life for us lies in wisdom, and that wisdom is most importantly a matter of self-understanding.

Throughout the four chapters of this book, I want to show how the Platonic and Stoic models of friendship that I describe (mainly in chapters two and four) are elaborations on, and consequences of, the respective ontological, and especially anthropological, positions with which they are connected (as described in chapters one and three). This is therefore in part an attempt to show how ancient theories of human relations show a close fit with issues that arise in other philosophical domains. In the Platonic case, the account of friendship in *Alcibiades* offers a solution to an epistemological problem posed in *Charmides*. In Stoicism, self-understanding and friendship are two aspects of the same thing, of perfect understanding.

6 WHAT IS NEW IN THE ACCOUNTS OF THE MODELS

I hope to advance our understanding of ancient philosophy by offering these models of friendship and self-understanding as competing and opposed philosophical accounts.¹⁰ I also attempt to develop new insights into the two models themselves.

Much previous scholarship has recognised in Plato's dialogues a view of philosophy as an essentially communal activity.¹¹ Others have tended to take a deflationary view of the social setting of Plato's philosophical work, emphasising instead the internal dialogue that Plato encourages us to have.¹² The case that we

⁹ For the Stoic theory of value in relation to *Euthydemus*, see Long 1988: 164-71; Striker 1994. The Stoic attitude to the world in relation to *Phaedo* and *Crito* is discussed in Sedley 1993: 317-20; Gill 2006: 8-9, 92-3. On Stoic cosmology and ethics as an interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus*, see Reydams-Schils 1999; Sedley 2002; Betegh 2003; Gill 2006: 16-20; Long 2010: 47-52.

¹⁰ Treatments of Stoic love often show how the Stoics developed ideas found in Plato (Nussbaum 1995; Inwood 1997). Collette (unpubl.) shows that in Plato (in this case *Symposium*) the pedagogical concern of love is about the lover, whereas it is about the beloved in the Stoics. Similar connections are rare in discussions of friendship. Most importantly, the opposed views on the relation between friendship and self-understanding, and understanding generally, have not been addressed as such.

¹¹ A recent treatment in Nichols 2009. Cf. further Gonzalez 1995; Gill 1996a, 2009. This has, not surprisingly, been a commonplace in treatments of Platonic love, though not in all (see Ferrari 1992).

¹² Valuable contributions in Gill and McCabe 1996. The view of the elenchus espoused by Vlastos (1991, 1994; cf. Davidson 1985), according to which critical examination can lead to

examine supports the former position. From the Platonic dialogues *Charmides* and *Alcibiades*, I reconstruct a philosophical model in which there appears an epistemological need for friendship.¹³ If other Platonic dialogues may be read as working towards the kind of wisdom described in *Alcibiades*, we can extend to these dialogues too the account that *Alcibiades* offers of why philosophy must be a shared pursuit.

Modern treatments of the Stoic theory of friendship have concentrated on the Stoics' view of it as a rational bond, or on the ways in which they reconciled a near-utopian ideal with ordinary friendships.¹⁴ Scholars who have focused on the political nature of Stoic thought have rather recognised each person's rationality as a sufficient condition for Stoic friendship (among other things).¹⁵ It is this latter approach that I find myself agreeing with. I take it one step further by arguing that the Stoics brought their technical ontological apparatus to bear on the identity of friendship; this enabled them to identify the understanding mind of the wise person as friendship, prior to any relation between people. This is not to say that there is not also an important role for the social dimension of friendship, and for its practice between people, in Stoicism. My focus here, however, is on understanding as the grounding case of friendship.

This role of the wise mind as friendship agrees well with the Stoics' view of understanding as something internally consonant and ordered. Understanding by its very nature also studies itself, and in this way involves self-understanding. Much work has already been done on Stoic psychology and on the Stoic view of understanding. I side with those who have taken the Stoic view to be that, in the final analysis, we are our souls,¹⁶ rather than the combination of our soul and our body.¹⁷ The idea that our understanding is by nature also self-understanding has not received much attention in recent scholarship.¹⁸ In addition to textual evidence, I offer arguments from Stoic physics and ontology as to why we should attribute this idea to the Stoics. The evidence I adduce also serves to refute a majority view among recent interpreters, viz. that God, the stuff of our minds (in the last analysis), is purely active, in the sense that it is not acted upon.¹⁹ It would in fact be a strict implication of this majority view that the mind cannot understand itself, because such self-understanding involves God's acting upon himself.

truth because everyone has true beliefs in their minds, does not seem to *require* the social setting of the dialogues.

¹³ *Alcibiades* has been relatively neglected in Platonic scholarship because many people have thought (and still think) that it was not written by Plato. Apart from considerations of authorship, however, its philosophical and historical significance amply justify careful study.

¹⁴ Rational bond: Lesses 1993; Fraisse 1974: 348-73. The (Aristotelian-inspired) reconciliation ideal-everyday: Banateanu 2002.

¹⁵ Notably Vogt 2008.

¹⁶ So Pépin 1971: 127-41, Brennan 2009.

¹⁷ So, e.g., Long 1982, Inwood 1985.

¹⁸ An exception is Long 1991a. Intimations of it in Nussbaum 1994: 316-58.

¹⁹ So, notably, Sedley 1999 (but *en passant*, as happens with issues that do not receive attention in their own right). Wildberger 2006 represents the minority view. She points to the implications of the Stoic view of perception as an argument for her view (15). The arguments I offer also serve to strengthen her case; if understanding is *eo ipso* self-understanding, then *a fortiori* God is entitled to self-action.

My interpretation of the Platonic and the Stoic models themselves, therefore, contributes to the reconstruction of Platonic and Stoic philosophy. At the same time, a theoretically clear view of the models enables us to contrast them properly. Again, the contrast is worth making because the background of these models is one of substantial agreement about our nature, about the goal of philosophy, and about the rationality of the world. This agreement brings out all the better the direct link between these models' different construals of friendship and their contrasting accounts of the ontological status of the power to understand.

2. CONTENT AND STRUCTURE OF THE TWO MODELS

1 VIEWS OF WHAT THERE IS – AND OF WHAT WE ARE

As I said, in both the Platonic and the Stoic model, we are identified ultimately with our power to understand. Beyond this shared idea, however, the two models diverge considerably. The divergence is part of a general ontological difference between the Platonic and the Stoic view, which we may perhaps crudely describe as the difference between a top-down and a bottom-up ontology. In the Platonic view, what things really are – their identity, what kinds of thing they are – is determined with reference to what is higher up on the ontological scale; in describing things, we must ultimately refer to the upper-most layer of our ontological inventory. This layer, Platonists say, contains items that are what they are in the most determinate way; they are always such as they are, without change, without a shadow of a doubt or appearance of not being such, relative to some angle of consideration or perception. A description of items of lower ontological status must refer to these upper strata; they are not sufficient for themselves for being the particular kinds of thing that they are. In the Stoic view, by contrast, all things are such as they are because of their share in the active basic constituent of the world. As I will show in chapter 3, each individual item's share in this constituent both determines what the individual thing is – is sufficient for this thing to be what it is – and is able to shape and transform itself.

Analogously to this general ontological difference, the Platonic and Stoic models conceive of the human power to understand in contrasting terms as well. In the former, the power to understand is one of the intermediate ontological items that must be described with reference to the fully determinate beings at the ontological top. More specifically, it is a member of a class of powers that are to be applied onto something determinate in order to be what they can be. In my first chapter, I argue that Plato's dialogue *Charmides* develops this view. In the third chapter I argue that the Stoic model, by contrast, views the power to understand as something fully active in itself. It is therefore both able to act on itself and to shape itself up to what it should be.

These different conceptions of what the power to understand is imply different conceptions of what we are. The Platonic and Stoic model alike identify what we are, mostly or completely, with our power to understand. In each, therefore, a general

ontological stance translates into an anthropological one – one about what we are. The Platonic model considers powers such as the power to understand as insufficient to themselves in ontological terms, since they need other, fully determinate entities in order to have their own being. Likewise, the Platonic model considers us, who are at heart powers to understand, as individually insufficient beings; we need other entities that do have some determinate being in order to have being ourselves, in relation to those determinate things. This is a claim about the nature of us, and is in that sense an anthropological one. In the Stoic model, too, the ontological view that each entity is active in and by itself brings with it the more specific anthropological view that we, human beings, are active in and by ourselves.

2 THE LIFE OF UNDERSTANDING – FRIENDSHIP AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Behind the shared conviction that the core of us human beings is our power to understand, therefore, the Platonic and Stoic models differ considerably on what this entails in ontological and anthropological terms. As yet, however, it is not clear in either of these pictures what difference they make to the question of how we should live our lives. It is here that another shared conviction becomes relevant. In the Platonic as well as the Stoic view, a good life is one in which you understand yourself. This conviction emerges clearly from the texts that we examine in chapters one through three. In both cases, the traditional (untheoretical) injunction that you should ‘know yourself’ is given a content that makes it something highly epistemological, concerned with our identity as beings that are able to understand.

This shared view, too, has very different results in our two models. In the Stoic view, the activity of the power to understand is in part already self-understanding, as I argue in chapter three. It is in our own power, as human beings, to reach understanding – and through it, self-understanding. In the Platonic view, however, self-understanding is to be achieved via other human beings. An individual power to understand cannot comprehend itself as a power to understand all by itself. It cannot directly take itself as its object. This puzzle is the principal focus of chapter one. But it would not qualify for self-understanding either to comprehend any odd external object; this would be understanding of that object, not of yourself. As I argue in chapter two, the Platonic model provides for self-understanding via other people, *qua* other powers to understand. In such a scenario, it is not any odd external object that you understand, but another power to understand; and that other power is not just involved in any odd activity, but in the activity of comprehending you. In virtue of the radical similarity between you and the other, between two powers to understand that are concerned with one another, understanding the other and understanding yourself coincide. This type of relationship is central to what we are and is central to what a good life amounts to for us; as such, it is the philosophically most pertinent kind of friendship, even if it has shed much that we ordinarily think of as belonging to friendships. In the Platonic model, therefore, the requirement that you should understand yourself implies the requirement that you should be friends. It is a model of friendship *and* self-understanding in the straightforward sense that the friendship

that it conceives involves self-understanding, and the self-understanding that it extols requires friendship.

In the Stoic model, friendship and self-understanding are no less implicated in each other, albeit in a less intuitive manner. Both are basically aspects of the wisdom that is necessary and sufficient for a happy life. The Stoics conceive of understanding in a way that makes clear that this is also at the same time self-understanding. As for friendship: whereas individuals are conceived of as sufficient to themselves for the purpose of reaching understanding (and so self-understanding), the Stoics do not infer from this self-sufficiency that there is no place for friendship in the best life. Fundamentally, this is because friendship already has a place in a life of understanding, because friendship *is* understanding. We will examine this view in detail in chapter four. The Stoics identify friendship with the wise state of the human mind. This is the primary sense in which they think we should use the concept of friendship; they see it as the condition for any other ascriptions of friendship. There is a subsidiary argument that the Stoics put forward in order to be able to say that the wise person will lead a life of friendship. This is the argument that a wise person will make friends because to do so is simply to execute her wisdom, is its outward activity, so to speak. The wise do not have a *need* so much as a *use* for friends. We will consider the Stoic view of sexual love as their specification of what it means for a wise person to make friends. Yet this remains a subsidiary point. Some of us may even consider it as an evasion of the question, on the part of the Stoics, to describe what the wise person will normally do. The question, we may feel, is not whether the wise person will display a certain pattern of life if all goes well; the question is, rather, whether a wise person will really need others. We may feel that such need is what gives meaning to human relationships. If the issue is put in these terms, the Stoic response is to say that relationships are not what matters, ultimately, in life. The value that we think we perceive in friendship as a relation, is actually contained in our self-understanding. The beauty of friendship is the beauty of a perfect mind.

3. HOW TO RECONSTRUCT ANCIENT PHILOSOPHICAL MODELS

1 EVIDENCE FOR STOICISM – LIMITS AND RECONSTRUCTION

Plato and the Stoics are difficult authors if you want to interpret them, but for quite different reasons. Let us take the Stoics first. The problem with them is that no complete works of the early Stoics, those who devised the system, have survived.²⁰ We depend on what later authors tell us about them. These later authors may do so in a perfectly friendly and cooperative spirit, but they may also have written their works in order to show how unacceptable Stoic thought really is. Most importantly, however, whatever the attitude with which they cite or report Stoic theory, they have

²⁰ An overview of our evidence (for the whole of Hellenistic philosophy) is provided in Mansfeld 1999.

never written their works in order to grant us access to it.²¹ Whenever we try to reach the thought of Zeno, Cleanthes, or Chrysippus through them, we have to allow for their purposes and interests; only then can we conclude anything about these protagonists of the story of early Stoicism. It is with such considerations in mind that I have approached the texts pertinent to my topic. In this book, nevertheless, I have only occasionally stopped to comment explicitly on this aspect of our evidence.²²

In addition to its indirectness, our evidence is limited. We simply do not have very much textual material about some of the main areas of Stoic philosophy. Later Stoic authors whose texts have been transmitted to us often concentrate on a few areas of Stoic thinking; this is mostly a matter of genre. The works that have come down to us with the names of Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, and Epictetus attached to them, for instance, are meant to prod people into living a better life, not to teach Stoic ontology.²³ Besides, in their case too we should ask ourselves whether what they tell us can safely be attributed to early Stoics. One important consequence of the paucity of our sources is that, with a few exceptions, we cannot attribute isolated pieces of doctrine to single figures within Stoicism.²⁴ Needless to say, we likewise cannot take just one text, or one group of texts, as the scope of our interpretation.²⁵ I have followed the dominant practice of contemporary scholarship on Stoicism in construing my brief as the reconstruction of Stoic thought as it was developed by Chrysippus. It was most probably he who gave Stoicism the shape it has in later sources – and whom antiquity regarded as the touchstone of Stoic orthodoxy.²⁶ Another major consequence of the skewed and inadequate transmission of Stoic texts is that scholars of Stoicism sometimes have to base general claims about Stoic thought on only a limited number of texts. At other times the most plausible overall interpretation of Stoic philosophy may even have to move beyond what is explicitly attested in our texts. This is the case, to some extent, with some of what I have to say about the theoretical aspects of Stoic ontology and thought about self-understanding.

Thus, in its indirectness and its limited availability, the nature of our evidence makes the study of Stoicism indeed a matter of reconstruction. To some extent, however, this reconstruction is facilitated by what the Stoics themselves were proud of

²¹ Works written to assemble the tenets of different schools and thinkers, however, come close. See Mansfeld 1999: 17-25.

²² Notably to reject T10 of chapter 4, to establish the reliability of T14 of chapter 4, and in connection with T19 of chapter 3.

²³ In Marcus's case, of course, the prodding was directed at himself (or so we think). Epictetus has not even written down his prodding himself – Arrian did so for him. The 'Epictetic Question' has not bothered scholars as much as has the 'Socratic Question', not yet at least (Wildberger's (2006) consistent use of high comma's in referring to Epictetus as author is perhaps a sign of things to come). Scholars used to think that later Stoics lost interest in the other parts of philosophy. That is probably not true; this impression is the result of what has been transmitted. Barnes 1997 has shown that logic, for instance, was studied with much verve in imperial times. The same applies to cosmology and physics (see Algra 2009).

²⁴ See also Algra 2002, who demonstrates that later sources commonly attribute tenets to 'Zeno' when all that this means is that the view in question is Stoic.

²⁵ A major exception is what Galen has preserved of Chrysippus's work on the soul and the emotions; Tieleman 1996 and 2003 provide reconstructions.

²⁶ Schofield 1991 constitutes an important exception to this trend, in explicitly attempting to isolate Zeno's contribution to Stoic political thought from Chrysippus's elaboration of it.

as the coherence of their system. In their view, true philosophy must be as tightly constructed as the world itself. We are therefore allowed to think along with them, and to try to bridge gaps from one piece of evidence to another on the basis of what we perceive as the best fit between them.²⁷ There is a flip side to this strategy, which is that we must be exceptionally sensitive to the possibility that evidence about an apparently unrelated topic in Stoicism may yet affect our interpretation of the topic that concerns us. In terms of the material that we may have to include, in other words, the scope of our interpretation may be very wide. There is no future in treating Stoic thought on friendship, for instance, in isolation.

Having said that, however, I must immediately add that I do not claim to provide an exhaustive analysis and survey of all of our evidence. I have chosen to concentrate on the main philosophical connections within and between Stoic thought on self-understanding and Stoic thought on friendship. That which passes for our understanding of Stoicism is always a particular arrangement of the evidence we have. More than other fields of interpretation, the study of Stoic thought is like solving a big puzzle (with many pieces missing). As we arrange these pieces, moreover, they also seem to change shape as they figure in different configurations. What I have done is to select only those pieces that are pivotal to an outline of that part of Stoic philosophy that deals with self-understanding and friendship. It is in this sense that I offer what follows as the reconstruction of a model. I think it is an accurate map of an area of Stoic thought, but it is certainly not the last word on each of the pieces involved.

2 *PLATONIC DIALOGUES: THE UNITY OF A LITERARY TEXT*

The case of Platonism is very different. What has been transmitted to us as Plato's œuvre consists of highly crafted literary texts. The dialogues among them do not allow for an easy identification of 'what Plato said'.²⁸ None of the characters portrayed in these dialogues bears Plato's name, nor is any one character uncontroversially identifiable as his spokesperson. The problem is compounded by a critique of texts in Plato's own *Phaedrus*, in which texts are said to be unsuitable vehicles for philosophical content (275d4-e5).

It is no surprise, therefore, that there are many different ways in which you can read Plato. Some hold that Plato's thought is not to be found in his texts at all.²⁹ Others say that Plato used Socrates as his voice; if we want to know what Plato thought, we should listen to Socrates.³⁰ A middle road between these positions is taken by those who think that Plato wants to convey things through his texts without

²⁷ Although serious questions about this coherence arise in view of some of the changes later Stoics made to their version of the system, such as the rejection of the conflagration and the idea of cycles of world history by Panaetius.

²⁸ To allude to Shorey's title (1933). There are also letters and sets of definitions in the Platonic corpus. Most of these are not genuine (that is, we think Plato did not write them); there are varying degrees of doubt about the others.

²⁹ This so-called 'esoteric' line of interpretation is most accessible through Szlezák 1999.

³⁰ This 'mouthpiece' theory is associated most of all with Vlastos (1991, 1994).

having them stated explicitly by any of his characters.³¹ On any of these views, again, you can think that Plato was true to one theory throughout his career as an author, or that he changed his mind (once, or more often).³²

Before we ask questions like the above, however, there is a methodologically prior question to ask. What is the proper scope of interpretation when we read Plato's works? Do we look for the meaning of single statements, for the meaning of the whole of Plato's work, or for the meaning of single dialogues? In my view, our answer should be firmly on the side of individual dialogues. These are literary works that have been composed as unified wholes in some way. Respect for their integrity requires us to interpret them in their own right and on their own terms first, before we try to relate them to other works.³³ This type of approach has in fact become more mainstream only recently.³⁴

Taking each dialogue as our primary scope of interpretation also allows us to do justice to their literary aspect. Plato *portrays* people in discussion, sometimes with elaborate descriptions of settings and non-verbal responses. We should therefore not read his works as collections of philosophical statements. Nor, however, should we oppose drama to dialogue and regard the author's comments as his disagreement with what his characters say.³⁵ Both of these approaches separate form and content to an unacceptable degree. In describing for us what happens when particular people in a particular situation have a philosophical conversation, Plato allows us to think along with his characters, and that in turn allows us to interpret their individual contributions as expressions of what they think. It is primarily in this respect that we should aim for an interpretation that synthesises narrated action and narrated argument. I have accordingly attempted, in my readings of *Charmides* and *Alcibiades*, to interpret what is said in these works as the contributions of intelligent participants to a particular conversation.

3 THE RELATIONS BETWEEN DIALOGUES

While the individual dialogues should be our primary objects of interpretation, we are not forced to isolate them from each other, as if any reference from one dialogue to another, or any attempt to identify a common concern between dialogues, should be ruled out altogether. Yet it is the meaning and aims of individual dialogues that provide the basis for building such bridges. It is such considerations at the level of

³¹ So e.g. Burnyeat 1990; Frede 1996.

³² Rowe 2007 and Kahn 1996 are two eminent recent so-called 'unitarians'; perhaps the most famous modern developmentalist is Vlastos (1991).

³³ It is fine to lift specific arguments out of the text in order to analyse them, as long as we recognise that the result of our isolating them may be a completely different argument than the one contained in the text.

³⁴ It is the explicit aim of the series of commentaries on Plato's dialogues under the editorship of M.M. McCabe (published so far: Sedley 2003, Penner and Rowe 2005, Scott 2006).

³⁵ The isolation of individual propositions from Plato's dialogues as an interpretative method has few supporters left nowadays. But it has led to the opposite extreme, that of preferring elements of description to the tendency of the arguments. In the particular case of *Charmides*, this is a weakness, in my view, of the approach of Schmid 1998 (and to some extent of McCabe 2007).

individual dialogues that support my bringing together *Charmides* and *Alcibiades* in claiming that they present a single model of friendship and self-understanding. What are these considerations? They are that, on the one hand, these dialogues share many of their themes and basic principles; and that, on the other hand, the former presents a problem which the latter surprisingly, in its context, takes for granted, while what the latter develops is a solution to the problem that the former is looking for, albeit in different terms.

In particular, *Charmides* and *Alcibiades* each describe a conversation between Socrates and leaders-to-be of Athens, in each of which the question of the wisdom that a ruler needs is placed centre stage. The leaders in question were to turn out highly controversial, or even notorious ones; a future to which the author alludes when, at the end of each dialogue, he makes Socrates's welcome to the declarations of allegiance by Charmides and Alcibiades a wary and ambivalent one. But it is not only at this surface level that the dialogues have similar themes and concerns. They also develop the same philosophical ideas. In analysing the wisdom that a ruler needs, both of the conversations work with a conception of understanding according to which perfect understanding is a sufficient condition for infallible action. They both connect this idea to the Delphic commandment that one should know oneself; but to this traditional motto they each give an emphatically intellectualist interpretation. This intellectualist turn is connected, in the two dialogues, with the view that human beings are first and foremost their souls. Along with the Delphic motto, the traditional virtue of good sense (σωφροσύνη) is taken up in this intellectualist programme as well, and becomes a central virtue.³⁶ It turns out, in both dialogues, that this intellectualist programme culminates in self-understanding as the central requirement for every competent human being, and all the more so for those who want to rule.

Against this substantial background of overlapping concerns and conversational tendencies, there is a significant difference between *Charmides* and *Alcibiades*. In the former dialogue, Socrates and his partners seem to have shown that a human being cannot understand himself. In the latter, Socrates presents a view of his own about what self-understanding consists in. What is distinctive about this view of Socrates's, however, is that it works with two minds that understand themselves through each other. The model assumes that one mind cannot understand itself on its own. This is a formidable assumption. Why would the author of this text have made it? In such a case as this, I submit, it is reasonable to see the one dialogue as (in part) a response to the other. In view of the otherwise great similarity in concerns between these dialogues, the tacit assumption that a mind cannot understand itself alone that we find in *Alcibiades* is most plausibly interpreted as a taking up of the result of that other inquiry, in *Charmides*. This receives confirmation when what *Alcibiades* offers us turns out to be a solution to the problem in *Charmides*, in terms that the debaters in the latter can accept. Since, however, it depends precisely on my interpretation of *Charmides* and *Alcibiades* whether they put forward the problem and the solution, respectively, that I say they do, this bringing together of the two dialogues is also in part validated precisely by my interpretation, as I develop it in chapters one and two.

³⁶ If not *the* central virtue, as Annas (1985) has argued. She sees in these dialogues a concern for σωφροσύνη that gives way to a concern with justice in later works of Plato.

In general, in making a connection of this philosophical type between two texts, there is only a limited role for the consideration that two works are written by the same author. On the one hand, a single author may express contrasting views in different works, or address wholly different audiences, or have completely unrelated aims. On the other hand, several authors may be engaged in one and the same philosophical project. If our interest is in biography, of course, the identity of their author is a dominant concern in relating texts to each other. If our aim is the reconstruction of philosophical thought as expressed in texts, however, authorial identity is only of minor interpretative value. My construction of a philosophical model on the basis of *Charmides* and *Alcibiades* is therefore not guided by any particular assumption about their authorship. This is particularly relevant in the case of *Alcibiades*, the authorship of which is controversial; some scholars ascribe it to Plato, others deny that Plato wrote it.³⁷ The decisive consideration for the type of approach I take, however, is that we can be reasonably sure that this dialogue was written in the same period and in the same intellectual context as many dialogues that we do think were written by Plato himself. Most importantly, this makes it highly plausible that the author of *Alcibiades* had access to *Charmides*.

4 THE FIRST MODEL AS 'PLATONIC'

The question of authorship does have consequences for the sense in which we may take 'Platonic' in saying, as I do, that the model of friendship and self-understanding that we can find in *Charmides* and *Alcibiades* is a Platonic model. If Plato is not the author of *Alcibiades*, then the model found in part in that dialogue cannot be said to be the brainchild of Plato. While this is true, I should still like to insist on using this label. This is not just because the model is found in the Platonic corpus. Nor is it only because the author of *Alcibiades* develops recognizably Platonic themes and trains of thought (to the extent that *Alcibiades* offers something beyond what else we find in the Platonic corpus, it is circular to claim that it offers Platonic material).³⁸ It is most of all because *Alcibiades* was pretty much the epitome of Platonism, in the view of ancient authors.³⁹ Most likely it will have been regarded as such by the Stoics. In a juxtaposition with the Stoic model, therefore, it is fitting to call the model found (in part) in *Alcibiades* a Platonic one.

³⁷ In the introduction to his edition, Denyer (2001) offers a good overview of the discussion and plausible grounds for thinking that Plato in fact wrote *Alcibiades* (14-26). He also describes some of the implications of accepting *Alcibiades* as Plato's for standard ways of classifying Plato's oeuvre.

³⁸ It is of course equally circular to exclude it from the corpus on the basis of what it offers beyond other dialogues.

³⁹ *Alcibiades* was hugely influential, not only among those we now call 'Neo-Platonists', but very soon after Plato's death. It is likely that the use of the mirror image in *Magna Moralia* 1213a20-2 derives from it. Cicero's work contains a number of unmistakable references (*Tusc.* 1.51f., 67; *Resp.* 6.26; *Leg.* 1.58ff.). A modern study on the influence of *Alcibiades* on Stoicism remains to be written; the first part of Pépin (1971) traces the idea that a human being is her soul from *Alcibiades* to the Stoics.

Some may be inclined to classify *Charmides* and perhaps also *Alcibiades* among the so-called Socratic dialogues; that would raise the question whether the model described here is perhaps Socratic, rather than Platonic. The term ‘Socratic’ is often associated with the group of Platonic dialogues that describe Socrates as engaged in inconclusive discussions about ethical themes; some assign these to an early period in Plato’s career. However, neither *Charmides* nor *Alcibiades* fit the required pattern. The former does not limit itself to ethical themes at all. The latter is far from aporetic. Indeed, what *Alcibiades* offers us is as metaphysical a philosophy as anything in *Republic*.⁴⁰ However, we should not interpret ‘Platonic’ as a specific reference to the philosophical views found in dialogues like *Republic*, *Phaedo*, &c. – the dialogues that some want to allocate to a so-called ‘middle’ period in Plato’s career. These views include such distinctive ideas as the theory of transcendent forms and the view that the soul has three parts (rather than only one). If that is what ‘Platonic’ means, then the model I describe is not Platonic. However, there is a perfectly legitimate use of the word ‘Platonic’ that does not commit us to this one particular view about the relation between different dialogues in the Platonic corpus – even apart from questions about the internal coherence of that view. Between them, *Charmides* and *Alcibiades* offer us a model that has epistemological, metaphysical, and anthropological aspects; that is found in the Platonic corpus; and that uses and develops Platonic themes. It has as much a claim to being Platonic as anything from the same context.

4. ON WORDS I USE

I end with a few remarks on words and conventions that I use. Speaking of self-understanding is speaking of something reflexive. As I mentioned above, our concern with self-understanding is with an understanding’s understanding of itself, and with a person’s understanding of herself insofar as the former is a central element in the latter. There is scholarly debate about the question whether there is a distinct notion of self (‘the self’) in ancient thought that is comparable to our modern notion of self, involving things like subjectivity and self-awareness.⁴¹ As I use it, ‘self’ implies no particular position in this debate (I think): I use it to refer to whatever it is that you ask for when you ask ‘what am I?’

I translate «ἔρως» as ‘love’ and as ‘sexual love’. Even if its ambivalent role in Greek culture had not already made this word untranslatable, that would have been ensured by the substantial reinterpretation it received in the hands of ancient philosophers.

Except in translations of ancient texts, I use female pronouns. There is reason to do so in this discussion especially, since the ancient philosophers with whom we are dealing made explicit room for the equal treatment of women and men.

⁴⁰ See Denyer (2001: 24-26) for the problems that a genuine *Alcibiades* poses to the old-fashioned division of Plato’s dialogues into three periods.

⁴¹ e.g. Sorabji 2006: 32-53 (positive); Inwood 2005: 322-52 (negative); Gill 1996b, 2006: 325-407 (ancient thought views selves in objective-participant, rather than subjective-individualist terms); Long 1991a; 1997; 2006a (positive), cf. 1999: 584.

In speaking of the active principle in Stoic philosophy, I speak of ‘God’ and use masculine pronouns to refer to him. In doing so, I attempt to conform to Stoic usage itself. There should be no mistaking the fact, however, that the Stoic God is a principle and a body, which is present in all entities of the world as their cause.

5. PLAN OF THIS BOOK

In part 1, I discuss the Platonic model of friendship and self-understanding. Chapter 1 provides a reading of *Charmides*; its focus is on self-understanding and the ontological status of the power to understand. In chapter 2, I interpret *Alcibiades*, and argue that this dialogue develops a philosophical view of friendship that takes up and solves the problem about self-understanding which *Charmides* could not get past.

Part 2 is about the Stoic model. I argue in chapter 3 that self-understanding is an inherent feature of the wisdom that the Stoics think constitutes happiness. In chapter 4, I look at the Stoic conception of friendship and argue that the Stoics identified friendship with the self-understanding mind.

PART I

A PLATONIC MODEL

CHAPTER 1

HUMANS AND POWERS – A READING OF *CHARMIDES*

We first examine a model that we can reconstruct from the Platonic dialogues *Charmides* and *Alcibiades*. The former presents a puzzle about the possibility of direct self-understanding; the latter offers a response to this in the form of an account of a very philosophical sort of friendship.

We turn to *Charmides* as a dialogue concerned with human understanding. What I want to show in this chapter is that the dialogue claims that understanding is a power, a power to understand, and that to be a power is to be something that has to be exercised, applied. I also argue that *Charmides* works with a view of who we are that identifies us with our power to understand. When therefore the power to understand turns out to be unable to grasp itself in its direct application to itself, that means in addition that we, human beings, are fundamentally unable to grasp ourselves in this direct way. Chapter 2 describes the indirect way in which we *are* able to understand ourselves.

I will start with the central passage that develops the conception of understanding as a power. To do so is to plunge rather abruptly into the dialogue. In a more meandering approach later on (1.2) I will consider the context, in order to justify my interpretation of understanding more broadly conceived and to show the continuity of this passage, on my interpretation, with the rest of the dialogue.

1.1

UNDERSTANDING OF UNDERSTANDING

Consider Critias's account of σωφροσύνη, good sense:¹ it is

T1	some singular understanding, which is understanding of nothing else, except of itself and of the other kinds of understanding, and this same understanding is also of incomprehension[.] (167b11-c2)	μία τις ἐπιστήμη, ἢ οὐκ ἄλλου τινός ἐστιν ἢ ἑαυτῆς τε καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιστημῶν ἐπιστήμη, καὶ δὴ καὶ ἀνεπιστημοσύνης ἢ αὐτῆ αὐτῆ[.]
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This is obviously a highly intellectualist account of good sense, but more on that later (see 1.2.1). The understanding described here is characterised by being reflexive – it is about itself – and by being of a higher order than the other kinds of understanding. These other understandings are specific branches of expertise (medicine and housebuilding have been mentioned earlier). A third feature is that it is understanding of nothing else: all other objects are denied to this understanding. This means in particular that it does not understand any of the objects of the lower-order

¹ On «σωφροσύνη» see Rademaker 2005.

understandings – geometric figures, economic theorems, etc. It is only of itself, the other kinds of understanding, and incomprehension.

The peculiarity of this understanding of understanding ('UU' from now on) places the very notion of understanding centre-stage. In *Charmides* this happens in three acts (on which more in 1.2.6): Socrates successively wonders about whether UU is possible, about its content, and about its usefulness. The first of these is the most fundamental discussion for our purposes, the question, that is, whether there can be such a thing as UU. Against this supposition, Socrates develops an argument that I will call the 'power argument' for reasons that will emerge; this has three parts. He first argues that in the case of sight, hearing, and all the senses, as well as in the case of desire, fear, judgement, and the like, the framework that Critias has proposed is unheard of. A desire, for instance, that desires nothing except itself and other desires does not exist, as Critias admits. The second stage of the power argument is in more or less quantitative terms: 'larger', 'double' and their kind. Socrates argues that it is impossible to conceive of something larger than all other larger things and itself, but not larger than anything else – including things than which other larger things are larger. Finally, we are offered the analogy of hearing and sight again, but now as instances of things that have their own objects as properties: since sight sees colour, sight must be coloured if it is to see itself. That too, Socrates presses, is unacceptable.

1 THE POWER ARGUMENT – FIRST STAGE

The discussion starts in confusion – ἀπορία.

T2	'Come on then, Critias,' I said, 'see if you prove a bit more resourceful about this than I; for I have no way out. Shall I tell you how come?' (167b6-8)	ἴθι δὴ, ἔφην ἐγώ, ὦ Κριτία, σκέψαι, ἔάν τι περὶ αὐτῶν εὐπορώτερος φανῆς ἐμοῦ· ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ ἀπορώ. ἢ δὲ ἀπορῶ, φράσω σοι;
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And confusion is where it ends for both Socrates and Critias – only the latter will not admit it.

T3	Critias listened to all of that and saw me without a way out. And just as people who see others yawn in front of them suffer the same thing themselves, so also Critias seemed to me overcome by my having no way out and to be taken over by confusion himself. He felt ashamed for the others there, however, since he was always very well regarded, and did not want to concede to me that he was unable to pick apart the things I challenged him with; and he said nothing precise, in an attempt to hide his confusion. (169c3-d1)	Καὶ ὁ Κριτίας ἀκούσας ταῦτα καὶ ἰδὼν με ἀποροῦντα, ὥσπερ οἱ τοὺς χασμωμένους καταντικρὺ ὀρῶντες ταῦτόν τοῦτο συμπάσχουσιν, κάκεινος ἔδοξέ μοι ὑπ' ἐμοῦ ἀποροῦντος ἀναγκασθῆναι καὶ αὐτὸς ἀλῶναι ὑπὸ ἀπορίας. ἄτε οὖν εὐδοκιμῶν ἐκάστοτε, ἡσχύνετο τοὺς παρόντας, καὶ οὔτε συγχωρῆσαί μοι ἤθελεν ἀδύνατος εἶναι διελέσθαι ἃ προυκαλούμην αὐτόν, ἔλεγέν τε οὐδὲν σαφές, ἐπικαλύπτων τὴν ἀπορίαν.
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Critias proves an obstinate respondent, which is why Socrates takes his time in establishing his case that UU is impossible. In the first instance, he lists no less than eight parallel cases as the basis of his analogical argument about understanding,

which would in other dialogues receive only two or three. He asks Critias whether there is

- 1) sight, not of colours, but of itself, other sights, and non-sights;
- 2) hearing, not of sound, but of itself, other hearings, and non-hearings;
- 3) sensation, not of sensibles, but of itself, other sensations, and non-sensations;
- 4) desire, not of pleasure, but of itself, and other desires;
- 5) choice, not of something good, but of itself, and other choices;
- 6) love, not of beauty, but of itself, and other loves;
- 7) fear, not of something scary, but of itself, and other fears;
- 8) judgement, not of what other judgements judge, but of itself and other judgements.²

Critias denies this in each case. ‘But we do seem to be saying’, Socrates observes, ‘that there is an understanding of this kind, which is understanding of nothing learnt, but understanding of itself and of the other understandings’. To which Critias responds apparently undisturbed: ‘We do say that’; but Socrates: ‘isn’t that absurd?’³

The first stage of Socrates’s examination is therefore an inductive argument. It would be highly peculiar, Socrates suggests, if understanding behaved differently from the other cases. These would in modern parlance be called ‘intentional states’ to express the idea that they are bound up with the object they are about: there is no mental state of seeing apart from an object seen. Even though talk of intentionality is a modern way of expressing a commonality between the cases, they still appear quite distinct. But this helps Socrates, for to the extent that he secures Critias’s agreement that there are no such things as listed above, the greater diversity of the listed items makes it more implausible that there is an exception to this pattern, in the shape of UU – an understanding that understands itself and other understandings, but nothing that those other understandings understand.

² 167c8-168a5: «ἐννόει γὰρ εἴ σοι δοκεῖ ὄψις τις εἶναι, ἢ ὧν μὲν αἱ ἄλλαι ὄψεις εἰσὶν, οὐκ ἔστιν τούτων ὄψις, ἑαυτῆς δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὄψεων ὄψις ἐστὶν καὶ μὴ ὄψεων ὡσαύτως, καὶ χρῶμα μὲν ὄρα οὐδὲν ὄψις οὔσα, αὐτὴν δὲ καὶ τὰς ἄλλας ὄψεις δοκεῖ τις σοι εἶναι τοιαύτη;» «Μὰ Δί’ οὐκ ἔμοιγε.» «Τί δὲ ἀκοήν, ἢ φωνῆς μὲν οὐδεμιᾶς ἀκούει, αὐτῆς δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀκοῶν ἀκούει καὶ τῶν μὴ ἀκοῶν;» «Οὐδὲ τοῦτο.» «Συλλήβδην δὴ σκόπει περὶ πασῶν τῶν αἰσθήσεων εἴ τις σοι δοκεῖ εἶναι αἰσθήσεων μὲν αἰσθησις καὶ ἑαυτῆς, ὧν δὲ δὴ αἱ ἄλλαι αἰσθήσεις αἰσθάνονται, μηδενὸς αἰσθανομένη;» «Οὐκ ἔμοιγε.» «Ἄλλ’ ἐπιθυμία δοκεῖ τις σοι εἶναι, ἥτις ἡδονῆς μὲν οὐδεμιᾶς ἐστὶν ἐπιθυμία, αὐτῆς δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιθυμιῶν;» «Οὐ δῆτα.» «Οὐδὲ μὴν βούλησις, ὡς ἐγὼμαι, ἢ ἀγαθὸν μὲν οὐδὲν βούλεται, αὐτὴν δὲ καὶ τὰς ἄλλας βουλήσεις βούλεται.» «Οὐ γὰρ οὔν.» «Ἐρωτα δὲ φαίης ἂν τίνα εἶναι τοιοῦτον, ὃς τυγχάνει ὧν ἔρωσ καλοῦ μὲν οὐδενός, αὐτοῦ δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἐρώτων;» «Οὐκ, ἔφη, ἐγώ γε.» «Φόβον δὲ ἤδη τινὰ κατανενόηκας, ὃς ἑαυτὸν μὲν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους φόβους φοβεῖται, τῶν δεινῶν δ’ οὐδὲ ἔν φοβεῖται;» «Οὐ κατανενόηκα, ἔφη.» «Δόξαν δὲ δοξῶν δόξαν καὶ αὐτῆς, ὧν δὲ αἱ ἄλλαι δοξάζουσιν μηδὲν δοξάζουσαν;» «Οὐδαμῶς.»

³ «Ἄλλ’ ἐπιστήμην, ὡς ἔοικεν, φαμέν τίνα εἶναι τοιαύτην, ἥτις μαθήματος μὲν οὐδενός ἐστὶν ἐπιστήμη, αὐτῆς δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιστημῶν ἐπιστήμη;» «Φαμέν γάρ.» «Οὐκοῦν ἄτοπον[;]» (168a6-10)

2 THE POWER ARGUMENT – SECOND STAGE

Stage two of the argument considers a feature that understanding shares with all of the analogous cases: that it is ‘of’ something. We may interpret this focus on the nature of the relations discussed thus far as an attempt to justify the use of induction from the eight relations above, by making explicit the similarity between them and understanding.⁴ The example Socrates uses is the relation of being larger than. That English has ‘than’ instead of ‘of’ here should not distract us. Socrates makes use of the fact that Greek uses the genitive case both to refer to the objects of sight and hearing and the like, and to refer to the second term in a comparison – larger than ... (something in the genitive). It is too quick to say that Socrates mistakenly compares unequal cases just because English treats them differently.⁵ The similarity between them that the Greek captures may well be more significant, and more relevant to the phenomenon under discussion, than the differences between them.⁶

The result of fitting ‘larger than’ into the mould Critias has proposed for self-understanding is problematic.

T4	If we would find something larger, which is larger than the things that are larger and is larger than itself; but not larger than any of the things than which the others are larger; then I think it would in any case be valid of this thing – if it is indeed larger than itself – that it is also smaller than itself. (168b10-c2)	Εἰ οὖν τι εὐροίμεν μείζον, ὃ τῶν μὲν μείζονων ἐστὶν μείζον καὶ ἑαυτοῦ, ὧν δὲ τᾶλλα μείζω ἐστὶν μηδενὸς μείζον, πάντως ἂν που ἐκεῖνό γ' αὐτῷ ὑπάρχοι, εἴπερ ἑαυτοῦ μείζον εἴη, καὶ ἔλαττον ἑαυτοῦ εἶναι·
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The absurdity of this case is secured by the reflexive element in it, that the thing (call it Λ) is larger than itself; this is repeated as if to mark it as the direct cause of the result. Λ cannot be, because there cannot be a thing that is both larger and smaller than itself. That Λ would also have to be higher-order, as expressed by the phrase ‘larger than the things that are larger’ (call these latter λ s), is not explicitly called into play, even if this, too, would yield an unacceptable result. For if Λ is not to be larger than the things than which a λ is larger (x and y , say), then it is either equal in size to x and y or smaller than them. But in this case λ , which is larger than x and y , must also be larger than Λ . But it was stipulated that Λ was larger than λ . So Λ is both larger and smaller than λ .⁷ The problem that Socrates calls attention to is that we

⁴ McKim 1985 has reason to signal that Socrates uses induction again, even though Critias has objected to it just before. However, McKim’s protest against it is unjustified, and it is implausible that Critias ‘misses the boat this time’ (66). Critias’s earlier objection is not to induction as such, but to its application in the specific case; he sees a decisive difference between the cases that Socrates compares. This time, *apparently*, Critias thinks the eight cases and understanding sufficiently alike for Socrates’s argument to work – and here we should keep in mind that Socrates is sensitive to Critias’s worries, not claiming absolute validity before he has considered the nature of the likeness between the cases. Similarly, Carone 1998 sees room for UU only because she does not recognise that Socrates offers more, ultimately, than merely an argument from analogy (274f.).

⁵ Guthrie 1975: 161: a ‘facile analogy’.

⁶ But note that not all the Greek cases use the genitive in fact. Socrates’s choice for the genitive is therefore significant – see 1.1.4.

⁷ *contra* McCabe 2007 (4n.9), we do not have to suppose that this, what she calls ‘hard’, construction (as opposed to the easy one) is contained in the result as reported in the passage;

would have to apply contradictory predicates to one and the same object. For the expressions ‘larger than’ and ‘smaller than’ are not applied to different objects, or to the same object in relation to different things, or to the same object at different times; they are applied to the very same object, while all other conditions are the same. This makes these predications truly contradictory. The contradiction is, moreover, of a highly problematic kind, because Λ is an otherwise unassuming something: being-larger-than is its only distinguishing mark – and that is contradicted.

Is this appeal to contradictories, like the mention that Λ is higher-order, unneeded to show that there is nothing to correspond to the description of T4? Doesn’t the expression ‘larger than’ itself imply that if x is larger than y , x and y must be distinct items? I think this is a plausible thing to say. But the role of this example is precisely to analyze other relations, notably ‘understanding’. To Critias it is not evidently absurd to say that if x understands y , x and y can be the same item. This may be why Socrates goes one step further in the case of being-larger-than, to draw attention to the absurdity of applying contradictory predicates to one and the same object. Perhaps by making explicit what the relation of being ‘of’ something involves, he can bring Critias to agree that UU is no more possible than something being larger than itself.

A similar result obtains for ‘double’.

T5	If something is the double of the other doubles and of itself, then it is the double of itself and the other doubles while, I take it, being half. For you surely cannot be the double of anything except a half. (168c4-8) ⁸	Οὐκοῦν καὶ εἴ τι διπλάσιόν ἐστιν τῶν τε ἄλλων διπλασίων καὶ ἑαυτοῦ, ἡμίσεος δῆπου ὄντος ἑαυτοῦ τε καὶ τῶν ἄλλων διπλάσιον ἂν εἴη· οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν που ἄλλου διπλάσιον ἢ ἡμίσεος.
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The trouble seems to be once more in the simultaneous application to the same object (call it Δ) of contradictory qualifications. The incomplete predicates ‘half ...’ and ‘double ...’ are applied to Δ with respect to the same object, Δ , all other conditions being equal. The wording here is very condensed, however, and there is the suggestion in the text that what is strange is the simultaneous application of ‘half’ and ‘double’ *simpliciter*, as if there is something incongruous between being double the others while being half of something else.⁹ Nevertheless, the main problem is seen to lie in the application of contradictory predicates, as a result of the reflexivity of Δ .

There is one unsurprising difference in phrasing between T4 and T5: T5 does not mention ‘not double the things of which the other doubles are double’. The corresponding phrase in T4 generates trouble because it contradicts the normal behaviour of being-larger-than, for this is a transitive property: if A is larger than B and B is larger than C, then A is also larger than C. If, on the other hand, A is double

the presence of ‘larger than the things that are larger’ is justified, even in the face of its not being used in the argumentation, by being member of the structure that the argument imposes on different kinds of relations (and which derives from Critias’s account of self-understanding).

⁸ alternatively: ‘... then it is double while, I take it, being half of itself and of the other doubles’; but it is hard to see how it becomes half of the other doubles.

⁹ Is this merely an attempt to stupefy Critias, or the love of verbal paradox?

B, and B is double C, then A is four times C, not its double. Its absence in T5 corresponds, therefore, with the normal behaviour of double: it is not transitive.

The other instances – more, heavier, older – which Socrates merely mentions, are again perfectly transitive. But it may be worth noting that the description is progressively shortened: from ‘larger than’ to ‘double’ the things than which the other larges are large drop out; from ‘double’ to ‘more’ the other doubles drop out, and from ‘more’ to ‘heavier’ the thing itself drops out of the description. But these are notes in the margin, which probably do not affect the line of thought here.

3 THE POWER ARGUMENT – THIRD STAGE

The time has come, in any case, to sum up, or so it seems: Socrates uses a locution that signals a conclusion, but by means of it he opens stage 3. The sentence is a central one, and has a Janus-face.

T6	And similarly for all the rest: whatever has its own power towards itself will also have that being towards which its power is[.] (168c10-d2)	καὶ τᾶλλα πάντα ὡσαύτως, ὅτιπερ ἂν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ δύναμιν πρὸς ἑαυτὸ ἔχη, οὐ καὶ ἐκείνην ἔξει τὴν οὐσίαν, πρὸς ἣν ἡ δύναμις αὐτοῦ ἦν[.]
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This sentence contains the heart of the discussion. It requires some spelling out, but it will clarify Socrates’s grouping together of understanding with being-larger-than and double, and also, at one remove, his core conception of understanding. Let us, however, postpone analysis of it until after stage 3 of Socrates’s argument, in which he gives two more examples of T6.

T7	‘I mean the following sort of thing: we say, for instance, that hearing is hearing of nothing other than sound, don’t we?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘If therefore it is to hear itself, it will hear itself as something that has sound.’ (168d2-7)	«λέγω δὲ τὸ τοιόνδε· οἶον ἡ ἀκοή, φαμέν, οὐκ ἄλλου τινὸς ἢν ἀκοή ἢ φωνῆς· ἢ γάρ.» «Ναί.» «Οὐκοῦν εἶπερ αὐτὴ αὐτῆς ἀκούσεται, φωνὴν ἔχούσης ἑαυτῆς ἀκούσεται[.]»
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The case of sight works just the same: it must have colour if it is to see itself.

4 THE POWER ARGUMENT – LANGUAGE AND ONTOLOGY

We can now look back on the power argument as a whole. It is clear that in all of the cases under consideration we are dealing with a relation of some kind. The argument first questions the conceivability of states that lack their related objects, the second stage focuses on the structure of the relation itself, and the third on the object in question. We can note this as the structure of the argument. If we have an eye in our left hand, and a colour in our right, Socrates’s argument moves from the left to the

right-hand side. But this argumentative structure from left to right masks an ontological structure from right to left.¹⁰

The decisive point is the characterisation of ‘power’ in T6. Socrates here presents an account of understanding by putting philosophical flesh onto the bones of a grammatical feature – although he would protest that it never was a merely grammatical feature to begin with. The feature is that the operative expressions in the power argument ‘take’ (as grammarians put it) the genitive. Most of the philosophical flesh is added in T6, when Socrates characterises power as being ‘towards being’.¹¹ Let me explain.

The two times that Plato uses ‘δύναμις’ – ‘power’ – in this context before T6 are at the beginning of phase two of the power argument. Socrates asks

T8	‘Is understanding itself understanding of something, and does it have a power of such a kind that it is of something?’ [...] ‘And we assert also that what is larger has a power of such a kind that it is larger than something?’ (168b1-6) ¹²	«ἔστι μὲν αὐτὴ [Shorey: αὐτὴ codd.] ἡ ἐπιστήμη τινὸς ἐπιστήμη, καὶ ἔχει τινὰ τοιαύτην δύναμιν ὥστε τινὸς εἶναι[:]» [...] «Καὶ γὰρ τὸ μείζον φαμεν τοιαύτην τινὰ ἔχειν δύναμιν, ὥστε τινὸς εἶναι μείζον;»
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By means of his specification (‘such that...’) Socrates seeks to designate a type of power rather than describe the nature of all powers (‘a power, therefore...’). The power in question is the seemingly completely general ‘being of something’ – τινὸς εἶναι.

As we saw, Socrates’s focus on the relation of one thing being of something else is his way to justify his earlier use of induction. It is a good way to strengthen an argument from induction to point out what is common between the cases you have enumerated on the one hand and the case about which you want to infer something on the other. This makes Socrates’s choice of the genitive τινὸς to characterise this common feature all the more surprising, however. While most of the eight earlier cases are described by means of an expression that includes a genitive for their proper object – love *of* something beautiful (ἔρωσ καλοῦ) – not all of them are. More to the point, perhaps: while we have a genitive in the Greek version of ‘understanding *of* something’, the verb ‘to understand’ in Greek does *not* ‘take’ the genitive.¹³ The grammatical feature of the genitive per se is not, therefore, what all of these cases share. In other words, it would make no sense to make Socrates’s point about power –

¹⁰ The problem with UU is not that it generates a regress (*contra*, e.g., Gauss 1954: 102-3). That is not mentioned here at all. (It is perhaps hinted at in *Tht.* 200b and stated, famously, by Aristotle, in *de An.* 3.2.)

¹¹ Heitsch (2004: 251ff.) is needlessly at a loss why Socrates forgets about the content that he had earlier insisted understanding must always have. Socrates does not: it underlies his whole argument.

¹² In 168b1 I follow Shorey 1907 in reading αὐτὴ for the MSS αὐτή. Earlier versions of the idea that understanding is ‘of something’ are in 166a3-5 and 166b5-6, but these passages add nothing to T6 and T8 and are, moreover, contested in their context by Critias.

¹³ This is true of ἐπίστασθαι as it is of εἰδέναι (according to the analysis of John Lyons (1963), the latter is functionally the verb that corresponds to ἐπιστήμη, since it is the general term under which the more specific ἐπίστασθαι and γινώσκειν are subsumed, much as τέχνη and γνῶσις are subsumed under ἐπιστήμη).

it is ‘of’ something – if it is a point about language, as quite a few scholars have thought. The same conclusion follows if we look only briefly at how Socrates develops the point. For having likened the case of being-larger-than to the case of understanding, he proceeds to analyze the possibility of UU by looking at the possibility of Λ ; that is, he considers things, not words. It would make no sense to look at the *reality* of things to which the expression «μεῖζόν τινος» (‘larger than something’) refers in order to say something about the common form of the expressions «μεῖζόν τινος» and «ἐπιστήμη τινός». The argument is not about language. Socrates is interested in how things are with a particular class of things. Nevertheless, there is an insight behind the misconception that the argument is about language, an insight that we should preserve. It is that Socrates does make the expression ‘being of something’ the locus of his examination. For we should note that in the absence of a developed vocabulary of grammar, this is a perfectly common way to speak about the genitive as a grammatical case. Grammar is Socrates’s way into understanding. He discerns philosophical substance behind the structure with the genitive, despite even its absence in some cases.

But if the argument is not about language, what is it about? What is this philosophical substance that Socrates sees behind the expression ‘being of something’? As a preliminary step to answering this question, let us consider what it means to use a genitive. The grammatical function of a genitive is to indicate separation and origin (its name is ‘genitive’), whether it be in a spatial sense, possessive, or otherwise.¹⁴ In constructions like the ones in our passage, the genitive is usually called one of object. ‘Fear of something terrible’ does not describe a lion’s fear, but my being afraid that the lion will do something to me: the lion (or his claws) are the object of my fear. Likewise, understanding of mathematics is not the understanding that the discipline of mathematics shows in its final exams, but my understanding of how mathematics works. Mathematics is not the subject, but the object, of this understanding. We should keep in mind that the genitive of object is in itself just a phenomenon of language. At the same time, it will be clear that in many cases there is a connection between the use of a genitive and the state of affairs to be expressed by it. It is plain that in the example of fear the use of the genitive is suitable because it expresses on the level of syntax how the mental state of fear is derived from, or dependent on, the object at which it is directed.

5 THE POWER ARGUMENT – THE NATURE OF A POWER (I)

Socrates exploits this connection between language and ontology to present understanding as something that depends on its objects. This is what he wants to make clear in T6, when he refers back to T8’s use of ‘power’ as ‘of something’ by means of his description of a power as directed towards a being. This characterisation is what we should concentrate on next. That in T6 Socrates refers back (to T8) is

¹⁴ Even if we can paraphrase sentences with genitive constructions in a way that does not involve that particular genitive construction, in most cases we have to use other expressions that still involve this sense of a relation to a source, a distance from a beginning.

implied in his wording. He says ‘And similarly for all the rest: whatever has its own power towards itself will also...’. Not only is this presented as a conclusion, it also infers things from the nature of the power that we are discussing. Contrast the earlier descriptions, where Socrates said ‘a power of such a kind that...’; these served to single out a kind of power, whereas now we are describing this kind of power that we have already selected. His statement is therefore meant to bring out what is implied in the examples and in the opening classification. They help us to interpret the statement of T6.

In his reference backward, Socrates characterises the kind of power that includes understanding as ‘towards’ («πρός») something, and this something he calls the ‘being’ («οὐσία») of something. We should note, firstly, that in returning to the power that was said to be ‘of something’ by means of a prepositional phrase – ‘towards’ – Socrates indicates that he means to be serious about the relation that this power involves. Its relational aspect is the focus of the discussion. Building on this, secondly, notice how ‘power’ and ‘being’ are placed in opposition as two notions that must be separated and yet have an essential connection; they refer to things that are, in a sense still to be determined, correlates.¹⁵ The failure of Λ and Δ was the consequence of the fusion of these correlates, in their cases, being-larger-than and being-smaller-than, and double and half, respectively. For Socrates, therefore, the relation of understanding too necessarily involves two distinct items. This is a major part of what the different stages of the power argument seek to demonstrate, from different perspectives.¹⁶

Thirdly, at a further level of analysis, we should note the significance of the terms used for the two poles in the opposition, ‘being’ and ‘power’. These are philosophically rich and problematic terms. They are problematic because they can be used to refer to many different things; their occurrence in a given passage may therefore leave the reader in the dark about their intended reference. By the same token, however, they are terms that a philosopher can use to refer to nodal concepts in his philosophy. Using public words idiosyncratically is the philosopher’s way to claim his conceptual property. In the present case, it is important to see that the individual terms are qualified by their paired occurrence: they are significant elements of our passage not as isolated referring expressions but as correlates and opposites.

In the relation of power and being, power is determined by being specific to a certain class of being. From the total field of beings, there is a distinct kind of being to which any particular power pertains. This is the import of the use of ‘that’ in ‘that being towards which its power is’. The being towards which the power is is the one and only object of that power.

The term ‘being’ («οὐσία»), taken by itself, can convey various things. In non-philosophical contexts it is mostly used for someone’s possessions, in philosophical uses it covers a range of things that we have come to keep apart by means of the

¹⁵ Cf. McCabe 2007: 5.

¹⁶ Schmidt (1985: 61) construes this argument as an argument about how things can be true; the necessity of distinct connected items is the ‘Grund aller *Wahrheit*’ (his emphasis). It is important to see, however, that Plato is doing ontology here, not philosophy of language.

distinction between existence and essence. In interpreting Plato's text, it may be tempting to pry apart such seemingly different uses; but it is more sensible to accept that Plato used the one word because he wanted to convey something basically similar in these to us dissimilar cases. Part of the reason why they are dissimilar to us is that we are inclined to count existents, things that exist versus things that do not exist, just as one would count heads in a meeting, without regard for whether they are bald or hairy, large or small, male or female.¹⁷ Plato's interest instead is in the way things are – with equal stress on 'way' and 'are'. He speaks of being in analog terms, we in digital ones. To say what something is like is for him part of saying that it is there, and likewise to draw attention to something as existent is part of saying what kind of thing it is. Within this conception, however, there is room to speak of things that are not, just as much as there is room to speak of things that are. Characteristically, however, these two classes may overlap. This is an ontology of degrees, in which some things can *be* more than other things.¹⁸ More specifically, while Plato lacks (or disregards) the modern distinction between existence and essence, he gives pride of place to one that our talk of existence and properties evens out: the distinction between basic, permanent, determinate being and what is more derivative, fleeting, indeterminate. This is a topic in its own right, of course, but we should note that the term «οὐσία» is firmly on the basic side of this divide. In both of these ways – in combining essence and existence, and in representing firm, determinate being – talk of the concept of οὐσία is talk of what is ontologically worthwhile and primary.

The use of precisely this word as the correlate term of 'power' emphasises the relative ontological firmness or independence of the object in any of the relations under discussion.¹⁹ Its effect is to make 'power' responsible for the relational aspect of the pair. And this is borne out in the way the text speaks of power. All uses of «δύναμις» in this context are accompanied by «πρός», 'towards'. Power is described as something that has its being in relation to its proper object.²⁰ To be for a power is to be-towards. This implies that the object needs both to be there and to be such as it is in order for the power to have being towards it. It enjoys ontological priority relative to the power that corresponds to it; this power is ontologically dependent on it.

What is said of powers in general has its focal application in the case of understanding. What Socrates is driving at here is that the power to understand has its being in being-towards what is understood. It is ontologically dependent on the

¹⁷ We will see in chapter 3 (1.8) that the Stoics are closer to us in that respect, in having a binary ontology, as I call it: either something is, or it is not.

¹⁸ The classic description of things that are between being and non-being in the Platonic corpus is, of course, in *Resp.* 478e1-79d9 (and cf. Vlastos 1991: 254-5). I do not mean to imply that the ontology of *Republic* is present in *Charmides*; I am claiming that a gradual understanding of being is implied generally in Plato's use of «οὐσία». In using it here, especially in its opposition to «δύναμις», I argue, the author of this dialogue introduces an ontology of degrees in *Charmides*.

¹⁹ I emphasise the choice for «οὐσία» here because it seems to me that Socrates could equally well have used «εἶδος», or a combination of «οἶος»/«ποῖος»/«τοιούτος», for instance.

²⁰ As said before, this applies to the kind of power that the discussion has individuated; it is not meant as a general statement about all possible kinds of power.

objects of understanding.²¹ And so, in describing it as ‘towards being’, Socrates has made explicit why he characterised this class of powers as ‘of such a kind that [they are] of something’, as powers with a genitive.

A description in terms of ontological dependence is abstract and relatively non-committal, not least because it remains very general. In modern discussions of ontological dependence, we find a variety of forms. Some take it as a relation of existence:²² the ontological dependence of A on B is given in the phrase

necessarily, if A exists, B exists

Others, and they more recently, advocate an approach in terms of essence. There is something in the essence of A, they say, that implies the existence of B. (Naturally, they put it much more subtly.)²³ Neither of these approaches is quite able to capture what we have here. Nor even if they did should we adopt one to the exclusion of the other: as we have seen, talk of existence *versus* essence is not the most illuminating way to interpret our text.

A better way to capture the relation between powers and their objects in *Charmides* is in terms of determination. Our analysis has highlighted the directional aspect of the dependence of a power on its object. I have also insisted that ‘being’, as used in Platonic texts, serves to refer to things that have a definite way of being, that are determined with respect to the kind of thing they are. If we put this together, we get a description of powers as having a determinate way of being only in relation to their objects. If we consider a power in isolation from its object, it will be undetermined with respect to being a particular kind of thing. That is, it is not in itself a particular kind of thing. Only in connection with its proper object does a power receive the determination that allows us to refer to it as a particular power: the power to swim, to rule, to do mathematics. We may refer to this process of determination (not as such a temporal process) as ‘application’, as a noun of action. A power is applied when it comes to have its being towards its determinate object.

The examples that I mentioned – the power to swim, to rule, to do mathematics – seem to involve powers that have types of action as their object of application. One could also think of powers as having tokens of these types as their object of application: e.g. a power comes to have its being towards the particular act of mathematical thinking that was involved in your solving a difficult equation yesterday. Perhaps, indeed, we should distinguish between powers as types and

²¹ It is too elliptic for me to quite see his point, but I think I am saying things similar to the following remark by Bonitz (1886: 248-9): ‘Platon erachtet es als durch den Begriff des Wissens selbst erfordert, dass sein Object etwas Reales sei. [... Bonitz cites *Resp.* 477a, and concludes:] Bei einer solchen Überzeugung über die nothwendigen Voraussetzungen des Wissens, aus welcher unter anderem ganz unbedenklich gefolgert wird, dass den Zahlen, den geometrischen Größen, w e i l sie ein Object des Wissens sind, Realität zugeschrieben werden muss – bei einer solchen Überzeugung findet die Annahme eines Wissens des Wissens offenbar keine Stelle.’

²² A good discussion is found in Simons 1987: 290-323.

²³ See for an influential statement of this line of thought Fine 1995. Perhaps something like this would be required if you develop Politis’ characterisation of the content of T6 in terms of essence: ‘Any thing that is, essentially, of some thing or directed at some thing, is what it is in virtue of the thing it is of or directed at.’ (2008: 18)

powers as tokens in the same way as we might distinguish between types and tokens of their objects: e.g. the power to do mathematics is a type of which the powers that are applied to token mathematical activities are tokens. Is there any way to determine which of these construals we should prefer? Both appear consistent with the text of *Charmides*. In favour of a reading in terms of tokens is the consideration that if the relevant objects are types, it seems that they could still to be specified further, in the same way that mathematical activity can be specified as your act of mathematical thinking of yesterday. Thus, one might say, there is still an element of indeterminacy left in tokens, and therefore in the power that has them as its object. In favour of a reading in terms of types, however, is that we may view tokens as the less determined items. They may be limited to some particular spatio-temporal location, for instance, or not be a suitable token in all relevant aspects; the act of mathematical thinking may also be confused thinking, so that it is less mathematical than it might have been. A reading in between these alternatives could be in terms of perfect tokens, which are what they are in the full sense (and so perfect), while also being particular rather than abstract (and so tokens). Each of these alternative readings has its merits, I think; but none forces itself on us. The text being as it is, I do not think that we can do more than signal the ambiguity of types and tokens in what *Charmides* says about powers and their application.

6 POWERS ILLUSTRATED – REPUBLIC AND MATHS

To illustrate the reading I propose of this text in *Charmides*, let us look at a well-known passage in *Republic*, where we find Socrates talking to Glaucon about, precisely, powers. It is celebrated as Plato's classic distinction between knowledge and belief.²⁴

T9	<p>'We shall say that powers are a class of things with which we are able to do whatever we are able to do, and anything else as well which is able to do something. I mean for instance that sight and hearing are among these powers, if you know what kind of thing I am trying to describe.'</p> <p>'I know what you mean,' he said.</p> <p>'Now listen what appears to me to be the case here. As for me, I do not see any colour, or shape, or anything like that in the case of a power, as I do in the case of many other things, by looking at which I differentiate them for myself, that some are such, and others different. In the case of a power I look only at that depending on which it is and which it produces, and in that way I designate each of these powers, 'the same' if it is set in</p>	<p>«Φήσομεν δυνάμεις εἶναι γένος τι τῶν ὄντων, αἷς δὴ καὶ ἡμεῖς δυνάμεθα ἃ δυνάμεθα καὶ ἄλλο πᾶν ὅτι περ ἂν δύνηται, οἷον λέγω ὄψιν καὶ ἀκοήν τῶν δυνάμεων εἶναι, εἰ ἄρα μαθάνεις ὃ βούλομαι λέγειν τὸ εἶδος.»</p> <p>«Ἄλλὰ μαθάνω, ἔφη.»</p> <p>«Ἄκουσον δὴ ὃ μοι φαίνεται περὶ αὐτῶν. δυνάμεως γὰρ ἐγὼ οὔτε τινὰ χροῖαν ὀρώ οὔτε σχῆμα οὔτε τι τῶν τοιούτων οἷον καὶ ἄλλων πολλῶν, πρὸς ἃ ἀποβλέπων ἕνια διορίζομαι παρ' ἑμαυτῶ τὰ μὲν ἄλλα εἶναι, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα· δυνάμεως δ' εἰς ἐκεῖνο μόνον βλέπω ἐφ' ᾧ τε ἔστι καὶ ὃ ἀπεργάζεται, καὶ ταύτη ἐκάστην αὐτῶν δύναμιν ἐκάλεσα, καὶ τὴν μὲν ἐπὶ τῷ αὐτῷ τεταγμένην καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ἀπεργαζομένην τὴν αὐτὴν</p>
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²⁴ To speak in standard terms. We come closer to what is meant if we not only substitute 'understanding' for 'knowledge', but also 'judgement' for 'belief'.

dependence of the same and produces the same, 'different' if set in dependence of something else and produces something else. And you, how do you do it?'

'Just so,' he said. (477c1-d6)

καλῶ, τὴν δὲ ἐπὶ ἑτέρῳ καὶ ἕτερον ἀπεργαζομένην ἄλλην. τί δὲ σύ; πῶς ποιεῖς;»

«Οὕτως, ἔφη.»

Socrates here points to the objects of powers as what enables us to tell one power apart from another. In *Republic* this allows him to argue that understanding and judgement are set over and produce different things (for they have earlier agreed that they are different powers). For us, the description illustrates one thing that may be meant in *Charmides*. Powers do not have the features by reference to which you would normally classify things. They constitute a family (γένος) whose members cannot be told apart by features that they bear on their faces. You must look at their area of competence.

There is no need to consider the powers that T9 speaks of as exactly the same as the powers that *Charmides* speaks of. There appears to be a significant difference, for instance, in T9's mention of the production of things by powers. In *Charmides* the suggestion seemed to be rather that the objects of powers are in some way given, prior to their powers. However, one could also argue that the two pictures are consistent. It does not seem impossible to develop a view in which a thing may be ontologically prior in some sense to another thing, while it is also produced by the latter. Ontological order and order of production need not concur. The relation between the powers of *Charmides* and the powers of T9 may therefore merit further discussion. All I wish to do here, however, is to adduce T9 as an illustration of how we may understand the idea in *Charmides* that the object of a power determines what the power is.

It may also be helpful to consider a use of 'power' as a term in mathematics. In *Theaetetus* we find a discussion of square roots. A particular puzzle was presented by square roots that are not integers ($\sqrt{4}$ is 2, an integer, but $\sqrt{2}$ is not). Talking to Socrates, Theaetetus relates of his maths lesson and his classification of just such non-integer roots:

T10 | Theodorus here was demonstrating to us with the aid of diagrams a point about powers. He was showing us that the power of three square feet and the power of five square feet are not commensurable in length with the power of one square foot [...] The idea occurred to us that [...] we might try to collect the powers in question under one term. [...] We took the intermediate numbers, such as three and five and any number which can't be produced by multiplication of two equals [...] A number of this kind we compared to an oblong figure, and called it an oblong number. [...] We defined under the term 'length' any line which produces in square an equilateral plane number;

Περὶ δυνάμεων τι ἡμῖν Θεόδωρος ὅδε ἔγραφε, τῆς τε τρίποδος πέρι καὶ πεντέποδος ἀποφαίνων ὅτι μήκει οὐ σύμμετροι τῇ ποδιαίᾳ [...]

ἡμῖν οὖν εἰσηλθέ τι τοιοῦτον, [...] πειραθῆναι συλλαβεῖν εἰς ἓν, ὅτῳ πάσας ταύτας προσαγορεύσομεν τὰς δυνάμεις. [...] Τὸν τοίνυν μεταξύ τούτου, ὧν καὶ τὰ τρία καὶ τὰ πέντε καὶ πᾶς ὃς ἀδύνατος ἴσος ἰσάκις γενέσθαι, [...]

τῷ προμήκει αὐτῷ σχήματι ἀπεικάσαντες προμήκη ἀριθμὸν ἐκαλέσαμεν. [...]

while any line which produces in square an oblong number we defined under the term ‘power’, for the reason that although it is incommensurable with the former in length, it is commensurable in the plane figures which they respectively have the power to produce.’ (147d3-148b3, tr. Levett/Burnyeat)

Ὅσαι μὲν γραμμαὶ τὸν ἰσόπλευρον καὶ ἐπίπεδον ἀριθμὸν τετραγωνίζουσι, μῆκος ὠρισάμεθα, ὅσαι δὲ τὸν ἑτερομήκη, δυνάμεις, ὡς μῆκει μὲν οὐ συμμέτρους ἐκείναις, τοῖς δ’ ἐπιπέδοις ἃ δύνανται. καὶ περὶ τὰ στερεὰ ἄλλο τοιοῦτον.

The trouble with these non-integer roots is that we cannot measure them by means of the unit (1). So there is no easy way to measure them by means of which you could identify each one of them. The way to identify a power is, instead, via the squares that it has the power to produce, if each side of that square has its length.²⁵ Only in its product, one could say, does the power become apparent, identifiable; only then is it applied.

7 THE POWER ARGUMENT – THE NATURE OF A POWER (II)

The account so far raises more questions than it answers. What exactly is it to be towards? What makes a power be towards something else? Are powers had by things, or are they things themselves? Do they exist? Do they have one object only, or multiple? Do they stop being a power when they are applied? We cannot expect an answer to all of these questions from *Charmides*, which offers only a sparse description of powers. It is nevertheless useful to pose them; and some enable us to draw out more information from the text.

It may be useful briefly to refer to recent metaphysical discussions of powers. These treat of some of the same issues, although noting the differences with *Charmides* may be even more helpful. (I will call modern powers ‘dispositions’ to distinguish them from what we have in *Charmides*; this is also the name most contemporary writers use.) In modern metaphysics, dispositions are things like the fragility of a glass window, the combustibility of wood, &c. One central debate is about the relation of these properties to non-dispositional ones (e.g. the molecular structure of the glass window): are the former identical to the latter, is talk of them an irreducible functionalist description of what happens at the non-dispositional level, or do they actually constitute different ontological domains?²⁶ There are also those who think that there need not be a non-dispositional basis for dispositions – that, e.g., at the lowest level science finds particles that have only dispositional properties.²⁷ In this view, dispositions are the ultimate constituents of reality (and a further division can

²⁵ Cf. the commentary to this passage in the *Anonymous Commentary* (Diels and Schubart 1905), 27.31-8: «οἱ παλαιοὶ τὰ τετράγωνα δυνάμεις ὠνόμαζον· ἡ γὰρ δύναμις τινὸς ἐστὶν δύναμις· δύνανται δὲ τὸ ἐπίπεδον τετράγωνον γραμμῆ, ἀφ’ ἧς ἐγένετο». I owe this reference to Mansfeld 1973: 112.

²⁶ Besides a very accessible introduction, Crane 1996 contains a discussion amongst three key players in the field: Armstrong, Place, and Martin. Cf. also Mellor 1974, Mumford 1998, Molnar 2003.

²⁷ See Shoemaker 1980 and 1998.

be made according to whether you admit non-dispositional constituents as well, or whether you espouse a so-called ‘pan-dispositionalism’).

Whether you call it a power or a disposition, these things seem to be fundamentally about something beyond themselves. A power is a power to do or suffer something, while a disposition is disposed to manifest a particular behaviour. In order to account for this being about something, metaphysicians have considered the relevance to all dispositions of intentionality, a concept that derives from the philosophy of mind. The question in the discussion about dispositions is whether there can be such a thing as physical intentionality. The very reason for which the concept of intentionality was introduced (by Brentano, 1874) was that it seemed to enable us to capture what is essential to mental phenomena, as opposed to non-mental ones. In other words, intentionality was originally conceived as the necessary and sufficient mark of any mental state. Recent writers, however, have argued that there is also non-psychological intentionality.²⁸ They argue that if we consider as the defining characteristics of an intentional state i) a certain directedness at an object beyond itself and ii) that the intentional object may exist but may also not exist, then we must also admit physical intentionality, because physical dispositions have both traits as well. In defence of the applicability of ii) to dispositions they claim that there may be dispositions that, while directed at objects beyond themselves, never become actualised because there happens to be no object of the required kind in the world.²⁹ Imagine a universe with a piece of wood in it, but without any fire, and a temperature of 0°C. The wood would still be flammable, but it would never burn. Now consider a more problematic case: a simple particle that is just the one dispositional property of being flammable. What happens if that never becomes inflamed, if this disposition never becomes actualised? Unless we secretly import in thought other properties of this particle (or a property-less ‘base’), it seems that there is not going to be any entity there, no existent particle.³⁰ Is that an acceptable consequence?

I mention these things, not because we have to settle them here, nor because Platonic philosophy has a straightforward key to modern puzzles, but because they may help us refine our view of *Charmides*’s description of understanding as a power. Let me offer a few observations. Firstly, it is unlikely that *Charmides* would consider the power to understand to be determined by, and so identical to, lower-level psychic properties, let alone bodily ones. In giving, say, a medical account of the soul you have not pinned down the power that is understanding (arguably you have not even given a proper account of the soul that way). Furthermore, that the power to understand is not identical to lower-level properties of the soul also follows from the characterisation of powers of this kind as having their being in being-towards their object. Something that has its being in being-towards cannot be identical to something that does not (it may, of course, be numerically identical, or something of the kind).

²⁸ Martin and Pfeifer 1986.

²⁹ Molnar 2003: 60-81.

³⁰ On a substratum theory of substance we would have something without any properties, which is not necessarily a more acceptable consequence.

In the account of powers in *Charmides*, powers are related to determinate things. That these are determinate things means in part that they have a firmer ontological status. Compared to a given power that is towards it, a fully determinate being is higher on the scale of being, so to speak, than the power. This implies, I submit, that we cannot have a universe in which there is only a power. The ontological priority of powers' proper objects requires their being in order for powers to be-towards them. But on the other hand there may well be powers that are never applied; there is no necessity that each power is at some point or other directed at determinate being. This does not exclude them from our ontology, since the Platonic conception of being is, as I put it above, analog, not digital. To ask whether an unapplied power exists is to ask a question that cannot be answered by a simple 'yes' or 'no'. A power has its being – which is being-towards – midway disorder and definiteness.

The development of the notion of non-psychological intentionality in recent work on dispositions is of particular relevance for us. Central to all intentionality is its directedness; this makes it very useful to describe the *Charmides* view of powers. In modern philosophy, however, it used to have strong associations of consciousness and mental representation. These are ill-suited to our context. The elaboration of a physical version of intentionality frees it of such associations. Thus, while our context is mostly concerned with psychological cases, as was Brentano when he introduced the notion of intentionality, it has closer correspondence with physical intentionality. We do not have categorically to deny that Platonic philosophy has a use for the concepts of consciousness and, particularly, of representation – although there are reasons to do so – to agree that they are unlikely to help us when we interpret texts like *Charmides*. Note, furthermore, how powers in *Charmides* are like physically intentional dispositions in the way that the second requirement of intentionality, that the intentional object may or may not exist, must be read. In the traditional conception of intentionality, this phenomenon is related to the representational nature of intentional states. I may fear ghosts even if there are no ghosts. I may be excited about tomorrow's party, even if what I think will be a party is actually a funeral. In other words, the intentional object may not exist at all, or may be different than I take it to be. Contrast the case of physical intentionality. Here the intentional object is its manifestation: the breaking of the glass is the intentional object of its fragility. The second requirement is met by it being both possible that the glass will break and possible that the glass will not break. That is, the event that is the intentional object may occur and may also not occur. There is no room here for mistakes. The same holds for powers as presented in *Charmides*. It may be the case that a power is never applied to its proper object. But it never happens that a power is applied to something else – the correlate of mistaken representations. Misapplications are no applications. Powers are applied infallibly, though not inevitably.

In speaking of events just now I have mentioned a significant difference between modern dispositions and Platonic powers. The intentional objects of modern dispositions are events (or perhaps states of affairs). The same applies to the conditions necessary to actualise a given disposition. This reflects the post-Humean focus on events on the part of modern philosophy. By contrast, the intentional objects of Platonic powers are determinate things, which have their particular way of being

to the full. At most you could discern an event-like aspect in what I have called the application of a power, although there is no need for this to be a process situated in time. There is to Platonic application a permanence that also suggests that understanding, once acquired, is not lost.

Application has a further aspect that needs to be addressed: repetition. Some modern dispositions are lost when actualised. The fragility of a glass window causes the destruction of the window when it is actualised by my throwing a stone at it. Is there an analogue to this in the application of a power? You could think there is. You could think of the application of a power as its transformation from indeterminate to determinate being. And if something is transformed, it no longer has the form it had. And so it is no longer an indeterminate being and therefore no power. But this misconstrues what application is. Application is not transformation of power per se. Application is the connection, as it were, of a power which is-towards to the being towards which it is. The determinate being that a power has is in relation to its proper object, not as considered in itself. The power as such is not transformed. It is still applicable to other proper objects. The power to hear remains the power to hear when it hears sound A, and so is able to hear sound B, when that presents itself.

Consequently, in a person's many hearings we can discern the same power to hear. For not only is that power available for future proper objects, it was so for ones that are now past as well. This has an important implication for our cases of the pattern: sight of itself and of other sights. Underlying these different sights, these more than singular applications, is one and the same power, the power of sight.

It may be helpful at this point to present things in a somewhat symbolised fashion (but it equally may not, and I do not mean to do logic with these half-formalisations). We can represent by the following notation:

⟨power(OBJECT)⟩

a power that is applied to an object. Sight of red becomes

⟨sight(RED)⟩

and hearing that is not applied

⟨hearing()⟩

The parentheses belong to the power symbol to express the being-towards of a power. The objects are given in capitals to indicate their ontological priority, their being determinate beings, whereas the powers are given in lower-case to express their derivativeness. The space between the parentheses makes the expression incomplete, which expresses the fact that in the absence of an object of application there is no determinate being. The advantage of symbolizing things this way over something like

$R(x,y)$

is that we can express the fact that the relation is not over and above two items of equal ontological standing, but is part of one of the items in the complex that these items form together. Talk of ‘application’ should not give rise to the idea that there is a relation of application over and above the power and the object; ‘application’ is a description of a power’s coming to bear upon its object.

8 THE POWER ARGUMENT – THE TROUBLE WITH A SUPERPOWER

If the above is along the right lines, we can be more specific about the problem that is UU. *Qua* power, a power is undetermined. It finds determinate being only in being applied to a proper object. Critias’s proposal, however, would demand self-application. UU attempts to be a superpower: a power that has its being in being-towards a power (itself). But this will never yield determinate being. Understanding is not a determinate kind of thing in itself; so it cannot, by being about itself, come to be about a particular determinate thing. It needs to be applied; but this application cannot occur with reference to itself, because for that to be possible, it needs to be applied already.

UU tries to be

⟨understanding(UNDERSTANDING)⟩

But there is no such thing as UNDERSTANDING, because all understanding is a power. The most we get is therefore – if we ignore for the moment the question whether understanding can be a *proper* object of understanding –

⟨understanding(understanding())⟩

(and this may be iterated ad infinitum), which does not yield determinate being – the expression remains incomplete.

This suffices for the reflexive aspect of UU, i.e. its being an understanding of itself. Its other aspect was its being higher-order, i.e. its being understanding of other understandings. Consider a case of sight – which will serve as a stand-in for its fellows, including understanding – with higher-order

⟨sight_H()⟩

and two lower-order sights, one which is, another which is not, applied:

⟨sight_{L1}(RED)⟩, ⟨sight_{L2}()⟩

If we bluntly substitute these expressions in the object place of the higher-order expression, we get

⟨sight_H(sight_{L1}(RED))⟩, ⟨sight_H(sight_{L2}())⟩

Here the question becomes acute whether this is a legitimate procedure, to substitute the expression for a power in the object place of the expression for another power. This is true especially of the first lower-order case. The second does not cause much trouble: it is anyhow an incomplete expression; there is no determinate being that corresponds to it. Note that this is the format of the higher-order cases in our text, including that of understanding, where it is specified that it is an understanding of other understandings, but not of anything that these other understandings understand. The conclusion regarding the lower-order cases in our passage is therefore that there cannot be such things.

But now for the first lower-order case, in which we seemingly have a complete expression. We must now ask whether it represents anything; here the question of the *proper* objects of powers poses itself. A brief look beyond the power argument to a later stage in the discussion gives us a definite answer. At this stage, the discussion proceeds on the hypothesis that UU is possible. Socrates is arguing that it will never be understanding of *what* other understandings understand, but merely understanding *that* there are other understandings. The argument relies on a principle that is expressed in the passage below: the principle that powers are identified by their objects.

T11	The sensible person will understand that the doctor has some kind of understanding; having to test what it is, however, will he investigate anything other than of what it is? Or is not each understanding demarcated as not being understanding only but also a particular one, by being of certain things? (171a3-6)	Ὅτι μὲν δὴ ἐπιστήμην τινὰ ἔχει, γινώσεται ὁ σώφρων τὸν ἰατρόν· δέον δὲ πείραν λαβεῖν ἥτις ἐστίν, ἄλλο τι σκέψεται ὧντινων; ἢ οὐ τούτῳ ὠρίσται ἐκάστη ἐπιστήμη μὴ μόνον ἐπιστήμη εἶναι ἀλλὰ καὶ τίς, τῷ τινῶν εἶναι;
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As in the case of powers generally, in the case of the class of understanding too, a particular power is individuated by coming to be applied to the relevant object. This is what T11 tells us. But the consequence of this principle is that if something is applied to object *x* it is the power corresponding to object *x*; there is no room for more powers. If therefore we postulate another power that also has its application in *x*, it must be the same power. In other words, if a higher-order power is applied to the object of a lower-order power, it cannot escape being identical to the lower-order one. If something tries to be a higher-order understanding with application to the object of a lower-order understanding, it will collapse into the latter.

Note that this case does not depend on Critias's characterisation in T1, that UU is not of anything of which the other understandings are. It is not the consequence of stipulation. It is presented as a consequence of what it is to be a particular power – in this case, a particular understanding. As such, it stands as an objection against scholars who think UU fails because it is explicitly denied access to the objects of other understandings.³¹

Qua higher-order understanding, UU must choose between having its application in the lower-order understanding, or in its object. It must have some application,

³¹ Politis 2008 (esp. 18).

because otherwise it will not be a determinate being. Of the two options, however, neither works. Application to a power *qua* power does not yield determinate being because the power is not a determinate being. Application to the object of the lower-order power is possible only if UU is identical to the lower-order power.

The lack of determinate being is the trouble with all superpowers. They need to be determined with reference to their object. Thus in the case of being-larger-than, we can call Plato 1cm³ larger than Socrates only if Socrates's bulk is there as an object for the power of being-larger-than to become determined by, viz. as Plato's being (1cm³) larger than Socrates. Likewise we need an appropriate determinate quantity for being double to be a valid determinate description of some object or other. In the absence of such objects, the powers are undetermined, and susceptible to such nonsense as the simultaneous application of contradictory predicates, in which case the attempt to disguise a power as a being does not only not yield determinate being, but even yields impossible being. In the case of UU (and the eight parallel cases of stage one) we do not have such a stark contradiction; this is the reason why Socrates makes a distinction between the quantitative cases and the others in T16 (see below). Nevertheless, in having to be both producer and produced, applicable and applied, UU and its fellows come close to having contradictory qualifications.

1.2

CHARMIDES ON SELF-UNDERSTANDING

Let us recapitulate. Socrates characterises understanding as a power. In his discussion with Critias he argues that this means that understanding cannot be of itself. For, as a power, understanding must be applied before it has determinate being. And in order to be applied, it needs a determinate object to which it can be applied. It cannot be such an object for itself, because of the very fact that it is not yet applied and therefore does not have determinate being. Thus far our analysis.

Thus far the notion of understanding of *itself*, too. What should induce us to think that it is an analysis of self-understanding, when we mean by this the understanding, on an understander's part, of *herself*? I propose to answer this question by means of a reading of the context of the power argument, in particular of the run-up to it. In doing so, I aim to show that my interpretation of the power argument congrues with the rest of the dialogue. Beyond this, I aim to show how Critias and Socrates construct self-understanding as understanding of itself. The implied anthropology is that we, who are to be understood, are to be identified with our power to understand.

1 GOOD SENSE

The dialogue as a whole, then, is about having good sense (σωφροσύνη). But what starts out as a discussion about character, and about proper behaviour, is half-way turned into a debate, rather, about understanding. All of this is associated with 'good sense', to be sure, but the intellectualist turn of the conversation is the influence of

Socrates's main partner in dialogue, Critias. He loves intellectuals, and is quite something himself.

Charmides is Critias's nephew. Proud of him as he is, Critias suggests that Socrates talk to him. Their pretext to get them together is Charmides's headache, for which they pretend Socrates has a remedy. Socrates gives a philosophical twist to it. He claims that when he was on the battlefield in the north, he was taught by a doctor of the sect of Zalmoxis. This Zalmoxis was a kind of divine king, and held that health cannot come to a part if not through the whole. Therefore, if your eye is diseased you should cure your head, and if your body is diseased you should cure your soul; Socrates says the doctor said that

T12	<p>'all bad and good things for the body and for the whole of man spring from the soul, and flow from there in the same way as from the head to the eyes.' [...] And he said, 'You should cure the soul, my friend, by certain charms, and these charms are excellent speeches. From such speeches good sense originates in souls.' (156e6-157a6)</p>	<p>πάντα γὰρ ἔφη ἐκ τῆς ψυχῆς ὠρμῆσθαι καὶ τὰ κακὰ καὶ τὰ ἀγαθὰ τῷ σώματι καὶ παντὶ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, καὶ ἐκεῖθεν ἐπιρρεῖν ὡσπερ ἐκ τῆς κεφαλῆς ἐπὶ τὰ ὄμματα· [...] θεραπεύεσθαι δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν ἔφη, ὧ μακάριε, ἐπωδαῖς τισιν, τὰς δ' ἐπωδάς ταύτας τοὺς λόγους εἶναι τοὺς καλοὺς· ἐκ δὲ τῶν τοιούτων λόγων ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς σωφροσύνην ἐγγίγνεσθαι[.]</p>
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This gives the dialogue its theme.

Critias then commends Charmides to Socrates as a particularly sensible boy – which gives Socrates his cue to ask Charmides what he thinks good sense is. Charmides has three answers – after a suitably modest evasion of the question whether he has good sense himself – which have a pattern. The pattern leads to Critias, and consists in an increasing interiorisation. First Charmides says that good sense is quiet demeanour. (Wrong, says Socrates: good sense in reading is quick, not quiet.) This is something outward. Then he tries 'a sense of shame', «αἰδώς». (Wrong, says Socrates: the revered poets say that shame is bad for a beggar.) With 'shame' we have gone somewhere mental already. The third and last attempt for Charmides is 'minding your own business'. (Wrong, says Socrates once more: a shoemaker makes other people's shoes, a teacher writes down other people's names.) In formulating his last try in this way, Charmides seems to want to address Socrates's half-suggestion that what is to count as sensible behaviour very much depends on your role: what suits a beggar does not suit a king. Implicit here is that you must be aware of yourself as having that role, or else you do not know what behaviour suits you. This brings us right into the middle of intellectual debate in Athens. And fittingly Charmides appeals to Critias – whom Socrates and reader alike suspect of being the source of Charmides's last suggestion – to take over the argument.³²

Critias intervenes, and gives the dialogue its intellectualist twist. He is happy to take over, because he is annoyed that Charmides has made such nonsense of such splendid ideas. From now on, the discussion will have a different tone, and a different dynamic. Critias does not agree to reject the substance of any of his suggestions. As

³² His very reliance on authority is what is wrong with Charmides, think Schmid (1998: 30-1), McCoy (2005).

far as he is concerned, ‘minding your own business’ remains a valid interpretation of ‘having good sense’ right up to the end of the dialogue. Difficulties are due to his imperfect articulation of what he means, or perhaps rather to Socrates’s disingenuous questioning:

T13	‘That, Socrates,’ he said, ‘cannot happen; but if you think that this must follow from the things I agreed with before, I would put aside some of that – and would not be ashamed to say that I have spoken incorrectly – rather than ever to concede that a man can have good sense and be ignorant of himself.’ (164c7-d3)	Ἀλλὰ τοῦτο μὲν, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐκ ἂν ποτε γένοιτο, ἀλλ’ εἴ τι σὺ οἶει ἐκ τῶν ἔμπροσθεν ὑπ’ ἐμοῦ ὡμολογημένων εἰς τοῦτο ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι συμβαίνειν, ἐκείνων ἂν τι ἔγωγε μᾶλλον ἀναθείμην, καὶ οὐκ ἂν αἰσχυνθείην μὴ οὐχὶ ὀρθῶς φάναι εἰρηκέναι, μᾶλλον ἢ ποτε συγχωρήσαιμ’ ἂν ἀγνοοῦντα αὐτὸν ἑαυτὸν ἄνθρωπον σωφρονεῖν.
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Part of the reason why he thinks he can maintain his claims is his intellectualist method of argumentation. Critias shows himself a good student of great teachers like Prodicus and Protagoras in his subtle differentiation of terms, his creative interpretation of poetry, and his highly intellectualist interpretation of traditional wisdom. His skill allows him to present his descriptions of good sense as reformulations of the same basic insight.³³ Nevertheless, not he but Socrates is in charge of the development of his answers. These too, like Charmides’s, display a very distinct pattern. I shall be a little more elaborate about them.

The first of Critias’s three shots is ‘doing the right thing’. He can plausibly present this as an interpretation of ‘minding your own business’ if we think of someone’s business as his area of competence. A competent man who does what he is good at does the right thing. His new formulation allows Critias to say that a sensible person is doing his *own* business also when he is doing the right thing for *another*. Critias also explicitly rejects the mere skills of shoemakers and prostitutes; his suggestions point to experts, cultured people with understanding. These people are in control of their affairs because of their expertise in managing them. Their wisdom makes the city’s politics, for instance, eminently *their* affair. It is their wisdom that Critias has his eye on. It is what makes their business the right thing to do, and the right thing to do their business.

Then Critias is prodded into another reformulation by Socrates’s question whether a doctor who cures a patient unknowingly does the right thing and so is to be called sensible. It was no part of his intention to leave out the element of self-awareness in his account of good sense. If a doctor can do the right thing by another without knowing about it, however, then apparently merely doing the right thing is not yet to be sensible and to act sensibly. In Critias’s view, in order to count as sensible, a doctor must be aware of himself as a doctor, that is, as an expert in matters medical, when he does his doctorly thing. When he opens a vein, the sensible doctor knows not only

³³ Many scholars seem to make a virtue of paying insufficient attention to what Critias is driving at. Small wonder, then, that they see him shifting course all the time. (Tuckey 1954: 24f.; Friedländer 1964: 66; Santas 1973; Pohlenz 1913: 46; Press 2002 in practice, despite its declared method (esp. 259-60, 262). Exceptions are Van der Ben 1985; Schmid 1998(20); Eisenstadt 2008.)

that he is opening a vein, but also that he is doing this as an expert, and that he is doing this as being the right thing to do at this moment.

Pressed by Socrates to formulate his insight in a way that captures the expert's self-awareness in doing his expert activity, Critias proposes that good sense is to know yourself. Again, this suggestion is meant to capture what is essential – to Critias's mind – to the previous ones. And that is that the expert elite must be self-conscious in their wisdom and expertise. This is what differentiates them from others; and they must be conscious of it.

The brevity of the expression 'know yourself' will have had its appeal to an intellectually cultured mind, although it obscures the connections between this and the previous formulations. Above all, however, the injunction is part of Delphic lore. In that context, its association with good sense is nothing new. It was traditionally interpreted as a warning to people to heed their limits, not to reach beyond the license of their social and mortal roles. The novelty here is in the cerebral colouring that it receives, which is just as much the favourite hue of Critias as of Socrates. The latter resumes his inevitable questioning with the notion of understanding. If to be sensible is to know yourself, he reasons, good sense must be some kind of understanding; but what kind? What is the object of this understanding, or what is this knowledge about? (Note that Socrates wants to know about the object of understanding as a way of identifying the understanding. In this, the power argument is continuous with this stage of the discussion.) Critias gradually refines his conception of understanding until what he is left with is an understanding which has itself as its object.

2 GOOD SENSE AS UNDERSTANDING

It is worth our while to zoom in on the last stage of Critias's conceptual revisions. For in looking at the way in which Critias arrives at the notion that we have considered at length – that of an understanding that understands itself – we will appreciate the place that this notion occupies in the dialogue. In a first stage, Critias rejects the demand for a product of this understanding; when Socrates uses the analogy of house-building, and asks him to point out the external result of good sense, he rejects the analogy. Good sense, taken as self-understanding, is not a power to produce external things.

The second stage is Critias's rejection of the analogy with mathematics. For when Socrates accepts that there is no product of good sense, he offers the theoretical sciences as parallel cases. They too have no product, but they do have an external object which they are *about*. Might good sense be like that? Socrates asks. But again Critias objects: the analogical method is not suitable, because the cases are not alike. The power of good sense has no purely external object to which it is related by being about it. That is just not what having good sense is like, in Critias's view.

Good sense is a third way. A simpler form of Socratic scrutiny might have presented the two ways of categorizing the craft of good sense as exhaustive: either it is something that produces things, or it investigates objects that are already there. In Critias, however, we have a more responsive discussion partner than in other dialogues. According to his line of thinking, it is not the same for a doctor to recognise

himself as being active as an expert as it is for him to produce health, or for him to study the laws of the human body. Critias rejects such analogies because he thinks good sense is in a class of its own. The doctor's good sense, he claims, is directed at itself.

A craft that is directed at itself is bound to appear mysterious and at least problematic. We have discussed some of the problems in examining the notion of UU. There may be others, however, that result from a misunderstanding of the text.

Firstly, the description of good sense as a power that is directed at itself does not in itself make it more similar to the theoretical than to the practical crafts that Socrates has offered as analogies. Scholars have been tempted to think it is. I suspect that is partly because the understanding of understanding that is object of discussion – especially if we translate the Greek as 'knowledge of knowledge' – sounds like our modern epistemology, as a body of theorems about knowledge, as it were.³⁴ It may also be in part the consequence of the mere fact that the theoretical crafts are dismissed later than the practical ones. Neither of these two reasons should have force for us. As most recent scholars have seen, Plato is not interested here in an abstract science of knowledge. For him, the concept of knowledge combines a theoretical grasp and a practical orientation. Nor is the fact that the analogy with the theoretical crafts is rejected later than the analogy with the practical crafts a reason to think that good sense, understanding of understanding, is more like the theoretical than like the practical crafts. You cannot count on Socratic dialectic to be a process of approximation. It is no more true (or false) to say that good sense studies itself than it is to say that good sense produces itself.³⁵

Secondly, readers have balked at the substitution, by Socrates, of «ἐπιστήμη» for «γνώσις». We may understand the dismay when we translate the former by 'science' and the latter by 'acquaintance'. Then we get a move in the interpretation of Delphi's command from 'be acquainted with yourself' to 'have science of yourself'.³⁶ These worries are quite ungrounded, however. The important thing to recognise is that «ἐπιστήμη» is a general term,³⁷ and the substitution therefore more like the substitution of a genus for a species than like a surreptitious increase in entrance requirements. Socrates means to discuss human cognition in general terms.

3 WE ARE UNDERSTANDING

The most important aspect of the approach to the power argument that is left for us to discuss is the shift, in the text, from an understanding of *yourself* to an understanding of *itself*.³⁸ It is substantiated by an implied conception in *Charmides* of

³⁴ Taylor 1949: 53f.; 'abstruse epistemological concept' (McKim 1985: 60).

³⁵ And if the former sounds more acceptable to us, that tells us more about our peculiar understanding of what it is to study something than about the logic of this Platonic text.

³⁶ Taylor 1949: 53; Tuckey 1951: 37-39 and 54-8; Martens 1973: 45.

³⁷ As Lyons 1963 has shown.

³⁸ Some locate here one of the reasons why the dialogue fails, among them McKim (1989: 61). Martens 1973: 39-45 argues for the identification of self and understanding as well, but on the basis of evidence that lies beyond *Charmides* (and even Plato). My take resembles Wellman's (1964: 111).

what it is to be a human being, to which this shift itself contributes. In a sense, then, it justifies itself in its coherence with other textual elements. In the narrative so far we have seen some of these elements already. Let us now draw together and develop these. First, revisit Zalmoxis (see T12), the mask behind which it is not hard to recognise Socrates himself. The Thracian god-king said that a part receives its well-being and ill-being from the whole of which it is a part. While an eye is part of a head, and a head of a body, the most significant relation asserted at that point is that the body is part of the soul. According to the Thracian-Socrates, therefore, insofar as it is more correct to answer the question ‘What is *X*?’ by means of a description of the whole of *X* than by means of a description of only a part of it, in thus far it is more correct to answer the question ‘What is a human being?’ by saying that it is the soul than by saying that it is the body.³⁹

It is also part of the Zalmoxis story that souls are amenable to curing by means of ‘charms’ (see again T12). These magic charms – one of which Socrates proposes to use on Charmides to relieve him of his headache – are the speeches that create good sense in our souls. The suggestion is, of course, that making such speeches is what Socrates is engaged in all the while in his discussion, a suggestion that is reinforced by Charmides’s statement of intention at the end, that he will follow Socrates from now on, in order to be enchanted by him (176b1-4). It is significant that this dialogue has Socrates interpret the magic charms specifically as speeches (λόγοι; 157a4f.). The theme of charms and enchantment is not uncommon in Socratic literature,⁴⁰ but the identification here with speeches is not universal and therefore meaningful – in another context they are associated with recommendations and praise, for instance. In other words, the cure of the soul, the generator of good sense in it, is identified as discussion, as thoughts and reasonings.⁴¹ This in turn implies that the soul is at least dominated by – and the suggestion is that it is to be identified with – its cognitive dimension, that is, the power to understand. This is therefore, by extension, what is the most important aspect, or perhaps even definitive, of being a human being.

Similar sentiments are behind Critias’s proposals. Against Socrates’s naive interpretation of ‘minding your own business’ as writing only your own name, making only your own shoes, and so on, he advances an interpretation that identifies what is your own on the basis of expertise. Things that are an expert’s are precisely the things with regard to which he is an expert. And, as we saw, this idea is also framed in terms of right, of noble actions; for such are the actions of an expert. Both what is right and what is your own are, in this conception, defined in relation to the expert *qua* expert. In pursuing this insight, Critias makes use of the language of nobility – he rejects cobblers and prostitutes. But it is important to see that he advocates a nobility of mind, not of birth. In his view, good sense is the quality *par excellence* of the intellectual elite, of those whose mental abilities and training enable them rationally to conduct public affairs as well as private. The critical case of the ignorant doctor gains meaning in this light. It is easy to see why Critias is taken aback

³⁹ Hazebroucq (2002: 113) thinks that this conception is actually *rejected* by Critias in 165c-66c, but I do not see why.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Lysis*, Xen. *Mem.* 2.6.

⁴¹ On this cf. particularly Schmid 1998: 17-9.

when Socrates points out that the literal version of his ‘doing the right thing’ does not include the intellectual’s self-awareness as a capable person. Indeed, in poking the doctor who fails to be self-aware in his doctorly activity, Socrates has reached beyond the doctor to the sophist, and has driven a wedge between the cultured man’s self-consciousness and the goodness that it yields him. But the former is essential to the intellectual’s wisdom, of the expert *qua* expert. And therefore Critias tries to reconnect self-consciousness and benefit in his new formulation. His interest is in the intellectual elite’s power to do the right thing and know it. As far as he is concerned, the injunction to ‘know yourself’ means ‘know yourself as capable’.

Behind his formulations of what good sense is, therefore, we can detect a Critias with a steady focus on the intellectual’s awareness of his wisdom. Furthermore, his attitude as to which kinds of expertise are to be admitted makes clear that he considers such self-aware intellectual wisdom the best that is to be attained in human life, the highest expression of what it is to be human. The same aspects are prominent later on, in what we may regard as Critias’s last statement of his ideal, just before Socrates demolishes this by separating its expertise from its usefulness. Critias says:

T14	You will not easily find some other culmination of doing well, if you disregard doing with understanding. (173d6-7)	Ἄλλὰ μέντοι, ἢ δ’ ὅς, οὐ ῥαδίως εὐρήσεις ἄλλο τι τέλος τοῦ εὖ πράττειν, ἐὰν τὸ ἐπιστημόνως ἀτιμάσης.
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Socrates asks Critias if he means to include manual craftsmen in this doing with understanding – he denies. And Socrates concludes:

T15	‘So we no longer stick to the assertion that someone who lives with understanding is happy. For these people live with understanding but do not meet with your agreement that they are happy; instead you seem to me to define the happy man as someone who lives with understanding concerning certain things in particular. And perhaps you mean the person that I spoke of just now, who knows all future things, the seer. Do you mean him, or someone else?’ ‘Him as well,’ he said, ‘and someone else too’. ‘Whom?’ I asked. ‘Isn’t it someone like this: someone who knows, in addition to future things, all past things and present ones, and is ignorant of nothing? For let us assume that there is some such person. For I do not think you would say that there is someone who lives with more understanding.’ (173e6-174a7)	«Οὐκ ἄρα, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ἔτι ἐμμένομεν τῷ λόγῳ τῷ εὐδαίμονα εἶναι τὸν ἐπιστημόνως ζῶντα. οὗτοι γὰρ ἐπιστημόνως ζῶντες οὐχ ὁμολογοῦνται παρὰ σοῦ εὐδαίμονες εἶναι, ἀλλὰ περὶ τινῶν ἐπιστημόνως ζῶντα σὺ δοκεῖς μοι ἀφορίζεσθαι τὸν εὐδαίμονα. καὶ ἴσως λέγεις ὃν νυνδὴ ἐγὼ ἔλεγον, τὸν εἰδότα τὰ μέλλοντα ἔσεσθαι πάντα, τὸν μάντιν. τοῦτον ἢ ἄλλον τινὰ λέγεις;» «Καὶ τοῦτον ἐγῶ γε, ἔφη, καὶ ἄλλον.» «Τίνα;» ἦν δ’ ἐγώ. «ἄρα μὴ τὸν τοιόνδε, εἴ τις πρὸς τοῖς μέλλουσιν καὶ τὰ γεγονότα πάντα εἰδείη καὶ τὰ νῦν ὄντα, καὶ μηδὲν ἀγνοοῖ; θῶμεν γὰρ τινα εἶναι αὐτόν. οὐ γὰρ οἶμαι τούτου γε ἔτι ἂν εἴποις οὐδένα ἐπιστημονέστερον ζῶντα εἶναι.»
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This is Critias’s ideal: someone who understands everything – or at least the important things, not cobblery and so on. In this capacity humankind finds its culmination.

Zalmoxis and Critias converge in seeing human beings primarily as beings empowered to understand. When, therefore, Critias moves from speaking of understanding of yourself to speaking of understanding of itself, he is not slipping up or changing topic. He agrees with Zalmoxis and puts forward his view of the relation between understanding and self. The move is part of the dialogue's engagement with a conception of human nature that identifies it with, or at least designates as a dominating part in it, the power to understand. To understand yourself is therefore to understand yourself as empowered to understand. To speak of an understanding of itself is merely to speak of such understanding in the abstract, not relative to a particular person.⁴²

4 THE FORMULATION OF SELF-UNDERSTANDING

The investigation has followed the thread of self-aware composure, and it has led Critias to a semi-technical expression of what he considers good sense to be: it is understanding of itself and of the other kinds of understanding. Socrates develops this expression in two ways: he broadens the understanding to encompass ignorance, and he declares it authoritative about everyone. The first step relies on a general Platonic principle. According to this principle, a grasp of things of kind γ is also a grasp of things of kind non- γ , or at least a grasp of those things *qua* non- γ . For if you cannot differentiate things that are not fast, for instance, from things that are, then you clearly do not have a firm grasp of what it is to be fast. In the case at hand, this principle allows Socrates to claim that an understanding of understanding must also be an understanding of incomprehension (*qua* non-understanding). In the second instance, the principle is generalised over all people. Someone who has this kind of understanding will not only grasp his own understanding, but also the understanding of whoever else has it.⁴³ Here as well Socrates makes a familiar move. Expertise that is restricted to particular circumstances – times, places, favourable conditions, luck, people – does not deserve the name. If you are an expert, you must be able to do your job anytime, anyplace. The combination of these two principles, these two extensions of Critias's formula, yields the ambitious understanding that understands your own understanding and incomprehension, and everyone else's understanding and incomprehension.

With this, the definition has reached its full growth, and we get to the power argument. That is the first of three stages in which Socrates examines what the definition implies and whether it is tenable (it runs from 167a to 169d). In the second stage (169d-172c) Critias and Socrates focus on the relation between the understanding of understanding and the particular kinds of understanding. The question there is whether the superunderstanding can move beyond the judgement that there is knowledge in someone to the judgement what knowledge he has. The

⁴² This is what hides behind the seemingly innocent remark in 169d9-e7 that 'if someone has understanding that understands itself, he will be such a person as to be what he has; [...] when someone has understanding of itself, he will also be understanding of himself'.

⁴³ Contrast Gerson's emphasis on first-person knowledge in his brief analysis of *Charmides* (2003: 34-7).

third stage (172c-175b) is more exclusively concerned with the use of good sense, identified as UU. In each of these three stages, Critias is unable to rise to Socrates's challenge. At the end of the dialogue, his charge Charmides pledges allegiance to Socrates, albeit with Critias's explicit consent. Critias's grand theory, scraps of which Charmides had offered as his best bet, lies in ruins.

5 THE STRUCTURE OF SOCRATES'S CRITIQUE (I)

That ruin is the dialogue's outcome only if Socrates is serious in his demolitions along the way. It remains for us to consider two features of the text that have been taken as signs that Socrates leaves ample room for a better account along Critias's lines, and that his rejection has been only half-hearted. In fact, both features turn out to emphasise Socrates's systematic critique of Critias.

The first feature is Socrates's presentation of the conclusion of the power argument. This conclusion is that UU is impossible. Actually, Socrates words it more cautiously. He says

T16	<p>'So do you see, Critias, that as for all the cases we described, of some it seems to us completely impossible, and of others it is highly doubtful whether they have their own power towards themselves? Of sizes and quantities and the like it seems completely impossible, doesn't it?' 'Yes indeed.' 'And of hearing and sight, or indeed movement, whether that may move itself, or whether heat may burn itself and all such cases more, this will produce unbelief in people, but not perhaps in some. We clearly need a great man, my dear, who will adequately take the matter apart in all cases, whether nothing at all has the makeup to have its own power towards itself, but [only] towards something else, or whether some things do, even if others do not. And moreover, assuming that there are things that have it towards themselves, whether understanding is among them, which after all is what we claimed good sense to be. I do not consider myself adequate to take this apart. For that reason I am also unable to insist if this can come to be, that there is an understanding of understanding[.]' (168e3-169b1)</p>	<p>«Ὅρᾳς οὖν, ὦ Κριτία, ὅτι ὅσα διελήλυθαμεν, τὰ μὲν αὐτῶν ἀδύνατα παντάπασιν φαίνεται ἡμῖν, τὰ δ' ἀπιστεῖται σφόδρα μὴ ποτ' ἂν τὴν ἑαυτῶν δύναμιν πρὸς ἑαυτὰ σχεῖν; μεγέθη μὲν γὰρ καὶ πλήθη καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα παντάπασιν ἀδύνατον ἢ οὐχί;» «Πάνυ γε.» «Ἄκοῃ δ' αὖ καὶ ὄψις καὶ ἔτι γε κινήσις αὐτὴ ἑαυτὴν κινεῖν, καὶ θερμότης κάειν, καὶ πάντα αὖ τὰ τοιαῦτα τοῖς μὲν ἀπιστίαν [44] παράσχοι, ἴσως δέ τισιν οὐ. μεγάλου δὴ τινος, ὦ φίλε, ἀνδρὸς δεῖ, ὅστις τοῦτο κατὰ πάντων ἰκανῶς διαιρήσεται, πότερον οὐδὲν τῶν ὄντων τὴν αὐτοῦ δύναμιν αὐτὸ πρὸς ἑαυτὸ πέφυκεν ἔχειν [45], ἀλλὰ πρὸς ἄλλο, ἢ τὰ μὲν, τὰ δ' οὐ· καὶ εἰ ἔστιν αὖ ἄτινα αὐτὰ πρὸς αὐτὰ ἔχει, ἄρ' ἐν τούτοις ἔστιν ἐπιστήμη, ἣν δὴ ἡμεῖς σωφροσύνην φαμὲν εἶναι. ἐγὼ μὲν οὐ πιστεύω ἑμαυτῷ ἰκανὸς εἶναι ταῦτα διελέσθαι· διὸ καὶ οὐτ' εἰ δυνατόν ἐστι τοῦτο γενέσθαι, ἐπιστήμης ἐπιστήμην εἶναι, ἔχω διισχυρίσασθαι[.]»</p>
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Socrates notes the difference between the quantitative cases and the mental cases (to call them that for convenience); expresses his own reluctance to make a firm

⁴⁴ <ἂν> may be omitted, see Murphy 2007: 224.

⁴⁵ MSS <πλήν ἐπιστήμης> ruins the argument; cf. most recently *ibid.*: 225.

statement of the matter since, he says, he does not trust his ability satisfactorily to analyze it; and calls for a ‘great man’ to do it. Are these signs that Socrates is not committed to the (outcome of the) power argument? Are we to take his statements as a challenge to the reader to spot the gaps that the writer has left open in the argument in order to resurrect an amended notion of UU? Many critics have thought so.⁴⁶

There is, however, a better way of reading T16. We should remind ourselves of the independent, or stubborn, attitude of Socrates’s interlocutor, and the roundabout way of argumentation that Socrates employs towards him. Critias objected twice to Socrates’s method of questioning (at 165e3-166a2 and at 166b7-c6), sticks to a seemingly implausible position (168a9) and will resist his inferences twice more (at 173d6-7 and at 174d8-e2). In turn, after Critias’s two objections, Socrates takes great pains to be explicit in his argumentation. Unusually, he gives no less than eight cases as a basis of his inference to understanding in stage one of the power argument. He also presents this argument itself elaborately in three stages. The caution that Socrates exercises in his conclusion is continuous with the rest of the conversation in precisely this respect. Moreover, he avoids an apodictic conclusion precisely to have the conversational room to challenge the ‘great man’ to produce a satisfactory argument. This is a challenge to Critias – compare the mention of his reputation and his concern with it in the sequel (T3). Socrates’s apparent caution, therefore, is more a conversational – or rather confrontational – attitude than it is a reflection on the force and status of the argument.

6 THE STRUCTURE OF SOCRATES’S CRITIQUE (II)

Let us turn now to the second feature that has been taken as an indication that Socrates does not mean to reject a Critian-style theory. The remainder of the discussion proceeds conspicuously by virtue of concessions. The transition from the power argument to the examination of understanding *what* versus understanding *that* happens as follows (this directly follows T3):

T17	And in order that we might have the discussion advance, I said: ‘But if you like, Critias, let us concede this for now, that it is possible for there to be understanding of understanding.’ (169d2-4)	κάγω ἡμῖν ἵνα ὁ λόγος προίτοι, εἶπον· Ἄλλ’ εἰ δοκεῖ, ὦ Κριτία, νῦν μὲν τοῦτο συγχωρήσωμεν, δυνατόν εἶναι γενέσθαι ἐπιστήμην ἐπιστήμης·
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Likewise, the transition to the final discussion of the worth of good sense is effected by Socrates’s saying:

⁴⁶ Most recently Politis 2008: 13. Another popular take is Friedländer’s (1964: 68), who says that Plato had an inkling of the solution for which he was headed, even if he did not yet hold his later views when writing *Charmides*. Others agree that the argument holds, but conclude that the notion of UU cannot have been Plato’s, ‘wenn wir nicht annehmen wollen, daß Plato auf selbstgebaute Kartenhäuser mit Kanonen schießt’, as Pohlenz writes (1913: 52-3); also Bonitz, who adds (1886: 250) that the proofs in this part of *Charmides* are in agreement with the rest of Plato’s philosophy.

T18	Let us look at this, if you want, after having conceded both that it is possible to understand understanding, to grasp it, and what we posited at the beginning that good sense is, knowing what you know and what you do not know – let us not deny but grant this. And let us investigate even better, having granted all this, whether it will bring us any benefit after all, if it is of this kind. (172c6-d2)	ἴδωμεν γάρ, εἰ βούλει, συγχωρήσαντες καὶ ἐπίστασθαι ἐπιστήμην δυνατόν εἶναι εἰδέναι, καὶ ὃ γε ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐπιθέμεθα σωφροσύνην εἶναι, τὸ εἰδέναι ἅ τε οἶδεν καὶ ἅ μὴ οἶδεν, μὴ ἀποστερήσωμεν, ἀλλὰ δώμεν· καὶ πάντα ταῦτα δόντες ἔτι βέλτιον σκεψώμεθα εἰ ἄρα τι καὶ ἡμᾶς ὀνήσει τοιοῦτον ὄν.
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Are these concessions an indication that the power argument is not meant to be the writer's (if not Socrates's) last word on the subject? Surely, some say, you are not interested in 'what if' when you think the first argument settles the matter?⁴⁷ This is a misconception. It is important to see that the concessions are an argumentative strategy. As such, they are withdrawn at the close of the discussion:

T19	We have now been defeated on all fronts, and are powerless to find out whichever thing it is over which the legislator decreed this name, 'good sense'. And yet we have conceded many things that did not follow for us in the argument. For we conceded that there is understanding of understanding, while our argument would not allow us and denied that there is. Again, we conceded to this understanding that it understands the products of the other understandings, while here too the argument did not allow us[. ...] Nevertheless our investigation, which encountered us as gentle people, not tough at all, is not one bit better able to find out the truth, but [even] laughed at it[.] (175b2-d2)	νῦν δὲ πανταχῆ γὰρ ἠττώμεθα, καὶ οὐ δυνάμεθα εὐρεῖν ἐφ' ὅτῳ ποτὲ τῶν ὄντων ὁ νομοθέτης τοῦτο τοῦνομα ἔθετο, τὴν σωφροσύνην. καίτοι πολλά γε συγκεχωρήκαμεν οὐ συμβαίνονθ' ἡμῖν ἐν τῷ λόγῳ. καὶ γὰρ ἐπιστήμην ἐπιστήμης εἶναι συνεχωρήσαμεν, οὐκ ἔωντος τοῦ λόγου οὐδὲ φάσκοντος εἶναι· καὶ ταύτη αὖ τῇ ἐπιστήμῃ καὶ τὰ τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιστημῶν ἔργα γιγνώσκειν συνεχωρήσαμεν, οὐδὲ τοῦτ' ἔωντος τοῦ λόγου[. ...] ἀλλ' ὅμως οὕτως ἡμῶν εὐηθικῶν τυχοῦσα ἡ ζήτησις καὶ οὐ σκληρῶν, οὐδέν τι μᾶλλον εὐρεῖν δύναται τὴν ἀλήθειαν, ἀλλὰ τοσοῦτον κατεγέλασεν αὐτῆς [...]
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The concessions, it is clear, were made against the grain of the argument, so that tough people would never have made them. Thus, the parts of the discussion that depend on the concessions do not stand next to the earlier parts as equals, as alternative views, but are illegitimate compromises.⁴⁸

It is important to see, moreover, that Socrates makes use of a well-known pattern of argumentation, meant, precisely, to show the utter untenability of the opposing view.⁴⁹ Its pattern can easily be seen from an analogous case, Gorgias's *On Not-Being*. Gorgias argues that a) there is no being; that b) even if there was, it could not be known; and that c) even if there was and it could be known, it could not be communicated. It should be clear that Gorgias – whose target was probably the theory of being advocated by Parmenides and his followers – does not mean to relinquish his arguments for a) by also paying attention to b) and c). Rather, he

⁴⁷ Politis 2008: 13; Telle 1975: 92.

⁴⁸ Pace Politis 2008, who detects here a kind of incomplete *pro* and *contra* argumentation.

⁴⁹ This sense of wider context is lacking in Ostenfeld 1999 (esp. 71f.). Kahn 1996: 196 sees the concessions as moves of simplification rather than as parts of a cumulative refutation.

means to convict his opponent of the utter unviability of his position.⁵⁰ So Socrates here.

CONCLUSION

We have focused on one aspect of *Charmides*; there are countless others. The conception that the dialogue develops of understanding as a power is nevertheless a significant piece of philosophy. We have seen, moreover, that it is conceived as a reflection on human nature. In portraying this discussion between his characters Critias and Socrates, Plato puts forward for our consideration the view that the power to understand has a central place in human nature; perhaps even that in seeking to understand ourselves we seek to understand this power.

Powers are defined with reference to their objects. They have their being in being-towards these objects. I have called this relation one of application. When separated from their objects, powers are incomplete, indeterminate beings. Only when they are applied to their proper objects do they have determinate being, can we truly say 'it is such-and-such'.

Charmides presents this as the reason why there cannot be an understanding of understanding. A power that is not in itself of a determinate nature cannot provide itself with the determinate nature that it requires. In particular, the power to understand calls for something determinate in order that it may understand it. It cannot fulfil this role for itself.

If the power to understand is a main ingredient of human nature, the latter must also be characterised as lacking fully determinate being. What it is to be a human being is not fully specified. There is leeway in how human nature is defined, for it must, *qua* power, be applied. It has its being in being-towards. Towards what? That *Charmides* does not say.

There is no need historically to ascribe this view to anyone. Even if it never found any adherents, in the sense that nobody voiced it as the content of her beliefs, it remains a recognisably philosophical position. It is not fully worked out. Its relation to some of the other ideas we find in Platonic texts is unclear. Yet it has a *prima facie* right of speech as a Platonic position, as have other views expressed in Platonic texts. To some extent, however, we are able to relate the *Charmides* view of powers and human nature to other Platonic ideas. This is our task in chapter 2.

⁵⁰ For another example, see Isocrates 21.7-8; and Gorgias's *Palamedes* with Spatharas 2001.

CHAPTER 2

REFLECTION AND COOPERATION – *ALCIBIADES*

What we investigate in this chapter is an author's attempt to resolve the difficulty of self-understanding that we examined in the last. The author of *Alcibiades*, in which we find this attempt, may be the same as the author of *Charmides*. No one I know denies nowadays that Plato wrote *Charmides*; there is an ongoing debate whether he also wrote *Alcibiades*. For our purposes it does not matter very much whether he did or did not. What we are interested in is the philosophical story that we can reconstruct from these texts, and the way in which *Alcibiades* offers a response to *Charmides*. Both the story and the reaction do not depend on the historical truth about the authorship of these texts.

This chapter has two main parts. In the first we consider some major themes in the dialogue that prepare the way for its central passage. This passage describes an analogy between eyes and souls, which we will examine in the second part. We will discover that it contains a model that solves the problem of self-understanding, and that this model is a philosophical account of friendship. The 'friendship' concerned is, as I said in the introduction, very intellectualist, so much so that we may not recognise it as friendship in our sense. Nevertheless, this is a model that describes the core of our humanity in our power to understand, and that finds the realisation of that power in the cooperation of different human beings. Before we get to that, however, let me first describe the structure of the text.

1 STRUCTURE OF ALCIBIADES

Alcibiades falls into three parts, each of which represents a spiritual stage (as it were) through which the protagonist passes. The first part is when he is ignorant of, or does not quite want to admit, the fact that he understands nothing of the most important things in life – politics, even himself (beginning-119a). Socrates meets Alcibiades, explains why he stays on as his lover, and claims that Alcibiades needs him to get what he wants – world leadership. He makes Alcibiades realise that the basis for his presumption that he can advise the Athenians is that he thinks that he has relevant knowledge. Socrates subjects this claim to knowledge to criticism: can Alcibiades point to someone who has taught him about politics? No. Can he remember a time when he thought of himself as ignorant of justice, so that he set out to discover what it is? No. And besides, he turns out to be confused about the topic, too. So how can he say he knows?

The second part of the dialogue is short, and shows us how Socrates persuades Alcibiades that he should work on himself, that he is not good enough as he is (119b-124c). In essence, this is by contrasting Alcibiades's qualities – beauty, wealth, ancestry – with those of Athens' traditional enemies: Sparta and Persia. Socrates

portrays the queen-mothers of these states as deriding Alcibiades: ‘What has the boy got, that he thinks he can challenge my son?’¹

In the third part we see Socrates and Alcibiades concerned to find the way to perfection – what is it that Alcibiades must develop, how must he take care of himself (124c-end)? They first establish that his soul is what Alcibiades really is. The argument that establishes this relies on the idea that a user is distinct from the things she uses, and observes that of both a soul and a person we can say that they use the body. Having discovered what Alcibiades himself is, they can now work on a therapy for him. Socrates now advances his eyes-souls parallel, the lesson of which is that Alcibiades must strive for wisdom, and can do so only with someone else. In the remainder of the dialogue, Socrates presses on Alcibiades once again that wisdom is the prerequisite for successful politics and successful living, the only proper state for a free man to be in. But the state in which Alcibiades finds himself at the moment – Socrates dares not say it, so shameful would it be.

2.1

THE RUN-UP

Six main themes will take us through the dialogue and draw out those features that work towards the dialogue’s climax.

1 *SOCRATES UNDERSTANDING-OBSSESSED*

A striking aspect of Socrates’s method of interrogating Alcibiades, of the course his questions take, is that they constantly aim to reduce Alcibiades’s responses to an understanding of some kind, often by means of an illustration from handicrafts. The first time this happens quite naturally. This is in 106cd: Socrates describes the future – but as far as Alcibiades is concerned, imminent – situation in which Alcibiades will take his stand in front of the assembly of Athens in order to speak to his fellow citizens. Socrates imagines himself as asking Alcibiades why he does so: ‘is it because it is about things which you understand better than they?’²

Alcibiades sees no harm in the suggestion that his pre-eminence is based on understanding. From this moment onwards, the dialogue spends much time on testing Alcibiades’s claim to understanding – the rest of its first part, in fact. The tests are conducted on the basis of the maxim: ‘you know only those things which you learned from another or found out yourself’.³

Alcibiades is unable to substantiate either of these options. When they have finally identified the relevant expertise as expertise about what is just and what is unjust, Alcibiades is unable to point to people about whom he can defend the claim that they

¹ Free for 123e4-5: «Τί οὖν ποτ’ ἔστιν ὄτῳ πιστεύει τὸ μειράκιον;»

² «ἐπειδὴ περὶ τίνος Ἀθηναῖοι διανοοῦνται βουλευέσθαι, ἀνίστασαι συμβουλευέων; ἄρ’ ἐπειδὴ περὶ ὧν σὺ ἐπίστασαι βέλτιον ἢ οὗτοι;» (106c7-9)

³ «ταῦτα μόνον οἶσθα, ἃ παρ’ ἄλλων ἔμαθες ἢ αὐτὸς ἐξηῦρες» (106d5-6)

are teachers of what is just and unjust. He therefore attempts to change tack, and says that he has discovered about justice himself. But, as he agrees with Socrates, discovery requires investigation, and investigation requires an awareness that you do not have what you are looking for. Alcibiades, however, is unable to point to a phase in his life in which he was aware of this lack. His further emergency measure to change the object of understanding from justice into utility (113d) does not help him, because Socrates proves to him that justice is utility – that what is just is useful, and what is useful is just. Thus the discussion continues, into the second part of the dialogue.

In the third part, Alcibiades has become convinced that he should improve himself. In Socrates's company, he starts looking for the aim of human development, that towards which he, too, should develop. He describes it as being able to look after interests – the interests, he specifies, of first-rate people (καλοὶ κάγαθοί, 124e16). Socrates traces 'first-rate' back to 'well-thinking'. Later, when Alcibiades has designated friendship as the specific topic of politics, Socrates once more translates this into terms of expertise: friendship, he says, is a matter of like-mindedness, and that is a matter of understanding, of craftsmanship. It is remarkable that in a later exchange Alcibiades describes the relevant friendship as that 'with respect to which a father who loves his son is like-minded and the mother, and a brother with a brother and a wife with her husband'.⁴ This seems like a rejection of the cognitive interpretation that Socrates has given to friendship. But Socrates is not to be deterred, and is quick to reapply his cognitive demands on this familial case of friendship too.

It is worth noting that this procedure already implies an identification of what makes a soul excellent with expertise and understanding. For each dimension in which you can humanly excel is here reduced to expertise as its necessary condition.

2 THE OBJECT-QUESTION

Socrates's focus on the kinds of expertise and his tracing back of other values to craftsmanship and expertise makes all the more important the second theme that we should look at: whenever the discussion turns on expertise and understanding, Socrates wants to know the object of the expertise. This starts at the beginning. As we just saw, Alcibiades claims that he has a better understanding of the things about which he wants to advise the assembly of the Athenians. So what sorts of thing are these, Socrates asks; what expertise does Alcibiades claim? In the first part of the dialogue this identification, or perhaps rather categorisation, of expertises serves the clear goal of testing Alcibiades's claims. The basis for this is once more the guiding principle that whatever you know is either something that you have been taught, or something that you have found out for yourself. The clearest cases of things Alcibiades has learned – writing, playing the ceter, wrestling – are not at issue in the assembly. Matters that are discussed in that forum – the art of building, prophecy – are not things that Alcibiades has learned. 'So when they are looking into *what*, will

⁴ «Ἐγὼ μὲν οἶμαι φιλίαν τε λέγειν καὶ ὁμόνοιαν, ἥνπερ πατήρ τε υἱὸν φιλῶν ὁμοιοεῖ καὶ μήτηρ, καὶ ἀδελφὸς ἀδελφῶ καὶ γυνὴ ἀνδρί.» (126e2-4)

you be right to stand up to advise them at that point? – When they are looking into their own interests, Socrates.’⁵

By saying this, Alcibiades claims understanding of interests. But Socrates continues his questioning. The Athenians have many interests; surely Alcibiades is not going to advise on all of them? Shipbuilding, for instance, is the domain of the expert in shipbuilding, not Alcibiades’s. Alcibiades mentions war and peace, but Socrates is only partially satisfied with that. For the proper object of the expertise that Alcibiades is driving at is what is right. As Socrates puts it, the craft is about how to have war and peace with the best people, at the best moment, for the best duration (107d). And that seems a suitable object – we have found Alcibiades’s expertise. Until Socrates starts to test the claim. For Alcibiades turns out to have neither learned nor discovered what is right.

When Alcibiades has been convinced that he lacks understanding, and that he should do something about it, they are faced with the question of what it is that you are striving for when you are striving for human excellence. Being able to look after your interests, Alcibiades answers (124e). Here too Socrates poses the object-question. What sorts of interests? The interests of first-rate people, Alcibiades ventures. Socrates reduces ‘first-rate’ to ‘well-thinking’ – we saw this before – and the question is once more: well-thinking about what? Alcibiades: the kind of intelligence possessed by those who are able to be in control (125b). Again Socrates poses the object-question: in control of horses? Of sailors? The conversation repeats itself when Alcibiades identifies being in control with good judgement (125e) – there too: does not the captain have good judgement about her area of competence, with an eye to the safe conveyance of her passengers? So what is the object of the good judgement that Alcibiades has in mind? Alcibiades says: the preservation of the state, and specifies this – pressed by Socrates – as friendship (126c). Again: friendship is like-mindedness, isn’t it, Socrates says, so with respect to what is this friendship (126d)? This barrage of object-questions brings Alcibiades to his admission of ignorance even about what must be done to him, about that towards which he must improve himself.

That result does not mark the end of the method of the object-question, however. It helps at this point to distinguish between expertise about a particular thing and expertise about its accessories, in the way that expertise about fingers differs from expertise about rings (128e). This is important, Socrates notes, because before you know it, you are practicing the art of an accessory, while thinking you are taking care of the thing itself.

3 AGREEMENT AS MARK OF UNDERSTANDING

The argumentative toolkit by means of which Socrates forces Alcibiades to surrender also contains the notion of agreement, which Socrates uses as a criterium. Whatever Alcibiades puts forward as his claim to fame, Socrates will first get him to say that the most important element in it is expertise; then make him specify the object of this

⁵ «Όταν οὖν περὶ τίνος σκοπῶνται, τότε οὐ ἀνιστάμενος ὡς συμβουλευσῶν ὀρθῶς ἀναστήσει; – Όταν περὶ τῶν ἑαυτῶν πραγμάτων, ὦ Σώκρατες.» (107c4-7)

expertise; and then show that Alcibiades, or those of whom Alcibiades says that he learned his expertise from them, are unable to tell a consistent story about that object of expertise. This is, for instance, the way he shows that the people of Athens are not a suitable teacher of what is right, even if they are in the case of, say, the Greek language. They agree about the latter, Socrates says, but the disagreements about the former are so significant, that epics have been written about them, and people killed.

Socrates pays separate attention to these symptoms of ignorance. 'If someone does not know something, his soul will necessarily wander with respect to this'.⁶ But he remarks in addition that this only applies to whoever is ignorant but thinks she understands. For someone like that will hold opinions about the things she thinks she understands. By contrast, if someone realises about herself that she does not comprehend something, she will not pretend to judgement either: she will much rather leave such things to others (117d). But whoever mistakenly thinks she understands will say one thing now, and quite another tomorrow.

This applies to Alcibiades too. He identifies political expertise as expertise about friendship. On the one hand he thinks, with Socrates, that friendship consists in agreement about something, in being like-minded about it. On the other hand, however, he thinks that friendship will rule in a city precisely when everyone does her own work, minds her own business. The first implies that the citizens have shared objects of expertise; the second that they each have a separate expertise, and so will not concur with each other in matters of expertise. Again, his inability to tell a consistent story – now about friendship and, what he identifies this with, justice – is the symptom that he is ignorant about this. His and the Athenians' ignorance about justice is demonstrated more directly at two earlier points. First, when he does not see that justice and utility go together (113d): this is when he tries to save his semblance of expertise by changing its object from justice to utility, and Socrates proves to him that they are in fact the same. The second, connected moment is when he signals that ordinary talk is uncomfortable with the standard of behaviour in war and peace. 'Against whom will you counsel the Athenians to wage war, against unjust people or against those who do just things?' Socrates asks. 'That is something tricky that you are asking,' is Alcibiades's reply, 'for even if someone thinks that war must be waged against those who do justice, he would not admit it.'⁷ What people say is in terms of justice, what they do is something quite different. Disagreement, this time between words and deeds, is once more the mark of ignorance.

4 *ITS IDENTITY IS IN ITS FUNCTION*

This theme is broached when Alcibiades describes human excellence as good judgement aimed at the better management and preservation of the state. Socrates asks Alcibiades to specify this by reference to three parallel cases.

⁶ «ἐπειδάν τις τι μὴ εἰδῆ, ἀναγκαῖον περὶ τούτου πλανᾶσθαι τὴν ψυχὴν» (117b2-3)

⁷ «Τί οὖν; Ἀθηναίοις σὺ πρὸς ποτέρους συμβουλεύσεις πολεμεῖν, τοὺς ἀδικοῦντας ἢ τοὺς τὰ δίκαια πράττοντας; – Δεινὸν τοῦτό γε ἔρωτᾷς· εἰ γὰρ καὶ διανοεῖται τις ὡς δεῖ πρὸς τοὺς τὰ δίκαια πράττοντας πολεμεῖν, οὐκ ἂν ὁμολογήσειεν γε.» (109b10-c3)

T1	If you asked me, for instance, “What must be present or absent for the body to be managed better and to be preserved?” I would answer that it would if health were present, but sickness absent. [...] And if you would ask me again: “What must be present for better [management] of the eyes?” I would likewise say that sight must be present, but blindness absent. And for the ears, if deafness is absent, but hearing is in them, they are better and are served better. (126a7-b7)	ὥσπερ ἂν εἰ σύ με ἔροιο· «ἄμεινον διοικεῖται σῶμα καὶ σώζεται τίνος παραγιγνομένου ἢ ἀπογιγνομένου;» εἴποιμ’ ἂν ὅτι ὑγείας μὲν παραγιγνομένης, νόσου δὲ ἀπογιγνομένης. [...] καὶ εἴ μ’ αὖ ἔροιο· «τίνος δὲ παραγιγνομένου ἄμεινον ὄμματα;» ὡσαύτως εἴποιμ’ ἂν ὅτι ὄψεως μὲν παραγιγνομένης, τυφλότητος δὲ ἀπογιγνομένης. καὶ ὤτα δὲ κωφότητος μὲν ἀπογιγνομένης, ἀκοῆς δὲ ἐγγιγνομένης βελτίω τε γίγνεται καὶ ἄμεινον θεραπεύεται.
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There is a close association here between good management and preservation. The aspect of management expresses that the subject is a complex whole, the parts of which must be fine-tuned together, so that the whole is able to execute its function. At the same time the whole has its identity in this: in the execution of their function is the preservation of eye and ear.

It is therefore no surprise when we encounter, a little later, this principle:

T2	Whenever someone makes something better, then you call it good care[.] (128b8-9)	ὅταν τίς τι βέλτιον ποιῇ, τότε ὀρθῆν λέγεις ἐπιμέλειαν[.]
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More striking, but in line with this, is Socrates’s statement below. After they have concluded that a human being must be identified with its soul, he remains pondering a little their method of argumentation, and whether it is strong enough. He says:

T3	And perhaps that is enough. For I do not think we would say that there is anything more authoritative about us than the soul[.] (130d7-8)	καὶ ἴσως ἐξαρκέσει· οὐ γάρ που κυριώτερόν γε οὐδὲν ἂν ἡμῶν αὐτῶν φήσαιμεν ἢ τὴν ψυχὴν[.]
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What Socrates offers here is at least a paraphrase of, and perhaps even an argument for, the identification of the human person with the soul. The scope of his remark is the same in both cases: at least in the case of human beings the thing itself is to be identified with what is best about that thing.⁸

There was an earlier specification of the identity of something as the best in that thing; that was in the shape of the domain of an expertise and the best within that domain. When Alcibiades has indicated that as far as he is concerned his expertise pertains to behaviour in war and peace, Socrates says that the standard for such behaviour is ‘what is best’ (τὸ βέλτιον, 107de). In matters concerned with bodily exercise and improvement you visit a trainer, who is able to point to the best times, methods, and duration for your exercise. The same applies to other arts: the expert is able to point to what is best. But Socrates goes one step further. For the best is described as that which is done in accordance with the rules of the art (108d). Strictly

⁸ Denyer 2001: 218, note *ad loc.*

speaking, the expertise applies to what is best in its domain. The best is what expertise is really concerned with.

The dialogue, therefore, sees the being of things in the closest connection with their function, and with what is best in them. This recurs later on. Another element should be added at this moment: that which rules, that which uses. The cobbler, to use one of the examples in the text, makes shoes, by means of her tools. In the argument that a human being is its soul, the human being and the soul take the place of the cobbler; the body is ruled and used by the soul, and so takes the place of the cobbler's tools (among which, incidentally, the text has also included her hands and eyes, 129d). Of the three places in the comparison two have been filled; the goal remains to be specified. We shall see that in the case of the soul the goal is identified with the user, the soul. For the moment, we can connect this move to what is said about improvement. If the soul aims at its own improvement, then its aim is itself – the soul is a self-carer that makes itself better than it was.

5 MUTUAL ADVANCEMENT

This theme unites a number of indications in the dialogue that the discussion between Alcibiades and Socrates is not for the benefit of the former alone. The discussion works towards the advancement of both Socrates and Alcibiades.

Twice when Alcibiades is puzzled about the way forward, Socrates expresses his solidarity in terms that show that he really thinks that Alcibiades's progress is tied up with his. The first instance comes after the speech that shows Alcibiades that his real opponents, the Spartans and Persians, are much better equipped than he is in terms of natural advantages like birth and wealth. Alcibiades seems convinced that he must develop the only thing by which a Greek can distinguish himself; but what is it? Is Socrates able to tell him? Socrates:

T4	Yes. But joint judgement now: how could we become as good as possible? For certainly I do not speak of you having to be educated, but not of myself; I am in no way different from you[.] (124b10-c3)	Ναί· ἀλλὰ γὰρ κοινή βουλή ᾧτινι τρόπῳ ἂν ὅτι βέλτιστοι γενοίμεθα. ἐγὼ γάρ τοι οὐ περὶ μὲν σοῦ λέγω ὡς χρὴ παιδευθῆναι, περὶ ἐμοῦ δὲ οὐ· οὐ γὰρ ἔσθ' ὅτῳ σου διαφέρω[.]
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He insists on this, too, when Alcibiades tries to be modest and says that he feels he is in need of improvement himself – so am I, says Socrates (124d2-6). Later on we reach a moment of real concern for Alcibiades. Socrates calms him by noting that nothing is lost at his age.

T5	'But what must you do when you become aware of it, Socrates?' 'Respond to the questions, Alcibiades. If you do that, if god wishes it, if we can rely a little on my prophecy, you as well as I will fare better.' (127e4-7)	«Τί οὖν τὸν αἰσθανόμενον χρὴ ποιεῖν, ὦ Σώκρατες;» «Ἀποκρίνεσθαι τὰ ἐρωτώμενα, ὦ Ἀλκιβιάδη· καὶ ἔαν τοῦτο ποιῆς, ἂν θεὸς θέλῃ, εἴ τι δεῖ καὶ τῇ ἐμῇ μαντείᾳ πιστεύειν, σύ τε κάγῳ βέλτιον σχήσομεν.»
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These statements are more than a pose to win Alcibiades's sympathy. They express Socrates's genuine conviction that he will and must profit from Alcibiades's progress. The epistemological grounds of this conviction are expressed in the eyes-souls analogy, as we will see shortly. But there are other things to consider, too. At the beginning of the dialogue, Alcibiades, and the reader with him, wonders why Socrates keeps following him everywhere, day and night – never saying a thing to him – while the other lovers have long left him, first overcome by Alcibiades's superiority, and later because his boyish beauty is fading away. So strange is Socrates's attitude that Alcibiades had almost gone to Socrates himself to ask what all of it is supposed to mean. What is in it for Socrates, what hope (104c6, d2) has he got?⁹

The turn that the conversation takes makes it clear that it is not Alcibiades's body that he is after. This may be beautiful, but it is not him, and Socrates is interested in him – his soul (131c-e). However, rather than making the question less pressing, it becomes more mysterious why Socrates should be after Alcibiades. At first, it is true, Alcibiades seemed to have everything, and to trump everything his lovers, including Socrates, could offer him (103b, 104c). But the new outlook that Alcibiades acquires during the conversation, in which he appears to himself destitute and hardly better off than a slave (135c), makes Socrates's interest seem even less explicable. What does Alcibiades have that Socrates should be after it?

The end of the dialogue has a nice image that shows what Socrates was hoping for. Before that, Alcibiades declares his loyalty.

T6	<p>'And I'll tell you this besides, that we are going to change our relationship, Socrates; I'll take your part, and you mine. No way I am not going to tutor you from today on, and you will be tutored by me.'</p> <p>'My good boy, my love won't be any different from a stork, if it broods a winged love from you and will in its turn be kept well by it.' (135d7-e3)</p>	<p>«καὶ πρὸς τούτοις μέντοι τόδε λέγω, ὅτι κινδυνεύσομεν μεταβαλεῖν τὸ σχῆμα, ὦ Σώκρατες, τὸ μὲν σὸν ἐγώ, σὺ δὲ τοῦμόν· οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ὅπως οὐ παιδαγωγῆσω σε ἀπὸ τῆσδε τῆς ἡμέρας, σὺ δ' ὑπ' ἐμοῦ παιδαγωγῆσῃ.»</p> <p>«ὦ γενναῖε, πελαργοῦ ἄρα ὁ ἐμὸς ἔρωσ οὐδὲν διοίσει, εἰ παρὰ σοὶ ἐννεοττεύσας ἔρωτα ὑπόπτερον ὑπὸ τούτου πάλιν θεραπεύσεται.»</p>
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As the stork is cared for by its young, so Socrates will be cared for by Alcibiades. But it is not the instigation to wisdom that Socrates needs from Alcibiades. The word Alcibiades uses to describe what he will do to Socrates is normally used in the context of education, and he is emphatic about it, too.¹⁰ Alcibiades has gotten the swing of the

⁹ Gordon (2003: esp. 28) is one of the few to recognise the importance of this question.

¹⁰ Denyer here (2001: 246) translates with 'attend on' and refers to his note on 121e5 (179): 'ordinary, unroyal, παιδαγωγός was a slave; his duty was not to give the boy in his care any instruction, but rather to conduct him to school' etc. He thereby suggests that Alcibiades says only that he will henceforth remain in Socrates's company. However, Plato's use of παιδαγ- elsewhere shows that while Denyer is to some extent right about the noun παιδαγωγός (although in many cases it is still said that the παιδαγωγός instructs children in good behaviour), the verb (and that is used in T6) has stronger force than that: it is used in contexts of education, though sometimes metaphorically about the soul *vis-à-vis* the body, and even about the process that leads Socrates up to the threshold of beauty in *Smp.* 210e3. Moreover, the one exception among the nouns is precisely in 121e5 of our dialogue, where

partnership that we will see is suggested in the eyes-souls passage; he likes the idea that he and Socrates indeed are in the same situation and must help each other to the perfection that they have discovered to lie in understanding. Why Alcibiades? He has the boundless ambition to reach for what is highest. He can reach that only with Socrates.

6 LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

We should not leave love out. The dialogue is obviously about love: it figures Socrates who declares and explains his love; and it ends with his judgement that there is now in Alcibiades another love to answer his. Pertinent to the love that we find described in the opening pages of the dialogue is the sense that the beloved must have something to offer to the lover: there must be a reason why the lover loves the beloved. Similarly, the lover must have a contribution to make to the life of her beloved if she is to win him over (106a). The final image of the stork and its young makes clear that the love of Socrates and Alcibiades fits this pattern, if rather differently.

Along the way, however, the conversation also turns out to be about friendship. This point may be more obscure. It may appear just a transient idea when Alcibiades says that rulers of cities aim at friendship along similar lines as captains aim at the safety of their passengers. If so, the appearance is misleading. Along with justice, friendship is a serious candidate-object of the understanding that Alcibiades first claims, and then realises he lacks and aspires for. Both of them are rejected because Alcibiades is unable to give a consistent account of them. (Justice was rejected in the first place because Alcibiades has had no consistent teacher, but in its association with friendship it too is rejected because he is confused about it.) But Socrates's analysis of friendship as like-mindedness has a purpose. It prepares the way to present the account of joint understanding in the eyes-souls analogy as a new and improved version of the friendship that Alcibiades thought central to the city.

2.2

THE EYES-SOULS ANALOGY

T7	<p>'So in what way can we grasp this most clearly? For if we grasp that, we will likely also grasp ourselves. But, dear gods, did we not follow what we thought of just now, the Delphic sentence that speaks so well?' 'What sort of thing are you thinking of when you say that, Socrates?' 'I will tell you what at least I suspect</p>	<p>«Τίν' οὖν ἂν τρόπον γνοιμεν αὐτὸ ἐναργέστατα; ἐπειδὴ τοῦτο γνόντες, ὡς ἔοικεν, καὶ ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς γνωσόμεθα. ἄρα πρὸς θεῶν εὖ λέγοντος οὐ νυνδὴ ἐμνήσθημεν τοῦ Δελφικοῦ γράμματος οὐ συνίμεν;» «Τὸ ποῖόν τι διανοούμενος λέγεις, ὦ Σώκρατες;» «Ἐγὼ σοι φράσω, ὃ γε ὑποπτεύω</p>
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four *παιδαγωγοί* are said to educate the Persian prince in the four virtues. The author does not merely make Alcibiades be a follower of Socrates: Alcibiades has grasped that his is an active role in their joint advancement to wisdom.

that this sentence tells and counsels us. An example of it is not exactly to be found everywhere, I am afraid, but only in the case of sight.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'Look at it yourself, too. If in its counsel it said to our eye as to a person "see yourself", how and what would we take it to advise it? Would it not be to look into that in which the eye will be seeing itself when it looks into it?'

'Clearly.'

'So let us think in what thing we would see it and at the same time ourselves, when we look into it.'

'Clearly, Socrates, in mirrors and the like.'

'That is right. Isn't there also something like that in the eye, with which we see?'

'Absolutely.'

'You recall that the face of someone looking into someone's eye appears in the sight of the person opposite, as in a mirror, which after all we call the pupil, as an image of who looks into it?'

'That is true.'

'When an eye sees an eye, then, and looks into that which is best of it and which it sees with, in that way it will also see itself.'

'Evidently.'

'But if it looks into anything else of persons, or of any things, beyond that to which this happens to be similar, it will not see itself.'

'That is true.'

'So, if an eye is to see itself, it must look into an eye, and, of the eye, into that space that the excellence of an eye comes to be in; and that would be sight?'

'That is how it is.'

'Therefore, dear Alcibiades, must a soul too, if it is to grasp itself, look into a soul, and most of all into that space of it in which the excellence of a soul comes about, wisdom, and into whatever else to which this happens to be similar?'

'It seems so to me, Socrates.'

'Can we say, then, that there is anything of the soul more divine than this, about which knowing and thinking are?'

'We cannot.'

'So this [aspect] of it is divine-like, and someone who looks into this and has

λέγειν καὶ συμβουλεύειν ἡμῖν τοῦτο τὸ γράμμα. κινδυνεύει γὰρ οὐδὲ πολλαχοῦ εἶναι παράδειγμα αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν ὄψιν μόνον.»

«Πῶς τοῦτο λέγεις;»

Σκόπει καὶ σύ. εἰ ἡμῶν τῷ ὄμματι ὡσπερ ἀνθρώπῳ συμβουλεύον εἶπεν «ἰδὲ σαυτόν.» πῶς ἂν ὑπελάβομεν τί παραινεῖν; ἄρα οὐχὶ εἰς τοῦτο βλέπειν, εἰς ὃ βλέπων ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς ἐμελλεν αὐτὸν ἰδεῖν;»

«Δῆλον.»

«Ἐννοῶμεν δὴ εἰς τί βλέποντες τῶν ὄντων ἐκεῖνό τε ὀρῶμεν ἅμα ἂν καὶ ἡμᾶς αὐτούς;»

«Δῆλον δὴ, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὅτι εἰς κάτοπτρά τε καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα.»

«Ὅρθῶς λέγεις. οὐκοῦν καὶ τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ ᾧ ὀρῶμεν ἔνεστί <τι> τῶν τοιούτων;»

«Πάνυ γε.»

«Ἐννεόηκας οὖν ὅτι τοῦ ἐμβλέποντος εἰς τὸν ὀφθαλμὸν τὸ πρόσωπον ἐμφαίνεται ἐν τῇ τοῦ καταντικρῦ ὄψει ὡσπερ ἐν κατόπτρῳ, ὃ δὴ καὶ κόρην καλοῦμεν, εἶδωλον ὃν τι τοῦ ἐμβλέποντος;»

«Ἀληθῆ λέγεις.»

«Ὅφθαλμὸς ἄρα ὀφθαλμὸν θεώμενος, καὶ ἐμβλέπων εἰς τοῦτο ὅπερ βέλτιστον αὐτοῦ καὶ ᾧ ὀρᾶ, οὕτως ἂν αὐτὸν ἴδοι.»

«Φαίνεται.»

«Εἰ δέ γ' εἰς ἄλλο τῶν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου βλέπει ἢ τι τῶν ὄντων, πλὴν εἰς ἐκεῖνο ᾧ τοῦτο τυγχάνει ὁμοιον <ὄν>, οὐκ ὄψεται ἑαυτόν.»

«Ἀληθῆ λέγεις.»

«Ὅφθαλμὸς ἄρ' εἰ μέλλει ἰδεῖν αὐτόν, εἰς ὀφθαλμὸν αὐτῷ βλεπτόν, καὶ τοῦ ὄμματος εἰς ἐκεῖνον τὸν τόπον ἐν ᾧ τυγχάνει ἢ ὀφθαλμοῦ ἀρετῆ ἐγγιγνομένη· ἔστι δὲ τοῦτο που ὄψις;»

«Οὕτως.»

«Ἄρ' οὖν, ὦ φίλε Ἀλκιβιάδη, καὶ ψυχὴ εἰ μέλλει γνῶσεσθαι αὐτήν, εἰς ψυχὴν αὐτῇ βλεπτόν, καὶ μάλιστ' εἰς τοῦτον αὐτῆς τὸν τόπον ἐν ᾧ ἐγγίγνεται ἢ ψυχῆς ἀρετῆ, σοφία, καὶ εἰς ἄλλο ᾧ τοῦτο τυγχάνει ὁμοιον ὄν;»

«Ἐμοίγε δοκεῖ, ὦ Σώκρατες.»

«Ἐχομεν οὖν εἰπεῖν ὅτι ἐστὶ τῆς ψυχῆς θεϊότερον ἢ τοῦτο, περὶ ὃ τὸ εἶδέναι τε καὶ φρονεῖν ἐστίν;»

«Οὐκ ἔχομεν.»

«Τῷ θεῖῳ ἄρα τοῦτ' ἔοικεν αὐτῆς, καὶ τις εἰς τοῦτο βλέπων καὶ πᾶν τὸ θεῖον

grasped all of the divine, god and wisdom, would in this way also grasp himself most of all.' (132c7-133c6)	γνούς, θεόν [codd.: νοῦν Carlini] τε καὶ φρόνησιν, οὕτω καὶ ἑαυτὸν ἂν γνοίῃ μάλιστα.»
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This passage is the culmination of the dialogue, and presents a model that describes how we, human beings, who are ultimately to be identified with our power to understand, can grasp ourselves. It is the culmination of the dialogue in finally describing the craft of caring for ourselves. Socrates first made Alcibiades see that he is deficient in what he needs to attain human perfection, then persuaded him that he should do something about this, and after that identified as the real Alcibiades his soul. Now, in the end, Alcibiades is shown this care of the soul, shown how he must improve and preserve it, shown how he can and must become the best of human beings.

Moreover, in the course of this discussion we are informed in more detail about the ultimate identity of the soul. We saw already that humans are to be identified with their souls. The argument that led to this conclusion made structural use of the relation between user and used, between ruler and ruled. It argued that a human being must be identified with its ruling element, and this happens to be the soul (see above on T3). In the same way, and even in similar terms, the present passage calls the region of understanding the most divine of the soul.¹¹ We can safely equate 'most divine' with 'most authoritative': Socrates means to say that in the last analysis the soul is understanding.¹²

Like the care of other things, this care of the soul is also the goal of a craft, an expertise. But there is something funny about this expertise. Like other branches of wisdom, it is something that the soul has – or indeed, given that the passage calls wisdom the best of the soul, something that the soul is. In the case of this care, therefore, the carer and the cared-for are the same. The expertise involved in this care is concerned with itself. Craft and object, user and product coincide. Hence Socrates's recourse to the motto of Delphi, that also shows this reflexive structure: understand *yourself*. The soul's care of itself is understanding of understanding.¹³

Alcibiades differs from *Charmides* in not discussing at all the question *whether* it is possible for the soul to understand itself. It assumes that the soul is in a like situation to the eye: that it cannot understand itself on its own, just as the eye cannot see itself on its own. Instead of a discussion *whether* the soul can understand itself, Socrates offers a way in which the soul *can*, in fact, understand itself.

¹¹ I follow Denyer 2001 here. In 130d5-6 we find «οὐ γὰρ που κυριώτερον γε οὐδὲν ἂν ἡμῶν αὐτῶν φήσαιμεν ἢ τὴν ψυχὴν»; in 133c1-2: «Ἐχομεν οὖν εἰπεῖν ὅτι ἐστὶ τῆς ψυχῆς θειώτερον ἢ τοῦτο, περὶ ὃ τὸ εἰδέναι τε καὶ φρονεῖν ἐστίν;» Denyer sees in the use of the genitives (ἡμῶν αὐτῶν and τῆς ψυχῆς) a careful avoidance of talk of parts (*ad loc.*).

¹² My reading therefore agrees with Brunschwig's (1996: 76) insofar as he too sees here a further identification of what we are as 'à me tout intellectuelle'. However, I do not see the contrast he posits between this and the earlier identification as a contrast between a soul 'dépersonnalisée' and a personalised soul, because I do not find in the text his notion that the soul is personalised by the body (69). His proposed emendation (70) αὐτὸ τὸ αὐτό for the MSS αὐτὰ in 132c7 is, in my view, unacceptable.

¹³ On this reflexivity cf. Gerson 2003: 33-4. For a discussion of the Foucauldian interpretation of *Alcibiades* as origin of a subjective (in the modern sense) notion of the self, see Inwood 2005: 322-39; and Gill 2006: 346-52.

The passage, then, presents a model for how it is possible for souls to understand themselves. Its vital feature is that it involves two souls. The whole can do more than its parts can do separately. For in cooperation with another soul, the soul is empowered to understand itself. We shall see that this is because the power to understand is able to grasp itself as a power when it encounters another, distinct, power to understand.

1 SYMMETRY

Before we continue, however, we need to discuss the symmetry in the model. This may not be immediately evident from the text itself, and has in fact been contested in recent publications. But it is important to see that we have here a symmetry between the two eyes and the two souls. Both eyes are looking into each other. The point is obscured a little because the text presents the situation from the perspective of one eye. And so the text has been read as saying that the first eye should look at the region of the second eye in which sight occurs, while the second eye is looking at something else. The method advocated here would be one of vicarious seeing. Two observations make it in fact more plausible that the second eye is looking at the first just as much as the first is at the second.

A preliminary point may be made against readings that want to make it a purely accidental or rhetorical element in the analogy that it involves two eyes. According to Jean-François Pradeau, for instance, the only function of the parallel of the eyes is to identify in the eyes and the souls what makes them better. The other eye serves as a more perfect instance of its kind, and therefore the first eye should look at it in order to discover what it can become itself.¹⁴ Such a reading makes nonsense of Socrates's statement earlier, that 'There may not be many examples of it, except the case of sight.' If the point is only to identify what is the more perfect condition of things of kind *K*, it could have been made by reference to almost anything, to horses and running (a slower and a faster horse), or even to ears and hearing; and then Socrates's choice of sight is arbitrary, and his statement misleading. But it is not.

The first observation that tells us that there is symmetry here is one of background. As we will see in more detail below (2.2.4), it was common opinion at the time when *Alcibiades* was written that an eye sees just when the image of what it sees is present on the pupil: that is what it is for an eye to see. But this means that the necessary condition for the reflection of the first eye – its being visible for itself to see – is also the sufficient condition for the second eye to be seeing the first.

The second observation is textual. That we are speaking of two eyes at all is the consequence of Socrates's direction. If we had had to work with the first answer of *Alcibiades* himself we would be speaking of an eye and a mirror. This is the exchange:

¹⁴ 'Le paradigme de la vue (132c-133c) a pour fonction, *pour unique fonction*, de répondre à cette question : qu'est-ce que, présent en l'âme, l'améliore?' (Pradeau 1999: 74). Gill (2006: 357-8) follows Pradeau (but also stresses the dialogical character of this context). Similar sentiments in Hazebroucq 2002: 115, whose inspiration seems above all to have been Brunschwig (1996).

‘So let us think in what thing we would see it and at the same time ourselves, when we look into it.’ ‘Clearly, Socrates, in mirrors and the like.’ ‘That is right. Isn’t there also something like that in the eye, with which we see?’

Actually, this is quite unusual for a Socratic conversation. Alcibiades’s is a perfectly adequate answer to the question. Socrates does not refute it, he merely asks for another instance of the same mechanism. But this means that he is looking for something quite specific that applies to an eye but not to a mirror. And we have a perfectly clear indication of what this is: Socrates adds ‘with which we see’. He prefers the eye to a mirror because a mirror does not see. Moreover, he identifies the mirroring aspect of the eye with the eye’s power of sight.¹⁵

2 FUNCTIONS AND POWERS

That identification brings us straight to the next feature of the passage: that the eye should look at the excellence of the other eye. From its introduction as ‘something like that in the eye, with which we see’, the object of sight is described in terms of what it can do. The pupil is also that element of the eye that is as close as you can get in tangible terms to the function itself of the eye, i.e. active sight. Hence the remark that the eye must be directed to ‘that space in which the excellence of an eye happens to come about’. In modern terms you would even note that the pupil is halfway towards immateriality: it is nothing more than a hole, a space indeed – but the writer of *Alcibiades* did not know that.

When Socrates calls the pupil that ‘which is best’ of the eye, part of what he means is that the rest of the eye is for the sake of the power of sight. That is to say that the rest is used, in a similar way as a carpenter uses her tools, for the purposes of the power of sight, that is, for sight, for seeing. In that respect the iris is no different from, e.g., the tear ducts: they are equally ‘mere adjuncts’ to the power of sight, as Denyer notes.¹⁶ What this suggests, and is affirmed by the procedure in the argument that humans are their souls – the identification of a thing with its ruling element – is that the eye is its power of sight. In looking at this, one sees the eye.

T7 does not speak in terms of ‘power’. Nevertheless, I want to suggest, in its talk of excellence (ἀρετή) it aims at the same kind of thing as the *Charmides* discusses in terms of powers. It is in the first place no coincidence that we are again discussing sight as an analogue of understanding. More importantly, however: *Alcibiades* considers things to be, ultimately, their best activity. What else there is in the eye derives its status from what the eye as a whole is directed at, the actual activity of seeing a thing (‘sight’ in one of its senses). This relation is similar to the relation of ontological dependence that we saw to be central to powers in *Charmides* (among which ‘sight’ in another of its senses, viz. as a capacity). Furthermore, T7’s mention

¹⁵ I am in agreement here with Gill 2007: 108. The point seems to me to be an important obstacle to the argument of Johnson 1999 that *Alcibiades* designates god as the perfect mirror.

¹⁶ 2001: 233, note ad 133a7.

of divinity and of the mirroring capacity of eyes and souls gains significance when we interpret them in the ontological scheme in which powers are operational. We will discuss them later on (sections 4, 5 and 6). Meanwhile, it is not surprising that we do not find here an explication that powers have undetermined being, nor separate reference to the ordinary proper objects of powers, by application to which powers acquire determinate being. The discussion circumvents these because it is interested in the self-understanding of souls, the power of a power to grasp to grasp itself (*sic*). It effects the kind of isolation of the power to understand from its ordinary objects that in *Charmides* proved to be problematic, but for which a solution is offered in *Alcibiades*.

3 SIMILARITY

Another feature of the text supports this insistence on the identification of a thing with what is best in it, and in these cases in particular the identification of the eye with its (power of) sight and of the soul with its (power of) understanding. T7 has Socrates say that the activity of sight must be directed at what it is similar to: ‘But if it looks into something else of a person, or of anything, beyond that to which this happens to be similar, it will not see itself.’ This applies equally to the merely bodily adjuncts of sight as to, say, another person’s hands. So the object of sight must be as much sight as is the subject of sight: power of sight A takes power of sight B for its object, for only in that way is there the similarity required for reflection.

The idea that similarity between an object and a subject is required in order for the subject to perceive or know the object is a received opinion among many ancient philosophers.¹⁷ It was not by any means an uncontested dogma, but important pre-Platonic philosophers had made it a fundamental datum in their theory of knowledge.¹⁸

Our text departs in important respects from this received notion of like knows like. Firstly, compared to the general epistemological context, the likeness seems to reside on the other end of the relation. There, we have an object to which the subject needs to become (or be) similar in order that the subject grasp the object. Here, we have a subject that looks for an object to which it is similar. This may merely be a matter of presentation, but more likely reflects the concern of the passage with the subject as ultimate object (through the direct object, that is, the facing object) of understanding. Secondly, given this ultimate aim, the similarity is not just (traditionally) a precondition for our understanding, but the reason why the soul wants to understand the thing to which it is similar at all; rather than a precondition, the similarity of that other thing is the very substance of our cognition.

¹⁷ See also Müller 1965.

¹⁸ A case in point is Empedocles, who argued that the soul must consist of all of the elements that make up the world, in order that humans can perceive and understand everything. Cf. DK 31 B 109: «γαίη μὲν γὰρ γαῖαν ὁπώπαμεν, ὕδατι δ' ὕδωρ, αἰθέρι δ' αἰθέρα δῖον, ἀτὰρ πυρὶ πῦρ ἀίδηλον, στοργὴν δὲ στοργῆ, νεῖκος δὲ τε νεῖκεῖ λυγρῶ» (*ap.* Aristoteles, *de Anima* 404b13f., *Metaphysica* 1000b6f).

Alcibiades plays with a traditional epistemological idea about similarity. But it is not the only variation on a similarity theme. Another has been functional before in the dialogue: that understanding requires agreement. The force of T7 is in the fusion of these variations. But let me first elaborate on the theme of agreement. Its first appearance was as a criterion of understanding. Alcibiades asserted that the Athenian people taught him justice, but Socrates made him see that the Athenian people, and most people in general, say and do contrary things with respect to justice; therefore, they concluded, they do not have understanding of justice (and therefore cannot be teachers). A contrary case is the Athenians' grasp of their language: they all say 'horse' to a horse – they did not say 'horse', of course – and by that agreement show that they grasp the meaning of the words they use (and therefore they are teachers of Greek). These mundane examples show a principle in action that can in fact become very strong, if you include in the set of things that must be in agreement *all* opinions that you hold. The strong version of this principle is the basis of Socratic dialectic, as we know it from the Platonic dialogues, and about the details of the mechanism of which there has been much discussion.

When Alcibiades confesses that he is unsure about himself, since his mind seems to waver under Socrates's questioning, Socrates spends some time explaining this phenomenon. We have seen this already, but I mention it again to remind us that it is given a prominent thematic role. As such, it recurs in Alcibiades's later attempt to describe the excellence of a community. He locates this in friendship, but is unable to choose between two attractive, but incompatible, interpretations of what friendship is. Socrates suggests to him on the one hand that friendship is in like-mindedness (*ὁμόνοια*), but on the other hand that it is a state in which each minds his own business – that is, does his own work. These are incompatible options for the following reason. Like-mindedness, on the one hand, is interpreted to mean co-expertise: two people are like-minded about a topic if they are in agreement about it, and they are in agreement about it only – here the conditionality of understanding on agreement is reversed – if they understand it, that is, if they are experts about it. This is incompatible with a state in which each does her own work, because in that situation, each has her own expertise, and no one has another's expertise. In the case of the family, for instance, there cannot be friendship because man and wife have distinct responsibilities and, hence, distinct areas of competence. In doing their own work, they are not like-minded. It is once more a sign of his incomprehension that Alcibiades is not able to make these different thoughts on friendship consistent with each other. Moreover, to the extent that we want to maintain the idea that friendship is in some kind of agreement, in similarity of expertise, Socrates has also shown Alcibiades that he is deficient in friendship even with himself. (In pressing the idea that Alcibiades lacks friendship Socrates is preparing him for the eyes-souls analogy as a revised and tenable account of friendship.)

The situation is not hopeless, however. Alcibiades's lack of understanding and his lack of friendship find a remarkable remedy in the situation that Socrates has sketched. When two souls direct their power to understand at the place in which understanding comes to be in each of them, we have three aspects of similarity. Firstly, they find agreement in what they grasp; secondly, they are similar in grasping

the same thing; and, finally, they find an object for their grasp that is similar to their grasp. That the object of their grasp is in internal agreement follows from the agreement requirement for understanding. Something just does not count as understanding if it is not consistent and able to produce agreement in statements and actions. But in this case we do have understanding, and therefore we do have agreement, too. As objects for each other's grasp, these souls are internally consistent, they are harmonious. They also have the same expertise: soul A has as objects of its grasp itself and the other, that is, soul A and soul B; while soul B grasps itself and the other, that is, soul B and soul A. Thirdly, grasp and object of grasp are highly similar. To the extent each soul grasps itself, grasp and the thing grasped are identical; and to the extent each soul grasps the other, it grasps something that is as similar to it as possible. And it is precisely when they grasp each other as things able to grasp that the souls are similar to each other – just as eyes, as powers of sight, are most similar to each other, not in respect of the colour of their iris, or the size of the body of the eye, but in respect of their power to see.¹⁹ This last element, incidentally, is also connected to the aspect of development that is present in T7, on which more below,

This talk of similarity is rather strained, and may make it highly tempting to substitute equality signs for each of these similarity relations. In other words, you may well wonder whether the aim of the text is not rather to abolish such distinctions between understanding A and understanding B. If the case of the eyes is chosen because only it shows such a close co-occurrence of seeing another and seeing yourself, does it not more accurately convey Socrates's meaning to say that the distinctions between subject, object, grasp, grasped, soul A and soul B, are no longer applicable? Should we not understand the passage as saying that our real identity is a depersonalised intellect, which is the same in all beings that have reason?

I do not think we should understand the text in this way. It is true that it has elements that are highly suggestive of this type of reading, on which later Neoplatonist readers have found ample opportunity to elaborate. It is also true that the selves here are not profoundly unique individuals in a post-Romantic sense.²⁰ Nevertheless, one of its central features resists this interpretation. For alongside the pervasive similarity in this situation of joint cognition is an ineliminable complementarity: each soul needs the other. Sameness will not do the trick. Their distinctness is a prerequisite for this special case of understanding. This is cooperation, not identification.

We should note, too, that this combination of similarity and distinctness is how T7 contains a conception of friendship that can meet the apparently contradictory demands on friendship that Socrates posed to Alcibiades before. On the one hand, there was the demand that friends are of one mind, and so in possession of the same expertise. On the other hand, there was the idea that friendship is a state that obtains when the participants do their own distinct work. In the intellectual friendship of T7

¹⁹ 'Eyes, as it happens, have different colours; pupils do not. All pupils are the same.' (Johnson 1999: 9) I agree only if 'same' is 'similar'. The author's point, moreover, is about the pupil *qua* place in which sight (in the sense of seeing) comes to be.

²⁰ As Annas 1985 emphasises; cf. Gordon 2003: 21.

the friends are co-experts, but also have their separate roles to fulfil. Specialisation and like-mindedness are reconciled.²¹

4 REFLECTION AND RECEPTIVITY

I have suggested above that we look at T7 partly in terms of what *Charmides* tells us about powers. It is now time to see how this invests it with deeper philosophical significance. Thus understood, T7 will also show us how the problem set out in *Charmides* can be resolved. The solution must be in similar philosophical terms as those in which the puzzle is framed. *Alcibiades*, in other words, must give us a philosophical model of self-understanding that explains it as a particular application of powers, that is, of yet-to-be-determined being.

Two features of T7 still await discussion. The first of these is the phenomenon of mirroring, the second the progressive tendency of the situation. T7 says two things about the mirror effect. In the first place that it makes it possible to see two different things at once, i.e. the seeing thing itself, the eye, and that to which the eye looks. We have discussed this already. Socrates also says the following:

T8	‘You recall that the face of someone looking into someone’s eye appears in the sight of the person opposite, as in a mirror, which after all we call the pupil, as an image of who looks into it?’ (132e7-133a3)	Ἐννενόηκας οὖν ὅτι τοῦ ἐμβλέποντος εἰς τὸν ὀφθαλμὸν τὸ πρόσωπον ἐμφαίνεται ἐν τῇ τοῦ καταντικρῦ ὄψει ὡσπερ ἐν κατόπτρῳ, ὃ δὴ καὶ κόρην καλοῦμεν, εἶδωλον ὅν τι τοῦ ἐμβλέποντος;
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It is unclear what the relative pronoun ‘which’, «ὃ», refers to. In its usual sense ‘pupil’, «κόρη», refers to the thing in the middle of your eye. That makes it plausible that the antecedent of ‘which’ is ‘the sight’, «τῇ ὄψει». In that case the pronoun fails to agree in gender with its antecedent, but that does happen. But the phrase that follows, ‘as an image of who looks into it’, seems to be an explanation of ‘which after all we call the pupil’; and it seems strange that sight and image are meant to be the same thing. Is the antecedent of ‘which’, alternatively, ‘the face’, «τὸ πρόσωπον»? In that case we do have agreement of gender, and a more straightforward sense to the explicatory phrase, but the word does seem too far away, and Socrates’s appeal to the ordinary sense of ‘pupil’ is ill-founded if he wants it to mean ‘image’. The late Jacques Brunschwig has devoted a study to the word «ὄψις» in which this passage figures prominently. He opts for the second of the two options above, that ‘which’ refers to ‘face’, and that therefore ‘pupil’ refers to the image that appears in the pupil (as we would call it). But it would be strange, he writes, if this passage does not mention the pupil at all. His proposal is therefore to read ‘sight’, «ὄψις», as referring to the pupil; as he notes, this word has a broad sense, and can also be used to refer to the organ of sight (rather than the process of sight, as it most frequently does), so why not here to the pupil?²² In my view, this is a rather stilted result. It seems implausible

²¹ Gordon grasps this point well (2003: 20).

²² Brunschwig 1973: 26-8.

to me that ‘pupil’ refers to the object of sight (and to nothing else), and ‘sight’ to the pupil (and to nothing else). Moreover, I think it is a mistake to seek resolution of the ambiguous reference, for it has a purpose. The writer of this passage was quite aware of what he was doing when he arranged ‘sight’, ‘pupil’, and ‘image’ in a way that runs counter to their ordinary associations. We have considered before the idea that a subject of cognition must become (or be) equal to the object of cognition. This idea was a popular one especially with reference to the senses. Another item of scientific orthodoxy was that for an eye to see is simply for it to be perfectly receptive of a miniature image of the thing seen. ‘Pretty much most people’, Theophrastus says, ‘assume seeing to be because of the reflection that comes into the eyes.’²³ Our text combines these two ideas in using ‘sight’ and ‘pupil’ for both the pupil of the eye and the image in it. It thereby conveys that the pupil actually conforms to, or takes the shape of, what is seen. It is precisely that, of course, which makes possible that the eye can see both itself and the other eye at once. Resolving the ambiguity ruins the this strategy.²⁴

The central notion here, behind the phenomenon of reflection, is the receptivity of the eye as a power of sight. That notion should be carried over, too, to the analogous case of the two souls. In other words, the power to understand is hereby characterised as something receptive. There is another textual element that strengthens this idea. It is said that the face of the one who looks into the other *appears in* («ἐμφαίνεται», a2) the sight of the other. Equally, a little later, we read that excellence *comes to be in* («ἐγγιγνομένη», b4) this particular space of the eye. And this is explicitly carried over into what is said about the souls: wisdom *comes to be in* («ἐγγίγνεται», b9) the corresponding space in the soul. The text thus emphasises the receptivity of the powers of sight and understanding.

If we put this a little crudely: eye and soul are empty before looking and understanding take place. In ordinary cases of perception and understanding the object is prior to the perception and understanding of it. In terms of powers we can say that the being of the power is in its application. This points to a difficulty in the case described in T7. For both powers are directed at each other, in the case of sight as well as of understanding; but since both are in a receptive position, it is not clear how sight and cognition can take place. We will come back to this below (section 6).

²³ «σχεδὸν γὰρ οἱ πολλοὶ τὸ ὄραν οὕτως ὑπολαμβάνουσι διὰ τὴν γινομένην ἐν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἐμφασιν» (*de Sensu et Sensibilibus* § 36, ll.1-2, not in DK). See also §§ 27, 50 (DK 59A92, 68A135); and Alexander of Aphrodisias on Democritus in *de Sensu* 24, 14-22, and 56, 10-5 (partially DK 67A29), although Alan Towey thinks the attribution to Democritus implausible (p.166 n.125 of his 2000 edition). There were modifications and nuances: cf. Theophrastus’s report on Diogenes of Apollonia in § 40 (DK64A19): other conditions must be normal.

²⁴ What is said to be reflected is, incidentally, the whole face of the viewer, not just the pupil. And that is to be expected insofar as this is an empirical observation. But we can consider this to be an imperfection of the analogy, especially in light of Socrates’s insistence, in the immediate sequel, that we focus on the one aspect that matters.

5 *PROGRESS AND THE DIVINE*

We turn now to the progressive tendency in T7. Under this heading I include the repeated mention of what is best in eye or soul, and the inclusion in the passage of god and the divine. If you would read the parallel in isolation from the rest of the dialogue, Socrates's prescription that you should look at what is best seems to come rather out of the blue.

'When an eye sees an eye, then, and looks into that which is best of it and which it sees with, in that way it will also see itself.'

But in fact we have had precursors of this idea. An important theme in the dialogue thus far was care. And, as we saw in T2, care is directed towards making things better. In this connection it becomes clear that the focus on what is best is not only imperative because it is what determines a thing's identity (see T3), but also because it provides a point of departure for care, for making the thing even better. And the appropriate method of care for yourself is, of course, what is being described here in T7.

The dialogue's concern with care and improvement and Socrates's emphasis that you should concentrate on what is best imply a gap between the way things are with a particular thing X and the way things should be – X's *status quo* and the X you should strive for. Not only do we call the latter the excellence of X, it is also most properly what X is. The *status quo* being of X is therefore to some extent undetermined with respect to what X can be, and demands realisation, determination.

While 'similar' and 'best' have precedents in the dialogue, Socrates's reference to the divine is really quite new. It is striking, too: the dialogue thus far was about Alcibiades's self-improvement; the introduction of divinity seems to constitute a rather abrupt move away from that. What does Socrates mean by introducing it?

You might think that Socrates proposes god as the object of that understanding which would be the best possible understanding. That is, when Socrates says:

'So this [aspect] of it is divine-like, and someone who looks into this and has grasped all of the divine, god and wisdom, would in this way also grasp himself most of all.'

he specifies two objects, god and wisdom, which jointly constitute the class of the divine – hence 'all of the divine'. Once you have understood god, you will also, as a result, understand yourself.

This is not how we should read the text. Firstly, because it is not uncommon for ancient philosophical texts to use terms like 'divine' to express the value of what is called divine. In other words, the term 'divine' often does not describe some object that is thereby introduced in the text, but attaches a valuation to an object that was talked about before. Secondly, we should note that 'god and wisdom' are part of a phrase, 'and has grasped all of the divine, god and wisdom', that is best read as an explication of what goes before. What it is an explication of is 'someone who looks into this', which refers back to the earlier statements about the excellence of the

human soul, as does ‘this [aspect] of it’. In other words, the divine is placed on one level with wisdom as the content of what is seen in the other’s soul. Of course we are free to speculate that this tiny phrase introduces the idea that there is a divinity in each of our souls, but it surely is a less burdensome reading to take ‘divine’ as an expression of value and aspiration.²⁵

For firstly the mention of ‘divine’ in ‘more divine’ serves to affirm the primacy within the soul of the intellect (to call it that). As we saw, this implies that understanding is the most determinative of the soul’s identity. Secondly, however, the divine also represents the supreme ideal, that which you will never reach, but towards which you strive nonetheless. Progression as characterised here is an infinite process.

If we interpret the motif of the divine in this way, we find a pre-echo of it when Socrates shows himself disappointed about Alcibiades’s lack of ambition. Alcibiades regards his fellow Athenians as his rivals, not the sons of the queen-mothers of Persia and Sparta. This prompts Socrates to say: ‘listen to me and to the Delphic sentence, and know yourself, that these are our adversaries, not the ones you think’.²⁶ This is the first time that the Delphic motto is mentioned in the dialogue, and its import is not to make Alcibiades more modest or introspective, but to make him realise that his ambitions must be greater, that he must look higher, farther away, that he must be serious about wanting to rule the world. In its context, the remark seems to have politics and power as its scope, but in the parallel it has become clear that Socrates has staked much higher claims: you must strive for the divine.

Against the background of such ambitions we should not overlook the noticeable mention in T7 of ‘most of all’ («μάλιστα») in the part about the souls.

‘Therefore, dear Alcibiades, must a soul too [...] look into a soul, and most of all into that space of it in which the excellence of a soul comes about, wisdom [...], and someone who looks into this [...] would in this way also grasp himself most of all[.]’

No similar terms are used in the part about the eyes. Why all of a sudden this mention of degree? I suggest this is to be interpreted as an expression of the limits of human ability, as a disclaimer ‘to the extent that merely human powers can do this’. The situation, after all, is one with two people, who both claim about themselves that they do not have wisdom. But in order that his questions are not interpreted as applying to ideal cases only, Socrates makes clear that whatever comes closest to the ideal in ordinary human beings is suitable for this type of cognitive interaction. Perhaps we can go further and interpret b10 ‘and into whatever else to which this happens to be similar’ in the same way as Socrates’s leaving room for what is not yet the excellence of the soul, but is on its route towards it.²⁷ We can look into Socrates’s soul, even if full understanding has not yet come to be within it.

²⁵ I am not sure I agree with Pietsch’s reference to Socrates’s midwifery at this point (2008: 350). I am quite sure I do not agree with the neoplatonic inspiration of his interpretation, in particular the idea that Alcibiades has always had wisdom in his real self, even if he did not realise that yet (351).

²⁶ «ἀλλ’ ὦ μακάριε, πειθόμενος ἐμοί τε καὶ τῷ ἐν Δελφοῖς γράμματι, γνῶθι σαυτόν, ὅτι οὗτοι ἡμῖν εἰσὶν ἀντίπαλοι, ἀλλ’ οὐχ οὐς σὺ οἶει» (124a9-b2)

²⁷ Against Johnson 1999: 10.

6 THE DETERMINACY OF THE INDETERMINATE

There is, then, a strong awareness of progress in this passage, and also of the gap between the beginning and end of the process. What does that mean, and how does this relate to the earlier aspect, of the receptivity of the powers involved? How, finally, is the necessary distinction between the souls to be interpreted in terms of powers?

We noted the importance, on the eyes-side of the analogy, of the presence of the reflection in the sight of the other and of the role of that sight as a receptive power; these elements must be carried over into what is said about the souls. We may therefore say of the souls as well that they are receptive powers of understanding, in which the content is generated when the other soul tries to understand it; and *vice versa*, when it tries to understand the other soul – the other power of understanding – then it generates content in the other, namely the excellence of the power of understanding, *i.e.* understanding, wisdom. But if we put it this way, we do as if we can isolate the contents of understanding and ascribe them to each of the powers to understand. In T7, however, the understanding of self and of the other coincide, in a way in which this does not apply to the respective powers.

But this returns us to the difficulty we have noted before: what is there to understand if each of the powers to understand is receptive? Whence their content? In terms of *Charmides*: where is the determined being, by application to which the power to understand has its being? In terms of *Alcibiades*: how can two things understand each other, grasp each other's identity, if each of these things has its identity only in grasping something? It seems as if the place in which wisdom comes to be is empty before there is something at hand for the power to understand to grasp. And in virtue of the total symmetry of the situation, that applies to both sides of the relation. Whence the object at hand?

What the new model has to offer is the contribution made by the duality, that this is cognition by two souls. This, and what this involves, distinguishes the *Alcibiades* situation from that of *Charmides*. Let us return once more to the analogy of the eyes. There are two eyes. What this makes possible is that there should be reflection (cf. the 'image' in the text). Part of what a reflection does is to report what happens to its original. The same holds for the case of the two souls. What finds its reflection in the other soul is what happens in and to the first soul. But we should note that this is what really happens in soul B as well as a report of what happens in soul A. The reflection of what happens to eye A's sight is what really happens in eye B's sight; likewise, the reflection of what happens in soul A, as grasped in soul B, is at the same time what happens in soul B.

When two souls are directed at each other, what they grasp is precisely this coincidence of report and happening. And through this, they grasp that no matter what the particular occasion, they are able to take the pertinent shape – their being is in their flexibility, rather than their content at any one time. The occurrence that is at any one moment the material, as it were, of the cognition, is accidental. Not only could it have been something else – the fact that it could equally have been something else is what they grasp. So for them to understand each other is to understand, of the both of them, that they can take shape in many ways. It is clear, incidentally, that the

similarity of the two souls is an absolute requirement for this type of cognition. Else there would be no way to bridge the gap between what you see (understand) in the other and what you see (understand) about yourself.

T7 speaks of the place in which understanding comes about. We can express the point in those terms too. For it is not the particular thing that comes to occupy that place, not the isolated piece of understanding that is fundamental in these souls' grasp of each other. What they grasp is the role of this space in conforming to many different things; the soul's excellence is its ability to accommodate an unlimited variety of objects of understanding.

This is a strange result. If Socrates were to encounter himself and to ask himself the object-question, as he asked Alcibiades, what would he say? He would have to say that the object of this expertise is expertise itself. And he would have to accept that, since the open-endedness of this expertise is precisely its defining characteristic.

The power to understand is something indeterminate – that goes with its being a power. In ordinary cases of cognition, the power to understand is applied to a determinate being, something determinate that is susceptible to being understood. And on its own, the power to understand would not be able to move beyond that. But when one power to understand meets another one, distinct from it but very similar, it is able to grasp it beyond its particular application at any one time. A soul that understands a tree is applied to the tree; but when it sees in another soul how the other soul is applied together with itself, it grasps the unlimited power to be applied in which its being consists. Joint application is the prerequisite for these souls' grasp of each other and themselves. The determinate being that they have as being applied to a determinate object of understanding does not exhaust their grasp, for they also grasp that they can have many other shapes of determinate being. The paradox is that these powers grasp each other as having their determinate being in being indeterminate.

7 *FRIENDSHIP IN ALCIBIADES*

Through the analogy of eyes and souls that his character Socrates sketches, the author of *Alcibiades* develops a model of cooperative self-understanding. When an eye sees itself in what another eye sees, it sees not any particular thing that it sees, but sees how it is able to receive the sights of all things seen. A soul understands itself not as merely one determinate thing; but in constant understanding of another understanding it understands how it has the power to grasp and conform to all things.

Just before offering the eyes-souls analogy, Socrates demonstrates to Alcibiades that he has no proper understanding of what friendship is, and that he is even deficient in friendship for himself. The central notion in terms of which Socrates speaks of friendship is that of like-mindedness. By means of it, he brings out Alcibiades's difficulties in making sense of friendship. It also serves to underline the implicit connection between this earlier talk about friendship and the analogy. Souls that cooperatively understand themselves are like-minded, if anything is.

More generally, the part-ontological, part-epistemological story that hides in the analogy has clear implications for the function this dialogue accords to friendship and

other bonds between people (which I here speak of under the name of ‘friendship’). These find their justification in the philosophical life in this role. There is no wisdom without them. And insofar as this self-understanding is not something you can acquire and stow away, but must be had in actual mutual understanding, there is no wisdom beyond friendship. There might be for gods: but humanity is characterised by having the *power* to understand, which must be applied continually.

The relations of Plato’s Socrates with those with whom he talks have been a popular topic for scholarly discussion. What justifies these conversations as a method of truth-finding? Is everyone eligible for Socratic questioning? Is it the only way of being a philosopher? While we do not have to proclaim as valid for all Platonic texts what is said in *Alcibiades*, it can still answer such general questions in its own context. And it can answer them because it offers a philosophical model, from which its answers follow in a reasoned manner. What Socrates looks for in *Alcibiades* and *Charmides* is the source from which understanding and proper management of other things flows, the vital thing that is the beginning and end of the life of wisdom: understanding of yourself. But since understanding is a power with the peculiar feature of having to be applied, self-understanding is to be had in joint cognition, with another human soul, another power to understand. Mutual understanding in action is what Socrates is after, not isolated pieces of knowledge that he suspects lie buried in his interlocutors’ souls. And therefore he is interested in people as beings that can understand. Only with them can a philosophical life be led. *Alcibiades* is a particularly ambitious person, and perhaps that explains why Socrates is particularly keen on talking to him. Grasping the unlimited power to understand is, after all, something divine, something beyond the reach of ordinary humanity. But at the same time, as we saw, being human is being a soul, being a power to understand. Someone with divine ambition is therefore most fully what it is to be a human being. *Alcibiades* is Socrates’s partner of preference, but in principle the road to wisdom is open to anyone.

The friendship of the eyes-souls analogy, which Socrates offers as the alternative to the confused thoughts of *Alcibiades*, is marked by a fundamental equality. The symmetry in the cognitive roles of the partners makes each of them equally indispensable to the whole project. This aspect of equality makes the *Alcibiades* picture of friendship agree to some extent with Athens’ political – democratic – ideology, but also with dominant views in contemporary theory of knowledge, and with many people’s expectations about a satisfactory theory of friendship.

In terms of Socrates and *Alcibiades*’ intentions, this equality is established only at the end of the dialogue. In T6 we heard *Alcibiades* announce his commitment to accompanying Socrates as his tutor, and Socrates’s subsequent remark that his love is like a stork, that broods a young version of itself, and has its favours reciprocated. This love is ἔρως, but part of what the *Alcibiades* view of human relations does is to bridge the gap between sexual love and friendship, between ἔρως and φιλία. It does this precisely by building into ambitious, striving love the equality and joint advancement that is characteristic of friendship. Likewise, it makes friendship something that goes beyond the *status quo*, something whose nature it is to aim at nothing less than human excellence.

Nevertheless, the view of friendship developed here is very much a philosophers' friendship. To mention only one aspect of this intellectualist orientation: in its focus on the power to understand that it considers as essential to human beings, and by the same token as present in each human being, it seems that this conception of friendship has no place for the idea that a particular relation of friendship is and must be between two particular people. Fourth-century Athenians would have had no less trouble than we have in recognising in this intellectualist understanding of friendship the relation or even the concept that ordinarily goes under the name of 'friendship'. It is part of the revisionist agenda of the texts we have considered, however, to leave out what is inconsistent and confused from the ways in which we ordinarily conceive of things like friendship, and to present us with a purified version of what they consider really worthwhile in these phenomena.

CONCLUSION

The analogy of eyes and souls takes up the fundamental themes that characterise the earlier discussion in *Alcibiades*, and combines them in an epistemological account of self-understanding that is at the same time an account of philosophical friendship. It takes up the notion developed in *Charmides* that the power to understand is something in itself indeterminate, and points to a way in which a power to understand as thus conceived may still understand itself. It is fundamentally the ability of indeterminate powers to understand to follow each other through being determined in different ways by different accidental objects of understanding that makes this epistemological account of friendship possible.

The philosophical model about powers and friendship that we have examined in the last two chapters gives a philosophically powerful account of the importance, within Platonic thought, of friendship, and of the dialogical, communal nature of philosophy. The view of human nature which *Charmides* and *Alcibiades* share portrays humans as fundamentally deficient beings – a not so promising point of departure for a philosophy of self-reflection. Yet in *Alcibiades* the idea that the realisation of such human being, and the practice of philosophy, requires cooperation and fellowship, is not merely a sentiment but is given a theoretical grounding.

PART II

A STOIC MODEL

CHAPTER 3

TENDING YOURSELF – THE PHYSICS OF STOIC SELF-UNDERSTANDING

1 *AIM AND STRUCTURE*

In this second part we consider the Stoic model of friendship and self-understanding. The fundamental difference between it and the Platonic model that we have considered in part one is that it sees friendship as something given with self-understanding, rather than as the way towards it. Both, in fact, are regarded as aspects of wisdom. What we look at in this chapter is the Stoic conception of self-understanding. I will try to establish that the Stoics thought of self-understanding as both possible and integral to living successfully and happily. In chapter 4, I analyse the place of friendship in Stoic philosophy and how it relates to self-understanding.

Our source material gives us reason to think, in my view, that the Stoics thought of our self-understanding as the cognitive activity of a part of God (the part in us) that is about itself. This, and some of the consequences of this idea, are what I aim to show in this chapter. Hence, also, the division of this chapter into, roughly, a section about ontology, a section about anthropology, and a section about the details of understanding in a wise person.

In the first section, I discuss the question whether the Stoic God can act on himself and be acted upon by himself. Since understanding is a type of action (as we will see), this is also a question about the possibility of an understanding of understanding. In the second section, we consider the evidence for the idea that the Stoics identified us with our understanding. The implication of this idea is that if we are to understand ourselves, we must understand understanding. In the third section, I argue that understanding is an active order of concepts, which acts on itself. As a reflexively active order, real understanding entails self-understanding.

The idea that our self-understanding is the self-understanding of a part of God has one consequence that I want to emphasise in particular. The way self-understanding works – the soul's activity that is affected by itself – is also the way we can reach understanding in the first place. The part of God in us is able to affect itself in such a way that it gradually increases its internal tension and finally reaches its fully developed form, i.e. understanding. As a consequence of this, in the Stoic view, a person does not depend on anything external to herself to achieve self-understanding. In other words, a wise person is sufficient to herself for becoming wise.

2 *SELF-UNDERSTANDING: AN ONTOLOGICAL ISSUE AND ITS PLACE IN STOICISM*

The ability of the Stoic God to act on himself is related to the Stoic conception of God as something dynamic, rather than something static. Stoicism stands out among

ancient philosophical schools in its emphasis on this ontological feature. The Stoic God, who is present in everything in the cosmos as a cause, is fundamentally something dynamic, to be compared, in Sambursky's famous image, with a field of force.¹ Images are of limited value only, however, in working out the consequences of basic ontological views. This is why I devote the first section of this chapter to an analysis of texts that tell us something about the ontological status of God as something that can act upon itself. This provides us with the ontological framework for Stoic thought on self-understanding, which we will approach in two stages, in sections two and three. Firstly, we look at grounds for thinking that the Stoics considered the soul to be what we are; i.e. in self-understanding we should understand our soul. Secondly, we will look at the details of our self-understanding. I will argue that the descriptions that the Stoics give of understanding make clear that it is at the same time also self-understanding. In this way I hope I can show that the ontology that the Stoics develop is of direct relevance for and impact on their conception of the wisdom that, in their view, guarantees a good life.

Readers may find that the idea of an understanding of understanding sounds too Aristotelian to be Stoic. The Aristotelian God, moreover, who is basically a self-thinking thought, is much different from the Stoic God, who provides for even the tiniest detail in the cosmos; it may be thought that self-understanding is part of this difference and therefore not at home in Stoicism. However, the fact that we are used to speaking of understanding of understanding in connection with Aristotle does not prove anything about its proper place in Stoicism. Furthermore, the reflexivity that I think characterises Stoic understanding does not exhaust this understanding. In other words, there is no reason why a self-understanding mind might not also understand and care for other things. One of the texts that we will consider as providing evidence for the view that there is a place in Stoicism for the self-understanding of the power to understand actually makes an explicit connection between a power's ability to apply to itself and its ability to apply to other things (T8 below).

The sources that we have do not often refer to self-understanding as an important element of Stoic philosophy (but see T9-T12 below).² A Stoic like Epictetus, who does often use the injunction 'Know yourself', uses it mostly in exhortative contexts, rather than theoretical ones.³ We should remind ourselves, however, of the fact that

¹ Sambursky 1959: 33-40.

² Although the emperor Julian does refer to works written about the Delphic motto: «ὅτι δὲ τὸ Γνωθὶ σαυτὸν κεφάλαιον τίθενται φιλοσοφίας, οὐ μόνον ἐξ ὧν κατεβάλλοντο ξυγγραμμάτων ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ τούτου πεισθείης ἄν, εἴπερ ἐθέλοις, ἀλλὰ πολὺ πλεόν ἀπὸ τοῦ τῆς φιλοσοφίας τέλους· τὸ γὰρ ὁμολογουμένως ζῆν τῇ φύσει τέλος ἐποιήσαντο, οὐπερ οὐχ οἷόν τε τυχεῖν τὸν ἀγνοοῦντα τίς καὶ ὁποῖος πέφυκεν[.]» *Or.* 6 (εἰς τοὺς ἀπαιδεύτους κύνας), 185d-186a. Wilkins 1917 relies on this text in claiming that 'the Stoics made γνωθὶ σαυτὸν the very foundation of their philosophy' (31). I agree that the injunction to understand yourself is important in Stoic philosophy (both as a general ethical directive and as a more technically epistemological one), but consider the evidence of Julian insufficient to establish it.

³ In addition to the texts I discuss below (3.1.2.6, T9-T12), we may point to *Disc.* 1.6.12-21 (LS 63E) as a text that comes close to giving an anthropological account of our self-understanding, if we may take the text as not so much about the contemplation of the cosmic God and his works (as it is usually taken), as about the study of our own 'use of presentations': the central phrase (§19) is that God «τὸν δ' ἄνθρωπον θεατὴν εἰσήγαγεν

many of the texts that have been transmitted to us are of a more practical nature than the average Stoic text would likely have been in antiquity. In other more technical areas of Stoic philosophy, too, we have to rely on secondary reports and on inferences. Still, the evidence that we do have allows us to say that the Stoics considered self-understanding to be an integral aspect of understanding itself; and this they considered to be necessary and sufficient for a happy life. We may even think that the self-understanding aspect of wisdom was itself presented as the ethical goal of human life (see 3.1.2.6 and 3.2.4).

Most likely as a consequence of its perceived absence in our sources, recent scholarship does not very much emphasise the importance of self-understanding as an epistemological feature in Stoic philosophy. I say ‘epistemological’, because there has been much discussion of, for instance, the care of the self, following people like Hadot and Foucault.⁴ There is also considerable debate about whether we can speak of a notion of the self emerging in (especially later) Stoicism; proponents of such an emergence emphasise elements of interiority and subjectivity that they detect in Stoic texts, as part of their argument that the modern notion of the self-conscious person can be traced back to these thinkers.⁵ The former issue is primarily a therapeutic one, while the latter is, one might say, about the mode in which persons may understand (or even have access to) themselves. I do not address either of these debates, and do not think that my argument depends on choosing any particular side in them. What concerns me in this chapter under the heading of ‘self-understanding’ is (i) the wise person’s understanding of what she is, whatever the specific answer to that question; and, what this involves, in my view, (ii) the understanding, on the part of understanding, of itself. The latter in particular has not received much attention in the literature.⁶ Yet it is an integral aspect of the Stoic conception of the good life, as I hope to show.

αὐτοῦ τε καὶ τῶν ἔργων τῶν αὐτοῦ, καὶ οὐ μόνον θεατήν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐξηγητήν αὐτῶν». Long 1991a: 112ff. seems to take it to be about us. Much of the (con)text seems compatible with both readings, but what supports Long’s reading is (i) the mention of παρακολούθησις «τῇ χρήσει» (§§13, 17), given that χρήσις, in the case of animals, is of φαντασίαις; and (ii) the denial that animals have any use for «παρακολουθεῖν ταῖς φαντασίαις» (§18, not printed in LS 63E or Long 1991a: 112). What counts against it is the difficulty of giving a meaning to the human role as «ἐξηγητήν» (§19) if this is of our own works, rather than God’s; «ἔργων» as label for our actions; and the mention of spectatorship («θεατήν») and following («παρακολούθησις»), which suggest something that happens *after*, rather than simultaneous with action. I suspend judgement about what reading we should adopt. If we do interpret the text as about us, we may wish to read «αὐτοῦ» for «αὐτοῦ» (twice) in §19.

⁴ Hadot 1995, Foucault 1984.

⁵ See also my introduction. Prominent recent advocates of this idea: Sorabji 2006; Long 1991a, 1997, 2006a. Contrast Gill 1996b, 2006. Cf. Conradie 2010. Recent attention for the Stoic idea that people can have different roles with which they may identify themselves in, e.g., Gill 1988, 2008: 372-4; Tieleman 2007.

⁶ An important exception is Long 1991a: 111-8 (cf. 1999: 575-7), who discusses how you can reflect on the presentations that you have without having to be something over and beyond these presentations. I attempt to address more directly than Long does the question how the reflexivity of understanding is ontologically possible. Crystal 2002 provides an account of ‘self-intellection’ in ancient thought which reserves a place for Stoic thought (161-78) as the foil against which to understand Sextus’s attack on the notion of self-intellection (M7.310ff.; cf. 7.441f.).

3 UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF INDEPENDENTLY FROM OTHERS

On the question whether someone who is to become a wise person has need of others in order to become wise, there is a consensus that she does not.⁷ But this agreement is not universal. Some scholars give a prominent place to the Stoic idea that most people are corrupted away from their natural development by the influence of other people and of pleasure. If this corruption is the standard, the thought is, then people need education in order to become wise.⁸ These, however, are considerations about what happens for the most part. It is true that most people do not become wise. The case that the Stoics put centre stage is, however, that rare case in which someone does become wise. The question they ask is about how someone becomes wise who actually does become wise. As I said, most scholars think that the wise person can do this on her own. Recent literature has also provided accounts of the ethical or wider deliberations that form the path by which an individual reaches wisdom.⁹ What I attempt to show, however, is that there is an ontological and epistemological basis for the idea that the individual herself is able to develop wisdom in herself. In making this basis explicit, I think we will also better understand what it is for an individual to grow towards wisdom. In particular, my analysis shows that the Stoics thought of understanding in a way that makes it inherently self-understanding as well.

There is an additional reason to focus on the ontological basis of the view that the individual does not need others to become wise. This is the widespread idea that God, one of the two principles in the Stoic worldview, is a purely active principle, i.e. is not acted *upon*.¹⁰ I believe this is incorrect. One of the implications of this idea is that the individual, insofar as she has a share of God, cannot act on herself insofar as she has a share of God. However, such acting upon oneself insofar as one has a share of God is needed for one to develop wisdom in oneself. In my analysis, I provide evidence for the idea that, in fact, the Stoics thought that God acts on himself at every level on which he is present in the cosmos; this includes the level of *λόγος*, i.e. the way he is present in human beings.

A final reason to concentrate on the ontological basis for the Stoic view that the individual is self-sufficient in becoming wise is the difference between this view and its Platonic counterpart. In holding a philosophically distinctive view that must have been of the utmost importance to them, the early Stoics will likely have been concerned themselves how they could ground it – which makes that grounding significant for our reconstruction of what they thought.

⁷ Thus LS p. 383 (contrast Long 2006: 368-9); Bonhöffer 1968a: 5-6 and 1968b: 146; Long 1986: 182; Nussbaum 1994: 316-58, who speaks of a ‘teacher-pupil relationship that is strongly *symmetrical and anti-authoritarian*’ (344, cf. 341, 345).

⁸ On Stoic ideas about how people are corrupted by their environment, both human and pleasurable, see Van Sijl 2010: 57-93. On the need for education, e.g. Ioppolo 1980: 120: ‘se anche quelli ben disposti non verranno adeguatamente educati, diventeranno malvagi’ (cf. 116); cf. also Nussbaum 1994: 359n.3.

⁹ Inwood 2005: 271-301; Frede 1999a; Striker 1996: 226-31; Annas 1993: 169-79; Engberg-Pedersen 1986, 1990; on the idea of progress generally, cf. Roskam 2005.

¹⁰ Prominent statements of this view: Sedley 1999: 385; Brunschwig 2003: 210. See 3.1.2.1 below.

I should insert a caveat about the claim that the Stoic sage-to-be can develop self-understanding without the intervention of others. I do not mean to say that she does not have to be raised by her parents, for instance, in order to survive at all. The gregariousness of human beings as a natural kind is beyond doubt (see also 3.3.1). What we are interested in here, however, is what makes the wise person, and ultimately everybody, what they are: their rational soul. Does that depend on other rational souls for its perfection? Nor do I claim that it is impossible for others to promote someone's development towards wisdom. Teaching is central to the writings of (especially later) Stoics, while their theory of ἔργως (see chapter 4) involves the idea that a wise person will try to make others wise. So others may help. But need they do so? We will see that the answer in the Stoic case, in contrast to the Platonic one that we have examined, is 'no'.

In reconstructing the ontological basis of self-understanding in Stoic philosophy, we must use the sources that we have. At times, these sources have a different focus than we do. We do not find, for instance, a phrase like 'understanding of understanding' in any of our sources. However, in giving a description of one phenomenon, an author may use language that tells *us* something about another phenomenon. This obviously calls for caution in our interpretation. We must be careful about the questions we pose to the texts that we have. We are nevertheless entitled to use our material in this indirect way, based on our understanding of how different tenets and parts of Stoic philosophy cohere. Moreover, in offering what seems to us to be the best interpretation of all of our evidence, we may to some extent let philosophical considerations play a role in determining what is the best interpretation. In part, this is a general question of charitable interpretation; in part also it is a matter of thinking along with the Stoics, whom we have every reason to think of as perceptive thinkers who aimed at consistency. When we attempt to answer questions that the texts that we have do not address directly, we should aim at what we would expect to find if the relevant texts *were* available to us.

4 AN EXAMPLE OF SELF-UNDERSTANDING

Before we look at the organisation of this chapter in more detail, let us consider for a moment the peculiar understanding of the Stoic wise person, which I claim is also at the same time self-understanding. Cicero gives us the following description of the moment that someone becomes wise.

T1	As soon as he has attained understanding [...] and has seen the order [...] of things to be done, he has set a much higher value on this than on all the things he loved before, and has reasoned intelligently and rationally in such a way that he established in this the whole of that highest good of a person which is to be praised and sought	simul autem cepit intellegentiam [...] viditque rerum agendarum ordinem [...], multo eam pluris aestimavit quam omnia illa, quae prima dilexerat, atque ita cognitione et ratione collegit, ut statueret in eo collocatum summum illud hominis per se laudandum et expetendum
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| for itself. (Cic. *Fin.* 3.21)¹¹

| bonum[.]

Cicero speaks of a moment when someone really grasps the order of ‘things to be done’, i.e. on the basis of the pattern of things done so far. The moment he sees the light, this person transfers his primary allegiance from food and drink etc. (‘the things he loved before’) to the order of his actions. Henceforth, this order is his highest good, that for which he does everything – that which fulfils his life and makes him a happy person. In this chapter, we examine what the understanding that is at play here is, and what ontological basis makes it possible.

5 SUMMARY

Since this chapter is a little long, let me offer an extended overview of it. As I said, it falls into three parts. In the first, we look at the ontological question whether God acts upon himself. I argue that he does, and most particularly so in those parts of the cosmos in which he is most present, as in the case of human understanding. Having set up this ontological framework, we proceed, in the second part of this chapter, to discuss the Stoic view of what we, ultimately, are. I will argue that the Stoics identified us with our rational souls. These, moreover, are a part of God in us. The implication of this is that when we understand ourselves, a part of God understands itself. The third part of this chapter looks in more detail at the Stoic conception of understanding. It gives a more specific description of what happens when our understanding understands itself – the process of which part one has argued the ontological possibility, and part two has urged the necessity if we are to understand ourselves.

The first part, then, concerns the ontology behind the idea that our power to understand is able to understand itself. We start by considering a number of basic notions in Stoic ontology. Since the Stoics mostly speak of physical entities and physical processes where other philosophers would have elaborated a metaphysics, they mostly address ontological questions by means of physical discussions and views. The basic notions that we need to address, therefore, are also physical ones. These are, most importantly, God, God’s role as cause of things in the cosmos, πνεῦμα, the notion of tension. Since our concerns are with understanding, we also look at some of the basic terms by means of which the Stoics explained human cognition. We also need a grasp of the structure of nature, of the hierarchy in which humans are above animals, which are above plants, which are above natural objects like stones. This structure is, in fact, an account of how God is present at different levels in the whole of the cosmos.

After this discussion of basic notions, we will consider the central question of this first part, whether God is able to act on himself. I argue that God indeed acts upon himself and is acted upon by himself. Since God is present in the cosmos in many ways, and particularly on many levels of nature, it makes sense to approach this issue

¹¹ In SVF 3.188, in LS 59D. This text and its context are subject of heated debate: recent contributions include Frede 1999a, Inwood 2005, Vogt 2008b.

by considering increasingly specific types of action. My argument will therefore be incremental, by which I mean that we look at God's self-action, as I will call it, on increasingly high levels of his presence (by 'self-action' I refer to cases of a subject acting upon itself). We start with action, as the most general class of activity. Then we proceed to tension, the activity of God in giving tension to things. The next level up is perception. Finally, the most specific type of action for our purposes is understanding. For all of these types of action I argue that the Stoic God is able to act upon himself. In the section on action in general, meanwhile, we will also consider how the Stoics employed their physical views to substantiate their (metaphysical, we would say) position that self-action is possible.

The second part of this chapter discusses the Stoic view of what we are; in it, I argue that the Stoics identified us with our souls. After a discussion of the relation between body and soul in Stoic thought, I present four main pieces of evidence that make it plausible that the Stoics did indeed identify us with our souls. In view of this identification, our self-understanding must be our understanding of the souls that we are. We will see in the final part of this chapter that the soul of a wise person has a configuration that is of such a kind that we can identify it with understanding. It turns out, therefore, that the Stoic identification of us with our souls implies that the wise person's self-understanding is essentially the self-understanding of her power to understand.

In the third and final part of this chapter, then, we return to self-understanding, examining now, not just the general principles of self-action or the possibility of self-understanding, but the shape that self-understanding takes in our case. I first discuss the relevance to this project of the descriptions of the theory of οἰκείωσις (familiarisation), and argue that this relevance is limited. A second preliminary issue is presented by a passage from Hierocles's *Elements of Ethics* about the self-perception of animals, which many appeal to as a central Stoic account about self-perception. I argue that the value of this text for our purpose is also limited. We then turn to what the Stoics say λόγος and understanding are. I argue that we have sufficient evidence to identify the understanding of the wise person with the order of the concepts in the wise person's mind. This order, moreover, is an active order. It is characterised by strength and unity, which mark out the part of God in us – λόγος, which, in its fully developed form, is understanding – as having in the highest degree the features of God's action in general. Most importantly for our purposes: the powers that characterise God's presence in the cosmos all have their primary application to themselves – they start with themselves. Understanding, the highest of these powers, has this most of all. In other words, the wise person's λόγος is among the most reflexive things in the cosmos. I also argue that we may understand this reflexivity in terms of the physical interaction of the parts of understanding, the concepts.

As the details of the Stoic model of self-understanding become clear, we will also be able to explain why it enables the soul to understand itself directly, in contrast to the Platonic model that we have considered in the previous chapters. The decisive difference is that the Stoic soul is something completely active in itself; it does not await application or actualisation.

3.1 GOD ACTS ON HIMSELF

3.1.1 BASIC NOTIONS

1 *GOD AS CAUSE*

What we want to find out in this chapter is what happens when the human soul understands itself; for this we first need to know what the human soul is made of, and what it means for it to understand something. Both, the constitution of the soul and the mechanism of understanding, have their ontological basis in God. For this reason, I want to start with this ontological basis. It will prove of fundamental importance for the later parts of this chapter that God is able to act on himself, rather than only on matter. In this part, therefore, we look at texts that can tell us something about this activity, and I will argue that they indeed imply that God acts on himself, and is acted upon by himself. In order properly to understand these texts, however, we should remind ourselves of some basic notions in Stoic ontology.

According to the Stoics, the world, which they call ‘cosmos’, is a mixture of two bodies and of nothing else. The first they call ‘God’, the second they call ‘matter’. Such is the mixture of these bodies that they are both everywhere: there is no part of the world in which there is not both matter and God. This means that every entity in the cosmos consists of a part of God and a part of matter. However, both God and matter keep their distinct identities and properties in this mixture.¹² Matter, in fact, has no properties beyond two which the Stoics did not recognise as properties, being instead what makes a body a body: resistance (to touch) and three-dimensionality.¹³ Matter is only passive. It is inert in itself, moved, changed, and shaped only insofar as god moves, changes, or shapes it – for god is able to act. God is therefore the great cause of everything.¹⁴

In calling God the cause of things the Stoics do not restrict his activity much. For they conceive of causes in very broad terms. In their view, causes are not only things that push other things in the way billiard balls push each other.¹⁵ Causes also make things the way they are for as long as they are that way. They are co-present with what they effect, actively causing it to be what it is. God is the cause of everything in

¹² This distinguishes mixture from juxtaposition and blending, respectively. Further discussion in LS p. 270-2; White 2003: 132-3. Cf. Hankinson 1998: 239-40.

¹³ DL 7.135 (in SVF 3.Apoll.6, LS 45E), Galen *Qual. Incorp.* 19.483.13f. (in SVF 2.381, in LS 45F). Hankinson (1998: 241) sees ‘no logical bar to treating solidity as a derived property’. There is a physical bar, however. Matter as a principle that can be acted upon needs to have solidity before it can be acted upon, since action requires this. Hankinson differentiates insufficiently between the solidity that results from the cohesive force of πνεῦμα and the solidity that is the mere sluggishness of matter. To be fair, however, it is not very clear how the Stoics drew the distinction.

¹⁴ «Δία δ’ [sc. καλεῖσθαι] ὅτι πάντων αἴτιος καὶ κύριος»: Chrysippus via Philodemus, in SVF 2.1076.

¹⁵ The Stoics did go somewhat into the direction of this more modern view by requiring activity of a cause. See Frede 1980; Hankinson 1998: 240-1.

this way. He is present in each thing – each thing is a compound of a piece of God and a piece of matter – and causes it to be qualified in the particular way that it is. Whenever we observe something to have properties beyond mere resistance and three-dimensionality, we observe the effects of God’s causal role.

According to the Stoics, only bodies can act and be acted upon. They used this idea in various contexts, for instance to argue that the soul is corporeal, or that the virtues are, on the basis of their being able to effect something. In saying that only bodies can act and be acted upon, the Stoics also restricted the class of existing things to bodies, because they considered the capacity to act and the capacity to undergo action as definitive of existence. However, these capacities need not jointly apply to each and every existent. The complete passivity of matter, in fact, implies that this one of the pair of basic bodies is not able to act. Whether the other of the pair of basic bodies, God, has also only one of these capacities, viz. the capacity to act, is controversial. I argue below (3.1.2) that God has both the capacity to act and the capacity to be acted upon.

2 THE FOUR ‘KINDS’ OF BEING

The Stoics developed different terms to refer to the results of the presence of God and matter in things (the compounds). There are four main terms for different ‘kinds’ of being. These are usually referred to as ‘genera’ or ‘categories’; this terminology occurs in various ancient sources themselves. It is a matter of debate whether these are indeed different kinds or modes in which a thing can be, or rather types of descriptions that highlight different aspects of things. I take the latter approach, which seems to become the modern standard. The four kinds then correspond to talking about a thing as, respectively, a substrate, as something qualified, as something disposed in a certain way, and lastly as something disposed in a certain way towards another thing. So when we look at any given entity, we can say of it that it is there, for instance when we want to go on and say something more definite about it later. In referring to something as being there, we make use of the first kind of being, ‘substrate’ («ὑποκείμενον»). If, however, we want to talk about it as something particular, something that is such and so, then we talk about it as something ‘qualified’ («ποιόν»), the second kind of being. Suppose I now want to describe its attitude, as when I say that someone showed me her fist – that is, her hand in a particular configuration. In describing it as something in a certain configuration, I make use of the third kind of being, ‘disposed in a certain way’ («πῶς ἔχον»). The fourth kind of being is used when we apply a label to something in virtue of its being in a certain relation to another thing, whereby this relation can be severed without a change in the thing itself that we label. The classic instance is being a father. We call someone a father, the Stoics say, in virtue of his relation to his son. In case his son dies, however, the father is no longer a father, but no change has taken place in the father himself. When we describe someone as a father, therefore, we make use of the fourth kind of being, that which is ‘disposed towards something else in a certain way’

(«πρός τί πως ἔχον»¹⁶). We will have occasion to consider the Stoics' use of this fourth kind of being in two important contexts: in the description of what the human soul is, in this chapter, and in the Stoic interpretation of the word «φιλία», in the next. Each of these four kinds of being may be applicable to one thing – the classification is therefore not one of different things, but at least of different modes of being, and perhaps only of different ways to talk about beings.¹⁷

Within this scheme, we talk of God most of all in talking of the ways in which things are determined, i.e. in the last three kinds of being. When we refer to something as a substrate, we highlight the matter aspect of it. However, God is not to be *identified* to the second, third, or fourth kind of being. The piece of God in each thing is properly called its 'quality' («ποιότης»), which makes the compound of God and matter be something qualified – the second kind of being. The compound *qua* qualified stands to God *qua* quality as an effect stands to its cause. The same applies to the third and fourth kinds of being, although there does not seem to be a specific word for God's role as cause with respect to these.

3 TYPES OF CAUSES

One of the more conspicuous causal roles of God is his activity in holding things together. This is referred to as 'cohesion' – which we should read as a noun of action (rather than result) as far as God's involvement is concerned. There are two aspects to God's cohesive activity: it makes things one, rather than a collection of material; and it makes them how they are. We may refer to these aspects as unification and qualification.

There corresponds to this causal role of God a specific category in the theory of causes that the Stoics developed (it should be noted, however, that our sources make it hard for us to see how developed the theory was at what point in time). This is the category of the so-called cohesive cause (ἀίτιον συνέχον). The Stoics appealed to cohesive causes to explain the typical behaviour of things; and we may reasonably consider such behaviour to be part of how these things are qualified. In this explanatory role, cohesive causes are distinguished from causes which are merely antecedent. The latter call forth the behaviour of things but are in themselves insufficient to guarantee such behaviour. Cohesive causes, in contrast, are.¹⁸ There is a famous image that illustrates this. Aulus Gellius cites Chrysippus from his discussion on fate and human responsibility:

¹⁶ The main text for this is Simplicius *in Cat.* 165.32-166.29 (= SVF 2.403, incl. LS 29C). Further discussion in Menn 1999. The distinction is far from simple or easily defensible, as appears already from Simplicius's comments in the sequel to his report. Critical discussion in Mignucci 1988.

¹⁷ See for further discussion LS p. 162-79; Menn 1999; Brunschwig 2003: 227-32.

¹⁸ Alexander (*Fat.* 192.18-9, in SVF 2.945, LS 55N) and Clement (*Strom.* 8.9.25.1 (in SVF 2.346), 32.7-33.1 (in SVF 2.351, part in LS 55I)) clearly distinguish προκαταρκτικά from συνεκτικά (among other things). Cicero distinguishes 'perfectae et principales' and 'adiuvantes et proximae', the latter two terms he identifies for the 'antecedentibus' (*Fato* 41 = in SVF 2.974, LS 62C). The relations between these different kinds of causes is a matter of debate. See Frede 1980; Sedley 1993: 321-5; Hankinson 1998: 246-7.

T2	<p>He says: ‘if you throw a cylindrical stone on a steeply declining piece of ground, you have indeed given it a cause and beginning of its fall; but soon it rolls downward, not because you make this too happen, but because this is the way it is and because it has a rollable form. In the same way the order, reason, and necessity of fate moves the kinds themselves and the beginnings of causes, but the particular choice of each and the characteristics of our souls regulate the impulses of our deliberations and minds, and indeed our actions. (<i>Not. Att.</i> 7.2.11)¹⁹</p>	<p>‘Sicut’ inquit ‘lapidem cylindrum si per spatia terrae prona atque derupta iacias, causam quidem ei et initium praecipitantiæ feceris; mox tamen ille praeceps volvitur, non quia tu id etiam facis, sed quoniam ita sese modus eius et formae volubilitas habet: sic ordo et ratio et necessitas fati genera ipsa et principia causarum movet, impetus vero consiliorum mentiumque nostrarum actionesque ipsas voluntas cuiusque propria et animorum ingenia moderantur.’</p>
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In a similar context in Cicero’s *De Fato*,²⁰ we find a comparison between a cylinder and a spinning-top, which react differently to the same push. The point there, as here, is that the nature of each thing determines its behaviour, not what goes before – even if some anterior event is needed to make it manifest that behaviour. That nature is nothing other than the quality and cohesive cause of each thing. It is clear in this case that the roles of unification and of qualification are closely linked. The cylinder’s piece of matter is held together in such a way that it assumes a cylindrical shape.

God’s role as cause, meanwhile, is through and through an active one. The Stoic’s treatment of causes (and qualities) as inhering in things should not deceive us into thinking that they are in some way static or non-active. On the contrary, the Stoic definition of cause emphasises its active nature.²¹ Throughout a thing’s existence, God, in his role as cohesive cause, actively holds it together, shaping it to be such-and-such in the process.

Later on in this chapter these givens about the causal role of God will help us to understand what happens when human understanding grasps itself. Understanding itself is, in the understanding human being, an activity of God; it is God, active as cause in us (or, more precisely, in the wise person).

4 TENSION; πνεῦμα; ELEMENTS

The Stoics associate the constant cohesive activity of God with what they call ‘tension’ («τόνος»). In speaking of tension, they seem to be specifying the activity of God in particular physical terms. In their descriptions of physical processes, for instance, or in their accounts of what makes two things two distinct things, rather than one thing, they appeal to the tension in things. But there is a difficulty about this discourse that we should face up front. When the Stoics speak of tension, they often

¹⁹ in SVF 2.1000, LS62D. If Graver 2003 is right, ‘voluntas’ translates προαίρεσις.

²⁰ 42 (in SVF 2.974, LS 62C): ‘revertitur ad cylindrum et ad turbinem suum, quae moveri incipere nisi pulsa non possunt. id autem cum accidit, suapte natura, quod superest, et cylindrum volvi et versari turbinem putat.’ Cf. Hankinson 1998: 245-6.

²¹ So Seneca in *Ep.* 65.4; *SE PH* 3.14; cf. Frede 1980: 217-21.

speak of pneumatic tension, i.e. the tension of the specific stuff, breath, which the Stoics refer to as «πνεῦμα». This breath pervades all things in the world, in the same way as we are told God does. Moreover, the tension of πνεῦμα is credited both with making individual things one (unification) and with making them the way they are (qualification). Does that mean that this tension is the tension of πνεῦμα rather than of God? In other contexts, too, the Stoics give πνεῦμα an explanatory role where we might expect God to fulfil that role, at least from the basic ontological perspective.²² If God is the active cause in every part of the world, then why should we appeal to something different in order to explain specific physical processes?

This question about the relation between πνεῦμα and God is a difficult one which has exercised scholars for a long time; nor has it been solved now. The problem is in part also one of the information that our sources provide us. That information is often too meagre to settle the question. It seems most likely, however, that the Stoics chose to speak of πνεῦμα as a way to speak of God.²³ Since God is always mixed with matter, you will never come upon a piece of pure God. It is likely that the Stoics therefore decided to treat as God those pieces of mixture in which God is present in a particularly intense way, or in a particularly pure form (our sources do not allow us to be more specific here). That seems to be the case with πνεῦμα.²⁴ Historically, the choice for πνεῦμα as a basic explanatory stuff was probably inspired by developments in the medical science of the day.²⁵ The hot breath that most of all manifests the life in living organisms appeared to be a familiar and scientifically respectable stand-in for the active principle of the world which you never encounter in isolation.²⁶

Similar things may be said about how the Stoics treat the elements fire and air. Among the four elements fire, air, water, and earth, the Stoics single out the former two as active elements. They also speak of tension in connection with fire and air; and appealed to them as explanatory factors in physics and biology. Once more, you might have expected a direct appeal to God as the ultimate explanatory factors of items and events in the cosmos. Instead, the Stoics speak of elements, almost as if they were self-sufficient explanatory factors. Here too, however, it seems that the Stoic choice for fire and air is inspired by the idea that they represent God, in their specific explanatory contexts. This is especially plausible in view of the Stoics' view that elements turn into each other through rarification and condensation; this suggests

²² Fragments of Zeno and Cleanthes seem to favour fire as the occupant of this role, which has given rise to the opinion that Chrysippus gave the concept of πνεῦμα its central position. This may well be true. See Hahn 1977: 158-63; Long 1986: 154-5. The question about the relation between πνεῦμα and God can be translated into the question about the relation between fire and God without any problem.

²³ Lapidge 1978: 'In Chrysippus's system, *pneuma* became equivalent to god and equivalent to divine reason' (170); Gill 2010: '*pneuma* in a specific body is the localised instantiation of the cosmic active cause or god' (158).

²⁴ In this way we can explain why certain texts speak of πνεύματα that are colder and more moist and πνεύματα that are hotter and drier (Galen, *QAM* 4.783, *SVF* 2.787). This is not a sign of a plurality of sorts of πνεύματα as much as an indication that the Stoics wanted to refer, by the word «πνεῦμα», to the stuff that vitalises the beings in which it is present, and which may be present in different beings in different forms. (Cf. Lapidge 1978: 171-2.)

²⁵ See Annas 1992: 20-6. On Chrysippus and science, see Tieleman 1996: 189-95.

²⁶ See Wildberger 2006: 75-78. Similarly for aether LS p. 287.

that it is the same material, all the while, that is designated as ‘fire’, ‘air’, ‘water’, or ‘earth’ according to its degree of expansion or density. The materials in question must be God and matter, and their compound. We find confirmation of this in texts that state that the names of the elements serve to designate domains of fire-like, air-like, &c., things.²⁷ In speaking of fire and air as causes of particular processes, therefore, the Stoics do not refer to distinct elements in the strict sense of the word. Instead, by speaking of items in which the creative energy of God is particularly present as of causes for other things in which this energy is present to a lesser degree, the Stoics are indirectly speaking of God himself.

There is another consideration that makes it plausible that talk of πνεῦμα, fire, and air, is talk about God. Our sources speak of πνεῦμα as pervading the whole of the cosmos. They also speak of fire and air as completely mixed to form πνεῦμα; in other words, in the mixture that πνεῦμα is, there is no part in which you will find only fire or only air. The inference from this must be that fire and air are also in the whole of the cosmos. Two more bodies are also in the whole of the cosmos: God and matter. If, however, we suppose all of these – God, matter, fire, air, and πνεῦμα – to be distinct bodies, it would follow that there are at least five different bodies at the same place at the same time. This is something that we know the Stoics did not accept. They deviated from other ancient philosophers in thinking that two bodies could occupy the same place at the same time, namely God and matter; but we know they did not accept more than two bodies doing that.²⁸ Our conclusion must be that in these contexts, fire, air, and πνεῦμα are not spoken of as bodies distinct from God.

Hence when we encounter descriptions in terms of πνεῦμα or in terms of fire and air as causes or explanations of particular processes, we may safely infer that through πνεῦμα and fire and air it is God that the Stoics appeal to as the ultimate actor in these processes. This is a very useful observation for our purposes. Descriptions of the activity of God in specific contexts are rare; and what is left to us of the texts of the Stoics is not always very forthcoming with providing us with information about the precise ways in which God acts, or about how we should conceptualise his action. It therefore represents an enlargement of the material at our disposal if we can use texts that do provide that kind of information, but in terms of the activity of πνεῦμα or of air and fire, as guides to the activity of God. Texts about particular physical processes can thus be used to reconstruct the ontology that underlies them.

Let us return to the notion that brought us to πνεῦμα in the first place: tension. The tension in πνεῦμα is involved in making things the way they are and in making them one thing rather than a loose collection of constituent parts.²⁹ In other words, tension unifies and qualifies things, just as we saw God does. The cohesive action of pneumatic tension, differences in which are responsible for differences between

²⁷ Stob. 1.129.23-130.1, in SVF 2.413, in LS 47A. For rarification and condensation as the mechanism of elementary ‘change’ see Gal. *Nat.fac.* 106,13-7 (in SVF 2.406, LS 47E). See Wildberger 2006: 62-4, 79.

²⁸ *Aet. Mundi* 48-9 (in LS 28P). The point is put in terms of the impossibility of two peculiarly qualified individuals (combinations of God and matter) occupying exactly the same place (this does not apply to spatial part – whole relations). See Sedley 1982.

²⁹ Alex. *De Mix.* 224.14-7 (in SVF 2.442, in LS 47I); Plut. *RS* 1053F-54B (in SVF 2.449, LS 47M).

things, seems to be the exact correlate of God's cohesive action. And this is no surprise, of course, if the former offers a description of the latter in more specific physical terms.

5 HUMAN NATURE AND COGNITION

So much must suffice in general terms about the status and role of God and tension in Stoic physics. We are now ready to look in more detail at the nature of a specific class of entities, i.e. human beings, and particularly at the Stoic view of how cognition takes place.

In some respects, the case of human beings is no different from the case of all other things. A particular person is also a compound of a piece of God and a piece of matter. Whatever we can say qualitatively about it is based, ultimately, on the relevant piece of God, which actively causes this person to be qualified in the particular way that she is, and holds together the different parts that constitute her.

Specific to human beings, however, is that the tension of πνεῦμα in them is such that we can call them rational. This tension is to be found above all in the central part of the human soul, the so-called ruling part (ἡγεμονικόν).³⁰ This is therefore also the most God-like part of a human being. The constitution of this part makes humans capable of reasoning. When we understand something, it is strictly speaking the ruling part of the soul that understands something. As we will see later, we can go one step further: the Stoics actually identify understanding with the ruling part in a particular configuration (see T23).

You understand something when you have a secure grasp of it. The Stoics express this point in general terms: understanding is something that cannot be overturned by reasoning.³¹ You do not meet the terms of understanding, therefore, if you have only a memory of a thing, or a justified true belief about it. Rather the opposite: imperviousness to reasoning, deceptive or otherwise, is yours only when your grasp of a thing is firmly embedded in your grasp of other things. It seems, then, that the Stoics were prepared to speak of understanding only when your mind has a firm grasp of all the connections that actually hold between your object of understanding and all the other things in the world with which it has relations.³² We shall see that this is the case pre-eminently with self-understanding.

Still, a firm grasp starts somewhere. And in the basic cases it starts with the so-called cataleptic presentation (φαντασία καταληπτική), a show-piece of Stoic epistemology.³³ It is supposed to be a clear and reliable presentation of its object, to

³⁰ On the relation between soul and body in Stoicism, see 3.2.2.

³¹ See T22 below.

³² This statement is to be qualified to allow for the different ways in which the Stoics used the word «ἐπιστήμη» (see T22). Still, the Stoics seem to have concentrated on what we may call a holistic conception of understanding more than is suggested in much modern scholarship, which has great interest in the debate between Stoics and Sceptics, and the related question what constitutes a cataleptic presentation (Hankinson 2003 is representative; cf. p. 78 for his rejection of what Annas (1980) has called the 'coherence' view of the Stoic criterion of truth – but it must be noted that this is specifically a debate about *justification*).

³³ Hankinson 2003 offers an accessible discussion.

which the human mind can safely give its assent: ‘yes, this is how it is’. In giving its assent, the mind acts; acquiring knowledge is not a passive process. Subsequently, by means of memory, a sufficient number of perceptions give rise to a concept.³⁴ The mind also acquires concepts via combinations, analogies, and other reasoning processes. The acquisition of concepts is part of our childhood – part of outgrowing it, in fact, since the more or less finished collection of concepts is what constitutes our power of reason, which itself constitutes the difference between adults and children.³⁵

Our sources describe the physical basis of these cognitive processes in terms of πνεῦμα. A perception, the Stoics say, is an imprinting (τύπωσις) or an alteration (ἑτεροίωσις) of the πνεῦμα of the soul. The former notion goes back to Zeno, who used an image that goes back via Plato’s *Theaetetus* to Democritus:³⁶ a perception is like the imprint that a ring makes when pressed upon a block of wax. Chrysippus is said to have compared the way πνεῦμα takes up different perceptions to the way the air is able to take up and contain the sounds of different voices when many people speak at the same time.³⁷ Similar things can be said about concepts as about perceptions. Each of the concepts in the mind is an enduring alteration in the πνεῦμα that constitutes the ruling part of the soul. What this way of conceiving things suggests is that if the ruling part of the soul is to understand itself – for this to be possible at all – this πνεῦμα must be able to act on itself and to be acted on by itself in a way that is at least similar to the way in which it acts on and is acted on by the other things that it understands. In other words, the question whether the human soul can understand itself is – via πνεῦμα – the question whether God can act on himself and be acted upon by himself. We will return to this question shortly (3.1.2).

6 LEVELS OF COHESION IN NATURE

We have looked at God’s role as the cause of the unity of things and of their being qualified in particular ways; we have also looked at how the Stoics describe this in physical terms by means of the notion of pneumatic tension; and we have looked at the process of cognition. A final preliminary topic is the so-called ‘scale of nature’. The scale of nature is a theoretical description of the relative statuses of entities in the world, in the form of a hierarchy. The hierarchy is based on the form in which God is present in things. There is also a correlation (if it is not more than that) between the form in which God is present in something, and the pneumatic tension in that thing.³⁸

³⁴ These concepts are called προλήψεις in this context; or also natural or common notions. The exact relation between these terms is still subject to some debate. Cf. Schofield 1980; Brittain 2005.

³⁵ More on this in 3.3.3.

³⁶ Theophr. *Sens.* 51.

³⁷ SE *M.* 7.231 (in SVF 2.56). Cf. Schubert 1993: 271-81.

³⁸ It is a matter of debate whether we should speak only of the *form* of God in things, or whether we can also say that there is *more* God in the higher forms. Wildberger 2006: 66-70 argues the latter.

There are five groups: gods, humans, animals, plants, and mere things.³⁹ In the order in which I have listed them, these groups partake of descending levels of God, while pneumatic tension in them weakens. The weakest tension is found in mere things, like stones, &c. The πνεῦμα in them is called «ἔξις», ‘cohesion’.⁴⁰ In plants it is called «φύσις», ‘nature’. In animals the tension is so strong that their πνεῦμα gets the name «ψυχή», ‘soul’, while humans and gods are said to be beings with reason, beings in which πνεῦμα is λόγος. The difference between humans and gods is in the perfection to which they bring their λόγος. Gods always have perfect λόγος; they are born with it.⁴¹ Humans, however, must do their utmost to achieve perfection. But once they have complete and perfect λόγος, they are in nothing inferior to the gods.⁴²

In classifications of the scale of nature our sources often draw attention to the functions that are proper to each of the beings in it. These are the direct result of the specific levels of tension in them.⁴³ The image of a scale is fitting also because the functions proper to the lower rungs are preserved in the higher ones. Things cohere, which gives them a particular shape and a degree of unity. Plants have this, plus the power to grow and to be nourished. Animals have all of this, plus the ability to notice things and move towards them; in soul is the power of perception and impulse, in the technical terminology (αἴσθησις and ὁρμή). To this humans add the power of assent and reason – hence the name for this stage of πνεῦμα, λόγος. (And gods add nothing new to the picture.)

God inheres in things on each of these levels and makes them the way they are. He does this as their cohesive cause. For even if the lowest level is called by the name ‘cohesion’, this is not because only things on that level are held together. On the contrary, the higher the level, the more cohesive God’s action in the things on that level. In T8 below, Hierocles calls the perceptive power that rules animals ‘more cohesive’ than cohesion and nature. The point is somewhat obscured in the names used in the scale of nature, because cohesion takes more specific forms in the higher levels, so that we can call these higher levels by more specific names. Nevertheless, the greater functionality of the higher levels is a manifestation of their greater cohesion. In plants, growth and nutrition allow for the attainment of the shape that the plant is meant to have and its cohesion over time. In animals, perception and movement enable them to defend and feed themselves, that is, to maintain cohesion over time. It is a purpose of this chapter to show that understanding, the form God takes in human beings, is one of the most cohesive things in the cosmos. In all of these levels, therefore, God gives cohesion to things; the higher the level the greater the cohesion.

³⁹ On the status of human beings *vis-à-vis* animals and gods, see the discussion in Vogt 2008a: 113-8.

⁴⁰ This, too, is primarily to be read as a noun of action rather than result.

⁴¹ This is not merely a metaphor. In the Stoic view, the gods are the heavenly bodies and the parts of God that pervade the world (‘Poseidon’ is the name of the part of God that is in the sea, ‘Hera’ of the part of God that is in the air, &c.). These are born after the conflagration (and are not immortal, since they disappear in the next conflagration: Plut. *CN* 1066A). Cf. Algra 2003a: 166.

⁴² Cf. Vogt 2008a: 135-48.

⁴³ Gill 2010: 78-80.

The same correlation is suggested by the link between a being's place in the scale and its strength. Seneca points out that seeds are strong enough to dislodge heavy stones: 'What is this except the tension of πνεῦμα, without which nothing is strong, and against which nothing is strong?'⁴⁴ To be sure, this is not the kind of resistance that inheres in stones. The Stoics do not call this strength either, for it is just the passive sluggishness of matter. When broken, stones cannot heal themselves, as an animal or even a plant can. Moreover, real strength can cause movement, is able to effect things. It is important to realise that cohesion too is not necessarily greatest in something very compact. What distinguishes things that are high on the scale of nature from things lower down is rather their functional organisation, the way in which they are internally connected.

Such strength and cohesion inheres eminently in human beings. This does not mean that the human body is impregnable to force, although our body's self-healing potential is certainly part of the cohesive power of πνεῦμα in us. It is rather the human soul that can reach heights of power and strength. This emerges in the perfected instances of the species. Nothing is stronger than the wise.⁴⁵ So strong is a wise soul, in fact, that it will survive the separation from its body, and continue to cohere until the end of the world.⁴⁶

Cohesion and strength, then, are signs of God's activity, and are most at work in understanding. We saw before that God is present in each thing as its active cause. The part of God in a particular dog makes this dog such as it is. It will be clear that a similar analysis applies to what makes all dogs dogs – even if this is not an analysis in terms of universals, since the Stoics do not recognise any – and to what makes all animals animals. The latter category is in fact involved in descriptions of the scale of nature. In specifying the different forms in which God is present in the world, therefore, the Stoics are specifying the forms of activity of God in the things classed in the five groups. In the case of a dog, God acts as the vitalising force that makes this dog a living dog. (The translation of «ψυχή» as 'soul' may obscure this active aspect; 'life' may do some of that job, but has other meanings that do not correspond to «ψυχή») Crucially for our purposes, in human beings God is present as rational activity, i.e. understanding.

⁴⁴ *NQ* 2.6.3: 'Intentionem aeris ostendent tibi inflata nec ad ictum cedentia[.]' and 5: 'parvula admodum semina [...] in tantum convalescunt ut ingentia saxa deturbent et monumenta dissolvant [...] Hoc quid est aliud quam intentio spiritus, sine qua nihil validum et contra quam nihil validum est?'

⁴⁵ Cf. Philo in *SVF* 1.218: «ἄξιον τὸ Ζηνώνειον ἐπιφωνῆσαι ὅτι θᾶπτον ἂν ἄσκὸν βαπτίσαις πλήρη πνεύματος ἢ βιάσαιο τὸν σπουδαῖον ὄντιν οὖν ἄκοντα δρᾶσαι τι τῶν ἀβουλήτων· ἀνένδοτος γὰρ καὶ ἀήσητος ψυχή, ἦν ὀρθὸς λόγος δόγμασι παγίοις ἐνεύρωσε.»

⁴⁶ Aetius 4.7.3 (*SVF* 2.810): «οἱ δὲ Στωϊκοὶ ἐξιοῦσαν ἐκ τῶν σωμάτων οὕτω φθίρεσθαι· <καὶ> τὴν μὲν ἀσθενεστέραν ἀμαυρὸν σύγκριμα γίνεσθαι (ταύτην δ' εἶναι <τὴν> τῶν ἀπαιδέυτων). Τὴν δὲ ἰσχυροτέραν (οἷα ἐστὶ περὶ τοὺς σοφούς) ζῆν μέχρι τῆς ἐκπυρώσεως.» Philodemus reports Chrysippus as having said that «καὶ ἄνθρωπος εἰς θεοῦ φησι με<τ>αβαλεῖν.» (*De Pietate* 11 (DDG 545b12), in *SVF* 2.1076) This may refer to after death, but also to the perfection of the wise during life.

3.1.2 GOD'S SELF-ACTION

1 WHAT IS SELF-ACTION AND WHAT IS AT STAKE WITH GOD'S SELF-ACTION?

With these basic notions now in place, we are sufficiently equipped to discuss the question whether it is possible for God to be acted upon by himself and by the same token to act upon himself. The two halves of that question – God's being acted upon by himself and God's acting upon himself – are two sides of the same coin; by the term 'self-action' I refer to the whole coin. 'Action' here serves as the most general expression for anything that you might do.

There are different ways in which you might conceptualise self-action. A popular way, certainly in ancient philosophy, is to distinguish different parts in the thing of which you assert that it acts on itself, and explain self-action as the action of one part on another. This is not how I conceive of self-action here. In asking whether God is capable of self-action, I ask whether God can fulfil the roles of *agens* and *patiens* with regard to the same action; whether he can be at the same time at the effecting and at the receiving end of the same action.

Why would it be necessary for God to act upon himself? For our purposes, the most important reason is that if the human mind is to understand itself, it must understand itself as an understanding mind. It is clear from the general outlines of Stoic epistemology that understanding something involves action between what understands and what is understood. The activity that understanding is, however, cannot be anything else, ontologically, than the activity of God in us. Therefore, the activity of God in us must be understood, and this involves understanding, God's activity, being acted upon.

One interpretation of the roles of God and matter that was dominant for a long time is that God and matter are aspects of the one substance that constitutes the world. In this view, 'God' is the name for the active aspect of the one substance, while 'matter' is the name for the passive aspect of that same substance. The sources' talk of 'principles', in connection with God and matter, seemed to be support for this interpretation, as also was a late variant reading in one of our sources, in which God and matter were called 'incorporeal'.⁴⁷

In fact, however, there is ample textual evidence that God and matter are bodies.⁴⁸ They must be, too, since they are the things that act and are acted upon in the final analysis, of which they would be incapable if they were incorporeal. Moreover, their incorporeality would imply their non-existence, in the Stoic scheme of things.⁴⁹

Most scholars nowadays hold the view that God and matter are bodies. There is a question, however, about the applicability to these primary bodies of the definition of

⁴⁷ In DL 7.134 the MSS read «σώματα εἶναι τὰς ἀρχάς»; the Suda has «ἀσωμάτους» (s.v. «ἀρχή»), a reading earlier modern editions have adopted. A prominent scholar who held this view is Pohlenz (1948: 66-9); more recently, e.g., Lapidge 1978.

⁴⁸ See LS 45 with discussion.

⁴⁹ A useful overview of the discussion (with further bibliography) is given in Wildberger 2006: 5-7, with (copious) notes (esp. 39-41).

bodies in terms of their capacity for action and their capacity for undergoing action (as we saw in 3.1.1.1). Must the aspects that earlier scholars ascribe to the one substance that they recognise be ascribed to each of God and matter? There is, in fact, no need for this. It is enough, for being a body, that something is able to act; and it is also enough, for being a body, that something is able to be acted upon. It is therefore possible to describe God as something which is only capable of action and still maintain that he is a body; and equally possible to describe matter as something which is only capable of being acted upon and still maintain that it is a body. The question is, however, whether God and matter actually fit this description. We concentrate here on God.

The view that God is only an active principle, and is therefore not acted upon, is influential. It is presented, for instance, by Long and Sedley in the commentary to their edition of sources of Hellenistic philosophy.⁵⁰ However, there seems to be no text that states this. God is described as ‘that which acts’, «τὸ ποιοῦν»,⁵¹ but it is not said anywhere whether that is the only thing he does. Furthermore, if we suppose these scholars to be right, we have a serious problem for the possibility of self-understanding. It also makes the notion that human beings can cause themselves to be wise a very problematic one.

In support of the idea that God is also at the receiving end of action, Julia Wildberger has recently adduced the Stoic notion of sympathy (συμπάθεια) and the mechanism of perception, which involve being acted upon, as cases which require that God is the recipient of action.⁵² In arguing that God is acted upon as well as active, I will bypass these specific cases and focus on the ontological structure of self-action.

My argument will be incremental, by showing on four increasing levels of specificity that our evidence allows us to draw precisely that conclusion. These levels are action, tension, perception, and understanding. We will linger a while on the level of self-action, because the texts we discuss there give an account of the physics of self-action that, I argue, we may regard as the Stoics’ defence of the metaphysical choice of admitting self-action.

2 SELF-ACTION GENERALLY

The first stage is therefore that of self-action in general. The texts that pertain to this stage discuss movement, although we should note that the Greek term «κίνησις» was used to refer both to what we call ‘movement’ and to what we call ‘change’. Consider firstly this text in Stobaeus/Arius Didymus:

⁵⁰ LS p. 274. Similarly Sedley 1999: 385: ‘Body is defined as that which has the capacity to act or be acted upon, thus carefully allowing god and matter, each of which has just one of these two capacities, still to count as bodies.’; Long 1986: 154; Brunschwig 2003: 210.

⁵¹ Just as matter is described as ‘that which is acted upon’, «τὸ πάσχον» (e.g. in DL 7.134

⁵² Wildberger 2006: 14-5 with n. 91; cf. p. 20 with n. 133. In support of the idea of God’s perception, specifically, Wildberger refers to SVF 2.1030 (Olympiodorus *ad Plat. Phaed.*), where it is said that the Stoics «διὰ τὸ κατὰ φαντασίαν ἐνεργεῖν σῶμα τὸν θεὸν ὑπέλαβον». We may add that in *De Natura Deorum* 2, Cicero has his spokesperson repeatedly ascribe *sensus* to God (see §§ 22, 29, 30, 46f., 58). Cf. Tieleman 2002: 193-5.

T3	Chrysippus maintained something like this: that which is is a breath that moves itself towards itself and out of itself, or breath moving itself forwards and backwards. (Stob. 1.153.24-154.2) ⁵³	Χρύσιππος δὲ τοιοῦτόν τι διεβεβαιοῦτο· εἶναι τὸ ὄν πνεῦμα κινῶν ἑαυτὸ πρὸς ἑαυτὸ καὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ, ἢ πνεῦμα ἑαυτὸ κινῶν πρόσω καὶ ὀπίσω·
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Here Chrysippus is reported as saying that πνεῦμα is a ‘mover’ («κινῶν») – a cause of movement therefore – which causes itself to move. As we mentioned earlier (3.1.1.4), we may use this statement in terms of πνεῦμα to infer what the Stoics thought about God’s activity.

Let us look at a second text before we attempt to say a bit more about this movement, and about the action of God on himself. This text comes from Sextus’s discussion of movement, and reports the opinion that God is a self-mover. The power that is responsible for the order and movement in the world is most likely something within the world, not outside it, he reports. And he continues:

T4	So this power is either self-moving or is being moved by another power. And if it is moved by another, that other cannot be moved except by being moved by another, which is absurd. There is therefore a power that is self-moving according to itself, and this is divine[.] (M. 9.76) ⁵⁴	αὕτη οὖν ἡ δύναμις ἤτοι αὐτοκίνητος ἐστὶν ἢ ὑπὸ ἄλλης κινεῖται δυνάμεως. καὶ εἰ μὲν ὑφ’ ἐτέρας κινεῖται, τὴν ἐτέραν ἀδύνατον ἔσται κινεῖσθαι μὴ ὑπ’ ἄλλης κινουμένην, ὅπερ ἄτοπον. ἔστι τις ἄρα καθ’ ἑαυτὴν αὐτοκίνητος δύναμις, ἣτις ἂν εἴη θεία[.]
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The vital point in this passage is the rejection of a regress of moving powers. It expresses the point elliptically,⁵⁵ saying that it is absurd for there to be a third power that moves the second, but it is clearly the absurdity of either (1) generating a regress of moving powers or (2) granting something to the third power that you deny the second, that is, self-movement. The Stoic strategy is very different from Aristotle’s. While they agree with him that there must be a first mover, they do not posit an unmoved mover. The Stoic prime mover is itself moved, by itself.⁵⁶ Here too, then, we find an affirmation that god is also a recipient of action, is being acted upon.

⁵³ = SVF 2.471.

⁵⁴ In SVF 2.311, LS 44C. We can safely identify the philosophers whose argument Sextus reports as Stoics. This is the communis opinio in the literature. It is made plausible most of all by the order in which Sextus says these philosophers establish the thesis that gods exist (§60). Wildberger vol.2 p. 376-86 discusses the issue.

⁵⁵ ‘seems an unsatisfactory oversimplification or an evasion of the philosophical issues’ Hahm 1994: 177.

⁵⁶ The confrontation is visible in Simplicius’ *in Aristotelis Physicorum libros commentaria*, p.420.6-7 Diels/SVF 2.339: «τισὶ δοκεῖ μὴ εἶναι τι κινῶν ἀκίνητον, ἀλλὰ πᾶν τὸ κινῶν κινεῖσθαι» λέγει καὶ τοῖς Στωικοῖς, l.11. Hahm 1977: 41-3 seeks the origins of the Stoic notion and finds them in Plato’s world soul (Sedley 2002 continues the thought).

3 *DETAILS OF SELF-ACTION: A PHYSICAL DEFENCE OF A METAPHYSICAL CHOICE*

The texts above are enough to show that God does, in fact, cause himself to move, and is both at the acting and at the receiving end of his own action. When we try to be more precise about this self-action, however, our lack of sources is an important barrier. But let us allow ourselves to make the most of the sources we have.

A conspicuous factor in the different reports about the movement of πνεῦμα and the self-action of God is the movement into different directions at the same time. In the statement from Arius Didymus (T3) we read about ‘a breath that moves itself towards itself and out of itself, or breath moving itself forwards and backwards’. At first sight it may seem that the movement of πνεῦμα is a simple movement into different directions at different times, a quick oscillation. However, that is not what T3 says. πνεῦμα does not move into and out of a centre, as something that leaves one place upon entering another, and comes back to the place from which it started. T3 says that πνεῦμα moves out of *itself* and into *itself*. It must therefore remain in the place out of which it moves, and already be in the place into which it moves. This characterisation does not fit spatial relocation. It might fit expansion and contraction, depending on our account of those; but even those processes do not capture what we hear about pneumatic movement.

For T3 is not our only evidence. When Alexander of Aphrodisias speaks of πνεῦμα’s movement out of and into itself in an attempt to convict the Stoics of absurdity, he focuses on its simultaneity:

T5	<p>And what is that movement of it that is simultaneously in opposite directions, according to which it holds together the things in which it is present, being, as they say, breath being moved simultaneously out of itself and into itself? And according to what species of movement does this happen? For according to none is it possible to think that something is being moved simultaneously in opposite directions in its own right. (<i>De mix.</i> 224.23-7 Bruns)⁵⁷</p>	<p>τίς δὲ καὶ ἡ εἰς τὸ ἐναντίον ἅμα κίνησις αὐτοῦ, καθ’ ἣν συνέχει τὰ ἐν οἷς ἂν ἦ, ὄν ὡς φασι, πνεῦμα κινούμενον ἅμα ἐξ αὐτοῦ τε καὶ εἰς αὐτό; καὶ κατὰ τί εἶδος κινήσεως γίνεται; κατ’ οὐδὲν γὰρ οἷόν τ’ ἐστὶ νοῆσαι τι ἅμα εἰς τὰ ἐναντία κινούμενον καθ’ αὐτό.</p>
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The absurdity, Alexander thinks, lies in the simultaneous movement in opposite directions that the Stoics ascribe to πνεῦμα. What sort of movement can this be? It would be fine if something were said to be moved in opposite directions: that could be at different times, or relative to different things, as when something moves away from me towards you. But here we have a movement ‘out of itself and into itself’, and so in opposite directions relative to the same thing. Indeed, it is a movement into opposite directions at the same time. That last trait makes it difficult any longer to imagine this movement as expansion and contraction. For while these types of movement (to stretch the English ‘movement’ along with Greek «κίνησις») allow for movement to

⁵⁷ = SVF 2.442 (in which the last line is omitted), LS 471.

some other place without requiring that the original place be vacated, it is difficult to imagine one and the same substance expanding and contracting at the same time.⁵⁸

Scholars connect the contrary movement of πνεῦμα with its description in many sources as a compound of fire and air. Other sources tell us that air makes whatever it acts on more compact, while they describe fire as something that has a dispersive influence, causing things to expand.⁵⁹ Given that πνεῦμα is described as a mixture of fire and air, we might take its movement as the sum of the separate movements of fire and air. And since the former makes things expand and the latter makes things condense, the sum result would be something that does both.⁶⁰

It is indeed likely that the Stoics described the movement of πνεῦμα in terms of the movement of fire and of air, even if we have no sources that say this in so many words. We must ask, however, to what extent this description is an explanation, rather than a mere description in terms familiar to us (an ancient 'us'). One problem is that if we conceive of fire and air as distinct stuffs, there seems no reason why their respective movements in opposite directions would not drive them apart, and thus end their mixture.⁶¹ More fundamental, however, is that we observed above that talk of fire and air seems to be talk of God's activity in terms of how this looks to us in different contexts. As we saw, the things the Stoics say about fire and air, and even about πνεῦμα, in terms of their intermixture with other elements and other things, results in an unacceptable multiplication of different bodies at the same place at the same time, if we take fire, air, and πνεῦμα to be distinct bodies. The Stoics accept there being two bodies at the same place at the same time: God and matter. However, there cannot be more than two. We can describe mixtures of God and matter as fire, air, water or earth, according to the specific mixture of any one part of God and any one part of matter; but in doing so we give a description in terms that we recognise, rather than an account of basic (active) bodies (except when it is, e.g., a camp fire that we want to talk about).⁶²

What the Stoics do when they describe the activity of πνεῦμα in terms of the tendencies of fire and air is to relate it to other processes in nature: in some of its effects, πνεῦμα acts as hot things do, in others, it acts as cold things do. Thus, we get

⁵⁸ The fragment in Nemesius also speaks of a *simultaneous* movement inward and outward: «εἰ δὲ λέγοιεν, καθάπερ οἱ Στωικοί, τονικήν τινα εἶναι κίνησιν περὶ τὰ σώματα εἰς τὸ εἶσω ἅμα καὶ εἰς τὸ ἔξω κινουμένην, καὶ τὴν μὲν εἰς τὸ ἔξω μεγεθῶν καὶ ποιότητων ἀποτελεστικὴν εἶναι, τὴν δὲ εἰς τὸ εἶσω ἐνώσεως καὶ οὐσίας [...]» (*Nat.Hom.* 2.18.5-8 = SVF 2.451, LS 47J).

⁵⁹ E.g. in Plutarch's treatise *Prim. Frig.* 948d-49b: the cold (air) is «συγχυτικόν», while the hot (fire) «διαχειῖ». «ἢ πήξις ... πάθος μὲν ἐστὶν ὕδατος ἔργον δ' ἀέρος».

⁶⁰ So, e.g., LS p.288; Long 1986: 157.

⁶¹ Galen signals this point (*Trem.Palp.* 7.616.17-618.4 (in SVF 2.446)). Interestingly, he adds that its mixture with air (he says 'the cold') imparts to fire (he says 'the hot') an inward motion. It is not, it seems, the joint product of air and fire that has both outward and inward motions, in Galen's version. It is rather fire itself that has both. This way of putting things seems to agree with a construal of fire and air as descriptive categories rather than bodies (for which see below).

⁶² It is no coincidence, I think, that many of our sources speak in terms of the principle of the hot and the principle of the cold in contexts where other sources speak of fire and air. It is not these latter as distinct bodies that the Stoics are interested in, but rather their usefulness as descriptive categories for distinct forms of activity of God.

a clear view of the activity of πνεῦμα. However, we do not thereby have an explanatory account of this activity.

For such an explanatory account we must look at the activity of God. In T5, as in other texts, I submit, the Stoics speak of πνεῦμα as a way of speaking of God. It is his activity that is described in such seemingly contradictory terms.⁶³ In my view the full significance of this peculiar account must be sought against the background of the major metaphysical choices that the Stoics make. The Stoics say that everything that is corporeal. They also make one of the two fundamentally constitutive bodies in the universe – God – the cause of everything. Thus the philosophical position that the Stoics have claimed for themselves is conspicuous in its reduction of explanatory principles (no transcendental forms, no unmoved mover, &c.). A consequence of this, however, is that they must face their own version of the metaphysical problem of self-action: if you reduce your explanatory principles in such a way that your principle partakes of the behaviour that needs explaining, it must explain itself; and since explanation involves real causation, in the Stoic view, this principle must be its own cause. In this respect the Stoic choice of a body as ultimate ground of explanation will, in the eyes of their contemporaries, have worsened their predicament. Bodies are typically the kind of things that are on the passive side of the actions and processes that you want to explain by means of causes. Plato and Aristotle, in any case, posited incorporeal causes to do that explanatory work. In their view, the Stoic bet on bodies is fatal, because bodies cannot serve as ultimate principles of explanation.

However, the Stoics can hold their ground. They can point to a basic metaphysical choice that you must make, and insist that what they choose is as good as anything else. The choice is whether you allow one entity to bear the seemingly contradictory predicates of ‘acts’ and ‘is acted upon’ with respect to the same action (and all the customary conditions), or whether you do not, and require separate entities to bear these on any given occasion – or on all occasions, as in the case of Aristotle’s unmoved mover. The Stoics choose the first option. And the reduction that T5 ascribes to the Stoics – the exclusion of moving powers beyond God – is the result of this choice.

One might think that a basic metaphysical choice like this one cannot really be argued either way. I want to suggest, however, that the Stoic account of pneumatic action is what the Stoics offer by way of corroboration of their choice of having one entity – God – bear the seemingly contradictory predicates of ‘acts’ and ‘is acted upon’. They respond to what is a metaphysical puzzle by giving a physical account – an account that is as close as you can get in physical terms to dynamic reflexivity. For in moving simultaneously into and out of itself, πνεῦμα acts on itself, pushing against itself and its neighbours, while remaining where and what it was before. If it is a metaphysical question whether one entity can be the active cause of its own coherence, the Stoic answer is physical: the simultaneous movement into and out of itself gives πνεῦμα maximum contact among its parts. As elsewhere in Stoic philosophy, their physics is how the Stoics respond to metaphysical issues.⁶⁴

⁶³ I suspect Alexander’s unease is not just the result of it being ‘a serious violation of the concept of natural movement’ (Sambursky 1959: 33).

⁶⁴ Brunschwig 2003: 206-9 discusses the question in what sense there is a Stoic metaphysics.

4 SELF-TENSING

We have now discussed self-action on its most general level. We concluded that the texts entitle us to say that God acts on himself, as is reflected in the characteristic behaviour of πνεῦμα. I have also suggested that the descriptions that the Stoics give of πνεῦμα's self-movement aim to come as close as possible in physical terms to reflexive behaviour; this I proposed, is plausibly taken as the Stoics' physical answer to the metaphysical question how they can defend their choice of making one thing both the *agens* and the *patiens* of the same action. It is now time to move to a higher level of specificity in the descriptions of self-action, that of self-tensing. By 'self-tensing' I mean the action by which something brings tension into itself ('tenses itself').

The added informational value of T5 compared to T3 is not only that the pneumatic movement in opposed directions takes place at the same time. It also tells us that this movement is the way in which πνεῦμα holds together the things in which it is. As we saw, the high degree of contact between its own parts makes πνεῦμα able to fulfil this role. T5 tells us that it actually does. As such, it is a physical description of God's role as cohesive cause in things.

In a number of places we read about the ability of fire and air to tense themselves as well as to give tension to the earth and water with which they are mixed. Plutarch asks scathingly how earth and water can still be elements if their existence depends on fire and air.

T6	For they claim that earth and water neither hold themselves together nor other things, but preserve their unity by participation in a pneumatic and firelike power. And they claim that air and fire hold themselves together because of their good tension, and give tension, endurance, and reality to the two other ones with which they are mixed. (<i>Com. Not.</i> 1085c-d) ⁶⁵	γῆν μὲν γὰρ φασὶ καὶ ὕδωρ οὐθ' αὐτὰ συνέχειν οὐθ' ἕτερα, πνευματικῆς δὲ μετοχῆ καὶ πυρώδους δυνάμεως τὴν ἐνότητα διαφυλάττειν· ἀέρα δὲ καὶ πῦρ αὐτῶν τ' εἶναι δι' εὐτονίαν ἐκτικά, καὶ τοῖς δυσὶν ἐκείνοις ἐγκεκραμένα τόνον παρέχειν καὶ τὸ μόνιμον καὶ οὐσιῶδες.
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Fire and air have good tension, and that means that they are cohesive factors for themselves. They do not fall apart, because they hold themselves together. Earth and water do not fall apart either, but not in their own right. They owe their cohesion to fire and air. In contexts like T6, in which fire and air are opposed to earth and water, the characteristics ascribed to the former are due to God as opposed to matter; this is what distinguishes them from the passive elements earth and water.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ = in SVF 2.444, LS 47G. Likewise Alexander in *De Mix.* 218.2-6 (in SVF 2.473, LS 48C): «καὶ τῶν στοιχείων δὲ φασὶ τῶν τεσσάρων τὰ δύο, τὸ τε πῦρ καὶ τὸν ἀέρα, λεπτομερῆ τε καὶ κοῦφα καὶ εὐτονα ὄντα, διὰ τῶν δύο, γῆς τε καὶ ὕδατος, παχυμερῶν καὶ βαρέων καὶ ἀτόνων ὄντων διαπεφοιτηκέναι ὅλα δι' ὅλων, σώζοντα τὴν οἰκείαν φύσιν καὶ συνέχειαν αὐτὰ τε καὶ ἐκεῖνα.»

⁶⁶ Galen claims the Stoics 'make what holds together one thing, what is held together another'. This misguided statement serves to create an *consensus omnium* against contemporary opponents of his. He betrays himself when he tries to pass off the idea that πνεῦμα holds itself together as the invention of some 'more recent Stoics'. «ποιεῖν δ' εἰς ἑαυτὸ λέγειν ὅτιοῦν, ἢ ἐνεργεῖν εἰς ἑαυτὸ, παρὰ τὴν ἔννοιάν ἐστιν· οὕτως οὖν καὶ

A similar point seems to lie behind Sextus Empiricus's statements about the soul's being a cause of persistence both of itself and of the body.

T7	<p>And it is not possible to suppose that souls are carried downward; they have thin parts, are no less firelike than pneuma-like, and so are rather carried lightly to higher places. And they remain in their own right and are not, as Epicurus has it, scattered as smoke when they are loosened from their bodies. For the body was not in charge of them before either, but they were the cause of persistence for the body, and much more so for themselves. (<i>M.</i> 9.71-2)⁶⁷</p>	<p>καὶ γὰρ οὐδὲ τὰς ψυχὰς ἔνεστιν ὑπονοῆσαι κάτω φερομένης· λεπτομερεῖς γὰρ οὔσαι καὶ οὐχ ἦττον πυρῶδεις ἢ πνευματώδεις εἰς τοὺς ἄνω μᾶλλον τόπους κουφοφοροῦσιν. καὶ καθ' αὐτὰς δὲ διαμένουσι καὶ οὐχ, ὡς ἔλεγεν ὁ Ἐπίκουρος, ἀπολυθεῖσαι τῶν σωμάτων καπνοῦ δίκην σκίδνανται. οὐδὲ γὰρ πρότερον τὸ σῶμα διακρατητικὸν ἦν αὐτῶν, ἀλλ' αὐταὶ τῷ σώματι συμμονῆς ἦσαν αἴτιαι, πολὺ δὲ πρότερον καὶ ἑαυταῖς.</p>
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The soul is the cause of its own persistence; it holds itself together when it is linked to the body, as well as when it is freed of the body, and sojourns in the heavens as a *δαίμων* (as Sextus goes on to relate). In this opposition between soul and body, the soul represents God. It acts on itself and the body as God acts on himself and matter. It is God in the soul who sustains himself.

5 SELF-PERCEPTION

A further degree of specificity in the description of God's self-action is reached when Stoic authors speak of self-perception. We do not have much evidence for this, but what we have is good. Hierocles, who was a Stoic lecturer in the second century AD, argues for the self-perception of all animal life on two counts: he is at pains to establish that animals have perception of their bodily parts and their functions, and he argues that the soul, as a power of perception, perceives itself.

T8	<p>In general it is not something to be unaware of that every ruling power begins with itself. In that way cohesion, too, which holds together whatever is held together by it, is cohesive of itself prior to this. For it would not hold together some other thing, having welcomed its parts, if it had not offered this to its own parts. And nature, which holds together, preserves, nourishes, and gives growth to plants, first partakes of these itself from itself. The same account holds of every principle, so that</p>	<p>τοῖς δ' ὅλοις οὐκ ἀγνοητέον, ὡς ἡγεμονικὴ πᾶσα δύναμις ἀφ' ἑαυτῆς ἄρχεται· ταύτη καὶ ἡ μὲν ἕξις, συνέχουσα τὸ καθ' ἑαυτήν, πρότερον ἑαυτῆς ἐστὶ συνεκτικὴ· καὶ γὰρ οὐδ' ἂν συνεῖχε ἄλλο τι πρᾶγμα, τὰ μόρια προσπαράδεδεγμένα, εἰ μὴ τοῖς ἑαυτῆς τοῦτο προπαρεῖχε μορίοις· ἢ τε φύσις, δὴ, συνέχουσα καὶ σώζουσα καὶ τρέφουσα καὶ αὔξουσα τὸ φυτόν, αὐτῶν τούτων πρότερον αὐτὴ μετέχει παρ' αὐτῆς. ὁ δὲ παραπλήσιος λόγος κατὰ πάσης ἀρχῆς, ὥστε καὶ ἡ</p>
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συνέχειν ἑαυτό. καὶ γὰρ οἱ μάλιστα εἰσηγησάμενοι τὴν συνεκτικὴν δύναμιν, ὡς οἱ Στωϊκοὶ, τὸ μὲν συνέχον ἕτερον ποιοῦσι, τὸ συνεχόμενον δὲ ἄλλο· τὴν μὲν γὰρ πνευματικὴν οὐσίαν τὸ συνέχον, τὴν δὲ ὑλικὴν τὸ συνεχόμενον, ὅθεν ἀέρα μὲν καὶ πῦρ συνέχειν φασὶ, γῆν δὲ καὶ ὕδωρ συνέχεσθαι. [...] οὐδ' οἱ νεώτεροι Στωϊκοὶ λέγουσι τινα ἀπόδειξιν τοῦ τὸ μὲν πνεῦμα καὶ τὸ πῦρ συνέχειν ἑαυτό τε καὶ τὰ ἄλλα, τὸ δὲ ὕδωρ καὶ τὴν γῆν ἑτέρου δεῖσθαι τοῦ συνέχοντος.» (*De Plen.* p.525-7, SVF 2.439, 440, LS 47F).

⁶⁷ = in SVF 2.812.

perception too, since that too is a principal power, and must be something more cohesive than cohesion and nature, clearly begins with itself and, before it gets hold of something else, perceives itself. (<i>El.</i> 6.10-22)	αἴσθησις, ἐπειδὴ καὶ αὐτὴ δύναμις ἐστὶν ἀρχικὴ, καὶ συνεχέστερον δεῖ χρῆμα ἢ ἕξις τε καὶ φύσις εἶναι, δῆλον ὅτι ἄρχοιτ' ἂν ἀφ' ἑαυτῆς καὶ πρὶν ἢ ἐτέρου τινὸς ἀντιλαβέσθαι, ἑαυτῆς αἰσθάνοιτο.
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Hierocles here tells us that all ruling powers have their primary application to themselves.⁶⁸ But that is not all. Hierocles also suggests that there is a scale of powers, parallel to the scale of nature which ranks all natural entities. At the bottom there is cohesion, then nature, and then we get to perception. As we have had occasion to note before (3.1.1.6), however, it is highly significant that perception is qualified as more cohesive than cohesion and nature. This is not surprising in view of our discussion of the causal role of God and the implications of tension. The higher the pneumatic tension in a thing, the more sophisticated its characteristic behaviour, and the firmer its internal coherence. Paradoxically perhaps, the state of cohesion is not the most cohesive; rather, it is called cohesion because this feature is the lowest common denominator of all determinations of πνεῦμα.

T8 tells us two more things if we note its precise line of reasoning. Firstly, we would have expected, after ‘that too is a principal power’, a statement like ‘that too holds things together’. But we read that it ‘must be something more cohesive than cohesion and nature’. This might be an isolated observation, with no reason for this greater cohesion – and why it ‘must be’ more cohesive – being given in this text. But it seems to me that Hierocles presents the feature of greater cohesiveness in perception as a consequence of the fact that perception, too, is a principal power. And we can understand this if we think of the greater cohesion of perception as an aspect of, or perhaps even the reason for, its claim to precedence over cohesion and nature. If entities that would also qualify for classification under nature or cohesion are nevertheless classified under perception, perception must be the more relevant characteristic by which to describe these entities. The reason for this is, in fact, not far to seek. The Stoics agreed with most Socratic philosophers that things are most properly identified with their ruling aspects. To call something a ‘principal power’ is, as it were, already a comparative statement with respect to the other powers that fall under the principal one, for it will also rule these. And Hierocles links this precedence with the very feature that all these powers share: giving coherence. It is because it ties the entities in which it is present even closer together than nature and cohesion tie together the entities in which they are present that perception plays the leading role when all three are present. Secondly, however, Hierocles does not only link a ruling power’s precedence over other powers to its greater cohesion, but also its self-rule. Perception ‘clearly begins with itself’; and this ‘clearly’ follows from the two facts mentioned: perception is a principal power and is more cohesive than cohesion and nature. Principality and cohesion correlate with self-application. In other words, the fact that a power begins with itself is tied closely to the superior role that it has with respect to the lower powers within its jurisdiction. Clearly, the same must apply to the

⁶⁸ I do not see that this is ‘baffling’ and ‘obviously fallacious’ (Annas 1992: 58).

power of λόγος, which exceeds perception by yet another degree of principality and cohesion.

6 SELF-UNDERSTANDING

We have now seen evidence of the self-action of God on the general level of action, on the level of tension, and on the level of perception. We are interested in the question whether God acts on himself because it is a necessary condition for self-understanding. So far, then, our evidence seems to allow us to supply this necessary condition. In view of the structure of Stoic thought, however, it does more. For that thought is hierarchically ordered, so that positive characteristics of lower levels of qualification or of lower powers are preserved when we move up towards higher levels. If perception admits of self-perception, then understanding will also admit of self-understanding. Moreover, T8 shows that the Stoics related a power's having itself as its primary field of application to its greater coherence compared to lower levels of God's presence. Therefore, not only will understanding begin with itself just like other powers begin with themselves, understanding will do so *a fortiori*, since it exceeds cohesion, nature, and perception in its degree of coherence.

This general line of thought is confirmed by three important texts that indeed speak of understanding as understanding itself. Actually, they speak of λόγος, or of the λογική power. In doing so, they grant something wider than the self-understanding of understanding. Understanding, as we will see below, is the firm form of λόγος: non-wise people may be said to partake of λόγος, but the Stoics are prepared to call someone's λόγος 'understanding' only when her logical power has reached an unshakeable shape. In other words, the following three texts ascribe reflexivity to all human beings, not just to the wise.

We find these texts in the *Discourses* that Arrian wrote in self-proclaimed copy-pasting of Epictetus's spoken words. The first is from the very first discourse in the collection – a programmatic one, it is fair to say. It describes the power of λόγος as uniquely capable of reflexive understanding. It begins with the question 'What power studies itself?'

T9	<p>You will find none of the other powers to be studying itself, nor indeed approving or disapproving of itself. To what extent does the skill of writing partake of study? To the extent of deciding about letters. Musical skill? To the extent of deciding about music. Does any of these study itself? Not at all. Instead, when you write something to a friend, the skill of writing will tell you that you need to write this and that – whether you should write to your friend or not, however, the skill of writing will not tell you. Musical skill is no different with music; it does not tell you whether to sing and play now or not</p>	<p>Τῶν ἄλλων δυνάμεων οὐδεμίαν εὐρήσετε αὐτὴν αὐτῆς θεωρητικὴν, οὐ τοίνυν οὐδὲ δοκιμαστικὴν ἢ ἀποδοκιμαστικὴν. ἡ γραμματικὴ μέχρι τίνος κέκτηται τὸ θεωρητικόν; μέχρι τοῦ διαγνῶναι τὰ γράμματα. ἡ μουσική; μέχρι τοῦ διαγνῶναι τὸ μέλος. Αὐτὴ οὖν αὐτὴν θεωρεῖ τις αὐτῶν; οὐδαμῶς. ἀλλ' ὅτε μὲν, ἂν τι γράφῃς τῷ ἐταίρῳ, δεῖ τούτων τῶν γραπτέων, ἡ γραμματικὴ ἐρεῖ· πότερον δὲ γραπτέον τῷ ἐταίρῳ ἢ οὐ γραπτέον, ἡ γραμματικὴ οὐκ ἐρεῖ. Καὶ περὶ τῶν μελῶν ὡσαύτως ἡ μουσική· πότερον δ' ἄστέον νῦν καὶ</p>
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to sing and play. So what will tell you this? The power that studies itself as well as all the others. Which is that? The logical power; this has been given to us as the only thing that apprehends itself, what it is, what it can do, and of how much worth it has come to be, and apprehends this of the others as well. (*Disc.* 1.1.1-4)⁶⁹

κιθαριστέον ἢ οὔτε ἀστέον οὔτε κιθαριστέον οὐκ ἐρεῖ. Τίς οὖν ἐρεῖ; ἡ καὶ αὐτὴν θεωροῦσα καὶ τᾶλλα πάντα. Αὕτη δ' ἐστὶ τίς; ἡ δύναμις ἡ λογική· μόνη γὰρ αὕτη καὶ αὐτὴν κατανοήσουσα παρείληπται, τίς τέ ἐστὶ καὶ τί δυνατὰ καὶ πόσου ἀξία οὔσα ἐλήλυθεν, καὶ τὰς ἄλλας ἀπάσας.

It will be clear that Epictetus's direct concern here is to pinpoint the power in us that can serve as our guide in life. The possession of many skills is no guarantee for success, since they lack direction if they lack the power of reason itself; without it, you might live your life doing everything technically right at the wrong moments. In this passage, the idea that reason understands itself serves to prevent a regress of directors. We can imagine a hierarchy of skills that determine a lower skill and are themselves determined by a higher skill. In such a scenario, however, all decisions about the proper use and application of a skill are deferred indefinitely. In our case, however, there is a power that directs itself and can determine when it is proper for itself to do one thing rather than another, and to direct one skill rather than another.

Epictetus's focus in T9 is not on the way in which the power of λόγος studies and so directs itself. The ontology behind the process is not what he is concerned with. These *Discourses* are in general meant as a practical work. Yet he tells us at least that our λόγος guides itself by means of an apprehension (κατανόησις) of itself. Theoretically, you could stop a regress of directive skills, the higher directing the lower, by declaring that the highest does not need directing. But this is not the picture Epictetus suggests. He makes the highest skill direct itself, by means of its study of itself.⁷⁰ λόγος is not blind about itself: it discerns what it is, what its force and worth are. This very reflexivity, it is needless to say, is an important part of its force and worth.

The rejection of a regress also characterises a related text, which speaks of the role of λόγος in articulation rather than direction:

T10 | Since λόγος is what articulates and elaborates the rest, and ought not itself to stay unarticulated, by what is it articulated? It is clear that this must be either by itself or by something else. Now that other thing is λόγος, or it will be something better than λόγος, which is impossible. If the other thing is λόγος, then again, what will articulate it? For if it articulates itself, the first will be able to do so too. If the other thing will need something else, this process will be infinite and unable to cease. (*Disc.* 1.17.1-3)

Ἐπειδὴ λόγος ἐστὶν ὁ διαρθρῶν καὶ ἐξεργαζόμενος τὰ λοιπὰ, ἔδει δ' αὐτὸν μὴ ἀδιάρθρωτον εἶναι, ὑπὸ τίνος διαρθρωθῆ; δῆλον γὰρ ὅτι ἡ ὑφ' αὐτοῦ ἢ ὑπ' ἄλλου. ἢ τοι λόγος ἐστὶν ἐκεῖνος ἢ ἄλλο τι κρεῖσσον ἔσται τοῦ λόγου, ὅπερ ἀδύνατον. εἰ λόγος, ἐκεῖνον πάλιν τίς διαρθρώσει; εἰ γὰρ αὐτὸς ἑαυτὸν, δύναται καὶ οὗτος. εἰ ἄλλου δεησόμεθα, ἄπειρον ἔσται τοῦτο καὶ ἀκατάληκτον.

⁶⁹ For a discussion of this text, see Dobbin 1998: 68-70.

⁷⁰ Cf. Long 1991a: 111.

Once more, Epictetus resists a regress on the basis of the ability of λόγος to do to itself what it does to other things.⁷¹ In the case of T10, however, the focus is on the ability of λόγος to articulate things. Articulation is the process by means of which our rudimentary concepts of things are clarified and allocated their proper place in relation to other concepts (see 3.3.3). It is a more theoretical sort of thing than the direction at issue in T9. λόγος is the cause of its own articulation, T10 tells us.

When we ask how λόγος is able to articulate itself, Epictetus speaks of the need to study logic. This seems to be part, therefore, of the self-study of λόγος. He speaks of the role of λόγος as a criterion for other things, and compares this to the measures that we use in determining the amounts of goods like grain. Epictetus remarks:

T11	If we do not thoroughly know and do not have a precise grasp of the measure by which we learn other things, then shall we be able to be precise about other things and learn them? How would that be possible? (<i>Disc.</i> 1.17.8)	τὸ τῶν ἄλλων κριτήριον καὶ δι' οὗ τᾶλλα καταμανθάνεται μὴ καταμεμαθηκότες μηδ' ἠκριβωκότες δυνησόμεθά τι τῶν ἄλλων ἀκριβῶσαι καὶ καταμαθεῖν; καὶ πῶς οἶόν τε;
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This comment is made specifically about the measures we use on the market, but since these are adduced precisely as analogies to elucidate the role of λόγος as a cognitive measure and the need to study it, we may take this remark to apply to λόγος too. Our precise grasp of λόγος is a precondition for our precise grasp of other things.

In describing the cognitive activity of λόγος in T9 and T11, Epictetus uses words with the prefix «κατα-» («κατανοήσουσα» in T9, «καταμαθεῖν» in T11). This is perhaps significant. As we saw earlier (3.1.1.5), Stoic epistemology has an important role for this prefix in the doctrine about the φαντασία καταληπτική, the clear presentation that provides the sure footing of understanding. You may lay hands (λαμβάνω) on all kinds of presentations, but this clear presentation is really something to take hold of (καταλαμβάνω). Epictetus may have been particular about choosing this prefix. It seems clear in any case that the apprehension he mentions in T9 and that which has been learned in T11 is not something fleeting; in the wise person especially, this is something firm, of the kind that understanding itself is made of.

In the first discourse – the sequel to T9 – Epictetus goes on to say that our power of reason is the only thing that the gods have given to us as properly ours. The seventeenth discourse – from which T10 and T11 are taken – is equally firm on our self-sufficiency with regard to λόγος.⁷² No one, Epictetus says, will hinder us in its execution. For it and its activity we need nothing and no one else.⁷³ But this is not the most fundamental fact of the case. Our control over the power of reason is the result of our identity with it. This becomes clear most of all when Epictetus identifies

⁷¹ Compare also T4 (on movement) and SE M7.441-2 (on the role of λόγος as criterion).

⁷² Dobbin (1998: 161) remarks: '[a] better title for the whole would be "On Self-Sufficiency"'.
⁷³ *Disc.* 1.1.7: «ὥσπερ οὖν ἦν ἄξιον, τὸ κράτιστον ἀπάντων καὶ κυριεῦον οἱ θεοὶ μόνον ἐφ' ἡμῖν ἐποίησαν, τὴν χρῆσιν τὴν ὀρθὴν ταῖς φαντασίαις, τὰ δ' ἄλλα οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν.»

himself with his preferential choice (προαίρεσις, 1.1.23). It is also evident when he makes Zeus say ‘we have given you a part of ourselves’,⁷⁴ which is the power that governs all choice and refusal. Epictetus thus expresses the Stoic conviction that reason in humans, their part of λόγος, is indeed a part of God in us.

The last text we should look at here comes from later in the first book of *Discourses*. It explains the ability of λόγος to study itself in terms of the sameness in kind of the power that studies and the thing that is studied. The passage has received the heading: ‘on λόγος – how it is able to study itself’.⁷⁵

T12	<p>Every skill and power studies certain things in particular. Now when it itself is of the same kind as the things studied, it must also come to study itself. If it is not of the same kind, however, it cannot study itself. The shoe-making craft, for instance, is occupied with leather, but it is itself wholly different from the matter of leather; for that reason it cannot study itself. The skill of writing, again, is about written language; but is it itself written language too? No. For that reason it is not able to study itself. And λόγος, what might it be for which that has been given to us by nature? For using our presentations as we should. And what is it itself? A composite out of certain presentations. So it comes by nature also to study itself. Intelligence, again, has been passed on to us as studying what? Things good, bad, and neither of the two. And what is it itself? Good. And what is ignorance? Bad. So do you see that it necessarily also comes to study itself and its opposite? (<i>Disc.</i> 1.20.1-6)⁷⁶</p>	<p>Πᾶσα τέχνη καὶ δύναμις προηγουμένων τινῶν ἐστὶ θεωρητικὴ. ὅταν μὲν οὖν ὁμοειδῆς τοῖς θεωρουμένοις καὶ αὐτῇ, ἀναγκαίως καὶ αὐτῆς γίνεται θεωρητικὴ· ὅταν δ’ ἀνομογενῆς, οὐ δύναται θεωρεῖν ἑαυτήν. οἷον σκυτικὴ περὶ δέρματα ἀναστρέφεται, αὐτὴ δὲ παντελῶς ἀπήλλακται τῆς ὕλης τῶν δερμάτων· διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτῆς θεωρητικὴ. γραμματικὴ πάλιν περὶ τὴν ἐγγράμματον φωνήν· μὴ τι οὖν ἐστὶ καὶ αὐτὴ ἐγγράμματος φωνῆ; οὐδαμῶς. διὰ τοῦτο οὐ δύναται θεωρεῖν ἑαυτήν. ὁ οὖν λόγος πρὸς τί ποτε ὑπὸ τῆς φύσεως παρείληπται; πρὸς χρῆσιν φαντασιῶν οἷαν δεῖ. αὐτὸς οὖν τί ἐστίν; σύστημα ἐκ ποιῶν φαντασιῶν. οὕτως γίνεται φύσει καὶ αὐτοῦ θεωρητικός. πάλιν ἢ φρόνησις τίνα θεωρήσουσα παρελήλυθεν; ἀγαθὰ καὶ κακὰ καὶ οὐδέτερα. αὐτὴ οὖν τί ἐστίν; ἀγαθόν. ἢ δ’ ἀφροσύνη τί ἐστίν; κακόν. ὁρᾷς οὖν ὅτι ἀναγκαίως καὶ αὐτῆς γίνεται καὶ τῆς ἐναντίας θεωρητικὴ;</p>
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The context of T12 is comparable to that of T9. Here, too, we have a comparison between λόγος and other powers in terms of what they study. Both texts also share some of the language they use. The key verb «θεωρέω», ‘to study’ recurs in many forms and derivatives. We find mention of the idea that our λόγος and intelligence has been given, or passed on, to us (T9: «παρείληπται», «ἐλήλυθεν»; T12: «παρείληπται», «παρελήλυθεν»). T12 makes more explicit that it is nature that has given this power to us, and it connects this origin to the kind of thing the power of

⁷⁴ *Disc.* 1.1.12: «ἔδωκαμέν σοι μέρος τι ἡμέτερον, τὴν δύναμιν ταύτην τὴν ὀρμητικὴν τε καὶ ἀφορμητικὴν καὶ ὀρεκτικὴν τε καὶ ἐκκλητικὴν καὶ ἀπλῶς τὴν χρηστικὴν ταῖς φαντασίαις[.]» The citation in the previous note follows.

⁷⁵ «Περὶ τοῦ λόγου πῶς αὐτοῦ θεωρητικός ἐστίν.»

⁷⁶ A discussion of the whole of 1.20, with a particular focus on Epictetus’s style of teaching, is found in Long 2002: 129-36. Cf. also Dobbin 1998: 182-3.

understanding itself is. Not only is the power to understand naturally ours, it is also naturally such as to study itself.

These texts are proof that self-understanding is possible, according to the Stoics. (As I said, they cast a wider net than around understanding alone, since understanding is present in wise people only, while T9-T12 seem to grant reflexivity to non-wise human beings too.) While Epictetus does not make a connection between this cognitive phenomenon and its ontological basis, what he says fits the general trend that we have discerned in the different levels of God's presence in the cosmos. On this highest level of understanding, God is no less cause of his being understood than he is cause, on a much lower level, of his being moved. What we find in T9 through T12 is a process that represents God's self-action on the level of *λόγος* in human beings.

Furthermore, we may also read in these texts a recommendation of self-understanding as at least part of our ethical goal in life. T12 says of *λόγος* – that which makes us specifically human beings – that it has been given to us in order that it may study, among other things, itself.⁷⁷ Self-study is integral to being an excellent and happy human being.

Finally, we may note, with a view to section 3, that T12 has Epictetus give a very brief description of what *λόγος* is. Its subject matter is given as 'using presentations', which includes the study of these presentations themselves. The conclusion that *λόγος* studies itself is reached via the further proposition that *λόγος* consists of presentations: it is a 'composite' («σύστημα») of presentations. We will encounter this description of what *λόγος* is later on, in a slightly more elaborate version (3.3.3 and 3.3.8). Here, however, we have in a nutshell two important aspects of what *λόγος*, of what understanding is. It is made up of presentations (more particularly, of concepts). It is also something very much unified, a composite in the sense that it is one thing out of many. In studying itself, surely *λόγος* will not be restricted to studying individual presentations, in ignorance of their order, which it itself is.

7 POSSIBILITY OF SELF-UNDERSTANDING: THE STOIC VS. THE PLATONIC MODEL

The Stoic view of the possibility that understanding understands itself is thus different from the Platonic one we have examined in chapters 1 and 2. In the latter, the power of understanding must understand itself indirectly, via another power of understanding. The Stoics say, however, that the power to understand can have itself as its direct object. It is the highest level of a dynamic substance that can act on itself at all levels, including the highest. If we step back a little, we can see that this difference between Stoic and Platonic approaches is part of a more general ontological difference.

I have suggested in chapter 1 that the view of powers developed in *Charmides* functions within the framework of a gradualist ontology. Things do not just exist or not exist; rather, they have different degrees of being. You need a pretty high degree

⁷⁷ Long (2002: 133) writes: 'because intelligence is not simply something good but *the* good, its practice and self-study are the very essence of goodness'.

of being in order to be an object of particular powers, like the power to understand. These powers themselves, when not applied, do not have the requisite degree of being. The power to understand, therefore, cannot be applied to itself.

The Stoic case is quite different. On the one hand, Stoic ontology is not an ontology of degrees. The criterion of being that the Stoics use, the ability to act or to be acted upon, allows for a binary understanding of being. Either you are, or you are not. Even action itself is not required for having the status of being, in the Stoic view: something that acts does not have a higher degree of being than something that does not act, but is only acted upon. There is, of course, a scale of being in the sense that πνεῦμα reaches different degrees of tension and concomitantly of functional sophistication. But that does not make λόγος any more real than ἕξις.

On the other hand, it is an integral feature of all powers that the Stoics recognise that they are already fully active.⁷⁸ They are different forms of πνεῦμα. To be sure, they have their peculiar characteristics because πνεῦμα has distinct configurations in each of them, but that does not make the one more active in its acting than the other. Because of its intrinsic activity, a power does not have to wait for something else, so to speak, to act on something. And since it is just as much an existent thing as anything else – this follows from the Stoics' binary view of ontology – it can take itself as its object as well. Understanding is no exception to this. It is active in its own right and fully existent in its own right; it does not need something else to understand itself.

3.2

SELF-UNDERSTANDING IS THE SOUL'S UNDERSTANDING OF ITSELF

1 PRELIMINARY: SOUL AND BODY

In the above I have proceeded on the assumption that the soul's self-understanding is also our self-understanding. It is now time to make this idea explicit, and to show that the Stoics thought that we are to be identified most of all with our souls. In order to facilitate that discussion, let us look at the relation between soul and body.⁷⁹

The soul, the Stoics say, has eight parts. The highest of these is called 'ruling part' and 'reason' (λόγος). This Chrysippus famously located in the heart. From this central – as we may also term it – location of the soul, offshoots spread throughout the body, like the tentacles of an octopus. There is a current of πνεῦμα that extends from the heart to the tongue, another that extends from the heart to the genitals, and for each of the five senses there is a current from the heart to the appropriate sense

⁷⁸ Here I mean the powers that are relevant to our discussion of understanding. You could call the ability of matter to be acted upon a power to be acted upon (Plato's *Sophist* uses δύναμις-language in the context of the criterion of being that the Stoics adopted). But that would be quite a different thing.

⁷⁹ A good recent discussion is in Gill 2006: 29-46. I emphasise more than Gill does the role of the soul as definitive of who we are.

organ.⁸⁰ These currents are directly responsible for our perception of things: when an object strikes against the πνεῦμα in our eye, for instance, that πνεῦμα passes on its peculiar impact until it arrives in the central part of the soul, at which moment you can be said to perceive it. What happens in the region of the eye itself is merely an ‘affection’.⁸¹ Reason, i.e. the ruling part, must interpret these affections before it can give assent to what is perceived – this interpretation itself is perception. Another suggestive image is that of a spider that sits in the middle of its web, and notices immediately when a fly gets caught into it.

The image of the spider raises the question of the relation of the ruling part to the other parts. A spider, it would seem, is not the same as its web. It has made the web, but is able to make another one if need be. In any case, we would not want to say that any odd piece of web is the same as the spider. Are we to say, in similar terms, that the piece of πνεῦμα in the eye is not the soul either?

We may want to say ‘no’ to this in view of the Stoic theory of the mixture of body and soul. It is often attested that the Stoics said that soul and body are mixed completely, that is, that there is no part of the human being in which you will find pure soul or pure body, in the same way in which there is no part of the world in which you will find pure God or pure matter.⁸² But it is worthwhile to point to the great extent to which the spider image agrees with Stoic views on the ruling part. Galen says, for instance, that the Stoics thought the heart is not only the first thing formed of a human being, but is also that which forms the other parts.⁸³ Moreover, the Stoics say that the ruling part is what is separated from the body upon death.⁸⁴

There is evidently a difficulty about the relation of soul to body, and about how to demarcate them. Some scholars point to the many things that the body seems to do on its own (metabolism, growth of nails) and argue that body and soul are two entities – formations of matter and God – the latter of which is superimposed on the former.⁸⁵ Christopher Gill has recently argued that the Stoics conceived of humans as ‘structured wholes’ rather than as ‘a combination of a psychic or mental core or essence and a body’.⁸⁶ An actual demarcation, as I just put it, of soul and body would be a misconceived project; while Gill speaks of the interaction of soul and body, this is, in his view, a non-dualistic one.⁸⁷ Gill’s emphasis on the structure of entities as definitive of what they are agrees very well with what we know about the different forms of God’s activity in the cosmos (3.1.1.6), as Gill himself observes.⁸⁸ At the same

⁸⁰ The classic text here is Aetius 4.21.1-4 (SVF 2.836, LS 53H); also Chalcidius 220 (SVF 2.879, LS 53G).

⁸¹ Aetius 4.23.1 (SVF 2.854, LS 53M): «οἱ Στωϊκοὶ τὰ μὲν πάθη ἐν τοῖς πεπονθόσι τόποις, τὰς δὲ αἰσθήσεις ἐν τῷ ἡγεμονικῷ.»; Chalcidius reporting Chrysippus: ‘Intimae vero deliberationis et considerationis proprium cuiusque sensus intelligere passionem et ex iis quae nuntiant colligere quid sit illud[.]’ (SVF 2.879, LS 53G9)

⁸² e.g. T19; Alex. *Mix.* 217.33-6, in SVF 2.473, in LS 48C.

⁸³ And this is the reason why it keeps governing them: SVF 2.761 (part of which in LS 53D).

⁸⁴ Most clearly SE *M*9.72 (=T7); also 7.234 (LS 53F).

⁸⁵ As do Annas 1992: 53-6 and Long 1982: 36-41, each in their own way. Long refers to J.L. Ackrill’s discussion of a similar difficulty in Aristotle (1972).

⁸⁶ Gill 2006: xv, xvii; Gill calls this ‘psychophysical holism’. See further pp. 29-46 and 129-66.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*: 30.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*: 30-1.

time, however, we should recognise that our sources do treat soul and body as to some extent different things (see below, 3.2.3 and 3.2.4); and that individual entities in the cosmos are, in fact, combinations of two different bodies, God and matter. Perhaps we can do justice to both of the perspectives we have just reviewed by denying that we can specify souls and bodies outside of a particular context. We may take ‘soul’ and ‘body’ to be words that we use to talk about the more pneumatic and the more material, or the more structured and the more unstructured, aspects of things; but what we call ‘soul’ on one level may be called ‘body’ on another.⁸⁹ What seems clear, in any case, however we should construe the relation between soul and body precisely, is that the Stoics speak of the soul as of what is more God-like.⁹⁰

The soul is also uncontroversially the thing in us which does the perceiving and the acting. Properly speaking, as we saw above, perception takes place in the ruling part of the soul. Another way this point is put is that the soul perceives things through the senses, rather than that the senses perceive things. An analogous story can be told about action. Seneca writes in his 113th letter that Cleanthes and Chrysippus disagreed about the most pertinent way to describe the action of walking. Cleanthes thought it should be described as the action of a piece of πνεῦμα extending out of the ruling part unto the feet. Chrysippus, on the other hand, wanted to identify walking with a particular configuration of the ruling part itself.⁹¹ While there may be something to the dispute, we should not overstate the difference between Cleanthes and Chrysippus. For Cleanthes too thought of the movement of πνεῦμα as originating in the ruling part, while Chrysippus will not have denied that the movement of πνεῦμα in the ruling part will have extended through to the feet.⁹² This dispute about action can be framed in terms of the corresponding processes of perception. If we separate the alternative ways of describing perception that I mentioned above, we can ask: is perception something that happens in the ruling part, or is it something that the ruling part does through the senses?

Questions and differences like these may point to an imprecision among the Stoics about how to designate the soul and its activities. There seems to have been no corresponding uncertainty about our ultimate identity, however. The Stoics are agreed that we are most of all our soul.

⁸⁹ So that when Sextus (*M* 7.234) says that «ψυχὴν λέγεσθαι διχῶς», he refers to the two main contexts in which we use ψυχή. This procedure would not be alien to Stoicism, witness the way they use οὐσία and ποιόν, two of their four so-called genera of being, in a context-dependent way (cf. 3.1.1.2). Graver says: ‘the relevant contrast is one of functions’ (2007: 20); this also looks like a context-relative proposal.

⁹⁰ The two interpretations mentioned in the text may be considered as two of a triad of possible interpretations, if we add the idea that body and soul just are the parts of matter and God, respectively, that constitute the human being (this could be defended by an appeal to texts that liken the relation between soul and body to that between God and matter).

⁹¹ *Ep.* 113.23 (= in SVF 2.836, = LS 53L): ‘inter Cleanthen et discipulum eius Chrysippum non convenit, quid sit ambulatio. Cleanthes ait spiritum esse a principali usque in pedes permissum, Chrysippus ipsum principale.’

⁹² Cf. the sensible remarks of Rist 1969: 34. Nussbaum insists on the relevance to the absolute moral divide between wise and fool of the idea that actions are ‘complete at [their] inception in the heart’ (1994: 365).

2 WE ARE OUR SOUL – DIRECT TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

That we are most of all our soul is, I think, something that scholars of Stoicism accept. Even if we make a strong separation between soul and body and hold that we are the sum of soul and body, we will still recognise the soul as by far the most definitive factor of what we are. This implies that self-understanding is also most of all our soul's understanding of itself.

There are also indications, however, that the Stoics identified us with our soul. This interpretation has recently been defended by Brennan, with special reference to the ethical idea that the good life for human beings consists in something that is in fact a good of the soul only.⁹³ After reviewing some main pieces of evidence in this and the next subsection, I will conclude that the Stoics did indeed identify us with our soul.

If this identification is correct, the soul's understanding of itself is the whole of our self-understanding. If it is not, then the soul's understanding of itself is still a major part of self-understanding. The next section (3.3), in which I develop an interpretation of what the soul's self-understanding consists in, may consequently be taken either as a description of our self-understanding *tout court*, or as a description of the most important and distinctive part of it.

We will see later (3.3.5, T23) that understanding and the soul are the same thing. More precisely, understanding is the soul in a certain shape, in the way that a fist is a hand in a certain shape. Stoic sources also identify virtue, i.e. the best state of a human being, with understanding. It is therefore not an arbitrary shape that a soul assumes when it has the shape of understanding; it is its best shape. The wise person's self-understanding is, therefore, wholly or most of all, the self-understanding of understanding.

Of the direct textual evidence that we have for the identification of us with our soul, the earliest in terms of whom it concerns is a statement about Cleanthes. Its reliability, however, is not a given. The fourth-century AD bishop Epiphanius writes:

T13	Cleanthes says that the good and beautiful are the pleasures, and he called only the soul man, and he said that the gods are mystical shapes and holy appellations, and he said that the sun is torchbearer and the cosmos a mystery, and those possessed by the divine he called initiates. (<i>Adv. Haer.</i> 3.2.9.37) ⁹⁴	Κλεάνθης τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ καλὸν λέγει εἶναι τὰς ἡδονάς, καὶ ἄνθρωπον ἐκάλει μόνην τὴν ψυχὴν, καὶ τοὺς θεοὺς μυστικὰ σχήματα ἔλεγεν εἶναι καὶ κλήσεις ἱερὰς καὶ δαδοῦχον ἔφασκεν εἶναι τὸν ἥλιον καὶ τὸν κόσμον μυστήριον καὶ τοὺς κατόχους τῶν θείων τελεστὰς ἔλεγε.
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This passage is suspect for essentially two reasons. Firstly, Epiphanius makes nonsense claims elsewhere.⁹⁵ Secondly, Cleanthes would never have claimed of the Stoic good that it is pleasure. It must be said against the first consideration that Epiphanius also

⁹³ Brennan 2009.

⁹⁴ = SVF 1.538 (and *De Fide* 9.41). The passage refers to the Eleusinian mysteries (on this connection see Boyancé 1962: 466-8).

⁹⁵ See Diels 1879: 175-7.

says many sensible things. This report is usually taken seriously in the literature as far as its second half is concerned.⁹⁶ We cannot just discard this report, therefore, even if we must treat it with caution. As concerns the second consideration, Jean Pépin has argued that it should be read as giving a new content to ‘pleasures’; Cleanthes shows us the good and beautiful and says to us: these are the real pleasures.⁹⁷ We should not accept this, I think, because Epiphanius goes on to say similarly odd things about Chrysippus (‘the end of all is the experience of pleasure’) and Diogenes of Babylon (‘everything is constituted out of pleasure’);⁹⁸ these cannot be saved in the way Pépin proposes. We had best accept this evidence provisionally and see if we can find other evidence to support or contradict it.

There is a wealth of statements that we are to be identified with our souls in later Stoic texts, notably in Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. The former alludes to *Alcibiades* when he exhorts a young man to care about himself instead of his appearance:

T14	<p>Because you are neither flesh nor hair, but choice. If you keep that beautiful, then you will be beautiful. Up till now I dare not say to you that you are ugly. It seems to me that you want to hear anything but that. But look, what does Socrates say to the most beautiful and handsome of all, Alcibiades: ‘try to be beautiful’. (<i>Disc.</i> 3.1.40-2)</p>	<p>ὅτι οὐκ εἶ κρέας οὐδὲ τρίχες, ἀλλὰ προαίρεσις· ταύτην ἂν σχῆς καλήν, τότ’ ἔσει καλός. μέχρι δὲ νῦν οὐ τολμῶ σοι λέγειν, ὅτι αἰσχρὸς εἶ· δοκεῖς γάρ μοι πάντα θέλειν ἀκοῦσαι ἢ τοῦτο. ἀλλ’ ὄρα, τί λέγει Σωκράτης τῷ καλλίστῳ πάντων καὶ ὠραισιτάτῳ Ἀλκιβιάδῃ· «πειρῶ οὖν καλὸς εἶναι».</p>
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Epictetus is famous for his insistence that his hearers are their preferential choice (προαίρεσις). What will a tyrant not be able to cut off? ‘Your choice. For this reason the ancients proclaimed the “Know yourself”’.⁹⁹ To the same effect Epictetus says that your judgements reveal who you are.¹⁰⁰ Or he opposes who we are and our body: he speaks of ‘I and my body’, he says that our body is something that is not ultimately ours, and compares it to a snail’s shell.¹⁰¹ ‘You are a little soul that carries a corpse.’¹⁰²

⁹⁶ So Boyancé 1962: 466-8; Mansfeld 1979: 134-6.

⁹⁷ Pépin 1971: 128. He adds that this solution ‘permet de relier sans difficulté le premier propos au second : pour montrer que les véritables plaisirs de l’homme sont effectivement le bon et le beau, Cléanthe pouvait arguer de façon cohérente que, selon lui, l’homme se définit par sa seule âme.’

⁹⁸ «Χρύσιππος [...] ἔλεγε δὲ τὸ τέλος τῶν πάντων τὸ ἡδυπαθὲς εἶναι» in §39 (= SVF 3.746) and «Διογένης ὁ Βαβυλώνιος ἔλεγε τὰ σύμπαντα συνίστασθαι ἐξ ἡδονῆς» § 40 (=SVF 3 Diog. 43).

⁹⁹ *Disc.* 1.18.17: «Ἄλλ’ ὁ τύραννος δῆσει.» τί; τὸ σκέλος. «ἀλλ’ ἀφελεῖ.» τί; τὸν τράχηλον. τί οὖν <οὐ> δῆσει οὐδ’ ἀφελεῖ; τὴν προαίρεσιν. διὰ τοῦτο παρήγγελ<λ>ον οἱ παλαιοὶ τὸ Γνωθὶ σαυτόν.» Similarly in 1.1.23, 4.5.12,23 (προαίρεσις), 3.1.26 (τὸ λογικόν), 3.10.16 (τὸ ἡγεμονικόν).

¹⁰⁰ *Disc.* 3.2.11-12: «Διογένης τῶν σοφιστῶν τινα οὕτως ἔδειξεν ἐκτείνας τὸν μέσον δάκτυλον, εἶτα ἐκμανέντος αὐτοῦ «Οὗτός ἐστιν», ἔφη, «ὁ δεῖνα· ἔδειξα ὑμῖν αὐτόν»[.] ἄνθρωπος γὰρ δακτύλῳ οὐ δείκνυται ὡς λίθος ἢ ὡς ξύλον, ἀλλ’ ὅταν τις τὰ δόγματα αὐτοῦ δείξη, τότε αὐτόν ὡς ἄνθρωπον ἔδειξεν.»

¹⁰¹ I, and/not my body: in *Disc.* 1.29.28, 3.13.17, 3.22.21,88, 4.7.31; the body not yours, alien: 1.1.12, 4.1.130; the body a shell: 1.20.17, 23.1.

¹⁰² Marcus Aurelius 4.41: «Ψυχάριον εἶ βαστάζον νεκρόν, ὡς Ἐπίκτητος ἔλεγεν.»

The use of these texts is not without its own problems, however. T14 is one among many texts that show Epictetus to be an avid reader of Socratic dialogues. How can we be sure that he does not mingle non-Stoic elements into his teaching? The concerns of Epictetus are not the concerns of a scholar who wants to transmit purely Stoic teaching (Marcus's case is no different). It is perfectly possible that everything he says is Stoic, but we cannot know that beforehand. Nevertheless, in combination with reports like T13, the evidence grows that the Stoics did indeed think that our souls are our real selves.

Thirdly, what we have by way of direct testimony from Chrysippus agrees very well with what we have found so far. There is firstly an argument for positing the heart as the centre of the human animal, rather than the head. Galen cites:

T15	<p>So also we say «ἐγώ» ['I'] pointing to ourselves down to where thought appears to be, since the gesture of pointing is naturally and properly carried there. But even without this kind of gesture with the hand we say ἐγώ by inclining towards ourselves; directly, because the sound of ἐγώ is such, as well as by being carried along according to the gesture described next. We pronounce ἐγώ by its first syllable by drawing down the lower lip, in a way that points at ourselves. Subsequently upon the movement of the chin and the inclination towards the chest and that gesture, the following syllable is alongside and indicates nothing of distance, which does happen with «ἐκεῖνος» ['him']. (PHP2.2.10-1)¹⁰³</p>	<p>Οὕτως δὲ καὶ τὸ ἐγὼ λέγομεν, κατὰ τοῦτο δεικνύντες ἑαυτοὺς ἐν ᾧ φαίνεσθαι διάνοιαν εἶναι, τῆς δείξεως φυσικῶς καὶ οἰκείως ἐνταῦθα φερομένης· καὶ ἄνευ δὲ τῆς κατὰ τὴν χεῖρα τοιαύτης δείξεως νεύοντες εἰς αὐτοὺς τὸ ἐγὼ λέγομεν, εὐθύς καὶ τῆς ἐγὼ φωνῆς τοιαύτης οὔσης καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἐξῆς ὑπογεγραμμένην δεῖξιν συνεκφερομένης. τὸ γὰρ ἐγὼ προφερόμεθα κατὰ τὴν πρώτην συλλαβὴν κατασπῶντες τὸ κάτω χεῖλος εἰς αὐτοὺς δεικτικῶς· ἀκολουθῶς δὲ τῇ τοῦ γενείου κινήσει καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ στήθος νεύσει καὶ τῇ τοιαύτῃ δείξει ἢ ἐξῆς συλλαβῆ παράκειται οὐδὲν ἀποστηματικὸν παρενημαίνουσα, ὅπερ ἐπὶ τοῦ ἐκεῖνος συντέτευχεν.</p>
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The argument serves to establish that the ἡγεμονικόν part of the human being, that which rules the rest, is in the chest. While Chrysippus presents this observation from ordinary behaviour and language as only a convincing argument, not one that clinches the matter,¹⁰⁴ it is a safe inference from T15 that Chrysippus thinks that the referent of 'I' is the ruling part of the soul, which is here further identified as thought.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, Chrysippus has preceded Epictetus in saying that the body is nothing to us. This emerges from an infamous text preserved by Sextus Empiricus,

¹⁰³ = SVF 2.895. For a discussion of the argumentation of this text see Tieleman 1996: 206-14, who argues that it involves the doctrine of οἰκείωσις. This text is taken as evidence for the Stoic identification of us with our souls by Pépin 1971: 128n.5; also, briefly, Brennan 2009: 400-1.

¹⁰⁴ On this see Tieleman 1996: 264-73.

¹⁰⁵ In the extract from Hierocles's πῶς συγγενεῖσι χρηστέον in Stobaeus, in which our relations with others are described as circles which you should pull inward, we are also by implication identified with our thought: «ὅλως γὰρ ἕκαστος ἡμῶν οἷον κύκλοις πολλοῖς περιγέγραπται, τοῖς μὲν μικροτέροις, τοῖς δὲ μείζοσι, καὶ τοῖς μὲν περιέχουσι, τοῖς δὲ περιεχομένοις, κατὰ τὰς διαφορὰς καὶ ἀνίσους πρὸς ἀλλήλους σχέσεις. πρῶτος μὲν γὰρ ἐστὶ κύκλος καὶ προσεχέστατος, ὃν αὐτὸς τις καθάπερ περὶ κέντρον τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γέγραπται διάνοιαν· ἐν ᾧ κύκλῳ τό τε σῶμα περιέχεται καὶ τὰ τοῦ σώματος ἔνεκα παρειλημμένα.» (Stob. 4.671.7-15)

in which Chrysippus says that we should, if need be, eat our parents' corpses, 'since the body is nothing to us, like nails or hair'.¹⁰⁶ The passage is infamous because later writers used statements like this for polemical purposes, accusing Chrysippus of advocating cannibalism. There is irony in this, because Chrysippus is concerned precisely to deny that we are eating our parents when we are eating their corpses. The comment I cited opposes us to our bodies; Chrysippus subsequently presents it as an inference from this distinction that our parents' corpses, i.e. their bodies after the separation of their bodies and souls, are fit to eat. If, in contrast, our parents were identified in part with their bodies, then it would not be right to eat these.

3 WE ARE OUR SOUL – OUR CONSTITUTION

Final evidence for the Stoic identification of us with our souls is found in the descriptions of our constitution (σύστασις) and our getting attached to it. Tad Brennan has recently drawn attention to these as pointers to the Stoic answer to the question 'Who am I?'¹⁰⁷ Our main witness is Seneca, whose 121st letter is a discussion of the idea that living beings are aware of their constitution. He tells us, via an imaginary questioner: 'as you [Stoics] say, your constitution is the ruling part of the soul, disposed in some way towards the body'.¹⁰⁸ The questioner turns this into an objection by asking how infants could understand such a difficult definition. Relevant for us is that his use of it as an authoritative description makes it almost certain that it is genuinely Stoic. This also appears from its use of the technical category of 'being disposed towards something in a certain way'. As we saw, the Stoics distinguished between simply 'being disposed in some way' and 'being disposed in some way towards something' (3.1.2). Being sweet is an example of the first class. Being a father is an example of the second. The former, but not the latter, requires an inherent change in order for it to be or not to be. You cannot stop being sweet without a change in you, but you can stop being a father without a change in you: your child may die.¹⁰⁹ The description in terms of being disposed somehow towards something has been compared with the Cambridge changes of contemporary philosophy: changes in the descriptions of something that require no real changes in the thing itself.¹¹⁰

What, then, does it mean that the Stoics classify the constitution of a living being among the things disposed in some way towards something? It means that they can

¹⁰⁶ *M.11.194* (= *SVF 3.752*): «ἀπογενομένων δὲ τῶν γονέων ταφαῖς χρηστέον ταῖς ἀπλουστάταις, ὡς ἂν τοῦ σώματος, καθάπερ ὄνυχος ἢ τριχῶν, οὐδὲν ὄντος πρὸς ἡμᾶς, [...]. διὸ καὶ χρησίμων μὲν ὄντων τῶν κρεῶν τροφῇ χρήσονται αὐτοῖς».

¹⁰⁷ Brennan 2009: 401-7. What follows is based on Brennan's discussion.

¹⁰⁸ *Ep. 121.10*: "Constitutio", inquit, "est, ut vos dicitis, principale animi quodam modo se habens erga corpus." Cf. Inwood 2007: 337.

¹⁰⁹ Note that being sweet, for all its being based in how the sweet thing is, is a relative thing: it is sweet for animal or species X. Not all relative terms are therefore members of the class of things disposed in some way towards something; some are of the disposed in some way *tout court*.

¹¹⁰ What counts as real is mostly defined in terms of a thing's causal powers (see, e.g., Shoemaker 1980). The term 'Cambridge change' was coined by Peter Geach (1969: 70-1).

speak of your constitution as a way of describing the relations that hold between your soul and your body without having to posit qualitative changes in your soul. One crucial case is, of course, death. The Stoics can describe death as the end of your constitution, while maintaining all the while that your soul experiences no inherent changes. What happens is that your soul stops bearing the name ‘constitution’, since it no longer has the relation to the body that it had before death.

Seneca’s letter may give rise to some confusion, however, since it also speaks of changes in your constitution that are also changes in your soul. He speaks, for instance, of the different constitutions that belong to a child, a boy, and an old man. Even more confusingly, he suggests that having teeth and not having teeth is part of your constitution¹¹¹ – but surely teeth are of the body? So should we not translate ‘constitutio’ by ‘physical constitution’, as Gummere does in the Loeb edition?¹¹² We should not; there need not be any confusion here. All qualification is due to God; teeth no less than thoughts are πνεῦμα informing matter. In the relevant sense, teeth are *not* of the body. The different constitutions that you go through in living your life are all different stages of the πνεῦμα that is you. A change in your soul is also a change in your constitution, since ‘constitution’ is a name for your soul. And yet your soul can stop being your constitution without change in itself. Likewise, a change in the man who happens to be your father is also a change in your father. And yet that man can stop being your father without change in himself, i.e. when *you* die.

Elsewhere in the letter we find further confirmation that Seneca is speaking of the soul when he speaks of your constitution. There is an explicit comparison of the awareness that a child has of its constitution with the awareness that we have of our souls. Moreover, the constitution of an animal is specified as that which it obeys and by which it is ruled.¹¹³

If these observations about the Stoic notion of σύστασις are to be of any help in determining whether the Stoics thought we are our souls, we must link σύστασις with self. In other words, did the Stoics speak of our constitution as a way of speaking about ourselves? It is in fact very plausible that they did.¹¹⁴ The following text suggests that the distinction between saying ‘yourself’ and ‘your constitution’ is a distinction between more vulgar and more sophisticated ways of putting the same point.

T16 | Now the Stoics – but not all – say that a living being is primarily familiar to itself; | οἱ μὲν οὖν Στωϊκοὶ οὐ πάντες δέ, λέγουσιν πρῶτον οἰκεῖον εἶναι τὸ

¹¹¹ *Ep.* 121.14-5: ‘Unicuique aetati sua constitutio est, alia infanti, alia puero, alia seni; omnes ei constitutioni conciliantur in qua sunt. Infans sine dentibus est; huic constitutioni suae conciliatur. Enati sunt dentes; huic constitutioni conciliatur.’

¹¹² In §9, see his note on p. 398.

¹¹³ The comparison is in Seneca’s reply to the objection that the definition of constitution is too complex for a child to be aware of its constitution: ‘Infans ille quid sit constitutio non novit, constitutionem suam novit. Et quid sit animal, nescit, animal esse se sentit. Praeterea ipsam constitutionem suam crasse intellegit et summatim et obscure. Nos quoque animum habere nos scimus; quid sit animus, ubi sit, qualis sit aut unde, nescimus. Qualis ad nos animi nostri sensus, quamvis naturam eius ignoremus ac sedem, talis ad omnia animalia constitutionis suae sensus est. Necesse est enim id sentiant, per quod alia quoque sentiunt, necesse est eius sensum habeant, cui parent, a quo reguntur.’ (121.11-2)

¹¹⁴ cf. Inwood 2007: 335-6; Gill 2006: 45.

for each living being is familiarised to itself as soon as it has come to be, the human being in particular. Those among them who seem to write more elegantly and to distinguish things more properly say that as soon as we have come to be we are familiarised with the constitution and preservation of ourselves. (Alex. <i>De An. Mant.</i> 150.28-33) ¹¹⁵	ζῶον αὐτῷ (ἕκαστον γὰρ ζῶον εὐθύς γενόμενον πρὸς τε αὐτὸ οικειοῦσθαι, καὶ δὴ καὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον· οἱ δὲ χαριέστερον δοκοῦντες λέγειν αὐτῶν καὶ μᾶλλον διαρθροῦν περὶ τοῦδέ φασιν πρὸς τὴν σύστασιν καὶ τήρησιν ὥκειώσθαι εὐθύς γενομένους ἡμᾶς τὴν ἡμῶν αὐτῶν)[.]
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In addition to this parallel presentation of ‘itself’ and ‘our constitution’, this text offers us another indication of the identification of ourselves and our constitutions: the preservation to which we are familiarised is said to be *our* preservation. If our constitution were meant to be something different from us, then, given that nature’s concern is to familiarise us with our constitution across time, we should be told that we are made to care about the preservation of our constitution, rather than the preservation of ourselves. In a similar way, a text from Chrysippus rephrases ‘itself’ by ‘its constitution’ – the citation is from Diogenes Laertius:

T17 They say that the first impulse a living being has is to care for itself, its nature familiarising it from the beginning, as Chrysippus says in his first book <i>On Ends</i> , explaining that the first thing that is familiar for all living beings is their constitution and the consciousness of this. (DL 7.85) ¹¹⁶	Τὴν δὲ πρώτην ὀρμὴν φασὶ τὸ ζῶον ἴσχειν ἐπὶ τὸ τηρεῖν ἑαυτό, οικειούσης αὐτὸ τῆς φύσεως ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, καθά φησιν ὁ Χρύσιππος ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ Περὶ τελῶν, πρῶτον οικεῖον λέγων εἶναι παντὶ ζῳῷ τὴν αὐτοῦ σύστασιν καὶ τὴν ταύτης συνείδησιν·
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Diogenes adduces Chrysippus as an authority for the claim he has just made about the Stoic school as a whole, that a living being is familiarised firstly with itself. In a more elegant way, as T16 has it, Chrysippus writes of the object of the living being’s self-familiarisation as ‘its constitution’. In T17, ‘awareness’ takes the place of ‘preservation’, «τήρησιν», in T16. But the latter is represented in the ‘care for itself’, «τηρεῖν ἑαυτό», at the beginning of T17. The verb τηρεῖν seems to belong specifically to this context.¹¹⁷ Perhaps it is appropriate, therefore, to return once more to Epictetus, who identifies self-preservation as preservation of the ruling part of the soul:

T18 It is not the job of a philosopher to care for [/to preserve] such external things, a little wine, a little oil, his little body. For what then should he care? For his own ruling principle. (<i>Disc.</i> 3.10.16)	οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἔργον τοῦ φιλοσόφου ταῦτα <τὰ> ἐκτὸς τηρεῖν, οὔτε τὸ οἰνᾶριον οὔτε <τὸ> ἐλάδιον οὔτε τὸ σωματίον, ἀλλὰ τί; τὸ ἴδιον ἡγεμονικόν.
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¹¹⁵ = SVF 3.183.

¹¹⁶ = SVF 3.178. Hierocles and Cicero pair ‘itself’ and ‘constitution’ without making clear whether these are different things or two expressions for the same thing: «τὸ ζῶον, τὴν πρώτην αἴσθησιν ἑαυτοῦ λαβόν, εὐθύς ὥκειώθη πρὸς ἑαυτὸ καὶ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σύστασιν.» (Hier. *El.* 6.51-3); ‘Placet his [...] simul atque natum sit animal [...] ipsum sibi conciliari et commendari ad se conservandum et ad suum statum’ (Cic. *De Fin.* 3.16 = SVF 3.182).

¹¹⁷ Its privileged use has a natural explanation if the first clause in T17 is a literal citation from Chrysippus. See also Plutarch’s use of it in *De Amore Prolis* 493C.

In saying that we are our souls, a Stoic affirms that we are to be identified with the piece of God in us, the cause that makes the whole of us the way it is. It is also an affirmation of our identity with that in us which rules the rest of us – and a challenge for us to identify ourselves with this ruling aspect, in order that we be autonomous, free beings. The similarities with the picture we encountered in *Alcibiades* are not accidental. The Stoics share with the author of that dialogue the view that things are most properly identified with the determinative aspect in them (see the introduction).

3.3

WHAT SELF-UNDERSTANDING IS

We have now seen that the Stoics identified ourselves with our souls. We have also seen, earlier, that God, the active principle of Stoic (meta)physics, is capable of being acted upon, notably in those cases of self-action which find their highest form in self-understanding. In this third section we will consider the details of Stoic thought on self-understanding, to the extent that we can reconstruct it. We will look at what the Stoics say about the nature of λόγος in human beings, and at their accounts of understanding. The properties that they ascribe to it make clear, I argue, that understanding is, for them, also self-understanding. First, however, I discuss the pertinence to our discussion of what is called the Stoic theory of οἰκείωσις (familiarisation); and of one particular account of animal perception which we find in Hierocles.

1 PRELIMINARY (I) – THE THEORY OF ΟΙΚΕΙΩΣΙΣ

The Stoic theory of οἰκείωσις explains how animals find their place in the world. We have seen some texts that report it in our discussion of ‘constitution’. We see in these and other descriptions a basic link between a living being’s sense of itself and its attitude towards the world, both in terms of the objects to be found there and in terms of the actions to be done in it.¹¹⁸ So, for instance, a dog will be attracted to dog-food on the basis of its (rough and inarticulate) sense of itself as a dog, and will play with other dogs on the basis of its sense that this befits its nature – this is what dogs do.

A human child develops itself into a rational being. At first, it has a sense of itself as a child. According to the Stoics, this is not so different from a non-human animal’s sense of itself. The sense that the child has of itself is also a confused sense. It is imprecise.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, this sense of itself allows it to move about in the world, striving for what benefits, shrinking from what harms it, and doing the things that

¹¹⁸ A recent discussion in Vogt 2008a: 99-108. The classic modern account is Pembroke 1971. Lee 2002 provides a good overview of interpretative debates surrounding the sources for this theory.

¹¹⁹ Sen. *Ep.* 121.12-3. See Tieleman 1996: 177-85 (this concerns the meaning of «συναίσθησις»).

suit it. It also strives for a cognitive grasp of things; what particular concepts it will acquire depends on what things are present in its environment. As a child develops into a wise adult, however, a few things are different (restricting ourselves to an ideal pattern of development, as many sources do). The nature of a wise adult is different from the nature of a child, so that the human being's sense of itself is a sense of something different in the two cases.¹²⁰ Furthermore, the wise adult has a clear, rather than a confused, sense of herself. This clearer grasp involves her being able to distinguish herself from her body, while identifying herself with her rationality – her thought (διάνοια), as our sources say.¹²¹ As well as a sense that her body belongs to, but is different from, herself, she now has a sense of the bond between her soul (herself) and her body, a bond that she has as part of the divine order of the cosmos, and of how she can preserve this bond.¹²² This latter sense will be the point of departure for her in deciding at each moment which of the many actions that are open to her she should select.

From this description of the theory of οἰκείωσις it is clear that what an animal will do, and what external objects an animal will identify with, is based on its perception of what it is. In the wise person this is no different. It is also clear from this description that the wise person's understanding of herself is something different from her understanding of her body, or her understanding of the particular actions that are suitable for her to do. These are, in a certain sense, secondary to her understanding of her soul. However, even if her understanding of herself as a soul is self-understanding in the strict sense, we may also call her grasp of her bond with her particular body self-understanding of a kind. In order to distinguish these, I refer to the former as self-understanding and as our understanding of who we are; while I refer to the latter as our understanding of the kind of being that we have.

Our self-understanding in the strict sense, and our consequent behaviour in a community of rationality, is the terminus of moral development. It is presented as such in one text, Cicero's *De Finibus* (3.20ff.). We have seen some of it at the beginning of this chapter and will return to it at the end (3.4, T28-30).¹²³ Other texts on οἰκείωσις, however, focus on the earlier stages of moral development. Some focus on the way that God (or nature) has established a match between the sense of themselves that living beings have and their actions in preservation of themselves.¹²⁴ Other texts discuss how it comes naturally to animals to have a concern for their offspring and other members of their species; these discussions often serve to argue that it is proper to human nature to care for others.¹²⁵

While these contexts involve the rationality of cosmic nature and are, in that sense, of a piece with the wise person's understanding of herself as rational, they do not tell

¹²⁰ See note 111.

¹²¹ Hierocles in Stob. 4.671.7-15 (cit. note 105).

¹²² In speaking of a bond, I try to express the relative function of the word «σύστασις» in our sources, as a name for the soul *qua* being disposed in a certain way towards the body (see above, 3.2.3).

¹²³ A focus on the final stage of οἰκείωσις can be discerned in Chrysippus's comment, reported by Galen, that «ἡμᾶς ὠκείωσθαι πρὸς μόνον τὸ καλόν» (*PHP* 5.5.8).

¹²⁴ DL 7.85ff. most particularly.

¹²⁵ E.g. Cicero, *Fin.* 3.62-8.

us what it is for a wise person to understand herself. For one thing, this is because most of the accounts of the theory of οἰκείωσις are about something other than our self-understanding in the strict sense. What accounts of οἰκείωσις tell us is how particular beings get to the stage when they acquire self-understanding in the strict sense: they give us a biography. What accounts of οἰκείωσις also tell us is what it is appropriate for a particular kind of being to do: they specify a wise person's behaviour. Secondly, and more importantly, what the wise person will consider οἰκεῖον to herself is based on her grasp of what she is; but the sources that speak of οἰκείωσις are not explicit about what it is for the wise person to grasp herself.

The accounts of οἰκείωσις that we have, then, do not give us an account of what it is to understand ourselves. Such an account must be reconstructed from what the sources tell us about the nature of understanding, and about the general characteristics of God's activity, which apply to the human soul *par excellence*. I attempt to give such an account in this section. Nevertheless, a full account of what a human being experiences and must do in her life will have to address both the self-study of λόγος that is our focus here and the relevant description in terms of οἰκείωσις. An account of the latter must therefore complement what I offer here.

2 PRELIMINARY (II) – AN ACCOUNT THAT IS NOT OF SELF-PERCEPTION

When we ask ourselves what it is to understand ourselves, many scholars point to the following text from Hierocles. Let us therefore consider this text first, and see whether it can help us answer our question (I will argue that it cannot).

Hierocles tries to establish the thesis that animals have awareness of themselves from birth and until they die. The summary of his argument is as follows.

T19	<p>Since then the living being is nothing other in kind than something composed, of body and of soul, and both are touchable, collidable, and liable to resistance; since they are moreover wholly mixed and the latter of these is a perceptive power, and just this moves in the way which we have demonstrated, it is clear that the living being perceives itself continuously. Stretching outwards, the soul collides with all the parts of the body as it lets go, since it is also mixed with all parts, and as it collides it is collided with in return. For the body too is sturdy, in the same way as the soul. And a co-resistant and counter-resistant effect results. And, ceding from the ultimate parts it is referred back towards the government of the chest, so that an apprehension takes place of all the parts of the body and of the soul. And that is the same as that the living being</p>	<p>Ἐπεὶ τοίνυν γένος οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἐστὶ τὸ ζῶον ἢ τὸ σύνθετον, ἐκ σώματος καὶ ψυχῆς, ἄμφω δ' ἐστὶ θικτὰ καὶ πρόσβλητα καὶ τῇ προσερείσει δὴ ὑπόπτωτα, ἔτι δὲ δι' ὅλων κέκρται, καὶ θάτερον μὲν ἐστὶν αὐτῶν δύναμις αἰσθητική, τὸ δ' αὐτὸ τοῦτο καὶ τρόπον, ὃν ὑπεδείξαμεν, κινεῖται, δῆλον ὅτι διανεκῶς αἰσθάνοιτ' ἂν τὸ ζῶον ἑαυτοῦ. τεινομένη γὰρ ἔξω ἢ ψυχὴ μετ' ἀφέσεως προσβάλλει πᾶσι τοῦ σώματος τοῖς μέρεσιν, ἐπειδὴ καὶ κέκρται πᾶσι, προσβάλλουσα δὲ ἀντιπροσβάλλεται· ἀντιβατικὸν γὰρ καὶ τὸ σῶμα, καθάπερ καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ· καὶ τὸ πάθος συνεριστικὸν ὁμοῦ καὶ ἀντεριστικὸν ἀποτελεῖται. καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν μερῶν τῶν ἄκρων εἴσω νεῦον ἐπὶ τὴν ἡγεμονίαν τοῦ στήθους εἰσάναφέρεται, ὡς ἀντίληψιν γίνεσθαι μερῶν ἀπάντων τῶν τε τοῦ σώματος καὶ τῶν τῆς ψυχῆς· τοῦτο δὲ ἐστὶν ἴσον</p>
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| perceives itself. (*El.* 4.38-52)¹²⁶

| τῷ τὸ ζῶον αἰσθάνεσθαι ἑαυτοῦ.

This passage is often read as establishing that the living being perceives the parts of its body and the parts of its soul, and as such provides a complete account of what it is for an animal to perceive itself.¹²⁷ If it were, T19 was an important text for reconstructing Stoic thought on self-understanding. However, I think that this type of reading is mistaken. I think we should turn to other evidence to discover what it is for, specifically, a human being to understand herself.

The reason that this passage does not give an account of our self-perception is simply that it does not give us an account of how the soul can perceive its own parts. It is a description of how the soul perceives the parts of the body with which it is connected. All that is said here is that the mixture of body and soul, the latter's constant movement, and the joint fact of their materiality, i.e., of their resistance and extension, is enough to give the soul a perception of all of the body's parts *given that* the soul is a power to perceive.

Hierocles takes it for granted in T19 that the soul perceives its own parts. This is what enables him to say, at the end, that the living being perceives itself when it perceives the parts of its body and the parts of its soul. The latter part of that claim, however, that the living being perceives the parts of its soul, is not established by the argument that Hierocles develops here; nor does he think it does. For he has a different argument to establish the soul's self-perception. We have seen this before (T8): Hierocles claims that the higher powers execute their own functions with regard to themselves; this applies eminently to the power to perceive.

We may note that Hierocles is speaking of the sense of self of all animals. Since this is not, therefore, the clear grasp of self of the wise person, there is no strict separation, here, between an understanding of what you are and an understanding of what kind of being you have. Hierocles's purpose, moreover, does not require this strict separation yet. What he is concerned with is to establish that animals have, from their birth onwards and throughout their lives, the kind of awareness of their needs and capacities that will enable them to pursue advantageous things and to reject disadvantageous ones from among the many things they encounter in their environments. The mechanism described in T19 underlies the other observations Hierocles makes about the self-perceptive behaviour of animals. Among these are the expert use of their body parts, which they do not appear to have derived from trial and error; and a good sense of the strengths and weaknesses of different body parts. By calling attention to observations of this kind, Hierocles is writing about some of the conditions for the process of οἰκείωσις.¹²⁸ He is concerned, not with self-

¹²⁶ = LS 53B (but note that their text is not yet based on the new text in Bastianini and Long (1992); the text I give is based on this and the corrigenda of Bastianini and Long 2002).

¹²⁷ E.g. Graver 2007: 23f., who specifies that the soul's perception of itself is 'indirect'; Gill 2006: 40-1; Long 1993; Arnim 1906: xxvi-xxviii. Similarly Inwood 1984: 164. Cf. Pembroke 1971: 119. In the passage, the soul's sensation of itself is presented as a condition of perception of other things, no matter whether that is the body or something else. Long and Sedley's translation of ἀντιβατικόν (I.47) as 'reacts to pressure' takes more than the text gives it.

¹²⁸ Seneca's 121st letter contains a parallel discussion. For a recent commentary on this letter see Inwood 2007: 332-46. It is significant that Seneca adduces as evidence of animals'

understanding *per se*, but with your awareness of what species you belong to, and of your opportunities for survival. However, the Stoic account of what self-understanding in the strict sense is, is much more specific to God's activity in human beings: understanding itself.

3 THE PARTS OF REASON – OR THE COHESION OF ΛΟΓΟΣ

In order to determine what the soul's self-understanding amounts to, let us first look at what it means to say that πνεῦμα is λόγος in humans; in other words, what is the rational nature of human souls? A very important text for our purposes is the following from Galen. The text starts by citing Chrysippus, and then has Galen's comment; the reference of the opening 'those' is unclear and the very subject of Galen's attack.

T20	<p>Those are parts of the soul, of which the λόγος in it [the soul] and its arrangement are composed. And a soul is beautiful or shameful according to whether its ruling part is thus or thus with respect to its proper divisions. [...] perhaps you are reminding us of the things you wrote in <i>On λόγος</i> that you have gone through, that it is a collection of particular concepts and anticipations. (PHP 5.2.49f., 5.3.1)¹²⁹</p>	<p>ἔστι δέ <γε> τῆς ψυχῆς μέρη δι' ὧν ὁ ἐν αὐτῇ λόγος συνέστηκε καὶ ἡ ἐν αὐτῷ διάθεσις. Καὶ ἔστι καλὴ ἢ αἰσχρὰ ψυχὴ κατὰ τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν μόνιον ἔχον <οὕτως> ἢ οὕτως κατὰ τοὺς οἰκείους μερισμούς. [...] ἀναμνησκῶν ἴσως ἡμᾶς τῶν ἐν τοῖς Περὶ τοῦ λόγου γεγραμμένων ὧν σὺ διήλθες, ὡς ἔστιν ἐννοιῶν τέτινων καὶ προλήψεων ἄθροισμα.</p>
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Here we are told, in a citation from Chrysippus's work on the matter, that λόγος is a collection of concepts. This description reminds us of what Epictetus calls λόγος in T12: a 'composite out of certain presentations'. The citation in T20 seems to be more precise and technical. The anticipations of which he speaks are notions that we acquire spontaneously in the course of our childhood as well as later; these are deemed reliable, because they are based on cataleptic presentations. In combination with 'anticipations', 'concepts' refers to our other set of notions, which we develop as a result of our active involvement, through study and instruction, for instance.¹³⁰ What Chrysippus calls a collection is the result of a process of articulation, by which rough notions – anticipations and concepts – are explicated and connected to each

awareness of their bodies not just their agility in moving their body parts, but also their behaviour with respect to other animals. That behaviour seems to point to an awareness on the part of animals of what other animals are harmful to them and what animals are not. This awareness has little to do with self-perception in a strict or theoretical sense.

¹²⁹ LS 53V, in SVF 2.841, 3.471a. Cf. Brittain 2005: 166-85, who devotes more space than I have to the content of concepts; and the contrasting analysis of Schofield 1980: 293-8.

Compare with T20 Stobaeus 2.62.22-63.5: «τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ὑγίαιαν εὐκρᾶσιαν εἶναι τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ δογμάτων. [...] καὶ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς κάλλος ἐστὶ συμμετρία τοῦ λόγου καὶ τῶν μερῶν αὐτοῦ πρὸς <τὸ> ὅλον τε αὐτοῦ [αὐτῆς Wachsmuth] καὶ πρὸς ἄλληλα.» I submit that this supports exactly the kind of interpretation that I develop in the text.

¹³⁰ Cf. Aetius 4.11 (= SVF 2.83). The term «ἐννοια» is used both for the genus of which πρόληψις is a species and for its sister species.

other.¹³¹ It is therefore not just a collection, but an ordered one, in which the constituent elements are connected to each other in the right ways.

It is Galen who has brought the two passages from Chrysippus together. Our text is lifted from a discussion of the statement ‘Those are parts of the soul...’, which Galen cites once more at the beginning. In the discussion as a whole, Galen argues that Chrysippus is inconsistent.¹³² This calls for some caution about the citations and connections that Galen brings to our attention. But Galen’s juxtaposition of these particular citations is an intelligent one, for it seems that the notions that arise in the ruling part of the soul can indeed be called parts of it. Modern scholars have on the whole agreed with Galen that Chrysippus’s calling notions ‘parts’ is misplaced.¹³³ However, this seems perfectly justified. Compare the following statement that one of Plutarch’s characters attributes to a Stoic philosopher:

T21	[Chrysippus] took away completely the confusion about anticipations and concepts, analysing each and putting them in their proper place. (<i>Com. Not.</i> 1059b-c) ¹³⁴	τὸν δὲ περὶ τὰς προλήψεις καὶ τὰς ἐννοίας τάραχον ἀφελῶν παντάπασι καὶ διαρθρώσας ἐκάστην καὶ θέμενος εἰς τὸ οἰκεῖον·
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Chrysippus has been analyzing notions and so worked towards a perfect collection of concepts. This removal of confusion and, presumably, creation of order, is also described as the allocation of each concept to its proper place, to where it belongs. You might read this as a manner of speaking only; whenever confusion is brought to order, you put the elements of the whole where they belong. But it is much more plausible that ‘proper place’ («τὸ οἰκεῖον») is meant quite literally as the place in the network of understanding that is due to each concept, that is naturally and properly its. The remark is aimed against the sceptics, who have taken away – the Stoic philosopher complains – confidence in the natural notions through confusion and destruction, pitting one plausible idea against another. Against them, Chrysippus has come and restored the order of things that the sceptics applied *pêle-mêle*. The articulation that he has brought to bear on this confusion has surely started from the cataleptic presentations that are the primary criterion of truth. *Via* his working out of definitions, Chrysippus has shown the connections between different grasps and notions. He has shown that different grasps do not contradict each other at all, once you set them in their proper order.¹³⁵

¹³¹ The process is *διάρθρωσις* (cf. DL 7.199, in SVF 2.16). Cf. Tieleman 1996: 201f.

¹³² His response to the second citation from Chrysippus is, for instance: «πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ οὐ ψυχῆς ἐχρῆν, ἀλλὰ λόγου ταῦτ’ εἶναι μόρια φάσκειν [...] οὐ γὰρ δήπου ταυτόν ἐστι ψυχὴ καὶ λόγος». It seems to me, however, that Chrysippus can maintain the identity of ψυχὴ and λόγος if he wishes to speak of the highest part of the ψυχὴ, which we are told is more often referred to as ψυχὴ (SE M. 7.234).

¹³³ Inwood (1985: 164) and Brittain (2005: 170) treat Galen’s reconstruction as if no reconstruction had taken place at all, and the first and second halves of T20 were a continuous exposition by Chrysippus. Inwood thinks it ‘hard not to sympathise with Galen’s criticisms of Chrysippus for calling this sort of thing a “part” of the soul.’ (1985: 303n.165) LS take the reference to be to the faculties that Iamblichus (Stob. 1.368.19-20, in SVF 2.826, LS 53K) ascribes to the Stoics – presentation, assent, impulse, λόγος – ‘misleadingly called parts’ (p. 321).

¹³⁴ in SVF 2.33, LS 40G.

¹³⁵ Cf. Epictetus on the discovery of a standard of judgement: «τοῦτο γὰρ, οἶμαι,

It is just that order of concepts that is *λόγος* in us. If we compare T20 with T21, we notice that the second mentions the *proper* place of concepts, while the first mentions the *proper* divisions in the ruling part of the soul. It is plausible that this comment in T21 has its origins in Chrysippus's own methodological comments about what he does. And in this way T21 helps us to bridge the gap between the two halves of T20, and to conclude that Galen was right to identify concepts as the parts of *λόγος* that Chrysippus was referring to. To be sure, places and divisions are not the same, but it is easy to see how the assignment of proper places to concepts results in proper divisions-into-parts (μερισμούς) and *vice versa*.¹³⁶ Once all concepts have been allocated to the places that are theirs, they constitute the order that is *λόγος* – which all along has determined for each concept what its proper place is. Chrysippus underlines this aspect when he adds 'and its arrangement', as a specification of the way in which *λόγος* is composed of concepts.

Talk of places and divisions suggests a rather physicalist way of looking at things, which may arouse suspicion of simplicity.¹³⁷ And it is only proper to emphasise that the collection of concepts is not a collection of books on a shelf, nor is articulation shelving.¹³⁸ Yet we should recall that concepts are permanent alterations in the πνεῦμα of the soul. Chrysippus's simile of voices in the air – meant as an improvement on the image of seals in wax – is as doggedly physicalist as is its predecessor. Even the elements of the simile are physical: air is corporeal, and so are voices.¹³⁹ The advantage of voices in the air over imprints in wax is that there is evidently enough place in the air for a lot of voices. But the disorder of many voices in the air of, for instance, a restaurant is due to the disorder in which people speak. Nothing prevents each of the voices to have its proper place. So also each of the concepts can quite literally have its proper place in the soul. An important difference between books on a shelf and concepts in the mind, however, is that the concepts are active. They consist of πνεῦμα, and that means that they are as active as other bits of πνεῦμα.¹⁴⁰ We will return to their activity (3.3.9).

You may object that concepts cannot be part of *λόγος* because they do not exist, according to the Stoics. But let me clarify that I speak here of concepts as the

ἔστιν ὁ εὐρεθὲν ἀπαλλάσσει μανίας τοὺς μόνῳ τῷ δοκεῖν μέτρῳ πάντων χρωμένους, ἵνα λοιπὸν ἀπὸ τινῶν γνωρίμων καὶ διευκρινημένων ὀρμώμενοι χρώμεθα ἐπὶ τῶν ἐπὶ μέρους διηρθρωμέναις ταῖς προλήψεσι.»

¹³⁶ Compare the process of division into genera and species, DL 7.61-2 (LS 32C and 30C).

Note, however, that this division seems to be about genera and species *qua* universals; it is therefore not identical to the physical arrangement of concepts in the soul. These processes will certainly correspond, but the genera and species included in the division are not physical themselves, but only fictions (see below in the text).

¹³⁷ Cf. the similarly physicalist tone of Aetius's «ὁ δὲ λόγος ... ἐκ τῶν προλήψεων συμπληροῦσθαι λέγεται» (4.11.4 = in SVF 2.83, in LS 39E), my emph.

¹³⁸ Although there seems to be a sense in which the Stoics can say, of concepts that are not in the forefront of mental activity at any one moment, that they are 'stored': Plut. *Soll.* 961C: «ὥσπερ ἀμέλει καὶ τὰ περὶ τὰς νοήσεις, ἃς ἐναποκειμένας μὲν ἐννοίας καλοῦσι κινουμένας δὲ διανοήσεις»; cf. Philo *Imm.* 34.

¹³⁹ SE *M.* 7.228-31 (= SVF 1.56). Voices are air struck in a certain way, presumably having a certain configuration as a result. Of course voices are not reducible to the word 'air' or to the stuff air generally; but (*pace* Graver 2007: 64-5) they *are* identical to the very particular piece of air that they are.

¹⁴⁰ Rightly so Graver 2007: 26.

modifications of the soul's πνεῦμα, which are corporeal and so do exist (ἔννοιαι rather than ἐννοήματα). The term 'concept' is ambiguous between a part of the physical content of the mind and the abstract types to which our words may be said to refer. It is the first which I speak of, and the second which the Stoics regarded as non-existent, in polemical reference to Plato's forms – these are mere figments of the mind, as the Stoics put it.¹⁴¹

4 THE FOUR SENSES OF UNDERSTANDING

Let us return to the thought that λόγος in us is constituted by the right order of concepts. What the Stoics have to say about understanding agrees with this view of λόγος, and that includes the physicalist talk of places and divisions. This is significant, because understanding is ultimately the same as λόγος as it should be, the stage of πνεῦμα which a human being reaches precisely by having understanding. The Stoics say that understanding is 'the ruling part disposed in a certain way' (see T23). Understanding and the ruling part of the soul are therefore extensionally identical. We can expand that statement to λόγος as it should be. In examining understanding, we examine what the human soul is as well as what cognition is. Both aspects are united in the notion of the strength of the wise soul; this is the strength of the order of λόγος in the soul, which is both cognitive and physical.

As is his wont, Arius Didymus (*via* Stobaeus) gives us an overview of the different senses in which the Stoics speak of understanding (ἐπιστήμη):

T22	<p>[They say] that understanding is a robust grasp, unchangeable by λόγος. In another sense understanding is a composite out of grasps of this kind, such as that of particulars, which is present as rational in the good person. In yet another sense it is a composite of expert understandings that has firmness from itself, as the virtues do. In another sense it is a state that accepts presentations which is unchangeable by λόγος, which they say lies in tension and power. (Stob. 2.73.19-74.3)¹⁴²</p>	<p>Εἶναι δὲ τὴν ἐπιστήμην κατάληψιν ἀσφαλῆ καὶ ἀμετάπτωτον ὑπὸ λόγου· ἐτέρως δὲ ἐπιστήμην σύστημα ἐκ καταλήψεων¹⁴³ τοιούτων, οἷον ἢ τῶν κατὰ μέρος, λογικὴ ἐν τῷ σπουδαίῳ ὑπάρχουσα· ἄλλως δὲ σύστημα ἐξ ἐπιστημῶν τεχνικῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἔχον τὸ βέβαιον, ὡς ἔχουσιν αἱ ἀρεταί· ἄλλως δὲ ἕξιν φαντασιῶν δεκτικὴν ἀμετάπτωτον ὑπὸ λόγου, ἣν τινὰ φασιν ἐν τόνῳ καὶ δυνάμει κείσθαι.</p>
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5 UNDERSTANDING IS THE SOUL

A first observation to make from this passage is that understanding is inherent in human beings. It is a description of human souls in a certain condition. Understanding in the second sense is said to be 'present as rational in the good person'. Likewise, the example of the virtues in the third sense is sufficient to identify

¹⁴¹ Stob. 1.136.21-137.6; DL 7.61 (both SVF 1.65, LS 30A resp. C). Sometimes the word 'conception' is reserved for «ἐννοια».

¹⁴² in SVF 3.112, = LS41H.

¹⁴³ The manuscripts give «ἐξ ἐπιστημῶν» for «ἐκ καταλήψεων», which is Wachsmuth's emendation. The emendation is, I think, unneeded. Anyhow, the sense remains the same.

this, too, as something that a human being has or develops. Nor is the ‘state’ mentioned in the fourth sense anything other than a state of the wise soul. We might be tempted to think of ἐπιστήμη as an impersonal body of knowledge, which you can acquire, or in accordance with which things must be done. But that is not how the Stoics think about ἐπιστήμη. Understanding, in their view, is to be identified with the cognitive apparatus of the perfect human being. This also applies, incidentally, to truth, which is ultimately the same as understanding. The following passage from Sextus, from a discussion of the differences between what is true and truth, makes this especially clear.

T23	But truth is a body – for it is understanding that declares everything that is true, and understanding is the ruling part disposed in a certain way, just as the hand disposed in a certain way is a fist, and the ruling part is a body; for it is πνεῦμα, according to them. (PH 2.81) ¹⁴⁴	ἡ δὲ ἀλήθεια σῶμα (ἔστι γὰρ ἐπιστήμη πάντων ἀληθῶν ἀποφαντική, ἡ δὲ ἐπιστήμη πῶς ἔχον ἡγεμονικόν ὡσπερ καὶ ἡ πῶς ἔχουσα χεῖρ πυγμῆ, τὸ δὲ ἡγεμονικόν σῶμα ἔστι γὰρ κατ’ αὐτοῦς πνεῦμα)
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Speaking of understanding, then, we are speaking of nothing other than the ruling part of the soul. And this, we know, is to be identified with λόγος in human beings. The λόγος of the wise *is* understanding, *is* truth. We speak of λόγος when we speak of understanding. The converse does not always hold. As well as in a normative way, the Stoics speak of λόγος in a descriptive way as something all human beings have. In such descriptive contexts only the λόγος of the wise is understanding.¹⁴⁵

At the same time, we should note the flexibility of Stoic talk about understanding. They are prepared to speak of understanding on a smaller scale as well, for instance. The grasps out of which the whole of understanding is composed may also be called understanding (provided they are ‘robust’).

6 THE STRENGTH OF UNDERSTANDING – UNALTERABILITY

A recurrent theme throughout the four senses that are given to us in T22 is unalterability. The first way in which the Stoics use ‘understanding’ is to refer to those presentations that are not only cataleptic but also safe and not changed by λόγος; presumably the contrasting case imagined here is that you are confronted with a piece of reasoning, which you might have come up with yourself or with which someone else confronts you, in which you discover much that makes sense, so much so that you abandon the impression that you originally had of something. If you are wise, however, you have presentations that are not merely reliable and accurate, but also of such a quality that you do not have to retract your assent to them later on.¹⁴⁶

The second sense of understanding covers understanding of particulars, we are told. This is made of ‘such grasps’, i.e. the ones that can be called understanding in

¹⁴⁴ in LS 33P.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. what we noted in 3.1.2.6.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Bonhöffer 1968a: 185 on dialectic as what ‘braces’ presentations.

the first sense. We can reasonably take understanding in this second sense to refer to the level of concepts (worked-out ones, to be sure). In the wise person, concepts share with the cataleptic presentations of which they are the result the unalterability by λόγος. In addition, however, they are said to be logical or rational (λογική). The word used here indicates something that pertains to λόγος, perhaps by being its material, or by being its product, or by being a part of it. Rather than being alterable by λόγος, this kind of grasp is composed in accordance with it.

Something stronger applies to the third sense of understanding. This is made up of ‘expert understandings’. It is reasonable to identify these with understandings in the second sense, that is, with concepts, or at least with something of that level of complexity.¹⁴⁷ In view of our discussion of λόγος above, therefore, in which we established that it is composed of concepts, we may identify this third sense of understanding with the λόγος in the wise person. It stands to reason that this kind of understanding is no more alterable by λόγος than are the other senses, since it *is* λόγος. And indeed, Arius Didymus tells us that it has its firmness in virtue of itself.

Finally, the referent of the fourth sense of understanding agrees with the referent of the third, in *being* the state that is unalterable by λόγος. The third sense emphasises the order and constitution of λόγος in the human soul, whereas the fourth describes the role of the λόγος of the human soul in the acquisition of further cognitive content. Understanding in the fourth sense is therefore also a prerequisite for understanding in the first sense: it is by being part of, and being embedded in, the logical state of the soul that cataleptic presentations are made safe and impervious to change by λόγος.

Each of the four senses in which the Stoics use ‘understanding’, therefore, highlights the stability and reliability of this type of cognition. We have seen, moreover, that this stability is due to λόγος. Robust cataleptic presentations differ from other cataleptic presentations in being made part of the λόγος of the human soul, and thereby being exempted from alteration by λόγος. In its third sense, moreover, understanding is to be identified in some way with λόγος. The strength of understanding, in other words, is the strength of λόγος, of right order. And this is what we would expect. Understanding concerns the way the world is. The only way in which it is sure to remain unalterable by the order of the world is in having that order itself.

¹⁴⁷ This is reasonable from the logic of the passage, proceeding as it does from smaller to greater, or from part to whole. It is also reasonable in view of the formulations used; «τεχνικῶν» is not unreasonably read as expanding on «λογική», both of these being words to describe that which pertains to something methodical. The added advantage of the identification is that we can read this passage as relatively self-contained, with no need to import a specific meaning for ἐπιστημῶν τεχνικῶν from elsewhere. If the description of concepts as expert understandings seems strange, we should remind ourselves that the Stoics recognised a class of presentations (even) which they called ‘expert’ (DL 7.51, in SVF 2.61, LS 39A). Wachsmuth (*app. crit. ad loc.*) is suspicious about «ἐπιστημῶν» and considers «ἐμπειριῶν» and «ἐπιτηδευσμάτων»; the progression of the passage is a sufficient reason to hold on to the manuscript reading.

7 THE STRENGTH OF UNDERSTANDING – UNWAVERINGNESS

That same theme of strength – the strength of λόγος and understanding – is present particularly in the last line of T22. We are told that the unalterable state that accepts presentations lies in tension and power. It is clear from this comment that the strong tension of the wise soul is directly responsible for the quality of the cognitive content that the wise acquire. On a more general level, the soul's tension is also directly responsible for – indeed, to be identified with – its understanding. Perfect understanding, moreover, is the epistemological equivalent of the greatest tension. An understanding soul is a piece of πνεῦμα at its most powerful and having the highest tension – at least as far as human beings are concerned, but we have seen already that the top of humanity equals the gods.

The contrast between the strength of the wise and the weakness of foolish people is illustrative.¹⁴⁸ And note that all non-wise people are fools.

T24	<p>They also say that each worthless person is mad, being ignorant of himself and of what belongs to him, which is madness. Ignorance is the vice opposite to intelligence; and this, something disposed to something in a certain way, is madness, they say, in making your impulses disorderly and fluttering; and this is why they characterise madness thus: fluttery-like ignorance. (Stob. 2.68.18-23)¹⁴⁹</p>	<p>Ἔτι δὲ λέγουσι πάντα φαῦλον μαίνεσθαι, ἄγνοιαν ἔχοντα αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν καθ' αὐτόν, ὅπερ ἐστὶ μανία. Τὴν δ' ἄγνοιαν εἶναι ἐναντίαν κακίαν τῇ φρονήσει· ταύτην δὲ πρὸς τί πως ἔχουσιν ἀκαταστάτους καὶ πτοιώδεις παρεχομένην τὰς ὁρμὰς μανίαν εἶναι· διὸ καὶ ὑπογράφουσι τὴν μανίαν οὕτως· ἄγνοιαν πτοιώδη.</p>
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According to the Stoics, then, those who do not understand themselves are fools, and have disordered and wavering impulses. The disorder mentioned is no surprise for us, who have seen that order is the essential characteristic of a reasonable soul. The fluttering referred to here is an effect of the weakness of the non-wise soul, and is reminiscent especially of Stoic descriptions of emotions (πάθη).¹⁵⁰ It is worth our while to look at these briefly. For although Stoic thought on emotions is a large topic, we need to look at them only insofar as they are presented as the visible side of weakness, as the stuff of vice.

Emotions are the opposite of the firm presentations and judgments of the wise. Cognitively, they are judgments that something good or something bad is present somewhere other than in the human mind. These are therefore misjudgments, and an immediate breach of the harmony of the soul with itself and the cosmos. Physically, they are contractions or elations of the soul.¹⁵¹ They have no constancy whatsoever over time, but are the soul's vacillations. For the Stoics did not think that there are conflicting parts in the soul, as is suggested in some of Plato's dialogues. As Plutarch reports it:

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Nussbaum's remarks from the therapeutical perspective (1994: 317, 321).

¹⁴⁹ = SVF 3.663, LS 41I.

¹⁵⁰ Stob. 2.88.11-2 (= SVF 3.378, LS 65A): «διὸ καὶ πᾶσαν πτοιάν πάθος εἶναι, <καὶ> πάλιν <πᾶν> πάθος πτοιάν.»

¹⁵¹ Andronicus *Passions* 1 (SVF 3.391).

T25 | Some say that emotion is no different from λόγος, and there is no difference or conflict in the two either, but rather the turning of one and the same λόγος to both sides; it escapes our notice by the sharpness and swiftness of the change, as we do not see that it is the same thing about the soul which is such as to desire and to change heart, to become angry and to cower, to be carried to what is shameful by pleasure and as it is carried away to check itself again. For they say that desire and anger and fear and all things of that kind are bad judgements and decisions, which do not appear about one part of the soul, but rather are the whole ruling part's inclinations, yieldings, assents, impulses, and in general activities that change in little time, as also the rushes of children are vehement, easy to trip up due to lack of strength, and unstable. (Plut. *VM* 446f-47a)¹⁵²

ἔνιοι δέ φασιν οὐχ ἕτερον εἶναι τοῦ λόγου τὸ πάθος οὐδὲ δεῖν διαφορὰν καὶ στάσιν, ἀλλ' ἐνὸς λόγου τροπήν ἐπ' ἀμφοτέρα, λαυθάνουσιν ἡμᾶς ὀξύτητι καὶ τάχει μεταβολῆς, οὐ συνορώντας ὅτι ταῦτόν ἐστι τῆς ψυχῆς ᾧ πέφυκεν ἐπιθυμῆν καὶ μετανοεῖν, ὀργίζεσθαι καὶ δεδιέναι, φέρεσθαι πρὸς τὸ αἰσχροὺν ὑφ' ἡδονῆς καὶ φερομένης πάλιν αὐτῆς ἐπιλαμβάνεσθαι· καὶ γὰρ ἐπιθυμίαν καὶ ὀργὴν καὶ φόβον καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα δόξας εἶναι καὶ κρίσεις πονηράς, οὐ περὶ ἓν τι γινομένης τῆς ψυχῆς μέρος, ἀλλ' ὅλου τοῦ ἡγεμονικοῦ ῥοπᾶς καὶ εἴξεις καὶ συγκαταθέσεις καὶ ὀρμᾶς καὶ ὅλως ἐνεργείας τινὰς οὔσας ἐν ὀλίγῳ μεταπτώτας, ὥσπερ αἱ τῶν παιδῶν ἐπιδρομαὶ τὸ ῥαγδαῖον καὶ τὸ σφοδρὸν ἐπισφαλές ὑπ' ἀσθενείας καὶ ἀβέβαιον ἔχουσι.

Rather than being a conflict of different parts of the soul, an emotion is the ruling part of the soul itself, engaged in a quick back-and-forth movement. The Stoics maintain this monistic description even while describing emotions as contrary to λόγος, and as movements in disobedience of λόγος; for even then, they say, it is a person's faculty of λόγος itself that is out of tune with itself.¹⁵³ What makes these strange proceedings possible is the very weakness of the non-wise soul. In physical terms, emotions testify to bad tension in the soul.¹⁵⁴ In cognitive terms, the non-wise are unable to subsume their presentations under the right concepts.¹⁵⁵ Most conspicuously, they consider to be good what is indifferent. This testifies to a faulty structure of concepts in their souls. For if the relevant concepts were connected properly in accordance with the way things are, they would never consider, say, the pleasure that derives from food as something in our control, something that we should make central to our well-being, something that is of real benefit to us, in short, something good. And it is the way in which the soul of the non-wise is a weak and disorderly structure that accounts for the successive subsumption under different concepts of one and the same thing, as when I praise someone when I am hungry and hate him when I have been well-fed.

The strong soul, in contrast, is steady, and stays its course. It is not overturned by the way things turn out to be. The causal course of things passes through it without obstacles, as Chrysippus writes.¹⁵⁶ In terms of her behaviour, this translates into the

¹⁵² In SVF 3.459, LS 61G. Likewise in 441c (SVF 3.459 too, and LS 61B).

¹⁵³ Stob. 2.88.8ff. = SVF 3.378, LS 65A.

¹⁵⁴ Gal. *PHP* 4.6.1-6, in SVF 3.473. Rist (1969: 88) notes the connection with a physical reading of εὐροια βίου (Stob. 2.77.20f. and SE *M* 11.30, both SVF 1.184).

¹⁵⁵ Epict. *Disc.* 2.11.8-9.

¹⁵⁶ Aulus Gellius 7.7f. (citing Chrysippus): 'Quamquam ita sit, inquit, ut ratione quadam necessaria et principali coacta atque conexa sint fato omnia, ingenia tamen ipsa mentium nostrarum proinde sunt fato obnoxia, ut proprietates eorum est ipsa et qualitas. Nam si sunt

wise person's correct intake of presentations and her correct response to these in terms of the impulses that she assents to, thus acting in conformity with nature. The centre of her being, which determines the quality of her presentations and is the source of her assent, has acquired the right coherence not to be swayed inappropriately by what comes at her.¹⁵⁷ It is this coherence that forms the strength of the wise soul, and that distinguishes it categorically from the foolish. There are no loose pneumatic ends in the wise soul; all its parts are connected together.

8 THE UNITY OF UNDERSTANDING

The strength of the wise soul has brought us to its unity and the unity of its understanding.¹⁵⁸ This theme is only implicitly present in T22, when it speaks of the high tension of understanding; we have seen before that tension goes with unity, and that a maximum of tension also implies a maximum of unity.¹⁵⁹ However, unity is a major concern in Stoic descriptions of understanding. We can see this from the texts in which expertise is characterised as a unity resulting from training; what applies to expertise also applies to understanding. The formula has come down to us in quite a number of versions, with minor variations. Sextus gives us a full version:

T26	Each expertise is a composite out of grasps that have been trained together, that have their reference towards a goal that is of good use for life. (M 2.10) ¹⁶⁰	πάσα τοίνυν τέχνη σύστημα ἐστὶν ἐκ καταλήψεων συγγεγυμνασμένων καὶ ἐπὶ τέλος εὐχρηστον τῷ βίῳ λαμβανόντων τὴν ἀναφορὰν.
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It would be less unidiomatic to translate «συγγεγυμνασμένων» by 'organised' or something similar, but it is significant that the Greek word conveys the sense of a process in which a multiplicity of raw material is shaped into one thing that takes its bearings with reference to one goal. While not every expertise can be called understanding in a strict sense, the structure is in each case the same, being one that has been laboured into unity.

Consistently with this, the idea of a σύστημα that occurs twice in T22 (and also in T12 and T26) contains the thought of unity from multiplicity as well. Σύστημα is first mentioned in the second sense of understanding, which is said to be a composite of grasps of the first kind («σύστημα ἐκ καταλήψεων τοιούτων»). Its second occurrence helps describe the third sense of understanding as a composite of expert

per naturam primitus salubriter utiliterque ficta, omnem illam vim, quae de fato extrinsecus ingruit, inoffensius tractabilisue transmittunt. Sin vero sunt aspera et incita et rudia nullisque artium bonarum adminiculis fulta, etiamsi parvo sive nullo fatalis incommodi conflictu urgeantur, sua tamen scaevitate et voluntario impetu in assidua delicta et in errores se ruunt.' Graver (2007: 65) calls attention to the architectural language of this passage. Compare, on the notion of a smooth flow, Sextus Empiricus M 7.242 (in SVF 2.65, LS 39G) on φαντασία πιθανὰ as producing a λείον κίνημα.

¹⁵⁷ In this sense her strength is her freedom (see SVF 1.218).

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Gill 2006: 151-7 on the mutual entailment of goodness and virtue, both conceived as revolving around the unity given by structure.

¹⁵⁹ See 3.1.1.6.

¹⁶⁰ See the texts in SVF 1.73 and SVF 2.93-6. The minor variations include ἐγγυμνασμένων for συγ-; and the specification «ἐφ' ἔν τέλος».

understandings («σύστημα ἐξ ἐπιστημῶν τεχνικῶν»¹⁶¹). In each case, we find on the next level a unity constituted by a plurality of items from the previous level.

From the perspective of unity, too, the wise person is conspicuously free from emotions. The soul's great unity makes for maximum contact among its parts. There is no way in which an incoming presentation ends up being linked with the wrong kinds of concepts, as happens in the case of emotions. One could compare a wise mind to an infallible sorting machine, which never allocates presentations of one kind to the concept of another, if that would not suggest a passivity that does not fit the wise mind, which is inherently active.

A final domain in which we can see the importance of unity as a description of the wise soul is its coherence with respect to time. In a straightforward sense the wise soul agrees with itself over time; this is one of the most basic demands of the Stoic demand of a life in agreement.¹⁶² What I mean here is rather the coherence of the wise soul's judgements about what has happened, what happens now, and what will happen. In contradistinction to other animals, human beings are in principle able to keep in mind what happened in the past, as well as to predict and imagine what will happen in the sometimes distant future. The coherence of λόγος is a coherence over time as well as one across space; and this applies to the λόγος in the human soul just as much as to the cosmic λόγος. It is this idea which makes divination such an important topic for the Stoics. Providence has tied events to each other both in direct causal chains and in correlations across causal chains.¹⁶³ Particular bird movements are tied to particular events, not because they are their direct causes or effects, but because the causal chains of the events and of the bird movements run parallel. A divination expert is able to tie these events together in thought just as they are tied together in the world. Her mind brings together future and past just as much as left and right. This is partly what Chrysippus refers to in his alternative formulation of the happy life as the life of an expert in what goes together by nature («κατ' ἐμπειρίαν τῶν φύσει συμβαινόντων ζῆν»¹⁶⁴). The wise are experts in things that naturally go together; that expertise enables them to connect the right actions to the right perceptual input,

¹⁶¹ We should, I think, resist the temptation to translate «σύστημα» by 'system', for the English implies a complexity and expansion that is only marginally present in the range of meaning of σύστημα. (LS do so, for instance: 41H; Inwood and Gerson (1997: 210) even have 'complex system'). The emphasis in «σύστημα» here – merely the product noun of the verb «συνίστημι» 'to make stand together' – is on the unity and coherence of a σύστημα as resulting from a plurality of input.

¹⁶² This is certainly the first application of the formula ὁμολογουμένως ζῆν, which is not at all an unfinished one. Whether it was Stobaeus himself or the authors he read, his comment in 2.76.1-3 is highly misleading: «Οἱ δὲ μετὰ τοῦτον προσδιαρθροῦντες οὕτως ἐξέφερον «ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν» ὑπολαβόντες ἔλαττον εἶναι κατηγορήματα τὸ ὑπὸ τοῦ Ζήνωνος ῥηθέν.»

¹⁶³ Cf. Cic. *Div.* 1.118 (= SVF 2.1210, in LS 42E).

¹⁶⁴ DL 7.87 (in SVF 3.4, LS 63C); Stob. 2.76.8 (in SVF 3.12, LS 63B); cf. Gal. *PHP* 5.6 (in SVF 3.12). It seems a little weak to translate this as, e.g., 'what happens by nature' (LS in 63C); likewise Cicero *Fin.* 2.34, 3.31, 4.14 ('eveniant'). Chrysippus's concern has surely been to make the wise person expert of natural processes, not through empirical knowledge of history, but through an insight in the logical causal nexûs in nature, which after all are also represented in the conditional propositions of logic (and the wise person is expert in dialectic).

not for the sake of those actions or that input, but for the sake of the order that dictates their connection.

As a unity of different cognitive elements and of present, past, and future, the understanding of the wise soul – that is, the soul itself in its best configuration – corresponds to the order of the cosmos. Significantly, this itself is also called understanding. We may throw some light on human understanding if we consider this cosmic understanding. In a text from Aristocles preserved in Eusebius's *Preparation of the Gospel*, we read the following:

T27	<p>Meanwhile, they say, the primary fire is like some seed, containing the λόγοι and causes of all things, of those that were, those that are, and those that will be. And the weaving together and sequence of these is the fate, understanding, truth, and law of all things, which is inevitable and inescapable. (PE 15.14.2)¹⁶⁵</p>	<p>τὸ μέντοι πρῶτον πῦρ εἶναι καθαπερεὶ τι σπέρμα, τῶν ἀπάντων ἔχον τοὺς λόγους καὶ τὰς αἰτίας τῶν γεγονότων καὶ τῶν γιγνομένων καὶ τῶν ἐσομένων· τὴν δὲ τούτων ἐπιπλοκὴν καὶ ἀκολουθίαν εἰμαρμένην καὶ ἐπιστήμην καὶ ἀλήθειαν καὶ νόμον εἶναι τῶν ὄντων ἀδιάδραστόν τινα καὶ ἄφυκτον.</p>
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The cosmic understanding, God, is identified with fate. The many names given here – fate, understanding, truth, law – are given to the same thing, considered under different aspects.¹⁶⁶ The special significance of the identity of understanding and fate, however, is that an important motivation for the Stoics to be so attached to the theory of fate was that they thought this necessary for the cosmos to be maximally unified. The very existence of the cosmos is involved in this, to the Stoic mind, because any gap between things in space or time, any breach of the unity of the cosmos, is a direct threat of dissolution of the whole cosmic order.¹⁶⁷ The same unity and order characterise understanding. The necessity of fate finds its correlate in the necessity of logic.¹⁶⁸

The same order characterises human understanding and cosmic understanding, and this has an important implication. The wisdom of the wise is equivalent to cosmic understanding. For even if the former does not cover the same material as the latter – the wise is not omniscient – the same patterns run through both. A wise person is infallible, not because she can foresee all things, but because she will classify everything that comes to her in a fool-proof way.¹⁶⁹ There is to human understanding a perfection of conceptual linkage that makes it worth just as much as cosmic

¹⁶⁵ in SVF 1.98, LS 46G.

¹⁶⁶ That comment in Stob. 1.79.10-2, = in SVF 2.913 = LS 55M.

¹⁶⁷ So Alexander's citation or paraphrase (*Fat.* 192.11-5, SVF 2.945): «διασπᾶσθαι γὰρ καὶ διαιρεῖσθαι καὶ μηκέτι τὸν κόσμον ἓνα μένειν αἰεὶ, κατὰ μίαν τάξιν τε καὶ οἰκονομίαν διοικούμενον, εἰ ἀναίτιός τις εἰσάγοιτο κινήσεις· ἢν εἰσάγεσθαι, εἰ μὴ πάντα τὰ ὄντα τε καὶ γινόμενα ἔχοι τινὰ αἴτια προγεγονότα, οἷς ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἔπεται· ὁμοίον τε εἶναι φασιν καὶ ὁμοίως ἀδύνατον τὸ ἀναίτιως τῷ γίνεσθαι τι ἐκ μὴ ὄντος.» Sambursky 1959: 36f. rightly stresses that πνεῦμα is presented as something that coheres across space and time.

¹⁶⁸ This shows in how the Stoics treat hypothetical propositions (if ..., then ...). According to them, these express real causal connections, in which the antecedent makes the consequent in some sense necessary. See for further discussion Bobzien 1998: 156-70; Barnes et al. 1999: 106-8.

¹⁶⁹ Vogt 2008a: 118-26 is a recent attempt to determine what exactly is to count as the wise person's wisdom.

understanding. We can express this in terms of the configuration of πνεῦμα. Human understanding, we saw, is the ruling part of the human soul, that is, the central part of human πνεῦμα, in a certain configuration (T23). Likewise, cosmic understanding is cosmic πνεῦμα in a certain configuration. We also know that human πνεῦμα is a part of cosmic πνεῦμα. The relation of human understanding to cosmic understanding, however, is not a part-whole relation. Human and cosmic πνεῦμα have the same configuration. And even if the point would be misleadingly expressed if you said that human understanding is the same as cosmic understanding, that is closer to the truth than to say that human understanding is (*qua* understanding) a material part of cosmic understanding.¹⁷⁰

9 THE SELF-STUDY OF CONCEPTUAL ORDER

Our reflections on the strength and unity of the wise soul may seem to have led us away from our purpose, that is, to establish that the Stoic soul is able to understand itself by itself, without help from other souls or agents. However, these ruminations allow us, I think, to describe the mechanism by which the Stoic soul understands itself.

We have seen that the wise soul is the strongest of all. At the cognitive level, this strength shows in the stability of the wise soul, which will not be brought out of balance by new information. This stability is due to the order that reigns in the soul; that is, it has reached the perfect deployment of λόγος. Physically, its strength is the expression of the extremes of tension of the soul. This places the wise soul physically at the top of a spectrum from the weakest to the strongest tensions found in the cosmos. I have been laying some emphasis on the role of πνεῦμα as cohesive cause in all the things in which it is present. In its highest concentrations, at its most active, πνεῦμα makes things most cohesive of all; and this is the strength of the wise soul.

Not only is the wise soul maximally cohesive, it can make itself so, too. T10 tells us that λόγος articulates itself. In doing so, it gives itself its proper structure, including the cohesion among its parts that characterises it as the highest stage of God's presence in the cosmos. Stoic physics corroborates this picture. We have seen that the Stoics characterise πνεῦμα throughout as acting on itself, and capable of tending itself, of making its tension stronger. It is not suggested in our sources that this capacity applies only to πνεῦμα in its entirety, and there seems to be no theoretical reason why that should be so. Individual pieces of πνεῦμα are able to tend themselves just as much as the whole of πνεῦμα. In the case of the human soul, this finds expression in its trajectory from the lowest to the highest stages of πνεῦμα. When it is a foetus, it shares in nature. The moment it is born, it tenses itself and becomes

¹⁷⁰ The same applies to truth. Striker (1996: 227) demands that the identity of cosmic and human reason be identified as an identity in kind or an identity in material, but I think we need to keep apart the category of understanding and the category of πνεῦμα; the question applies to the latter, but not to the former.

soul.¹⁷¹ Then, in an ideal trajectory, when it becomes a complete adult, it again gives itself more tension, and changes from soul to λόγος. This is its becoming wise, which, therefore, is an endogenous process.

It requires little argument that the unity of the wise soul is also a matter of its high degree of cohesion. Instead of a disconnected manifold, the wise soul is a highly unified and internally connected piece of πνεῦμα. On the conceptual level, this is the result of the self-articulation of λόγος (see T10). On the physical level, we have seen that the unification of the wise soul is compatible with its being very expansive, for it is not the sluggishness of a stone that the Stoics consider strongest and most unified, but the functional organisation of structures whose constituent elements are in closest possible contact with each other. The order of the soul gives it its strength and its unity.

We have learned from T12 that the status of λόγος as a composite of presentations is closely connected to its studying itself. More generally, as T8 shows, things that are most unified and strongest are also the things that most of all begin with themselves in doing what they do. This general tendency finds its highest expression in understanding – λόγος as it should be. The unified and strong structure that is the understanding soul is also most self-determinative and reflexive.

In a discussion of Epictetus's claim that the aim for human beings is to make good use of their presentations, Anthony Long has made a strong case for the importance, to this Stoic, of the notion of a life in which reason surveys itself (compare T9-T12, 3.1.2.6).¹⁷² Long rejects the idea that there is an entity external to λόγος that is to act as its monitor. The question that faces Epictetus, in his view, is how he can make sense of the activity of λόγος as selecting and rejecting presentations if it is a composite of presentations itself. Long suggests that this is possible when particular presentations provide the point of view from which to select or reject other presentations.¹⁷³

Long is right, I think, to locate the self-study of λόγος in between (so to speak) the concepts that constitute it. It is clear that the Stoics reject anything over and above concepts and their order that might be a candidate-student of these concepts (cf. T10). Long's emphasis on distinct presentations is perhaps too piece-meal an approach to do justice to the unity of understanding in its every activity.¹⁷⁴ When Epictetus describes λόγος in T9 as a 'composite out of certain presentations', his primary object is to show that λόγος is of the same kind as the things it studies – presentations – and that it will therefore naturally study itself. It is unlikely, however, that this composite will escape study *qua* composite, i.e. unity. Indeed, Epictetus is

¹⁷¹ Although the environment gives reason for it to increase tension: Hier. *El.* 1.21-2 (in LS 53B), Plut. *RS* 1052F (= SVF 2.806); Hierocles is keen to indicate that the soul (initially the seed) is itself active, however (*El.* 1.7-8, 26).

¹⁷² Long 1991a (esp. 111-8); the discussion is of *Disc.* 1.6 (see note 3).

¹⁷³ Long's formulation goes a bit further in involving talk of selves: 'It is representations that provide selves with the viewpoints which they can select as appropriate to who they are, or reject as inappropriate.' (ibid.: 117-8)

¹⁷⁴ In speaking of 'human life' as a 'sequence of representations' (ibid.: 116), Long seems to wield a conception of human life that makes this too loose (too Humean) a collection to be the Stoic conception.

clear on this in connecting the self-study of *λόγος* with the study of logic, that is, of the connections between particular concepts (in *Disc.* 1.17, cf. T10, 11). Understanding is self-understanding in the sense that it understands its parts, but also in the sense that it understands itself as the unity and order that it is.

We may perhaps be a little more specific, in view of our discussion, about the physical basis of the self-study of understanding. Cohesion, we said, is the continuous activity of *πνεῦμα*. The highest level on which we find this activity is understanding – *λόγος* as it should be. We have seen that understanding is the ordered composite of its concepts, which are themselves alterations of *πνεῦμα* and as such active bits of stuff. Concepts, in the Stoic view, are not books in a library, which may lie passive as connections are made between them, or wait in line to be called up for scrutiny. They themselves constitute the activity that is the human soul. And it is precisely in the way that they act, on each other and on themselves, that I think we should locate their order. *λόγος*, as a composite of presentations, is a *σύστημα* that is actively sustained in the coordinate pneumatic action of all of these concepts.

God's action is described, on a much lower level of description, as a body that simultaneously moves into and out of itself (see 3.1.2.3). This description verges on the incomprehensible, but is clearly meant to capture something that is highly self-related. I suggested earlier that this is the Stoics' physical response to the metaphysical question about the possibility of self-action. This pneumatic process also underlies the cognitive activity of understanding. It is an order in virtue of its activity, but is also able to study itself in virtue of that same activity. Understanding thus satisfies the principle voiced by Hierocles in T8, that the power with the highest cohesion (order) will also have the highest degree of beginning with itself. For the Stoics, therefore, self-understanding, as we may put it, or self-study, as Epictetus puts it, is inherent in perfect *λόγος* and understanding.¹⁷⁵ Nor is a human being dependent on other minds to achieve this self-studying understanding. It is the result of the action on itself of our part of God, in its functioning and in its coming to be. True to one of the central characterisations of the good, self-understanding does not depend on anything extraneous; it is up to us, and in our power.

¹⁷⁵ The stranger the few texts that speak of a delay in the wise person's sense of herself as wise (see SVF 3.539-42). For a discussion of this idea see Sedley 1977; Tieleman 1996: 182 n.151.

3.4

A SOUL BECOMES WISE

Let us, in conclusion, return to Cicero's description of the attainment of wisdom.¹⁷⁶ It shows us how a human soul understands the good to be, not in something external, but in the order of its own ruling part. This realisation, moreover, is the result of the wise person's own efforts. Here is a fuller version of T1:

T28	<p>As soon as he has attained understanding, or rather the notion – which they call <i>ἔννοια</i> – and has seen the order and harmony – so to speak – of things to be done, he has set a much higher value on this than on all the things he loved before, and has reasoned intelligently and rationally in such a way that he established in this the whole of that highest good of a person which is to be praised and sought for itself. And since this is placed in that which the Stoics call <i>ὁμολογία</i> and we may call agreement, if you will – since that good, then, to which everything else is referred, is located in this, [therefore] noble actions and the noble itself, which is alone included in things good, even if it comes about later, is nevertheless to be sought only on account of its own power and dignity[.] (<i>Fin.</i> 3.21)¹⁷⁷</p>	<p>simul autem cepit intellegentiam vel notionem potius, quam appellant <i>ἔννοιαν</i> illi, viditque rerum agendarum ordinem et, ut ita dicam, concordiam, multo eam pluris aestimavit quam omnia illa, quae prima dilexerat, atque ita cognitione et ratione collegit, ut statueret in eo collocatum summum illud hominis per se laudandum et expetendum bonum, quod cum positum sit in eo, quod <i>ὁμολογίαν</i> Stoici, nos appellemus convenientiam, si placet,—cum igitur in eo sit id bonum, quo omnia referenda sint, honeste facta ipsumque honestum, quod solum in bonis ducitur, quamquam post oritur, tamen id solum vi sua et dignitate expetendum est[.]</p>
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Some scholars complain about the brevity of this text, which makes it impossible to reconstruct the precise mechanism by which this person reaches wisdom. This is true about the process of reasoning referred to.¹⁷⁸ Apart from that, however, this passage seems actually to be rather expansive. Not only do we have here Cicero's regular practice of giving multiple Latin equivalents for one Greek term – *intelligentia* and *notio* for *ἔννοια*; *ordo* and *concordia* (for *ἁρμονία*?); *cognitio* and *ratio* (for *διάνοια*?) – he also gives several expressions for what is the same referent, letting the repetition of it clutter and disturb even his syntax.¹⁷⁹ The understanding, notion, and the seeing in the first line are all of the order of things to be done. This order is then recognised as the only good (specified as the only thing sought and praised for itself). Cicero repeats this twice, adding two more synonyms for the order: *ὁμολογία* and

¹⁷⁶ There is much more to be said about this account, of course (see Vogt 2008b; Gill 2006: 129-66; Inwood 2005: 271-301; Frede 1999a), and I cannot enter into a full discussion here. All I do here is to suggest that it is the reflexivity of understanding that is Cicero's focus here, and which accounts both for the paired occurrence of the good's being and its being understood (in T29); and, in for the unique self-involvement of wisdom (in T30).

¹⁷⁷ In SVF 3.188, in LS 59D.

¹⁷⁸ E.g. Inwood 2005: 278; Annas 1993: 170; Gill 1990b: 145-8.

¹⁷⁹ 'Disturb' only from a formal grammatical point of view, for he probably meant this to be the rhetorically most effective way of putting the point.

convenientia (agreement). Then, finally, he says that the noble is sought for itself, even if it emerges later. Effectively, this is an identification of the noble with the order that has received so many equivalent descriptions already: the noble is the only good, sought for itself; the order of action is also the only good ('the whole', 'to which everything else is referred') and sought for itself. Putting it very briefly, Cicero says here that whoever understands the order of action seeks only it for itself as good.

It is significant that Cicero speaks of the order of *things to be done*. In view of the Stoics' insistence elsewhere on the role of the order of the world – in their arguments for the existence of the gods or for God's providence, for instance – you would have expected a reference to the order of things, or of the way the world functions. Instead, we have a reference to the things that are to be done. In the context of T28, Cicero speaks of the pattern of behaviour of the subject of understanding herself (who is described as subject of understanding in T28). So presumably the things to be done here are also the things that this subject must do.

While the things to be done are not themselves, of course, concepts, the order that runs through them is the same as the order that characterises the concepts of a wise mind. Part of the wise person's wisdom is precisely the attunement of her part of λόγος with the whole of λόγος that pervades the cosmos. This also forms the background to Cicero's calling the order of actions ὁμολογία. In the case of the order of actions as in the case of the order of concepts, we are speaking of λόγος, as the state of πνεῦμα at its most perfect level, i.e., the soul of the wise. Moreover, in the process that leads to action, the mind's concepts are expressed, in their own orderly way, in what we call a person's outward actions. We saw in 3.2.2 that the Stoics even identified actions with the activity of the ruling part of the soul. This is the concerted activity of its parts, the concepts, under the stimulus of presentations that invite us to act.¹⁸⁰ But whatever the details of this process, it should be clear that Cicero does not mean that the good resides in the individual actions which the wise person does. The good itself is in the order of the soul's activities, which is nothing other than the order of understanding, as applied to whatever input it receives from outside.¹⁸¹ The wise person's actions show a consistent pattern because they are the expression of a constituted whole of concepts (a σύστημα), of a consistent mind.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ This is extremely brief, but I have no room to discuss this here. See Inwood 1985: 56ff. on the φαντασία ὀρηκτική. That assent is a matter of conceptual application emerges in many places in Epictetus, especially *Disc.* 2.11.

¹⁸¹ Compare Diogenes' statement that speech is the result of the imprint (on air, in the end) of concepts that are in thought (Gal. *PHP* 2.5.11-2, in SVF 3.Diog. 29, LS 53U): «ἀλλὰ μήν γε κάκεινο ἀληθές, τὸ τὸν λόγον ἐκ τῆς διανοίας ἐκπέμπεσθαι. ἔνιοι γοῦν καὶ ὀριζόμενοι αὐτὸν φασὶν εἶναι φωνὴν σημαίνουσαν ἀπὸ διανοίας ἐκπεμπομένην. καὶ ἄλλως δὲ πιθανὸν ὑπὸ τῶν ἐννοιῶν ἐνσεσημασμένον τῶν ἐν τῇ διανοίᾳ καὶ οἶον ἐκτετυπωμένον ἐκπέμπεσθαι τὸν λόγον» (cf. Sedley's discussion: 1993: 330-1).

¹⁸² Cicero's perspective from inside, as it were, from the point of view of an acting subject, has given rise to a line of interpretation of Stoic moral development that some call 'subjectivist' (Annas 1993: 159-79; Engberg-Pedersen 1990; cf. the critical remarks in Gill 2006 on the use of the label 'subjective' (259-70)). In essence, this is the view that a moral agent can concentrate on what is ethically right and so arrive at moral perfection; understanding of cosmic nature, of physics and logic, is not necessary. Others insist that Cicero's description of moral development is not reliable as an isolated source, and that the whole of our evidence shows that understanding of cosmic nature is very much required for a human being to

The inference that we can draw from this should no longer be surprising. The wise person's grasp of the good is the self-understanding of understanding – the self-study of intelligence, as Epictetus puts it in T12. Understanding understands its own order. Accordingly, Cicero writes a little before T28, speaking of the final stages of moral development:

T29	Then, finally, [there follows the selection] that is consistent and in agreement with nature, in which for the first time there comes to be and comes to be understood what it is that can truly be called good. (<i>Fin.</i> 3.20) ¹⁸³	tum ad extremum [sequitur] constans consentaneaue naturae [sc. selectio], in qua primum inesse incipit et intellegi, quid sit, quod vere bonum possit dici.
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The good comes to be and is understood at the same time in the perfect order in the wise mind.¹⁸⁴ It is nothing other than wisdom, which is nothing other than understanding – λόγος as articulated by itself into the shape it should have: a σύστημα, an ordered unity, of concepts. This λόγος apprehends itself as the good. Besides being sought for itself, it studies itself. Cicero expresses both of these aspects a little later; in a comparison of wisdom with other skills (reminiscent of Epictetus in T9 and T12), he adds:

T30	Wisdom alone is wholly turned into itself[.] (<i>Fin.</i> 3.24) ¹⁸⁵	sola enim sapientia in se tota conversa est[.]
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Self-understanding thus shows itself to be an essential feature of the soul of the Stoic wise and happy person. It is the self-relation of the unified body of alterations in πνεῦμα. In the Stoic view, the soul does not need other souls to reach its perfection. It has all the characteristics of πνεῦμα, and so is sufficient unto itself to give itself tension, to keep itself unified, and to understand itself. It owes its perfect activity to itself.

become virtuous (Striker 1983; Long 1996: 134-55; Lee 2002: 23-58). While this controversy merits more space than we have here, our findings allow us to see that the opposition is to a large extent artificial. (So also Long 1996: 155.) For neither our moral nature nor the ultimate constitution of cosmic nature is anything other than the order of λόγος.

¹⁸³ In SVF 3.188, in LS 59D.

¹⁸⁴ Compare Sextus's attack against precisely this point in *M* 11.184-7.

¹⁸⁵ In LS 64H. In the context, dancing and acting are mentioned as turned into themselves in the sense that they are sought for themselves; but they do not have their material from themselves. Wisdom is alone in combining these aspects.

CHAPTER 4

STOIC UNDERSTANDING – FRIENDSHIP AND EROTIC VIRTUE

The Stoic conception of friendship usually gets short shrift. People complain that it is not worth the name.¹ The notion that all the wise are each other's friends has such unacceptable implications – it is said – as that friendship does not involve particular affection;² or that friends are replaceable; that friends need not even have met; and that the wise merely love the virtue in another, not her person.³ The Stoic theory of sexual love fares no better.⁴ I will not discuss such complaints directly. In part they represent an unbridgeable gap between Stoic and other moral intuitions. In part, however, I think that the Stoics are concerned to preserve the very value that we recognise in friendship by relocating this value from the relation, which they cannot countenance morally, to the perfect understanding of excellent people. As I will argue in this chapter, the Stoics actually call perfect understanding, i.e. the human soul in its best configuration, 'friendship'.

The Stoic wise person has an understanding that is in itself complete and active, as we saw in the previous chapter. The ruling part of the soul, once in its most perfect configuration, makes wholly firm and correct use of all the presentations it has, thereby being active in ordered actions, in a pattern that is the order of the wise soul itself. In an extreme situation in which the ruling part is robbed of all outward efficacy – when a wise person is paralysed, for instance – it will still be wholly active in itself.

As we will see in this chapter, however, the wise will also want their ordered actions to reach out into the world. It is true that such outward efficacy will not constitute their happiness, and will therefore be a matter of indifference to them. Nevertheless, the wise will want to exercise their virtue outwardly as well.

Friendship – *φιλία* – would seem to occupy a special place in this regard. This is, after all, the notion that we use to think about people's relations with others. But what is peculiar about the Stoic treatment of friendship is that they do not see it primarily as the relation that can subsist between people. I will argue in this chapter that they identify it primarily with understanding, i.e. with something that may be related, rather than with a relation. Scholars have not recognised this point sufficiently; they continue to speak of Stoic friendship as if it were chiefly a relation.⁵ However, the two main senses the Stoics give to the word «*φιλία*» both stand for the human soul in its

¹ Bonhöffer 1968b: 108.

² It is an 'unvermeidliche Folge der [...] uniformisierenden Tendenz der stoischen Ethik, dass die Freundschaft in derselben eigentlich keine Stelle hat' (Bonhöffer 1968b: 106, cf. 107 'aufgehoben').

³ Lesses 1993: 75 and Wilamowitz 1965: 122 observe that within the Stoic theory of friendship, Zeno's comment that a friend is an ἄλλος ἐγὼ (DL 7.23), usually a statement of sentiment or one expressing a deep connection, is meant literally as a statement of replaceability.

⁴ See Inwood 1997: 59-69, particularly the concern with fungibility (i.e. replaceability) at 68.

⁵ So for instance Banateanu 2002; Nussbaum 1995; Lesses 1993; Schofield 1991.

understanding configuration (I discuss these senses in sections 4.1.4 and 4.1.5 below).⁶ Friendship is therefore not something that you can add to the life of a wise person, as you could add a relation. Rather, friendship is in one sense already there whenever someone is wise, since it is a description of understanding as such (I will call this the ‘internal’ sense of friendship). In another sense, friendship is a description of the understanding of the wise person in its relation to other wise people, given their existence (this I will call the ‘relative’ sense). The latter description may cease to apply to the understanding soul, viz. when there are no other wise beings to which the understanding may be related. Even in its relative sense, however, friendship is a description of a person’s understanding, not of a relation that subsists in between two people. It is, to use a different terminology, a description of a *relatum*, rather than of a relation.

These two senses in which friendship is used seem to be the technically strictest uses of the notion. In many Stoic texts, including many that I do not discuss here, we also find a manner of speaking that is much closer to how we ordinarily speak of friendship. What I have to say in this chapter is not meant to deny this, nor do I claim exclusivity for the strict usage of the Stoic notion of friendship. It is important, however, to recognise the two senses outlined above as central to the Stoics’ philosophical reinterpretation of friendship.

The Stoics, then, have two different ways of labelling the understanding mind as ‘friendship’. We also made a distinction earlier between an understanding that is merely internally active and an understanding of which the activity reaches out into the world. If ‘friendship’ is indeed a name for the same (active) body that we also call ‘understanding’, then we can also talk of friendship either as something active in itself or as something of which the activity reaches out into the world. In doing so, however, we should be careful to keep apart the two distinctions that we have made. The one distinction is between the internally active understanding (whether or not we call this ‘friendship’) and its outward exercise. The second distinction is between friendship as a way to speak of understanding no matter to what else this understanding is related, and friendship as a way to speak of understanding under the aspect of the relations this understanding has to other people.

Having distinguished these distinctions, however, we are in a position to recognise that they overlap to some extent: whenever understanding is correctly described as friendship in its second, relative sense, it will also be exercised outwardly. This is because the Stoics hold that whatever is done according to virtue (i.e. understanding) is a benefit, and that benefits are the common property of all the wise. In other words, given two wise entities, each action of the one – even as minimal an action as mere assent to something – will automatically be a benefit to the other as well, thereby

⁶ It may be misleading to speak of senses if that brings to mind the Fregean sort of sense to which we are used in modern philosophy. Ancient philosophers do not have a clean separation between Fregean sense and Fregean reference. When they distinguish the multiple ways in which words are used, their descriptions factor in references as well as senses. Nevertheless, if we understand by the ‘sense’ of a word the way it may be used, ‘sense’ is a close enough modern term to be useful.

constituting the outward exercise of the understanding of the first;⁷ equally, the availability of two wise entities is enough to describe the understanding of each as friendship in the relative sense.

An important way in which the virtue of wise people is outwardly active is in sexual love (ἔρως). The Stoics reinterpret this notion and make it refer, primarily, to the wise person's pedagogical efforts towards young people whose beauty promises future virtuousness. In making others wise, the Stoic sage makes friends for herself. She thus spreads the order, so to speak, that characterises her understanding. In contrast to the Stoic view of friendship, however, sexual love, interpreted in this way, is contingent⁸ upon external circumstances, since there will not be sexual love if there are no suitable objects for it. There is thus an asymmetry between friendship and sexual love. Whereas the former refers primarily to understanding, and is as such not contingent to a wise life, the latter is the contingent external activity of another virtue, which the Stoics call 'erotic virtue'.

It must be clear from the outset that the relations of the organism that will be wise to its fellow human beings are deep and necessary. A human being is conceived, nurtured, cared for, brought into this world, taught to walk, to speak, &c. by other human beings. At no point in her life will a wise person turn away from human society. The human species is a gregarious one, and a human being no less a social organism in the Stoic view than in the Aristotelian. Nevertheless, it is not with these relations that we are concerned. It is not them that the Stoics take seriously, in the end, as friendships. It may well be that these other relations look more like friendships to us than does what the Stoics call friendship when they are speaking strictly; nevertheless, the latter alone is able, in the Stoic view, to preserve what is true in our ordinary talk about friendship without running into contradictions and enmities.

In this chapter, we will first examine the identification of friendship with understanding, and look at the different senses of friendship which the Stoics recognised. After that we will consider how understanding is outwardly active in promotion of friendship, via an examination of Stoic thought on sexual love.

⁷ Strictly speaking, it seems, the second entity must encounter the virtuous movement of the first (which the benefit is): Plut. *CN* 1076A (SVF 3.246, LS 61J).

⁸ In this chapter, I speak of 'contingent' and 'fortune' from the point of view of the wise subject, as of the things that she does not herself control. I thereby want to avoid saying anything about the actual contingency or necessity of events from the point of view of the predetermined chain of causes the Stoics call 'fate'.

4.1

THE STOIC THEORY OF FRIENDSHIP

1 *THEY NEED FRIENDS BUT ARE NOT IN NEED OF THEM*

Seneca devotes a letter to the question: ‘Do wise people need friends?’ The core of what he offers, for our concerns, is a subtle distinction that Chrysippus makes between different senses of the term ‘need’.

T1	<p>The wise is sufficient to himself for living happily, not for living. With respect to the latter he has a use for many things; to the former, only for a sound and upright soul that looks down on fortune. I also want to mention to you a distinction by Chrysippus. He says that the wise needs nothing, but still has a use for many things. By contrast, a fool has no use for anything, since he does not know how to use anything, but is in need of everything. (<i>Ep.</i> 9.13-4)</p>	<p>[S]e contentus est sapiens ad beate vivendum, non ad vivendum. Ad hoc enim multis illi rebus opus est, ad illud tantum animo sano et erecto et despiciente fortunam. Volo tibi Chrysippi quoque distinctionem indicare. Ait sapientem nulla re egere, et tamen multis illi rebus opus esse. Contra stulto nulla re opus est, nulla enim re uti scit, sed omnibus eget.</p>
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Seneca tells us here that the sufficiency of the wise is a sufficiency with regard to the perfection of their lives. It does not mean that the wise will not want anything. Earlier in the letter, Seneca states in so many words that the wise person will want friends.⁹ Now the reason why the wise will want many things is the reverse of the reason why fools have no use at all for things: fools do not know how to use things; by contrast, the wise do, for they are experts. Since fools obviously do lack many things, it is useful to have a verbal distinction to mirror the conceptual one; Chrysippus provides it. His distinction was expressed in Greek, and it was probably between «χρεῖαν ἔχειν» and «ἐνδεῖσθαι».¹⁰ If you have a use (χρεῖα) for something, you are able to use it (χρησθαι) in an expert manner.¹¹ If you need (ἐνδεῖσθαι) something, you are needy (ἐνδεής) in some respect of quality of life; something is missing.

The distinction itself is only of minor importance. What we should focus on is what makes things objects for which you have a use rather than objects for which you are needy. And this is in fact the very wisdom of the wise. The wise are perfect within the sphere of influence, as it were, that is allotted to them.¹² If they have eyes, they

⁹ §3: ‘amicum habere vult’; §8: ‘habere amicum vult’.

¹⁰ So also Plutarch in *CN* 1068A-C (parts in *SVF* 3.674), who pairs «χρεῖαν ἔχειν» with «δεῖσθαι» in opposition to «ἐνδεῖσθαι», e.g.: «ὁ φαῦλος οὐδενὸς δεῖται, οὐδενὸς ἔχει χρεῖαν» (1068A); of things according to nature «οὐδεὶς ἔχει χρεῖαν, ἂν μὴ γένηται σοφός» (A); «νυνὶ δὲ τίς ὀλιγὸς οὗτος τὸν μὲν ἀνευδεᾶ δεῖσθαι ὧν ἔχει ἀγαθῶν, τὸν δὲ φαῦλον ἐνδεᾶ μὲν εἶναι πολλῶν δεῖσθαι δὲ μηδενός; τουτὶ γὰρ λέγει Χρῦσιππος, ὡς οὐ δέονται μὲν ἐνδέονται δ’ οἱ φαῦλοι» (C). cf. *SR* 1038A.

¹¹ It is useful to note that «χρησθαι» is very commonly used to express whatever it is that one does with friends – associating or being with them, treating them as friends, &c. Cf., e.g., T3.

¹² Bonhöffer uses an agricultural metaphor: ‘der Weise [lässt] kein Feld der Tugendübung [...] unbebaut’ (: 108). He complains that Seneca’s concern with the cultivation of virtue may establish the need for other people, but not for friends. However, we should recognise

will be able to use these perfectly. If they have friends, they will be able to use them perfectly. (They could do without eyes and without friends, for their quality of life is determined by their healthy soul alone.) In each case, it is the expertise of the wise that causes something to be wanted as instrument or material for the activity of that expertise.¹³

Nevertheless, there seems to be a gap between the expertise of the wise and their wanting to have things in order that they can act on their expertise. What makes it the case that a wise person will actively want something that, were it given to her, she would be able to make expert use of? To put it in paradoxical terms: a wise person does not want wings, even if, were they given to her, she would be able to make expert use of them. Seneca says that a wise person wants friends because the virtue of friendship is too great to leave at rest, ‘if for nothing else’.¹⁴ This is admittedly a kind of minimal condition, and it does not in itself explain why the wise will marry rather than seek to make herself wings.¹⁵

The answer seems rather to be in the conformity of the wise with what it is natural to do for a being of the kind that she is. A human being is not a being with wings, and therefore the wise will not seek to have them. But a human being is a gregarious being, that naturally marries and raises children, that participates in politics, &c. The wise person opts in her own case to do all the things that nature would have done, were she not a being that can manage itself. So strong is this commitment to a natural life in this sense that a wise person will decide to quit life when there is no other human being to share it with.¹⁶ That decision has nothing to do with avoiding the unhappiness of being the only human being in the world, for the wise person would not be unhappy without friends. It has everything to do with the wise person’s policy of being a substitute decision maker in the place of nature, who freely chooses to do what nature would have done. If nature had made human beings solitary, the wise person would happily refrain from all social acts. But nature has in fact established that human beings ought to live in communities or not be able to live at all; the wise soul shall therefore manage the organism of which it is in charge in such a way as to have it live in a community or not live at all. The content of the decisions that the wise will make – decisions that are often the same as those made by non-wise people – are the subject of the theory of appropriate actions. The bulk of later Stoic literature addresses these.¹⁷

the wise in his role as ‘faciendarum amicitiarum artifex’ (see note 54) as the wise person in love whose concern for others in ἐρώς leads precisely to the making of friends, as I will show below; Bonhöffer’s contrast is false.

¹³ God has similar wants: cf. Epict. 1.29.29; Long 2002: 174-5; Wildberger 2006: 263-5.

¹⁴ ‘Sapiens etiam si contentus est se, tamen habere amicum vult, si nihil aliud, ut exerceat amicitiam, ne tam magna virtus iaceat’, §8.

¹⁵ Seneca mentions marrying and raising children as things a wise person will do regardless of her perfect self-sufficiency (§17).

¹⁶ As Seneca says in §17 as well: ‘se contentus est et tamen non viveret si foret sine homine victurus’. It should be emphasised that ‘non viveret’ represents the wise’s decision, not the impossibility as such of living without other people: for ‘illi licet suo arbitrio res suas ordinare’ (ibid.).

¹⁷ And they have been subject of sensitive study in recent years, such as in Gretchen Reydams-Schils 2005.

The notion that the wise live the natural life for human beings goes a long way towards explaining the particular behaviour of wise people, and towards accounting for their particular wishes. But in the case of friendship, it cannot be all. For while the Stoics are lenient enough to let us call those we associate with ‘friends’ of a sort, yet in the strict sense, most of them are not really our friends – only the wise are.¹⁸ Fools are enemies of the wise no less than of the gods.¹⁹ Conversely, in this strict sense, the Stoics do not only call the wise among our associates friends. They also have a peculiar enough theory of friendship to say that all wise people are *ipso facto* friends, even if they have never met.²⁰ Their friendship, moreover, does not consist merely in living the natural life of human beings.²¹ It is the agreement of their minds that grounds their friendship. Seneca’s ninth letter is less than helpful in not distinguishing these different aspects of Stoic talk of friendship.

2 FRIENDSHIP AS UNDERSTANDING

The notion that wise people are friends in virtue of the agreement of their minds brings us to our main theme, that friendship is understanding. This theme is also present in the letter of Seneca which we have just considered. Seneca calls friendship a virtue; since the virtues are all to be identified with understanding, the implication of Seneca’s statement is that friendship, too, is understanding.²² Seneca’s mention of virtue in this context suggests that, in examining what it means for friendship to be understanding, we may also consider how friendship is to be thought of as a virtue.

You may wonder whether Seneca was being a Stoic when he called friendship a virtue. In recent literature, you do find the idea, often no more than an assumption, that friendship for the Stoics is a relation, just as it is for most of us.²³ And how, you may wonder, could a relation be a virtue? It is therefore important to show that Seneca was very much being a Stoic when he identified friendship as a virtue. Stoic thought on friendship looks to the expertise of the wise, to the understanding soul, as the chief place where friendship is to be found. Only by derivation from that understanding can you call relations between people friendships as well.

Let us start by looking at a number of general descriptions of friendship. We read the following in Arius Didymus (*via* Stobaeus):

¹⁸ Epict. *Disc.* 2.22.3, 29 (and *passim*); Stob. 2.108.15-7 (T5 below), in SVF 3.630; DL 7.33, 124 (SVF 1.222, 3.631 = LS 67P); Clem. *Strom.* 5.14.95 (SVF 1.223).

¹⁹ Cf. Stob. 2.106.12-20, in SVF 3.661.

²⁰ Plut. *CN* 1068f-69a, part in SVF 3.627; Cic. *ND* 1.121, in SVF 3.635: ‘sapientes sapientibus etiam ignotis esse amicos’.

²¹ Someone could do all appropriate actions and not be wise; by the same token, she would not be friends with the wise.

²² *Ep.* 9.8 (cit. note 14).

²³ Wildberger 2006: 267; Banateanu 2002: *passim*; Lesses 1993: 62, 74.

T2	[They say] that friendship is a community of life; and consonance is sameness of opinion about what has to do with life. (Stob. 2.74.3-5) ²⁴	Φιλίαν δ' εἶναι κοινωνίαν βίου· συμφωνίαν δὲ ὁμοδογματίαν περὶ τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον.
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Diogenes Laertius writes something similar:

T3	They say that [friendship] is a certain community of what has to do with life, whereby we deal with our friends as with ourselves. (DL 7.124) ²⁵	φασὶ δὲ αὐτὴν κοινωνίαν τινὰ εἶναι τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον, χρωμένων ἡμῶν τοῖς φίλοις ὡς ἑαυτοῖς.
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T2 and T3 say that friendship is a community, of life (T2) or of what has to do with life (T3). If anything, these descriptions are conspicuous by being so commonplace. At first sight there seems little specifically Stoic about them. They would have been acceptable to adherents of widely differing philosophical schools. Reading them, you would not expect Stoic thought on friendship and familial relations to be among the most controversial aspects of their philosophy. But that just means that the work of giving an account of the Stoic notion of friendship starts, but does not end, with descriptions that were probably meant to be accessible to all. And we can readily imagine Stoic teachers asking their students: yes, what you mention is a community of life, but is it really a *community of life*?

Another text in Arius Didymus goes some way towards giving a more specifically Stoic description of friendship, although this too makes use of terms that are relatively commonplace.

T4	For [they think] that enmity is dissension and a dividedness of mind <about> what has to do with life, just as also friendship is consonance and like-mindedness. (Stob. 2.106.13-5) ²⁶	τὴν γὰρ ἔχθραν ἀσυμφωνίαν εἶναι <περὶ> τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον καὶ διχόνοιαν, ὥσπερ καὶ τὴν φιλίαν συμφωνίαν καὶ ὁμόνοιαν.
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Friendship is here described *via* its opposite as a consonance and like-mindedness about what has to do with life. This description is less universally acceptable than the ones in T2 and T3. It suggests a view of friendship that sees it in terms of sameness rather than of a complementarity of opposites. This is primarily the result of its use of the prefixes «συν-» and «ὄμο-». These are, incidentally, very common elements of friendship language in ancient philosophy.²⁷ The identification of friendship and consonance in this text explains why they occur in close proximity to each other in T2.

T4 is also more specific than the previous descriptions in its use of the relatively intellectualist terms «ὁμόνοια» and «συμφωνία». Like the privileged position of

²⁴ In SVF 3.112.

²⁵ In SVF 3.631, LS 67P.

²⁶ In SVF 3.661.

²⁷ A survey and analysis of such language can be found in Algra 2003b. Cf. Long 1991b for the musical connotations of συμφωνία.

sameness as opposed to difference as explanatory of friendship, this intellectualist aspect of T4 is not surprising; indeed, in theory, T4 could do duty as a Platonist or Aristotelian description of friendship as well. To say this, however, is to give an indication of the common orientation of much ancient thinking about friendship. The Stoics' choice itself of intellectual rather than other terms in their account of friendship is a very specific one.

The texts we have looked at so far describe friendship in terms that would have been acceptable to adherents of many different philosophical schools. Indeed, it seems they were meant as such. The most specific among them, T4, describes friendship in relatively intellectual terms; that indicates the direction in which the Stoics develop their theory of friendship, but does not yet tell us much about the precise form it takes. Nevertheless, one element of T4 will turn out to be very significant as we look at other texts: the identification of friendship with like-mindedness (ὁμόνοια). For it is in giving a more specific description of like-mindedness that the following report allows us to identify friendship with understanding.

T5	<p>And they leave friendship to be in the wise only, since only in them is there like-mindedness about what has to do with life. Now like-mindedness [they say] is understanding of common goods. For friendship that is true and not falsely so called cannot exist without trust and steadfastness. But in worthless people, who are untrustworthy and wavering, and who possess opinions that are at war with each other, there is no friendship, but there are certain other external connections and bonds that are constrained by compulsions and opinions. They say that even having affection, embracing, and loving is of the wise only. (Stob. 2.108.15-25)²⁸</p>	<p>Ἐν μόνοις τε τοῖς σοφοῖς ἀπολείπουσι φιλίαν, ἐπεὶ ἐν μόνοις τούτοις ὁμόνοια γίνεται περὶ τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον τὴν δ' ὁμόνοιαν εἶναι κοινῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐπιστήμην. Φιλίαν γὰρ ἀληθινήν καὶ μὴ ψευδώνυμον ἀδύνατον χωρὶς πίστεως καὶ βεβαιότητος ὑπάρχειν· ἐν δὲ τοῖς φαύλοις, ἀπίστοις καὶ ἀβεβαίοις οὔσι καὶ δόγματα πολεμικὰ κεκτημένοις, οὐκ εἶναι φιλίαν, ἐτέρας δὲ τινὰς ἐπιπλοκάς καὶ συνδέσεις ἔξωθεν ἀνάγκαις καὶ δόξαις κατεχομένης γίνεσθαι. Φασὶ δὲ καὶ τὸ ἀγαπᾶν καὶ τὸ ἀσπάζεσθαι καὶ τὸ φιλεῖν μόνων εἶναι σπουδαίων.</p>
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The first sentence of this text states that the Stoics recognise a friendship in wise people only, and proceeds to give a reason for this: it is only in wise people that there is like-mindedness. We know from T4 that like-mindedness is not just a ground for the presence of friendship, but is actually to be identified with it. This makes the next statement all the more important. Arius Didymus tells us that like-mindedness is understanding. The identity of friendship and like-mindedness implies that friendship, too, is understanding. This is an important result, which we will spend the rest of this chapter elucidating.

In his next move, Arius connects friendship and like-mindedness with the trust and steadfastness that are only in the wise. Only the wise have this trust and steadfastness, because they, in contrast to bad people, do not have warring opinions.²⁹ While this

²⁸ In SVF 3.630.

²⁹ Pace Vogt 2008a: 157, the Stoics' so-called psychological monism is no obstacle to their speaking of like-mindedness in the soul in terms largely parallel to Plato.

may refer to the war between opinions of different people, it is more likely, given that this is the reason that bad people are untrustworthy, that the war is between the opinions of each single bad person. Someone with consistent opinions which happen to be in conflict with other people's opinions is not thereby untrustworthy; someone who may follow one set of opinions today and an opposed set tomorrow is.

Arius Didymus then reports what the Stoics have to say in response to the objection: Surely you can see that bad people do not fall apart completely in internal strife – how do you explain that? The Stoics respond that there are external bonds in the case of bad people. These bonds are held in place by necessities and opinions (or should we translate 'reputations'?) rather than constant by virtue of the characters of the people involved. It is telling that in the contrast between friendship and other bonds, these latter are expressly characterised as external. The implication is that friendship is internal. And in fact that is not just an implication. It follows directly from the identification of friendship with understanding (via like-mindedness).³⁰ Friendship in the wise is found in their internal agreement, while any unity that may externally seem to be present in and among bad people is due to constraining factors that have little to do with the quality of their character.³¹

T6	Further, they say that all the goods are common among the wise, for which reason someone who benefits one of his fellows even benefits himself as well. And that like-mindedness is understanding of common goods, and hence also all good people think like each other, because of their chiming in with each other in matters to do with life. But that worthless people, jarring with each other, are enemies, and evil-doers to each other, and at war. (Stob. 2.93.19-94.6) ³²	τά τε ἀγαθὰ πάντα τῶν σπουδαίων εἶναι <κοινὰ> λέγουσι, καθ' ὃ καὶ τὸν ὠφελούντ' αὐτὸν τῶν πλησίων καὶ ἑαυτὸν ὠφελεῖν. Τὴν τε ὁμόνοιαν ἐπιστήμην εἶναι κοινῶν ἀγαθῶν, δι' ὃ καὶ τοὺς σπουδαίους πάντας ὁμονοεῖν ἀλλήλοις διὰ τὸ συμφωνεῖν ἐν τοῖς κατὰ τὸν βίον· τοὺς δὲ φαύλους διαφωνοῦντας πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἐχθροὺς εἶναι καὶ κακοποιητικούς ἀλλήλων καὶ πολεμίους.
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While this text does not use the word 'friendship', its concern with common goods, benefits, like-mindedness, consonance, and its mentioning two opposite terms for 'friends' make it clear that it is very much concerned with the concept. T6 too describes like-mindedness as understanding (of common goods). It is specified as the cause of the wise being of one mind amongst each other.³³ I suggest that this reference to thinking alike as a consequence of like-mindedness is the separation between understanding and acts done in accordance with understanding that we are familiar with from other contexts of Stoic ethics.

³⁰ Schofield 1991 notes that 'the Stoic definition fails to spell out that this knowledge is *shared* knowledge' (129, his emph.) but considers it 'not credible that such a requirement was not accepted by the Stoics' (48). By contrast, I think the Stoics had good reason not to accept it, viz. their desire to remove the basic forms of like-mindedness and friendship from the insecure realm of relations.

³¹ In her valuable account, Katja Vogt (2008a: 148-54) emphasises the revisionary nature of Stoic friendship. She also recognises that 'being a friend is [...] a disposition or state of the soul, not a relationship' (149). This observation may be extended to friendship itself, I argue.

³² SVF 3.625.

³³ A typically Stoic sort of causation, where cause and effect differ hardly at all (cf. Stob. 1.138.18-22, in SVF 1.89 and 2.336, in LS 55A).

The other element here is the idea that all goods are common to the wise. For this reason all benefit is also beneficial to all the wise. Any wise person, therefore, who produces something that is good for another wise person, increases the stock of common goods, and thereby her own stock of goods.

Jula Wildberger has drawn attention to the connection of this doctrine with the Stoic idea that everything that happens in the world is an action of god. A benefit is defined as virtue or an action done in accordance with virtue;³⁴ since god is eminently virtuous, all its actions are benefits. All benefits, as T6 tells us, are benefits for all wise people; therefore whatever happens in the world is a benefit to a wise person. Moreover, taking seriously the idea of common possession of all goods, a wise person can also regard whatever happens in the cosmos as her property.³⁵

Friendship is identified as like-mindedness, and through it as understanding of common goods. While T6, as we noted, does not mention friendship, it does describe its content. As a person in whom there is friendship, the wise will understand the goods that are at the same time all hers and all everybody's. She has expert knowledge of the benefits done to her and of the opportunities she has to benefit others (and herself). The cosmic scale that we have looked at just now suggests the extent of the doctrine of friendship. In the Stoic framework, friendship is certainly not a small, particularistic corner of ethics.

One more text is worth looking at to expand on the notion that friendship is understanding. It is part of a chapter in which Clement shows that all the Christian virtues are connected. Among these virtues he includes a number of subspecies of friendship. In this text as in others, Clement uses 'love' («ἀγάπη») where Stoic writers use 'friendship' («φιλία»).

T7	<p>Love is supposed to be like-mindedness about the things that accord with λόγος, life and character, or, in sum, a community of life, or the extension of friendship and familial love with right λόγος, centering around how we treat our fellows. A fellow is another I. And in this way we call brothers those who have been begotten again by the same λόγος. Next to love lies also love of strangers, which is a kind of friendship-skill with respect to how we treat strangers. And they are strangers to whom worldly things are strange. [...] Now love of strangers is concerned with what is beneficial to strangers; and our guests are strangers, and our friends are guests, and our brothers friends: 'dear brother', says Homer. And love of humanity, because of which there is also familial love, and which is the friendly treatment of human beings, as well as</p>	<p>ἀγάπη δὲ ὁμόνοια ἂν εἴη τῶν κατὰ τὸν λόγον καὶ τὸν βίον καὶ τὸν τρόπον ἢ συνελόντι φάναι κοινωνία βίου ἢ ἐκτένεια φιλίας καὶ φιλοστοργίας μετὰ λόγου ὀρθοῦ περὶ χρῆσιν ἐταίρων. ὁ δὲ ἐταῖρος ἕτερος ἐγὼ ἢ καὶ ἀδελφοὺς τοὺς τῷ αὐτῷ λόγῳ ἀναγεννηθέντας προσαγορεύομεν. παράκειται δὲ τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἢ τε φιλοξενία, φιλοτεχνία τις οὕσα περὶ χρῆσιν ξένων· ξένοι δὲ ὧν ξένα τὰ κοσμικά. [...] ἀναστρέφει τοίνυν ἢ φιλοξενία περὶ τὸ ὠφέλιμον τοῖς ξένοις, ξένοι δὲ οἱ ἐπίξενοι, ἐπίξενοι δὲ οἱ φίλοι, φίλοι δὲ οἱ ἀδελφοί· «φίλε κασίγνητε» φησὶν Ὅμηρος. ἢ τε φιλανθρωπία, δι' ἣν καὶ ἡ φιλοστοργία, φιλικὴ χρῆσις ἀνθρώπων ὑπάρχουσα, ἢ τε φιλοστοργία, φιλοτεχνία τις οὕσα περὶ στέρξιν φίλων ἢ οἰκείων,</p>
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³⁴ e.g. SE M 11.22, in SVF 3.75: «ὠφέλειαν μὲν λέγοντες τὴν ἀρετὴν καὶ τὴν σπουδαίαν πρᾶξιν».

³⁵ Wildberger 2002: 268; cf. Vogt 2008a: 151-2.

familial love, which is a kind of friendship-skill with respect to the affection for friends and those familiar to us, follow along with love as well. And since the real human being is the pneumatic one in us, love of humanity is brotherly love for those who have taken part in the same πνεῦμα. Affection, in turn, is the preservation of good-will or lovingness, and lovingness is complete acceptance, and loving is to be content in your character to be led one way and then another; and they are led into sameness by like-mindedness, which is understanding of common goods; also sameness of opinion is a consonance of opinions. (Clem. *Strom.* 2.9.41.2-42.2)³⁶

συμπαρομαρτοῦσιν ἀγάπη. εἰ δ' ὁ τῷ ὄντι ἄνθρωπος ὁ ἐν ἡμῖν ἐστὶν ὁ πνευματικός, φιλαδελφία ἢ φιλανθρωπία τοῖς τοῦ αὐτοῦ πνεύματος κεκοινωνηκόσιν· στέργεις δ' αὐτῶν τήρησις ἐστὶν εὐνοίας ἢ ἀγαπήσεως, ἀγάπησις δὲ ἀπόδεξις παντελής, καὶ τὸ ἀγαπᾶν ἀρέσκεσθαι τῷ ἡθελῆσαι, ἀγόμενον τε καὶ ἀπαγόμενον· ἄγονται δὲ εἰς ταυτότητα δι' ὁμόνοιαν, ἐπιστήμην οὕσαν κοινῶν ἀγαθῶν· καὶ γὰρ ἡ ὁμογνωμοσύνη συμφωνία γνωμῶν.

Clement was a Christian who wrote with quite different purposes in mind than the transmission of Stoic thought. This text also contains specifically Christian elements, like, to mention just a few, the prominence of «ἀγάπη», the idea of being 'begotten again', and the mention of 'worldly things' as 'strange'. So before we use this text as evidence for Stoic thought, we should justify this. Later on, we will examine another passage from Clement (T9) and find that there is insufficient evidence to take it to report Stoic views. In the case of T7, too, we cannot just assume that it is Stoic thought that it exploits. Clement does not explicitly attribute any part to the Stoics. In this case, however, the views expressed are of a sufficiently peculiar nature to warrant identifying this material as Stoic (as I spell out below). We have a number of descriptions of terms that are Stoic descriptions, not so universally accepted that it is not significant that they turn up here.³⁷ Other descriptions are not attested elsewhere, but the emphasis they give to skill makes them very similar to the Stoic definitions of the virtues, such as we find them, for instance, in Arius Didymus.³⁸

It is plain that Clement is concerned to show that love of strangers, familial love, and love of humanity (φιλοξενία, φιλοστοργία, φιλανθρωπία) follow in the train of love (ἀγάπη). They are taken up, as it were, in love, so that the agreement between love and the other virtues that Clement writes about in the context surrounding T7 is seen to include these more specific forms. In T7 itself, Clement underlines this by using a ring composition: he begins and ends with love and like-mindedness.

Against the synthetic tendency of Clement's treatment of them, the descriptions of the sub-forms of love stand out quite clearly. Grammatically, the use of participles («οὔσα» and «ὑπάρχουσα») marks these descriptions as phrases of external origin just as effectively as the subjunctive phrase «ἂν εἴη» the identification of love as like-mindedness. Love of strangers is defined as 'a kind of friendship-skill about the

³⁶ SVF 3.292.

³⁷ As noted, «ἀγάπη» takes the place of «φιλία» in Clement's vocabulary. With ἀγάπη as ὁμόνοια τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον, cf. T4, T5; with ὁμόνοια as ἐπιστήμη κοινῶν ἀγαθῶν cf. T5, T6. Note also ὁμογνωμοσύνη as συμφωνία γνωμῶν, and cf. T2: ὁμοδογματία. Less specifically, but still Stoic is ἀγάπη as κοινωνία βίου, the ἑταῖρος as ἕτερος ἐγώ (cf. Zeno in DL 7.23, in SVF 1.324).

³⁸ Sections 5b1 and 5b2 in Stobaeus 2 chapter 7 (59.4-62.6).

treatment of strangers'. Familial love is said to be 'a kind of friendship-skill with respect to the affection of friends and those familiar to us'. Love of humanity, thirdly, is 'the friendly treatment of human beings'. Two of these are 'friendship-skills' (φιλοτεχνία).³⁹ As I noted, these should be compared with known Stoic descriptions of the virtues, which state them to be 'understanding of X' or 'X-like understanding about such and such'.⁴⁰ To the extent, then, that love of strangers and familial love can be understood as subforms of friendship (the Greek terms «φιλοξενία», «φιλοστοργία», and «φιλία» make this more evident), their designation as expertises in Clement's text is at the very least highly compatible with a designation of φιλία as an expertise in Stoic thought.

The third description is of love of humanity (φιλανθρωπία), which is not given as an expertise, but as treatment (χρησις). This may be for the sake of verbal variation, so that an expanded version would be something like 'a friendship-skill about the treatment of human beings'. It would then run parallel to love of strangers and familial love. This is likely also in view of its being the reason for familial love (Clement says: 'because of which there is also familial love'). But perhaps verbal variation is not at issue, so that love of humanity is something different than a subform of friendship.⁴¹ Clement's use of «χρησις», however, is interesting. It brings us back to Seneca's 9th letter. There we saw that the wise are said to have use for people because of their understanding. The love of humanity as defined here is such a use. The wise person will be able to treat/use (the same Greek word) all human beings expertly because of her understanding. The description of love of strangers that Clement gives includes the notion of χρησις as well: it is the specific form of friendship that is the skill of dealing expertly with strangers.

3 THE SENSES OF FRIENDSHIP

An important passage that clarifies the senses in which the Stoics speak of friendship is contained in the compendium of Stoic ethics by Arius Didymus. It comes in between T2 and T4. The passage has been misunderstood before, as a consequence of which it has usually been taken to inform us about the Stoic view on the origin of friendship and of friendly feeling, rather than about the status of friendship as a concept. The text distinguishes different ways in which you can speak of friendship. We should keep in mind that it is not necessarily an exhaustive list.

T8	Friendship is spoken of in three ways. It is in one way on account of common benefit, with respect to which people are said to be friends, and this they deny to	Τριχῶς δὲ λεγομένης τῆς φιλίας, καθ' ἓνα μὲν τρόπον τῆς κοινῆς ἕνεκ' ὠφελείας, καθ' ἣν φίλοι εἶναι λέγονται, ταύτην μὲν οὐ φασι τῶν
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³⁹ This word usually refers to love of the arts, but this is another case where the Stoics have taken a word and given it a different meaning.

⁴⁰ See note 38. Strictly speaking, a τέχνη is not an ἐπιστήμη. But that does not affect the point here, which is that φιλία is not a relation, but the understanding of the wise. Cf. also Arius Didymus's «πάσας δὲ τὰς ἀρετάς, ὅσαι ἐπιστῆμαί εἰσι καὶ τέχνηαι[...]» in T18.

⁴¹ Cf. Stob. 2.74.18-9, in SVF 3.101: «ἡ δὲ εὐγηρία χρησις σπουδαία γήρως κατὰ φύσιν ἔχουσα».

be among the goods, because according to them, nothing is good that is constituted out of disparate things. The friendship that is spoken of according to the second meaning, being a friendly attitude to one's fellow, is among the external goods, they say. The friendship revolving around oneself, with respect to which one is friend to one's fellows, they declare to be among the goods involving the soul. (Stob. 2.94.21-95.2)⁴²

ἀγαθῶν εἶναι, διὰ τὸ μηδὲν ἐκ διεστηκόντων ἀγαθῶν εἶναι κατ' αὐτούς· τὴν δὲ κατὰ τὸ δεύτερον σημαίνοντα λεγομένην φιλίαν, κατάσχεσιν οὔσαν φιλικὴν πρὸς τὸν πέλας, τῶν ἐκτὸς λέγουσιν ἀγαθῶν· τὴν δὲ περὶ αὐτὸν φιλίαν, καθ' ἣν φίλος ἐστὶ τῶν πέλας, τῶν περὶ ψυχὴν ἀποφαίνουσι ἀγαθῶν.

Let us first devote some time to the first of these three senses. In this sense, friendship is not included among the goods, Arius Didymus reports. This friendship is on account of common benefit. The Stoics took benefit quite seriously, actually. Their working definition of the good prominently includes the notion of benefit. It is therefore a little surprising that this text excludes friendship that is on account of common benefit from the goods. It may be that the reason for this exclusion is that this friendship is *for the sake of* common benefit, as Banateanu has suggested.⁴³ The idea is that a friendship that has its goal in benefit is not to be counted among the goods, even if the friendship that *is* does also produce common benefit. I am not sure that this distinction will stand up to examination. Other texts tell us that benefit is primarily to be identified with virtue and virtuous activity. If we substitute these for 'benefit' in the above definition, then this first friendship is for the sake of virtue and virtuous activity. It is not clear to me why that sort of friendship should be excluded from the goods because it is for the sake of virtue and virtuous activity. Banateanu's suggestion does not solve the problem.

It becomes plausible not to read 'benefit' in the technical Stoic sense if we read on; the reason why friendship in the first sense is not among the goods is that 'nothing is good that is constituted out of disparate things'. The first friendship for the sake of benefit is apparently constituted out of disparate things. It is the disparateness of its elements that disqualifies it from inclusion among the goods. We know of the goods recognised by the Stoics that they are good to all (wise) people (see T6). Presumably, therefore, the disparate goods mentioned here are things that are good relative to particular purposes and people only. They are apparent goods of which people do not realise that they are not good. The benefit at which friendship in its first sense aims is benefit only in the eyes of fools. One fool thinks wine is good, another thinks money is good; if the second has a vineyard and the first is a banker, they can be friends for the sake of their exchange of wine and money.

A friendship of exchange is mentioned in the following passage in Clement that Von Arnim has printed in his collection of Stoic fragments under the heading 'de amicitia et gratia' (SVF 3.723). It may be tempting, therefore, to identify the first sense in T8 with the second kind in T9; but we should resist that temptation. There is in fact no reason to consider T9 as reporting Stoic thought. Nor is the thought that

⁴² = SVF 3.98.

⁴³ 2002: 68.

exchange may be or give rise to some sort of friendship sufficiently distinctive to let the coincidence count in favour of T9.⁴⁴

T9	We are taught three kinds of friendship. And of these the first and best is that according to virtue; the love that is from λόγος is strong. The second and middle kind is that according to exchange. That is communal and generous and useful for life; the friendship from gratefulness is shared. The third and last kind we say is from habit; but they say it is the variable and changeable one according to pleasure. (Clem. <i>Strom.</i> 2.19.101.3) ⁴⁵	Τριττὰ δὲ εἶδη φιλίας διδασκόμεθα καὶ τούτων τὸ μὲν πρῶτον καὶ ἄριστον τὸ κατ' ἀρετὴν· στερρὰ γὰρ ἢ ἐκ λόγου ἀγάπη· τὸ δὲ δεύτερον καὶ μέσον <τὸ> κατ' ἀμοιβήν· κοινωνικὸν δὲ τοῦτο καὶ μεταδοτικὸν καὶ βιωφελές· κοινὴ γὰρ ἢ ἐκ χάριτος φιλία· τὸ δὲ ὕστατον καὶ τρίτον ἡμεῖς μὲν τὸ ἐκ συνηθείας φαμέν· οἱ δὲ τὸ καθ' ἡδονὴν τρεπτὸν καὶ μεταβλητόν.
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From the context it is not clear who are the 'they' (or the 'we', for that matter). Clement has just cited the Stoic version of the final end – living in agreement with nature – and has assimilated it to the Platonic end, which he has adduced earlier as imitation of God. This fits his purpose, because in the chapter in which we find T9, Clement is concerned to show that the life of the true believer (the gnostic or 'knower') is indeed one of becoming like God. From his having quoted the Stoics just before, however, it does not follow that the people who have taught us about the three kinds of friendship are the Stoics as well.⁴⁶

Directly following T9, Clement cites with approval a certain Pythagorean named Hippodamus, who distinguished three sorts of friendship, 'one from the understanding of the Gods, one from the gifts of men, and one from the pleasures of beasts'.⁴⁷ By means of this quote, Clement reinterprets the classification of friendships that 'we are taught', in order that it too agrees with his identification of the best human life with a life in imitation of God. The pattern seems the same as what Clement did just before with the Stoic end of life: he reinterprets an authoritative doctrine that at first sight does not look like Clement's imitation of God in such a way that it turns out to be pointing to exactly that.

What this use of T9 shows is that this classification has some authoritative status for Clement's readers – or he would not use it. And of course Clement says as much in introducing it as something that 'we are taught'. However, that does not bring us closer to an identification of the 'they' with the Stoics.⁴⁸ We should also note the similarities between the three kinds that Clement identifies and the three kinds in the Aristotelian theory of friendship, albeit Clement reverses the order between the friendship based on pleasure and the friendship based on utility (to speak in

⁴⁴ Clement describes a division of kinds of friendship, not senses. However, the difference between senses and kinds, as they occur in ancient classifications of this type, is perhaps not as great as our terms may suggest (there seeming to be no strict separation between the roles of senses as referents and as referring expressions).

⁴⁵ SVF 3.723.

⁴⁶ This is assumed by Banateanu 2002: 68-9.

⁴⁷ «τᾶν φιλιᾶν ἃ μὲν ἐξ ἐπιστάμας θεῶν, ἃ δ' ἐκ παροχᾶς ἀνθρώπων, ἃ δὲ ἐξ ἀδονᾶς ζώων» *Strom.* 2.19.102.1.

⁴⁸ The prominent use of λόγος and χάρις is not specifically Stoic. You may even suspect them to point to a Christian origin of this classification.

Aristotelian terms). In the Aristotelian scheme, the former is the third and lowest kind, while the latter takes its place between the highest kind based on virtue and the lowest kind based on pleasure. Furthermore, what Clement presents as a divergence in views, between countenancing a friendship based on pleasure and one based on habit, sits very well together in its Aristotelian correlate: the friendship from pleasure is in the same league as that from habit, if only because in many cases sameness of habits produces pleasure. In other words, Clement has not copied T9 out of Aristotle. But for all we know, it may reflect Peripatetic or early Christian thought just as much as Stoic doctrine. The value of this text as evidence for Stoic thought on friendship is therefore less than secure.⁴⁹

The first sense of friendship given in T8 has occupied us long enough now; what we are really interested in are the two other senses. In its second sense, friendship is ‘a friendly attitude towards one’s fellow’, which is classified among the external goods. In its third sense, it is friendship ‘revolving around oneself’, which is classified among the goods of the soul. Both of these, then, are included among the goods, in contrast to the first sense of friendship.

4 THE RELATIVE SENSE

In its second sense, the relative sense, as I have called it, friendship is one of the external goods. One question is whether in its description as *κατάσχεσις φιλική πρὸς τὸν πέλας*, the *κατάσχεσις* refers to a relation; it is sometimes translated along those lines. However, there is no reason to think that it stands for a relation. The only text that LSJ adduces for this meaning (A.iii) is ours. In other Stoic texts, meanwhile, the related verb *κατέχω* is mainly used to describe things as holding a particular position, or occupying some place (these are mostly contexts in which the Stoic theory of place or their theory of mixture is being discussed). Unless other evidence shows up, then, we should take the second sense to refer to something more internal than to a relation.⁵⁰

There is, however, more behind T8’s use of «κατάσχεσις». And this has to do with the Stoics’ strategy in thinking about friendship. They want friendship to be something less open to contingency than what we would call the relation of friendship itself. This is the reason why they do not recognise a sense of friendship that stands for this relation. The description of the relative sense shows how the Stoics reinterpret friendship in a way that allows them to speak about the relational aspect of friendship without having friendship itself consist in the relation.

As a first step, let us consider how the phrase *κατάσχεσις φιλική* is a nominalisation of *φιλικῶς κατέχειν*. And let us compare this terminology with the

⁴⁹ Pace Banateanu 2002: 110.

⁵⁰ The alternative noun from «κατέχω», «κάθεξις», refers specifically to retention and restraining (in all three meanings that LSJ gives). It is plausible, then, that «κατάσχεσις» was the noun of choice if one wanted to refer to the more, so to speak, possessive or dispositional aspects of «κατέχω».

following description in another text in Arius Didymus, which reflects the qualms some Stoics seem to have had in calling people ‘friends’ who have never met.

T10	<p>[They say] that all good people benefit each other, while neither being by all means friends of each other, nor well-wishing, nor honoured, nor welcoming, since they do not happen upon one another nor live in the same place; yet they are disposed in a well-wishing, friendly, approving, and welcoming way towards one another. (Stob. 2.101.24-102.2)⁵¹</p>	<p>Πάντας δὲ τοὺς σπουδαίους ὠφελεῖν ἀλλήλους, οὔτε φίλους ὄντας ἀλλήλων πάντως οὔτε εὖνους <οὔτε> εὐδοκίμους οὔτε ἀποδεχομένους παρὰ τὸ μήτε καταλαμβάνεσθαι μήτ' ἐν ταύτῳ κατοικεῖν τόπῳ, εὐνοητικῶς μέντοι γὰρ πρὸς ἀλλήλους διακεισθαι καὶ φιλικῶς καὶ δοκιμαστικῶς καὶ ἀποδεκτικῶς.</p>
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T10 is evidence that the Stoics have a special use for adverbs in their account of friendship. There are, of course, significant differences between T8 and T10. The value of the latter for our purposes is, however, that it specifies a certain theoretical minimum, in the following sense. There were Stoics, apparently, who thought it too offensive to received opinion to speak of people who have never met as of friends. For them it is less objectionable to hold on to the more sophisticated technical expression of what wise people are to each other. (In the end, it is hard to see just how much less problematic it is to be disposed in a friendly manner to someone you have never met than to be called that person’s friend.) The sophistication of the description in T10 makes it plausible that this is the more theoretical way of putting things. And this makes T10 a useful text for us, as it constitutes another theoretical context in which the Stoics described the friendship of wise people in adverbial terms.

We can begin to see the point of doing so if we return to the φιλικὴ κατάσχεσις of T8, and recognise behind its verbal counterpart – the phrase φιλικῶς κατέχειν – the fourth category of Stoic ontological classification. What I want to suggest, in other words, is that when T8 gives the second sense in which ‘friendship’ is used as «κατάσχεσιν οὔσαν φιλικὴν πρὸς τὸν πέλας», it marks friendship as a member of the class of things that are disposed in some way to something else: as a πρὸς τί πως ἔχον. Let us remind ourselves of the function of the category of things disposed to other things in some way. The stock example is the father to a son, who can lose his claim to being a father without having experienced any change in himself. Something disposed to something else in some way is something as considered purely under the aspect of its relation to something else. If friendship is such a thing, then something is labelled as friendship because it has a relation to something else. We have seen that what is labelled is nothing other than the perfect, wise and virtuous soul; in other words, the understanding of a wise person. T8 itself specifies what understanding is related to, if it is to earn this label of ‘friendship’: one’s fellow. In its relative sense, then, friendship designates the understanding of a wise person, considered under the aspect of its relation to other wise people.⁵²

⁵¹ SVF 3.626.

⁵² You may complain that τῶν πέλας has not explicitly been identified as other wise people, but I take it as sufficient for this identification that (i) we have enough evidence that strict Stoic usage restricted the class of friends to the class of the wise and (ii) that T8 is sufficiently technical to be conforming to strict usage.

That there was such a sense of friendship appears also from another Stobaeian text. This is part of a division of goods into things that are by themselves and things that are disposed in some way towards certain things.⁵³

T11	And [they say] that of good things some are in their own right, others are disposed in some way towards something. In their own right: understanding, justness in conduct, and the like; towards something: prestige, goodwill, friendship, <consonance>. (Stob. 2.73.16-9) ⁵⁴	Ἔτι δὲ τῶν ἀγαθῶν τὰ μὲν εἶναι καθ' ἑαυτά, τὰ δὲ πρὸς τί πως ἔχειν. Καθ' ἑαυτὰ μὲν ἐπιστήμην, δικαιοπραγίαν καὶ τὰ ὅμοια πρὸς τι δὲ τιμὴν, εὐνοίαν, φιλίαν, <συμφωνίαν>.
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Here friendship is ranked among the things that are disposed in a certain way towards something.⁵⁵ T8 has told us that the disposition is towards other friends; and we know already that it is wise understanding that is so disposed.

One final issue remains with respect to the relative sense. It is explicitly included among the external goods. This also bears on the editorial change that the standard edition of Stobaeus's text makes in T8. It reads «κατάσχεσιν οὔσαν φιλικὴν πρὸς τῶν πέλας», 'a friendly attitude from one's fellows', where the manuscripts give «πρὸς τὸν πέλας» 'to one's fellow'.⁵⁶ The change makes sense if we take the concern of T8 to be the specification of the category of goods that friendship falls in from the first-person perspective. Then the inclusion of the relative sense of friendship among the external goods seems to require this friendship to be external to the agent. A simple way to ensure that the text is about externals is to change the accusative «τόν» into the genitive «τῶν». The change is quite unnecessary, however. The central concern of T8 is the specification of the ways a wise person can be engaged in friendship. The first of these ways is an inferior one. The second describes how the wise person's friendship may bear upon others. The third describes how her friendship bears upon herself. It is in this third sense that friendship counts as a good for the wise person herself (it is correspondingly included as a good of the soul). In the second sense, however, it is not relative to herself that friendship counts as a good, but relative to others. It is therefore an external good for the wise fellow of this wise friend.⁵⁷ It is an added advantage of reading «τόν» that it makes the contrast implied

⁵³ This is a classification of the different way good things can be, not one that specifies the different ways in which things can be good. In this connection I should also point to the identifications at the end of the passage, 66.10-4: e.g. of ἀλυπία and εὐταξία with σωφροσύνη. The goodness of ἀλυπία is the goodness of σωφροσύνη; this goodness does not depend on its relation to other things, whereas the status of σωφροσύνη as ἀλυπία does depend on its relation to other things. Note however, that the manuscripts have 66.10-4 after 66.20.

⁵⁴ In SVF 3.112.

⁵⁵ And it is worth observing that τιμή and εὐνοία are, too – to correspond to the εὐνοητικῶς and δοκιμαστικῶς of T10. Stobaeus here uses «πρὸς τι» as an abbreviation for «πρὸς τί πως ἔχειν», which is not unusual. Still, Elorduy (1936: 165) wants to emend lines 16-7 to read «τῶν ἀγαθῶν τὰ μὲν εἶναι καθ' ἑαυτά, τὰ δὲ πρὸς τι, <τὰ δὲ πρὸς τί> πως ἔχειν». The whole of his account (160-80) should be used with caution.

⁵⁶ 'corr. tacite Heeren', writes Wachsmuth *ad loc.*

⁵⁷ This agrees with the standard accounts of the Stoic division of goods – into goods of the soul, external goods, and goods which are neither of the soul nor external. For each of these puts friends in the category of external goods. What we have in T8 is a version of the same

in «περὶ αὐτόν» stronger. If the second sense is about others' friendly attitude towards me, there is only a weak contrast with the third sense, since both are about me. On the manuscript reading, however, the relative sense of friendship is about another, and the internal sense about oneself.

5 THE INTERNAL SENSE

T8 gives the third sense of friendship as 'friendship revolving around oneself, with respect to which one is friend to one's fellows'; this 'they state to be among the goods involving the soul'. We should not read this as an account of the origin of love for other people. On such a reading, the phrase «τὴν δὲ περὶ αὐτόν φιλίαν» might be translated as 'the friendship for oneself'.⁵⁸ The idea would be that the Stoics consider there to be a primordial friendship that every wise person has for herself, which serves as the source of friendly feeling for others – «καθ' ἣν φίλος ἐστὶ τῶν πέλας» as a thesis about the origin of benevolence.

This reading has the benefit of sounding in agreement with some of what we know of the Stoic theory of familiarisation, the accounts of which state that each being has its primary attachment to itself. A disadvantage on that same count is that recent studies have indicated that this theory keeps the origins of personal and social attachments quite distinct.⁵⁹ Too bad for those studies, you might say, if our text must express this thesis about the origins of benevolence. However, the conflict is avoided, once we see that our text has no such thesis to offer.

Let us note as a preliminary that it would have been more straightforward to describe self-love by means of a genitive or using the preposition «πρός». The constructions used for the self-attachment of animals in the texts that report the theory of familiarisation to us are quite different from the one in T8.⁶⁰ Furthermore, if «καθ' ἣν φίλος ἐστὶ τῶν πέλας» were meant as a thesis about the origin of friendship for others, the point should have been expressed in terms of the wise person's love for others, rather than that this person is their friend (you would expect this to read along the lines of «καθ' ἣν φιλεῖ τοὺς πέλας»).

The remarkable thing about the prepositional phrase «περὶ αὐτόν» is that it seems to indicate a subject matter rather than an object proper of friendship. It is not so much direction as location that «περὶ» expresses. However, I think that we should have expected precisely this from the identification of friendship with understanding. Given how the Stoics emphasise harmony in their accounts of friendship, it is not surprising if they located the prime instance of friendship in wise understanding itself,

principle couched in terms of friendship. For a friend, the understanding of her friend that is disposed towards her in a friendly way – that is, friendship in its relative sense – is an external good.

⁵⁸ So Banateanu 2002: 68: 'l'amitié pour soi-même'.

⁵⁹ Inwood 1983; Annas 1993: 265; cf. already Pembroke 1971: 121; and the critical remarks in Lee 2002: 121-36; Algra 2003b.

⁶⁰ e.g. Alex. *De An.* 150.30, 32, in SVF 3.183: «πρός αὐτό», «πρός τὴν σύστασιν»; Plut. *SR* 1038b = SVF 3.179: «πρός αὐτούς»; DL 7.85 = SVF 3.178: fort. «αὐτῶ», «πρός ἑαυτό». Nor does T8 give us the reflexive αὐτόν, but only αὐτόν, although this is an editorial decision.

which is the very embodiment of order. We should recall the type of description that the Stoics start from, ones that they advance as capturing common intuitions about the phenomenon in question: T4 describes friendship in terms of συμφωνία and ὁμόνοια, consonance and like-mindedness. Now the understanding of a wise person is itself fundamentally a consonance and like-mindedness. According to the Stoics, what consonance there is in action and between people is based on this primary consonance of understanding. I submit that the Stoics thought of understanding as meeting to the fullest degree the demands on friendship mentioned in descriptions like T4. On its surface, the description of T4 is generally acceptable, but it is also able to communicate the more specific Stoic doctrine if you interpret consonance and like-mindedness as features of wise understanding.

Perhaps we may move beyond what the sources explicitly testify here. How, we wonder, may we further describe this friendship that is understanding? T8 speaks of it as a sense of friendship in its own right; that seems to involve something more than merely a condition of friendship in its relative sense. Possibly we may speak here of a friendship between the parts of the soul. Compare, for instance, the way in which the Stoics speak of agreement (ὁμολογία) in an internal way, as being not merely the agreement of the soul with other souls, or with the order of the cosmos, but the agreement of a soul (a mind, as we would say) with itself. This, I take it, is plausibly interpreted in terms of the agreement between the concepts that constitute our λόγος. I submit that something similar is going on when the Stoics consider understanding the primary case of friendship.⁶¹ Not every human λόγος is also understanding, but only a λόγος of which the constituent parts, its concepts, cohere to the highest degree, both physically and logically (in the Stoic view these go together). It may very well be this consonance between concepts that the Stoics have in mind when they use friendship in its internal sense. It is also possible that this specific construal of the internal sense of friendship is not how the Stoics thought of it; nevertheless, in that case too our conclusion remains that the Stoics conceived of understanding as the primary case of friendship.

How, on this interpretation, should we understand Arius Didymus when he tells us that friendship in its internal sense is that ‘with respect to which one is friend to one’s fellows’? It is probably impossible to achieve a high degree of precision here, since the phrase «καθ’ ἑν» is itself so general. A plausible way to look at it, however, is to see friendship in its internal sense, which describes understanding, as a condition for friendship in its relative sense – for that is surely what ‘friend to one’s fellows’ refers to, being so close to the description of friendship to one’s fellow itself. Given a wise person, you can describe her understanding as friendship (in the internal sense). Now add another wise person, and you can describe the first’s understanding as friendship in virtue of its relation to that other wise person (in the relative sense). Together with the presence of another wise person, the friendship that resides within the first wise person herself is a sufficient condition to describe that person’s wise soul as friendship in its relative sense. We may compare this to the standard example of a fourth-

⁶¹ Compare the way Chrysippus speaks of the beauty of a soul in terms of the order of its parts (H3, T16, with text in n.119). Cf. Sen. *Ep.* 109.10: ‘omnibus inter se virtutibus amicitia est’.

category description: that of a father – a man being disposed in a father-like way towards another human being. The description ‘father’ may no longer hold of this person without change in himself. Yet this person must be of a particular kind in order to be eligible for the description. He must be a man who was at some point able to procreate. Perhaps it is in this way that we can describe how friendship in its internal sense is a condition for friendship as a fourth-category label. A soul must have friendship residing within itself in order for it to be eligible for the description of friendship in its relative sense.

One feature of this discussion remains to be emphasised. Both the relative and the internal senses of friendship that Arius Didymus mentions in T8 are counted among the goods. If we conceive of friendship as a relation, external to the wise soul, we will have to deny this and say that it is something indifferent (in the Stoic sense).⁶² If, by contrast, my interpretation is right, and the Stoics identified friendship with understanding, then the inclusion of friendship among the goods makes perfect sense.

6 *UNDERSTANDING AS FRIENDSHIP (TWICE)*

In two ways, then, friendship is identified with understanding. In the second, relative, sense of T8, friendship is the fourth-category description of understanding if one considers it under the aspect of its relations to other wise people. In its internal sense, friendship is a description that actually captures something that is permanently true of understanding in itself.

Perhaps it is not wrong to capture these different identifications of friendship with understanding (those who prefer may substitute virtue) by saying that friendship is both a dimension and a function of understanding. As a dimension of understanding, friendship captures something that is of the essence of understanding, wherever understanding occurs (this may be the harmony between the parts of understanding itself). As a function of understanding, friendship is a description that applies if we consider understanding under the aspect of its relation to other people. As with all fourth-category descriptions, friendship as a function of understanding may at some point no longer apply to understanding without understanding itself having changed. For if there are no other wise people and no gods and no demons,⁶³ there are no suitable objects for understanding to be related to in such a way that it can properly be described as friendship towards them (in the relative sense). Of no human wise person will this ever be true; but it is true of god in the conflagration.

7 *ACTIVE UNDERSTANDING*

We know what happens when the world has been burned up. God will make another one (it will be uncannily like this one). The same happens with friendship. If a wise person happens to lose all her friends, she will make another one. Seneca says in his

⁶² So Lesses: 62. Or, calling it good, we wonder, with Zeller 1963: 299-300, whether the need for friendship outside themselves does not diminish the self-sufficiency of the wise after all.

⁶³ On the gods as friends, see Vogt 2008a: 153.

9th letter that the wise is an expert at making friendships. He adduces as the reason why the wise won't remain inert, that they do not wish the great virtue of friendship to be inactive.⁶⁴

What is it for a virtue 'to lie dormant'?⁶⁵ If we take the Chrysippean line – a fair choice not only because it is orthodox but because Seneca's letter so explicitly incorporates Chrysippean thinking – each of the virtues is distinguished by a real inherent difference with respect to all other virtues, while it shares all of its theorems and its goal with all other virtues. Within this framework, Seneca can call a virtue inactive when there are no actions to be done that are primarily the domain of that virtue. So courage would rest, for instance, if there were nothing to be endured at all. All the while, however, a Stoic would insist that all virtues are implicated in all virtuous actions. So friendship as a virtue must be implicated in all virtuous action, even if there may be (imagined) situations in which there is no occasion for the activity of friendship as the dominant virtue.

But have we not shown that the virtuous soul is in itself active? Why then does Seneca speak of the inactivity of a virtue? We should bear in mind that Seneca's letter is not a technical piece of writing. The only thing that is properly technical is Chrysippus's distinction between having a use for and being in need of, and this is also, in fact, introduced and marked as something technical. For Seneca's purposes, therefore, a soul that is active in itself may still be called inactive if none of its actions reach beyond its boundaries, so to speak. But, regardless of the expressions used, Seneca is of course right in saying that the wise person will want to be active and will want to bring order into the world as much as possible.

As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, the distinction between a wise soul that is active in itself only and a wise soul whose activities reach out into the world is a different one from the distinction between the relative and internal senses of friendship. But we also noted that the wise person strives for external, ordering influence, for making use of things in an expert way. A prime example of such action are the efforts of the wise to make young people wise as well. In the imaginary situation in which there is only one wise soul, this external action, if successful, will make the relative sense of friendship applicable to this wise soul: having helped someone else become wise, the first wise soul is now related to this other soul in the required way for the first soul to be called friendship in the relative sense.

⁶⁴ *Ep.* 9.5: 'faciendarum amicitiarum artifex'; 9.8: 'sapiens, etiam si contentus est se, tamen habere amicum vult, si nihil aliud, ut exercent amicitiam, ne tam magna virtus iaceat[.]'

⁶⁵ As Gummere translates (Seneca 1917: 47).

4.2

EROS

This imaginary situation brings us to the topic of ἔρως, of sexual love. In the remainder of this chapter we will examine the outward activity of the understanding of the wise in matters of love; this is the activity of erotic virtue. The wise kind of ἔρως, as distinct from the ἔρως to which non-wise people are susceptible, is a special case of the activities that relate the wise person to other human beings: it seeks to make others wise. Nonetheless, the outward activity of love is no more necessary to the wise person than other activities that are directed at other people. If the earth had no young people, the wise would not have ἔρως. So perhaps the wise would find no use for the name of erotic virtue; but the thing itself to which the name refers, which in the last analysis is simply wise understanding, would be there, active in itself, sufficient unto itself.

1 THE GENERAL SHAPE OF STOIC LOVE

The Stoics have their own version of the philosophically revised and purified notion of ἔρως, of sexual love. Plato was not their only predecessor to have given this notion, with its powerful cultural associations and norms, a prominent place in his writings. Nevertheless, it is Plato's version with which the Stoic conception of ἔρως shows the most significant contrasts.

It seems at first sight that the Stoics should do one of three things with ἔρως. They may banish it, as a violent and unstable affection that is out of tune with the rational life of the wise. They may incorporate it within their ideas on each animal's preservation of its own nature, and give it a circumscribed place in whatever the wise do wisely in matters of procreation. Or they may follow the gist of Plato's redescription of it as a motor towards perfection. Given the role of the sage in their philosophy this option would look a little different in its Stoic than in its Platonic form; it would probably make the wise the object of ἔρως and those progressing towards wisdom its subjects.

None of these is the Stoic route. In many respects, they stay very close to non-philosophical ideas about what ἔρως is. It is something experienced by an adult, and directed at young people. It is one-sided, and stops once those young people have reached maturity. The Stoic twist to this general scheme is that the adult is a sage, and that the terminus of ἔρως is also perfect maturity. Here is one of a range of similar statements.

T12	And [they say] that the wise person will love the young people who through their appearance show their aptitude for virtue[.] (DL 7.129) ⁶⁶	καὶ ἐρασθήσονται δὲ τὸν σοφὸν τῶν νέων τῶν ἐμφαινόντων διὰ τοῦ εἶδους τὴν πρὸς ἀρετὴν εὐφυΐαν[.]
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⁶⁶ SVF 1.248 (= 1.Apoll.18 = 3.716)

The Stoics take ἔρωσ seriously as a natural given. Their wise will therefore not repudiate it as if it were something unnatural. Their wisdom, rather, shows in their proper use of it, just as it shows in their proper use of food, pleasure, &c. So far, then, ἔρωσ itself seems to be something indifferent, something that is neither good nor bad.⁶⁷ The wise will opt for it, not as something good, or as a part of something good, but as something that may be preferred to other things as a part of the order of λόγος – and this latter is what the wise really go for in directing their efforts towards ἔρωσ.

T12 also gives us an object of ἔρωσ. The wise will love young people who show some aptitude for virtue through their appearance. Wise ἔρωσ will not be directed at older people, not at people without an aptitude for virtue, and equally not at people with an aptitude for virtue that do not show this through their appearance. The latter group will in fact be a notional one from the Stoic perspective. Like many of their contemporaries, they were firmly convinced that people's appearances tell us something about their characters.⁶⁸ We may therefore simplify the situation by restricting the reference to young people with an aptitude for virtue as the possible objects of ἔρωσ. We do not really find in our sources any specification of whether wise people may have favourites, or whether all young, apt people are equally loved by the wise.⁶⁹

The specification in T12 of a particular group of people as the objects of wise ἔρωσ may still be perfectly compatible with ἔρωσ being merely something indifferent. The wise treatment of indifferent things is recognizable by being right treatment; the wise use indifferent things well. It may be just a feature of the right use of ἔρωσ that the wise will love this particular group of people. Still, the description of these people as apt for virtue suggests that ἔρωσ is more than just something indifferent. Let us keep this in mind as we examine it further.

2 YOUNG PEOPLE AND APTITUDE

In choosing young people as the objects of wise ἔρωσ, the Stoics may seem to leave themselves little defence against Plutarch's complaint that their ἔρωσ is diametrically opposed to the common man's sane judgement.

⁶⁷ Cf. Stob. 2.66.9-11, in SVF 3.717: «Τὸ δὲ ἔρᾶν αὐτὸ μόνον ἀδιάφορον εἶναι, ἐπειδὴ γίνεται ποτε καὶ περὶ φαύλους.» See Inwood 1997: 59; I am not sure the idea is sufficiently peculiar to warrant his connection of the Stoic view with that of Pausanias in Plato's *Symposium*.

⁶⁸ A recent discussion can be found in Laurand 2006: 200-7.

⁶⁹ We do find statements prescribing that one should not choose to have intercourse with the object of one's love rather than with others, or with females rather than males; this may suggest that sexual exclusivity was regarded as a hazard (so in SE M 11.190; DL 7.131; cf. Nussbaum 1995: 257-8). It would also be congruent with their general view of what the wise would do for the Stoics to say that they would give those near them more time and attention (ibid.: 265).

T13	<p>[They say] that young people are ugly, since they are bad and fools, but that the wise are beautiful. But these beautiful people are neither loved nor loveable! And that is not the worst, but that they say that those who love ugly people cease to do so once these have become beautiful. Who recognises this as love, that is held fast and kindled the moment it sees for itself sickness of soul in sickness of body, but is extinguished and dies once beauty and at the same time wisdom, with justice and moderation, come to be? (Plut. <i>CN</i>1073A)⁷⁰</p>	<p>αἰσχροὺς μὲν γὰρ εἶναι τοὺς νέους, φαύλους γ' ὄντας καὶ ἀνοήτους, καλοὺς δὲ τοὺς σοφοὺς· ἐκείνων δὲ τῶν καλῶν μηδένα μήτ' ἐρᾶσθαι μήτ' ἀξιέραστον εἶναι. καὶ οὐ τοῦτό πω δεινόν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἐρασθέντας αἰσχροῶν παύεσθαι λέγουσι καλῶν γενομένων. καὶ τίς ἔρωτα γινώσκει τοιοῦτον, ὅς ἅμα σώματος μοχθηρίας <μοχθηρίας> ψυχῆς βλεπομένης συνέχεται καὶ ἀνάπτεται, κάλλους δ' ἅμα φρονήσει μετὰ δικαιοσύνης καὶ σωφροσύνης ἐγγινομένου κατασβέννυται καὶ ἀπομαραίνεται;</p>
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This text is from a very polemical work in which Plutarch argues that Stoic doctrines are hopelessly at odds with common sense. We should therefore use it with caution. Still, you may say, Plutarch has a point if the Stoics did indeed hold that the love of the wise has ugly people as its object. All fools are enemies, the Stoics say;⁷¹ so do the wise have love for their enemies? What blocks Plutarch's assault, I think, is that the Stoics would not themselves have said that young people are ugly. The addition in Plutarch's text 'since they are bad and fools' makes us suspect that he is here producing his own inference rather than reporting some Stoic author. In the third sentence of the translation, too, perhaps the only thing we can reliably take to be said by the Stoics is that the young people stop being loved once they reach the state of wisdom – «παύεσθαι» is the new element in the sentence, to which «λέγουσι» may be said to apply most of all. A special reason to distrust Plutarch's inference is that it concerns youths, and the prominence in T12 and other texts of the key term of 'aptitude'.

The objects of the affections of the wise are young people. These are not yet rational, and so are neither beautiful nor ugly in the sense in which wise people are beautiful and fools ugly. Plutarch is right to say that unwise people will have their vice shining through their appearance, according to the Stoics' own view of the relation between character and appearance. As yet, however, the aptitude visible through young people's appearance is not actually either wisdom or foolishness.⁷²

A description of aptitude preserved by Arius Didymus shows us that 'aptitude' is indeed a term that refers to an approximation to virtue, but one which, when used of young people, means precisely the absence of real virtue (as opposed to what some may wish to call natural virtue).

⁷⁰ part in SVF 3.719.

⁷¹ cf., e.g., T6.

⁷² The Stoics' insistence on the aptitude of the objects of wise affection seems to require some leeway for the status of people between 14 – the official threshold of the age of reason – and 28 – when, some sources say, surprised at its lateness, the Stoics ceased loving their loved ones (Ath. 563E). But perhaps we should not assimilate the behaviour of the wise to the behaviour of the Stoics themselves, who did not claim to be wise (contrast Nussbaum 1995: 258).

T14	[They say] that aptitude is generally a state – from nature or deliberate effort – that is germane to virtue, or a state in accordance with which people can easily lay hold of virtue. (Stob. 2.107.21-108.3) ⁷³	εὐφυΐαν μὲν εἶναι κοινῶς ἔξιν ἐκ φύσεως ἢ ἐκ κατασκευῆς οἰκείαν πρὸς ἀρετὴν, ἢ ἔξιν καθ' ἣν εὐανάληπτοι ἀρετῆς εἰσὶ τινες.
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It is worth noting that aptitude is not necessarily a natural given, but something which is either inherent in what and how you are, or the product of your commitment and effort.⁷⁴ In any case, however, it is a term that has a special link with what comes before virtue. It makes young people able easily to lay hold of virtue. There can be little doubt that this is why the wise are especially keen on young people with aptitude.

The love of the wise ceases when their loved one becomes wise. From the self-proclaimed common-sense perspective of Plutarch, this is paradoxical. ἔρως is always directed at beauty and goodness; but upon the acquisition of these very traits, the Stoic beloved stops being loved. The Stoic answer to Plutarch's bewilderment is that the beloved will be no less loved after the transformation into wisdom than before (more on that below, after T18). The only difference is that the young beloved (ἐρώμενος) is now an adult friend (φίλος).⁷⁵

3 LOVE AS AN ONSET

So far, we know little about what the wise do to those they love. What is the effect of their loving, or what does their loving consist in? What, indeed, is ἔρως itself? We know that it is something that the wise have with regard to human beings before they mature. But we have also heard it suggested that non-wise people can have it. Diogenes Laertius describes ἔρως as a desire for friend-making, in a formulation that recurs more often.

T15	[They say] that love is an onset of friend-making because of beauty that shows itself. And that it is not desire for intercourse, but for friendship. (DL 7.130) ⁷⁶	Εἶναι δὲ τὸν ἔρωτα ἐπιβολὴν φιλοποιίας διὰ κάλλος ἐμφαινόμενον· καὶ μὴ εἶναι συνουσίας, ἀλλὰ φιλίας.
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We recognise here the importance of beauty as a signpost to something else. In the immediate sequel bodily beauty is described as the 'flower of virtue'.⁷⁷ We might take this as an expression of the idea that virtue shows itself in external beauty,⁷⁸ in which

⁷³ = SVF 3.366.

⁷⁴ The passage in Stobaeus attributes to some Stoics the sensible idea that much training can change you. Cf. Schofield 1991, appendix C, esp. pp. 117-8.

⁷⁵ So rightly in outline already Zeller 1963: 291n.2.

⁷⁶ Sequel to T1, = SVF 3.716. Similarly Stob. 2.66.11-13, 91.14-5, 115.1-4; SE M 7.239; Schol in Dion. Thr. 120.3-5 Hilg.; Alex. Top. 139.24-5 (resp. SVF 3.717, 395, 650, 399, 721, 722). DL 7.113 (SVF. 3.396) is confused.

⁷⁷ «εἶναι δὲ καὶ τὴν ὥραν ἄνθος ἀρετῆς». «κάλλος» and «ὥρα» are close enough to warrant the connection.

⁷⁸ Schofield 1991: 113-4 takes it so.

case this passage invites criticism along Plutarch's lines. It makes more sense, however, to read it as saying that beauty announces virtue, in the way that flowers announce the fruit that succeeds them.

This harbinger beauty is responsible for an onset of befriending (befriending the beautiful person, probably). 'Onset' renders «ἐπιβολή», which is difficult to translate; depending on its context, it can signify things as different as an assault, an act of understanding, a projection, or an approach. All of these resonate in an erotic context. 'Onset' links the daring aspect of ἔρωσ with a more future-oriented project – we will see in a minute why this is appropriate. In any case, wise ἔρωσ is decidedly not the kind of desire that foolish people have. That would be called «ἐπιθυμία», which is emphatically a wrong impulse towards something considered as good which is not actually good.⁷⁹ The wise do not think of their beloveds or of their relationship with them as good at present, although there may be good in the offing.

In order to say more about what «ἐπιβολή» is, let us look at the following part of Arius Didymus's overview of Stoic ethics.⁸⁰

T16	<p>[They say that] there are several kinds of activating impulse, including the following: intention, onset, preparation, undertaking, choosing, choice, wish, will. [...] and that desire is an impulse before an impulse. (Stob. 2.87.14-8)⁸¹</p>	<p>τῆς δὲ πρακτικῆς ὁρμῆς εἶδη πλείονα εἶναι, ἐν οἷς καὶ ταῦτα· πρόθεσιν, ἐπιβολήν, παρασκευήν, ἐγχείρησιν, <αἴρεσιν>, προαίρεσιν, βούλησιν, θέλησιν. [...] ἐπιβολήν δὲ ὁρμὴν πρὸ ὁρμῆς·</p>
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This passage classifies onset with activating impulse. Activating impulses are ones that move you to do whatever they are impulses towards. In principle, therefore, an onset also moves you. The immediacy that this description suggest seems to be withdrawn when T16 terms an onset as something that comes before an impulse. How should we understand this?

In the text preceding T16, Arius Didymus has made mention of ὄρουσις as a kind of rational impulse towards something in the future. Brad Inwood has argued that ἐπιβολή is included in T16 as a species of ὄρουσις.⁸² In my view this indeed makes best sense of the description of ἐπιβολή as an impulse before an impulse.⁸³ The first

⁷⁹ Stob. 2.66.11 (in SVF 3.717) explicitly denies that ἔρωσ is an ἐπιθυμία. There is some confusion because we also see ἔρωσ mentioned as something not to be approved of and as an ἐπιθυμία: DL 7.113 and Andr. *Pass.* 4 (SVF 3.396-7). So this must be regarded as confused, or as a description of an ἔρωσ that the Stoics would not want to call fully ἔρωσ. At any rate, DL 7.113 calls ἐπιθυμία an «ἄλογος ὄρεξις». An ὄρεξις is always for something as good, whether it is really good or only apparently so; see the discussion in Inwood 1985: 235-7.

⁸⁰ Schofield (1991: 29n.14, cf. 30n.15) suggests that the definition of ἐπιβολή in T16 is an attempt by later Stoics to account for the definition type that we find in T15, because we find the word very seldom in relation to the old Stoa. However, the scarcity of all of our material makes that fact not surprising; the same observation holds for many other pieces of technical terminology. And yet even if Schofield's suggestion holds we are entitled to the content of T16 to reconstruct what the Stoics thought T15 means.

⁸¹ in SVF 3.173.

⁸² Inwood 1985: 229-33. Inwood rightly criticises Bonhöffer (1968a: 257-8) for giving up too early in finding a relatively technical use for the term. Concerned as he is with Epictetus, Bonhöffer claims that the older Stoa shared Epictetus's terminological flexibility *re* ἐπιβολή.

⁸³ Considering that each impulse must result in an action – the link is causal – Inwood suggests that an ἐπιβολή should be taken as an impulse to some action A that 'is logically

impulse is not isolated, but comes to be with an eye to another, future, one. Interpreted along these lines, ἐπιβολή is just what you would expect ἔρωσ to be; the descriptions that we have seen so far specify immediate objects for ἔρωσ that themselves point to something in the future: the flower that announces virtue, the aptitude that easily takes hold of virtue.

4 EROTIC VIRTUE

Having gained some idea of what an onset might be, we can now go back to T15, and concentrate on its insistence that ἔρωσ is directed at friendship. The befriending that this passage speaks of, however, is a special type of befriending. It is not just the establishing of ties of friendship, but the actual making of friends. «φιλοποιία», ‘friend-making’, is production. Before I spell this out, however, let us add one more text to our collection. It is another part of Arius Didymus’s overview, in which the productive aspect of wise ἔρωσ comes to the fore as well. It is part of a larger description of the wise person as engaging in drinking and loving.

T17	<p>Similarly as the erotic they accept the sympotic among the virtues[. ... The erotic virtue] is understanding of the chase of apt young people, which is such as to encourage them towards the understanding in accordance with virtue; and in general it is understanding of loving well[.] (Stob. 2.66.3-8)⁸⁴</p>	<p>Ὁμοίως δὲ τῇ ἐρωτικῇ τὴν συμποτικὴν παραλαμβάνουσιν εἰς τὰς ἀρετάς[. ...] τὴν δ’ ἐπιστήμην νέων θήρας εὐφυῶν, προτρεπτικὴν⁸⁵ οὔσαν ἐπὶ τὴν κατ’ ἀρετὴν, καὶ καθόλου ἐπιστήμην τοῦ καλῶς ἐρᾶν[.]</p>
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From this text we learn that the Stoics recognise an erotic virtue. It is not the most prominent virtue. It does not appear, for instance, in the catalogue of virtues that Arius Didymus provides earlier in his work.⁸⁶ But the brief last explication of what erotic virtue is agrees in format with the concise definitions of virtues that we find elsewhere, not least in Arius’s catalogue. Many of these also say that the virtue in question is an understanding *of X*; or they say it is an understanding *about X*. For X, you get a verb or noun referring to some part of life and living, like eating or food. The description of erotic virtue offered here fits this mould; it is the understanding of the subdivision of life that has to do with loving.

There is much to be said about the precise way in which the Stoics differentiate between the virtues. They all agree that having one virtue implies having them all. But they disagree about the reason for this. Some, most prominently Aristo, say: because there is just one virtue, which gets called by different names as it deals with

connected to B which is further in the future’ (233). By introducing this logical connection, Inwood can avoid a conscious one, and so distinguish ἐπιβολή from πρόθεσις. But in a fateful world, there are too many logical connections between actions to make this a meaningful differentiating factor for ἐπιβολή. Something more is needed, something that makes both actions part of a larger whole in the mind of the actor.

⁸⁴ in SVF 3.717. Plut. CN 1073b, in SVF 3.719, also speaks of a hunt: «Θήρα γάρ τις, φασίν, ἐστὶν ὁ ἔρωσ ἀτελοῦς μὲν εὐφυοῦς δὲ μειρακίου πρὸς ἀρετὴν.»

⁸⁵ Schofield (1991: 33n.19) reads «πρὸς τρέψιν» (*sic*).

⁸⁶ Stob. 2.60.9-62.6, SVF 3.264, part in LS 61H.

different objects. Chrysippus's alternative position was accepted by later Stoics as the orthodox one. According to this view, virtues are differentiated by an inherent qualification: there is a real difference between the virtues, corresponding to the different names that we give to them.⁸⁷ We do not have to analyse the dispute and the differences in detail. Most important for our purposes is to note that even Chrysippus holds on to the fundamental unity of understanding.

T18	[They say] that all the virtues, all those which are understandings and expertises, contain common theorems and one and the same end [. . .] But that they differ in their chief ingredients. (Stob. 2.63.6-11) ⁸⁸	Πάσας δὲ τὰς ἀρετάς, ὅσαι ἐπιστῆμαί εἰσι καὶ τέχναι, κοινὰ τε θεωρήματα ἔχειν καὶ τέλος [...] τὸ αὐτό [. . .] Διαφέρειν δ' ἀλλήλων τοῖς κεφαλαίοις.
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However Chrysippus wants to construe the difference in 'chief ingredients' as a difference in qualification among the virtues, he commits himself to a commonality of theorems among the understandings that these virtues are. He seems to attribute to the individual virtues a distinctive identity based on whatever theorems are more salient in particular contexts, while the whole set of theorems is always present in the background. That whole, meanwhile, remains the one understanding that makes its possessor wise.

Erotic virtue, then, is also to be identified at some level with the whole of understanding that the wise have. It shares its theorems with all other virtues and takes part in their theorems. Having one virtue implies having all; and so having erotic virtue implies having all virtues, and having any given virtue implies having erotic virtue. Every wise person is a love expert. In a word: erotic expertise has all the characteristics of Stoic virtue. It is at some level to be identified with the whole of understanding, that is, it is the ruling part of the soul disposed in the particular understanding-way.

5 LOVE AIMS TO MAKE FRIENDS

Let us return to T15 and T17 with that in mind. The longer description of erotic virtue in T17 spells out that it is essentially exhortative towards virtue.⁸⁹ Not all virtues have this structure. For even if all virtues have the same end – the life in agreement – their concerns still differ considerably. Most focus on the right behaviour of the wise person in the various circumstances of life. The same is true of erotic virtue, of course, since this too is concerned with right behaviour, viz. in matters of love. Erotic virtue, however, is special in having the right behaviour of others as its direct concern as well; it aims to lead young people to the possession of that virtue by

⁸⁷ The clearest text here is Plutarch *VM* 440e-41b, incl. SVF 1.Aristo 375, 3.255; in LS 61B. Cf. Schofield 1984: 87-95.

⁸⁸ in SVF 3.380, LS 61D.

⁸⁹ It is erotic virtue that the following description of the wise in Stob. (2.108.5-8, SVF 3.630) refers to: «Τὸν δὲ σπουδαῖον, ὁμιλητικὸν ὄντα [...] καὶ προτρεπτικὸν καὶ θηρευτικὸν διὰ τῆς ὁμιλίας εἰς εὐνοίαν καὶ φιλίαν, ὡς δυνατὸν εὐάρμοστον εἶναι πρὸς πλῆθος ἀνθρώπων, παρ' ὃ καὶ ἐπαφρόδιτον εἶναι[.]» Cf. Babut 1963: 61.

which they will behave themselves rightly as well. In the shape of erotic expertise, you could say, understanding seeks to reproduce itself.

That is not technically true, however. To the extent that the soul of another person is not given to you to determine, you cannot form that soul. Your virtue cannot actually produce virtue in another soul. Besides, your actions always have agreement as their goal. Anything that you select as part of aiming at agreement, whether it be food or the coming to be of virtue in someone else, you will select with reservation, so that you will not be surprised when that external thing does not happen the way you anticipated.⁹⁰ To appreciate the distance between causing virtue in another and causing something that may be an antecedent for the young soul to make itself virtuous, compare what is said about the snares that the wise person lays for the foolish (as a manner of speaking). The wise person may tell lies, we hear; not in order that the foolish assent to the lie and be deceived, but lies she will tell (even if we should not call it ‘lying’).⁹¹ It remains the fool’s responsibility if she assents to the lie. That is how close a wise person may come to influencing another’s soul. But it would not count as a case in which the wise person is the principal cause of the mistaken judgement. Yet it is clear to everyone that her utterance was part of the causal nexus we know as fate. As an antecedent cause, the utterance did produce the mistaken judgement. Similarly, we may say, the efforts that wise people expend in and as a result of their ἔρωσ are antecedent causes of some young people becoming wise themselves.

The special concern of erotic virtue with producing virtue in others gives content to the statement in T15 that ἔρωσ is an onset of friend-making. The word «φιλοποιία», which I have translated as ‘friend-making’, is most commonly used in Greek for the sympathetic treatment that wins others for you. It is a matter of attaching others to yourself. There is, of course, a perfectly everyday way in which we can understand ἔρωσ as the onset of making others feel friendly to you, which preserves the future-looking aspect to it – the very reason, as we saw, of calling ἔρωσ an ἐπιβολή. Thus Brad Inwood suggests that we understand ἔρωσ as the attempt to make your beloved feel friendly towards you (the impulse before an impulse of T16) in order to enter into sexual relations with your beloved (the second impulse).⁹²

While this is a possible interpretation, I think it misses the full extent of the work the Stoics want ἔρωσ to do. They mean it to be friend-making in a much more literal sense. They want to make people the kind of people that you call friends. A wise person wants to change young people into wise people.⁹³ This is the reason behind the inclusion of aptitude in the description of the ἔρωσ of the wise, behind the characterisation of erotic virtue as hortative towards virtue, and also behind the

⁹⁰ On the doctrine of reservation, cf. Inwood 1985: 119-26.

⁹¹ Stob. 2.111.10-7, SVF 3.554; Plut. SR 1055F-56A, SVF 2.994.

⁹² Inwood 1985: 233.

⁹³ I owe the point to Collette (unpubl.). Along similar lines already Schofield (1991: 34), who, however, continues to speak (35) of a tension between a ‘disinterested concern that my beloved achieve virtue’ and ‘the attempt to get him to be my friend’. Strike out ‘disinterested’ and the two options are the same. The interest of the wise is not opposed to the interests of other wise people. Babut (1963: 62) translates «φιλοποιία» as ‘créer une amitié’, wrong in content but in the right direction.

termination of erotic love upon the advent of beauty that Plutarch complains about.⁹⁴ The conversion of a young soul into a wise one is not just a happy by-effect of the ἔρωσ of the wise, but integral to what it is as its consummation.⁹⁵

Arius Didymus tells us that ‘what has to do with ἔρωσ is spoken of in two ways’.⁹⁶ If the above interpretation is right, we can recognise the Stoic concepts of ἔρωσ and φιλοποιία as belonging to a type. It is the type of concept which the Stoics describe in a way that many people would agree captures their own intuitions about that concept. The concept and its description can thus be usefully applied in everyday contexts. But on closer inspection, the description turns out to be a very demanding one, so that the concept can be properly applied only to the wise.⁹⁷ In our case, most people would agree that ἔρωσ is directed at friend-making, i.e. that it has to do with trying to make someone favourably disposed to you. Its link to the appearance of beauty is likewise unoffensive. The wise kind of ἔρωσ, however, does not just want beauty, but aptitude; and does not just want to establish friendly relations, but wants to produce friends. Seen in this light, wise ἔρωσ turns out to be nothing other than the exercise of erotic virtue. It is the action which belongs to the understanding that the wise have, insofar as this understanding is concerned with love. While it may be true, therefore, that ‘loving in itself is indifferent’, as Arius Didymus also says,⁹⁸ the difference between wise and fool is not just in their good and bad use, respectively, of the same thing. Wise ἔρωσ is beyond fools, just as friendship is.

In erotic virtue, we have wise understanding at work. It aims to increase the number of wise people and thereby to increase the number of people to which it can itself be friendship in the relative sense. In the imaginary situation in which the wise will find herself the only wise being in the world, the outward efficacy of her understanding thus tends to make it true of this understanding that it not only has friendship within itself, but will also come to be friendship in relation to the newly wise.

It is a significant difference, therefore, between friendship and ἔρωσ that the former is a name for understanding, while the latter is the name of a class of actions that understanding will cause, given certain external conditions. ἔρωσ is the contingent result of the outward activity of erotic virtue. Thus, friendship has an ontological status that is comparable to erotic virtue, while ἔρωσ is to be compared with the *products* of friendship.⁹⁹ This differential treatment of the twin concepts of friendship and of sexual love is in conspicuous contrast with their Platonic integration of which we have seen evidence in chapter 2. The Stoics choose to identify friendship with understanding, and to leave ἔρωσ in the hands of fortune. Yet wise ἔρωσ,

⁹⁴ Compare with this third factor that Diogenes specifies φιλία as the τέλος of ἔρωσ (SVF 3.Diog.82). Vogt 2008a: 159 is wrong to equate Stoic ἔρωσ with friendship. They are, rather, mutually exclusive categories.

⁹⁵ Perhaps we can read «καὶ μὴ εἶναι συνουσίας, ἀλλὰ φιλίας» in T15 not merely as an opposition but as a temporal succession. At any rate, the fragment in Athenaeus 561C (SVF 1.263, LS 67D) that speaks of Ἐρωσ as god of friendship, freedom, and concord, belongs in this context, I think.

⁹⁶ Stob. 2.65.17-8: «τὸν δὲ ἐρωτικὸν καὶ διχῆ λέγεσθαι».

⁹⁷ Cf. Vogt 2008a: 126-30 for a discussion of what it means to say ‘only the wise is X’.

⁹⁸ Stob. 2.66.9-10: «τὸ δὲ ἐρᾶν αὐτὸ μόνον ἀδιάφορον εἶναι».

⁹⁹ Such as the wise extension of a finger that Plutarch calls the ἔργον φιλίας (CN 1068f).

fortune-dependent as it is, is not classed among the indifferents. Whenever it is there, it is virtuous activity directed at wisdom itself (in other people). This sets it apart from other natural impulses, which are open to wise and non-wise uses alike.

CONCLUSION

The Stoics insist on the independence – one could say ‘freedom’ – of people with understanding. Both in becoming and in being wise, they are entirely sufficient to themselves. That this does not imply that there is no place in Stoic thought for meaningful relations between people is clear by now. It is significant, however, that by the same token that friendship is inherent in understanding, understanding constitutes the subject matter of friendship. The strict Stoic conception of friendship is not of a relation, but of a state of mind. We see here the Stoic strategy of redefinition of common terms employed to safeguard the self-sufficiency of the wise; to locate what is valuable in friendship, not in insecure outward bonds, but in the firm understanding itself of perfect humans.

In matters of love, however, the Stoics are less radical in their redefinition. ἔρως is for them still the outward expression of a person’s desire to reproduce, even if it is essentially, in the wise, the activity of perfect understanding. Its dependence on the presence of apt young people makes it a contingency, beyond the control of the wise.

EPILOGUE

In contrast to the mind of a Stoic wise person, this dissertation has had to leave many threads loose, and many ends open. Virtually each of the passages I have discussed calls for deeper textual interpretation and philosophical analysis. My aim has been, however, to show some of the lines of thought that connect seemingly unrelated views and topics in Platonism and Stoicism. In particular, I hope to have shown how the radically different relations between self-understanding and friendship in the models we have considered are the consequences of radically different ontologies.

1 THE MODELS

In emphasising the ontological insufficiency of human beings, conceived as essentially their power to understand, the Platonic model calls for something else to make an individual human life good and complete. This other thing is identified as another human being in a theory of friendship that makes self-understanding truly a matter of cooperation. Self-understanding is thus both the fulfilment of individual potential and a public result.

In the Stoic view, by contrast, human communities are subsidiary to the self-understanding that represents full human development. There are two dimensions to this subsidiarity. Firstly, this development is the result of the human soul's making itself more and more coherent; as such, self-understanding is endogenous to the wise person herself. Secondly, communities formed by multiple individuals are subsidiary to self-understanding in the sense that the Stoics consider the wise person's self-understanding the primary case of friendship, from which other cases derive.

2 THE CHAPTERS

I argue in chapter 1 that the Platonic dialogue *Charmides* presents us with a puzzle about the possibility of self-understanding that it cannot itself resolve. This puzzle results from a particular conception of the power to understand. The Socrates that features in *Charmides* describes the power to understand as something that is intrinsically directed at something else. Central to his description are, on the one hand, the characterisation of the power to understand as 'of' something – in Greek this is expressed by means of the genitive case; and, on the other hand, the opposition between power (δύναμις) and being (οὐσία). The combination of them, I argue, allows Socrates to present the power to understand as derivative from the being (the object, we say) towards which it is directed. It is derivative in the sense that the power to understand depends on something determinate in order for it to be something determinate itself. In isolation from such a determinate being, the power to understand itself is not determinate. This conception of the power to understand gives rise to the

puzzle about the possibility of self-understanding. In case the power to understand is not itself something determinate, it cannot be directed towards itself as towards something determinate.

In the second half of chapter 1 I aim to show that this problem is not just a problem about the possibility of an understanding of understanding, but also about the possibility of self-understanding. This is because we also find, in *Charmides*, a view of ourselves according to which we are primarily our power to understand; this view is communicated in particular through three of its elements. Firstly, Socrates says – via the story of Zalmoxis – that speeches develop the soul. By that time he has identified the soul as what we are. Since such speeches are directed at the power to understand, the suggestion is that the soul is (dominated by) the power to understand. Secondly, Socrates's interlocutor Critias, who has proposed self-understanding as the content of the virtue of good sense in the first place, makes clear that he is interested in excellent people as people with perfect understanding. Thirdly, the discussion moves from considering an understanding of ourselves who understand to considering an understanding of understanding. This move contributes implicitly to the view of what we are that operates in this dialogue, i.e. that we are primarily or completely our power to understand. Therefore, the impossibility of an understanding of understanding entails the impossibility of self-understanding.

In chapter 2 we consider the Platonic dialogue *Alcibiades*. I argue that it offers a conception of self-understanding as something reached together with another, so that self-understanding and other-understanding coincide. Like *Charmides*, this dialogue too equates self-understanding with understanding of understanding. The Socrates in this dialogue exhorts Alcibiades to become as good as he can be, i.e. to develop himself. Together, they examine what it is that Alcibiades must develop (i.e. what he is). They conclude that it is his power to understand. They reach this conclusion by means of the idea that something is to be identified with its controlling element, rather than with whatever it is of which this controlling element makes use. Of the pair of soul and body, the former controls the latter; so Alcibiades is his soul rather than his body. Similarly, the power to understand controls the rest of the soul, so that we may conclude that Alcibiades is his power to understand.

We also examine, in chapter 2, the answer that Socrates gives to the question he himself poses: How can I understand myself? The answer is developed by means of the image of eyes seeing themselves in each other, which serves as an analogy for souls understanding themselves in each other. Surprisingly, Socrates assumes that a soul cannot understand itself directly, in the same way that an eye cannot see itself directly. In view of their similarities of theme and concern, I argue, we may regard this assumption as a sign that *Alcibiades* takes up the problem that *Charmides* develops, i.e. the problem of the impossibility of direct self-understanding.

The crucial difference between *Alcibiades* and *Charmides* is the duality that Socrates introduces in the former. This duality allows a soul to see in another soul what happens when the latter understands something. *Alcibiades* describes the power to understand as something receptive, similarly to the way *Charmides* characterises it as something in itself indeterminate. In both descriptions, this power assumes determinate content in acts of understanding. Two powers to understand that aim to understand

each other will be able to follow each other, and to assume the shape that the other assumes, whatever the particular object that is also understood at any one time. This coincidence of event and mirror-event allows the souls to grasp the flexibility of their power to understand to assume the shape of whatever it is that it understands. This epistemic model is simultaneously a model of philosophical friendship, describing, as it does, a relation that involves what it considers to be the essence of human beings, and that aims at what it considers to be the consummation of human life.

In part II we turn to Stoicism. Chapter 3 examines Stoic thought on self-understanding. Contrary to the Platonic model, self-understanding in the Stoic model does not require the intervention of other minds. I develop this idea by means of an ontological examination of the status and activity of the mind of the wise person (and of the wise-to-be). In the Stoic view, we are constituted of a part of God and a part of matter, as are other things. In each of the things in which he is present, God is responsible for the activity of that thing, since of the pair of God and matter, God alone is active. Moreover, this divine activity is also what makes each thing what it is. In us, God's activity is understanding, and understanding makes us what we are. Our self-understanding therefore involves God's activity of understanding that understands itself.

I argue that the Stoics thought of God's activity in such a way that it is not only able to understand itself in the wise person, but is also able to work itself up to that level, without having to depend on anything extraneous. God is described as a cause for himself at the lowest levels of his activity, but also at higher levels, like perception and understanding. The descriptions that the Stoics give of understanding, moreover, emphasise its cohesion, unity, and exceptional relatedness to itself. There are also texts that speak of the self-studying activity of *λόγος*, which is the power that, if fully developed, is understanding. Through such texts, and the general Stoic view of God's activity, I argue that the Stoics thought of understanding as involving self-understanding.

In chapter 4 we examine what place there is in Stoic thought for the notion of friendship. We may wonder about this because the central aspect of a good life, understanding, is endogenous to the wise person. What need does she have of others, then? The answer is twofold. On the one hand, the Stoics reinterpret the notion of friendship and make it refer to the understanding of the wise person. Our sources tell us that the Stoics used the notion of friendship in two chief ways; in both of these ways they used it to speak about understanding. It is as if they want to show that whatever it is that we value in relations with other people, it is already contained in understanding itself, as they conceive of it. On the other hand, the wise person does have a use for others in the sense that she wants to exercise her expertise towards other people. One focal case of this exercise of understanding is *ἔρωσ*, which the Stoics reinterpret as the desire that the wise person has to make promising young people wise. These two answers to the question what need a wise person has of others are complementary, since love seems to be the desire to spread friendship (understanding). They are also very different, since the wise person, considered by herself, may be said to possess

friendship, while we may call her a lover only if we consider her together with other people.

3 DIRECTIONS

Socrates in *Alcibiades* describes an expertise that has itself for its object; Cato in *De Finibus* speaks of a wisdom that is wholly turned into itself. Both, as we have seen, occupy a central place in the respective views of the good life that these texts develop. There are also significant ontological similarities between our models. Stoicism employs two bodily principles to account for the world, the one purely receptive and passive, the other quintessentially active and determinative. Historically, it is plausible that these are developments of the two principles that figure in *Timaeus*. We have seen the basic opposition between determinative and indeterminate being at play in *Charmides* and *Alcibiades* as well.

And yet, despite such ontological and ethical parallels, Stoicism endows human beings with a self-sufficiency that the Platonic model we examined denies them. The difference is perhaps grounded in a difference in general motivational direction. The Stoic model has the active principle move towards the passive, permeating it down to the farthest detail of the cosmos. To the extent that they are, and can develop themselves into, particular, qualified beings, human beings are placed firmly on the God-side of things. In the Platonic model, however, the motive factor is that which is not yet determinate, which has need of that which is always so. It accounts for human beings and the shape of our development in terms of deficiency and aspiration.

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SAMENVATTING

Dit proefschrift beschrijft twee modellen van vriendschap en zelfbegrip. Het zoekt naar de verbanden tussen deze twee centrale noties in de antieke filosofie. Het eerste model noem ik 'Platonisch', het tweede 'Stoïsch'. Heel kort gezegd wordt in het Platonische model aan vriendschap een rol toebedeeld in het mogelijk maken van zelfbegrip. In het Stoïsche model zijn vriendschap en zelfbegrip aspecten van hetzelfde ding, namelijk de begrijpende geest. Met het één heeft men ook het ander te pakken.

De twee centrale termen 'vriendschap' en 'zelfbegrip' behoeven enige toelichting. Om te beginnen heeft 'vriendschap' in ons vocabulair een heel andere plaats dan verwante woorden in het Oudgrieks. Bij gebrek aan een beter woord heb ik het hier echter toch gebruikt, en wel als ruwweg corresponderend met het Oudgriekse woord *'philia'*. Bij ons verwijst 'vriendschap' naar relaties tussen mensen die elkaar min of meer hebben gekozen als vrienden en die op voet van een zekere emotionele intimiteit met elkaar omgaan. Familiale, romantische of professionele relaties vallen voor ons doorgaans buiten de categorie van vriendschappen. In de cultuur van het antieke Griekenland worden deze conceptuele scheidslijnen zo niet getrokken. Dit verschil uit zich in het betekenisveld van *'philia'*, waarmee men eigenlijk alle menselijke banden aan kan duiden die gepaard gaan een zekere mate van affectie, vertrouwdheid, formele steun of iets dergelijks. Dit is niet slechts een terminologische kwestie. Wanneer antieke filosofen over menselijke (ver)banden nadenken delen zij ze niet op langs de ons vertrouwde lijnen. Voor het voorliggende onderzoek betekent dit dat de vraag naar vriendschap breed moet worden opgevat, als vragend naar de plaats van potentieel elke betekenisvolle menselijke verhouding.

De beantwoording van deze vraag in de teksten die hier zijn behandeld is echter een stuk minder breed. De reden hiervoor is dat zij blijk geven van een heel intellectualistische visie op hoe het menselijk leven zou moeten zijn, volgens welke de wijsheid de vervolmaking van ons bestaan is. De vraag naar de plaats van betekenisvolle menselijke verhoudingen wordt daarmee een stuk puntiger. Slechts weinige verhoudingen worden als werkelijk betekenisvol gezien, omdat slechts weinige deel uitmaken van een zoektocht naar of een uitoefening van de wijsheid.

Hiermee is wel duidelijk geworden dat het verschijnsel vriendschap zoals wij tegenwoordig daarover nadenken, niet het onderwerp van dit proefschrift is. Dat is veeleer de vraag hoe antieke filosofen omgaan met het concept van vriendschap, in het bijzonder in verhouding tot het idee van zelfbegrip.

Ook de term 'zelfbegrip' wordt in dit proefschrift op een heel bepaalde manier gebruikt. Van zelfbegrip in de strikte zin is sprake wanneer ons begripen zichzelf begrijpt. Het is een epistemologisch vraagstuk of een dergelijk zelfbegrip mogelijk (of zelfs coherent) is. In dit proefschrift kijken we naar de rol van dit zelfbegrip in strikte zin in de twee genoemde modellen. We staan echter niet stil bij andere verschijnselen die we met 'zelfbegrip' aan kunnen duiden, zoals onze greep op onze

levensgeschiedenis, ons besef van onze beperkingen, ons bewustzijn van wat ons drijft, of wat dies meer zij. Voor zover 'zelfbegrip' verwijst naar ons begrip van wie of wat wij werkelijk zijn speelt dit wel een ondergeschikte rol in dit proefschrift. In de modellen die we onderzoeken wordt namelijk ons begripsvermogen als een centraal aspect gezien van wie wij zijn. Willen we derhalve onszelf begrijpen, dan moet ons begrijpen ook zichzelf begrijpen. Vanuit de concentratie op zelfbegrip in de strikte epistemologische zin heeft dit proefschrift derhalve ook zijdelings betrekking op zelfbegrip als ons begrijpen van wie wij zijn.

In dit proefschrift staat dus het verband tussen vriendschap en zelfbegrip centraal, zoals dat in Platonische en Stoïsche filosofische teksten wordt opgevat en vormgegeven. De centrale vraag die zich bij de twee modellen laat stellen is of wij bij het bereiken van een filosofisch goed leven, waarvan ons zelfbegrip als begrijpende wezens een hoofdonderdeel is, anderen nodig hebben. Is het antwoord op deze vraag bevestigend, dan willen we graag weten hoe die anderen ons kunnen helpen tot dat zelfbegrip te komen. Is het antwoord ontkennend, dan willen we graag weten of er een ander wezenlijk verband is tussen zelfbegrip en vriendschap – of moeten we concluderen dat zij losse filosofische thema's zijn, die slechts incidenteel met elkaar in verband kunnen worden gebracht? De eerste twee van deze drie vragen houden ons bezig in het eerste deel van dit proefschrift, waarin we het Platonische model nagaan. De eerste en de derde vraag houden ons bezig in het tweede deel van dit proefschrift, waarin wij het Stoïsche model onderzoeken.

In het eerste deel van dit proefschrift bespreek en analyseer ik twee Platonische teksten, *Charmides* en *Alcibiades*. In *Charmides*, het onderwerp van hoofdstuk 1, vinden we een discussie tussen Socrates, Charmides en Critias, waarin twee voor ons relevante zaken worden besproken en uitgewerkt. In de eerste plaats is er een onderzoek naar de mogelijkheid van zelfbegrip. Dit onderzoek vindt plaats door middel van een analyse van ons begripsvermogen: wat is een begripsvermogen? Zoals andere vermogens wordt ook het begripsvermogen beschreven als iets dat intrinsiek op iets anders gericht is, en wel op iets bepaalds – iets dat bepaald zus en zo is, in plaats van iets dat vlees noch vis is. Van dergelijke bepaalde dingen kunnen we in principe nauwkeurig aangeven wat ze zijn. Van dingen die relatief onbepaald zijn moeten we dit echter enigszins in het midden laten. Ons begrijpen nu is intrinsiek gericht op dingen die heel bepaald zijn zoals ze zijn. Wanneer we daarom vragen naar wat ons begrijpen is, dan moeten we ook iets zeggen over wat we begrijpen. Is dat echter afwezig, zoals wanneer we ons begrijpen onder de loep nemen in afzondering van wat het begrijpt, dan blijkt ons begrijpen op zich ook iets dat niet bepaald zus of zo is, ofwel iets dat vlees noch vis is. Het is deze omschrijving van het begripsvermogen die voor problemen zorgt als we de mogelijkheid van een begrip dat zichzelf begrijpt – zelfbegrip – overwegen. Hoe kan het begripsvermogen, dat intrinsiek op iets bepaalds gericht is, iets begrijpen dat niet bepaald is, namelijk zichzelf? Dit probleem wordt in *Charmides* niet opgelost. In *Alcibiades*, de tekst die we in het tweede hoofdstuk bekijken, wordt hiervoor echter een oplossing aangedragen.

Het tweede voor ons relevante thema van de discussie in *Charmides* is de plaats van zelfbegrip in een goed leven. De discussie als geheel betreft bezonnenheid

(σωφροσύνη). Deze eigenschap wordt behandeld als de toestand van een excellente en gezonde menselijke geest, een toestand die de mens die hem heeft in staat stelt om onfeilbaar te zijn en om de macht over anderen uit te oefenen. De discussie loopt uit op het centraal stellen van zelfbegrip voor de inhoud van deze deugd 'bezonnenheid'. Zowel de manier waarop Critias zijn beweringen bijstelt onder druk van Socrates' vragen als enkele meer narratieve elementen van de dialoog onderstrepen deze centrale positie van zelfbegrip in wat in dit debat als een gelukt leven wordt gezien. Zodoende wordt het probleem van zelfbegrip een probleem voor een gelukt menselijk leven.

In *Alcibiades*, het onderwerp van hoofdstuk 2, wordt voor dit probleem een oplossing aangedragen. Dit is vervat in een beroemde passage, waarin Socrates het tot begrip komen van zichzelf door twee zielen vergelijkt met het zien van zichzelf in elkaar door twee ogen. Het valt op dat Socrates uitgaat van de noodzaak van twee zielen. We kunnen hieraan zin geven wanneer we Socrates' opmerkingen, zoals de auteur van *Alcibiades* ze hem in de mond legt, plaatsen tegen de achtergrond van *Charmides*. Er zijn belangrijke raakvlakken tussen beide dialogen, in het bijzonder hun bemoeienis met bezonnenheid als centrale deugd, hun filosofisch uitdiepen van het traditionele Delfische motto 'ken jezelf' en hun duiding van zelfbegrip als een noodzakelijke en ook voldoende voorwaarde voor een leven van onfeilbaar handelen en onaantastbaar regeren. Deze mate van inhoudelijke en thematische overeenstemming rechtvaardigt het gebruik van de interpretatieve hypothese dat *Alcibiades* het probleem opneemt dat in *Charmides* wordt ontwikkeld.

Deze interpretatieve hypothese wordt sterker als we vervolgens in de bewuste passage in *Alcibiades* een mogelijke oplossing vinden voor het probleem in *Charmides*. Ik heb geprobeerd te laten zien dat deze passage een aantal structurele thema's van *Alcibiades* op een zodanige manier verbindt dat haar voorstelling van zaken dicht aansluit bij die van de puzzel van zelfbegrip in *Charmides*. Zo vinden we een sterke nadruk op het voorwerp van begrip als bepalend voor wat het begrip is, en op het idee dat de identiteit van dingen in hun functie ligt. Daarbij voegt *Alcibiades* echter het idee dat twee zielen samen meer kunnen dan de optelsom van twee enkele zielen – waarbij onder ziel vooral het begrijpende aspect van de ziel wordt verstaan. Met name kunnen zielen via elkaar inzien hoe begrip ontstaat. Door dit als een goddelijk resultaat te presenteren lijkt Socrates in *Alcibiades* vooral te suggereren dat dit eerder een oneindig proces van benadering is dan een enkel moment van begrip.

Deze beschrijving van de wijze waarop zelfbegrip mogelijk is, is effectief al een kenschets van vriendschap in de brede zin waarin zij in dit proefschrift aan de orde is. Dit wordt in de dialoog onderstreept door een prominente rol voor het concept van vriendschap. Alcibiades verraadt zijn onkunde onder meer doordat hij niet in staat is een consistent verhaal over vriendschap te vertellen. Socrates staat op een invulling van vriendschap als eensgezindheid. De centrale passage die ogen en zielen vergelijkt biedt juist zo'n consistent verhaal waarin vriendschap een haast letterlijke eensgezindheid blijkt te zijn.

Zo vinden we in *Alcibiades* een verwerking van het probleem van *Charmides* die we een model van vriendschap en zelfbegrip mogen noemen. Het is niet gezegd dat Plato dit model heeft onderschreven. Afgezien van algemene vragen over de verhouding van Plato tot de inhoud van zijn teksten staat niet eens vast of Plato de schrijver van

Alcibiades is. Voor onze filosofische interpretatie van deze teksten en hun onderlinge verhouding maakt dit echter weinig uit. De link tussen *Alcibiades* en *Charmides* is filosofisch, niet biografisch.

In dit model heeft vriendschap een wezenlijke epistemologische rol, door zelfbegrip niet alleen mogelijk te maken, maar zelfs de context ervan te vormen. Voorzover zelfbegrip centraal staat in een goed menselijk leven – en dat lijkt het volgens deze Platonische teksten te zijn – is vriendschap voor zulk leven essentieel. De grond daarvoor is het ontologisch ontoereikende, het in zichzelf niet bepaald zus en zo zijn, van mensen als begrijpende wezens.

In het Stoïsche model dat ik in dit proefschrift naast het Platonische stel vinden we een heel andere rol voor vriendschap in verhouding tot zelfbegrip, en een heel andere ontologie die daarvan de achtergrond vormt. Hoofdstuk 3 onderzoekt een cluster van thema's rond zelfbegrip. Ik bespreek een aantal teksten die over het zelfverstaan van *logos* (ruwweg onze 'rede') spreken. Deze *logos* noemen de Stoïci 'begrip' wanneer hij de vereiste vastheid heeft. Volgens hen is *logos* ook de hoedanigheid waarin God in mensen aanwezig is. God, het lichamelijke, actieve principe, is voor alle activiteit in de wereld verantwoordelijk en maakt naast het passieve principe dat 'materie' heet het totaal van de wereld ('kosmos') uit. De kwestie van zelfbegrip werpt een belangrijke vraag over dit goddelijke principe op. Volgens de Stoïsche kenleer is begrip op een bepaald niveau van analyse een kwestie van de interactie tussen het begrijpende en het begrepen. De mogelijkheid van zelfbegrip lijkt hiermee de mogelijkheid te vereisen dat God, als werkzaam (actief) lichaam, op zichzelf inwerkt. Ik bespreek daarom in dit hoofdstuk ook teksten die laten zien dat God op verschillende niveaus waarin hij in de wereld aanwezig is inderdaad op zichzelf inwerkt. Hiermee komen we de ontologische grond van zelfbegrip op het spoor.

Verdere onderbouwing van het idee dat het menselijk begrip op zichzelf betrekking heeft en deze toestand aan zichzelf te danken heeft, komt vanuit een centrale gedachte van de Stoïsche filosofie. Volgens de Stoïci zorgt Gods inwerken op de dingen waarin hij aanwezig is voor de coherentie van dingen. Hoe hoger de mate van Gods activiteit, hoe coherenter deze dingen. Ik breng aanwijzingen naar voren dat voor de Stoa deze toenemende mate van coherentie ook samenhangt met een toenemende mate van op zichzelf betrekking hebben. Zo heeft de samenhoudende kracht in planten betrekking op zichzelf, maar in mindere mate dan het samenhoudende vermogen van waarneming en streven in dieren, dat we (de Stoïci) 'ziel' noemen. Het begrip vormt van deze ladder van coherentie de hoogste trede. Ik betoog dat deze hoge mate van coherentie van het begrip gepaard gaat met een eveneens hoge mate van op zichzelf betrekking hebben.

Voorts probeer ik in dit hoofdstuk te laten zien dat onze bronnen voor het Stoïsche denken de gedachte ondersteunen dat zelfbegrip een belangrijke plaats inneemt in wat de Stoa als de volmaakte vorm van menselijk leven ziet. Volgens de Stoïci kan in principe elk mens een volmaakt, 'wijs' mens worden. Het ontologische principe hierachter is het principe dat ook zelfbegrip mogelijk maakt: Gods vermogen om op zichzelf in te werken. Het deel van God dat in ons aanwezig is kan zichzelf opwerken

tot de volmaakte menselijke vorm. Deze vorm, die uiteindelijk niets anders is dan begrip, is tegelijk ook zelfbegrip.

In deze voorstelling van zaken vereist zelfbegrip geen interventie door anderen. Tussen zelfbegrip en vriendschap is er echter in het Stoïsche denken wel degelijk een wezenlijk verband. In hoofdstuk 4 analyseer ik enige kernteksten die over vriendschap gaan. Deze teksten geven ons mijns inziens reden te denken dat de Stoa de begrijpende menselijke geest op zichzelf als basisgeval van vriendschap ziet. Vriendschap en zelfbegrip blijken daarmee twee aspecten van eenzelfde zaak: de menselijke geest die zichzelf tot perfectie, namelijk tot begrip, heeft gevormd. Dat het hierbij meestal niet blijft komt naar voren in de korte bespreking die ik aan de Stoïsche notie van *erôs* wijd. Hieronder verstaat de Stoa het pogen van een wijze om veelbelovende jonge mensen tot wijsheid te brengen en zo niet alleen haar wijsheid voort te planten, maar ook in letterlijke zin vrienden te maken.

In de twee modellen waarvan ik een filosofische reconstructie heb proberen te geven lijken de verschillende rollen die voor vriendschap zijn weggelegd verband te houden met een verschil in ontologie. In het Platonische model is zelfbegrip iets dat slechts in samenwerking met anderen vorm kan krijgen; dit houdt verband met het idee dat begrip op zichzelf onvoldoende bepaald is om voor zichzelf een geschikt voorwerp van begrip te zijn. In het Stoïsche model is zelfbegrip het natuurlijk verlengde van de ontwikkeling van het deel van God in ons, een ontwikkeling waarin dit deel van God zichzelf tot oorzaak strekt. Voor zover zelfbegrip een wezenlijk deel van wijsheid is – en ik heb geprobeerd te laten zien dat dit in beide modellen in vérgaande mate het geval is – geven deze modellen aan de filosofie zelf, het streven naar wijsheid, onderscheiden plaatsen. De Stoa ziet haar als het eigen product van de menselijke geest; het Platonische model stelt haar de vriendschap als voorwaarde.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Lubbertus Adriaan Joosse was born on 2 December 1982 in Middelburg. He received his BA from University College Utrecht in 2004. After earning MA degrees in philosophy and ancient history from King's College London and Utrecht University, respectively, he started his doctoral research at the Department of Philosophy of Utrecht University in 2007. In the Spring of 2011 he taught philosophy at University College Utrecht. From July 2011 onwards he will be involved as a postdoctoral researcher in the Graduiertenkolleg 'Friends, Patrons, Clients' at the University of Freiburg.

Quaestiones Infinitae

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