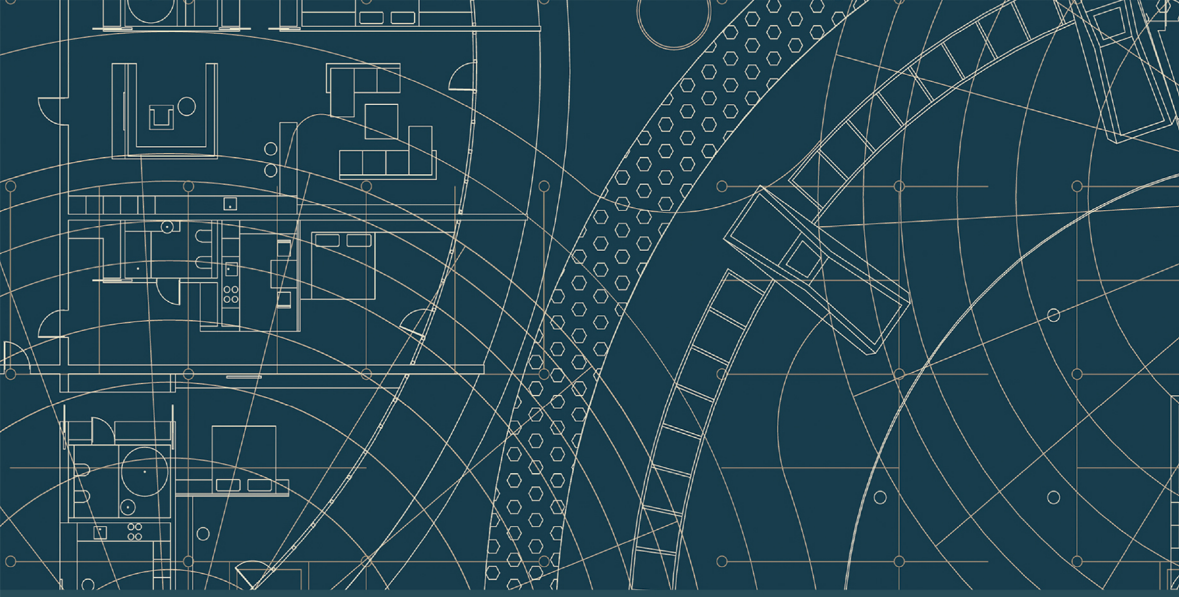

*Issues in Ancient Philosophy*

# THE STOIC DOCTRINE OF PROVIDENCE

## A STUDY OF ITS DEVELOPMENT AND OF SOME OF ITS MAJOR ISSUES

Bernard Collette

# The Stoic Doctrine of Providence

*The Stoic Doctrine of Providence* attempts to reconstruct the Stoic doctrine of providence (as argued for in ancient texts now lost) and explain its many fascinating philosophical issues.

Examining issues such as the compatibility between good and evil, and how a provident god can serve as model of political leadership, this is the first monograph of its kind to focus on the question of Stoic providence. It offers an in-depth study of the meaning and importance of this topic in eight distinct generations of Stoics, from Zeno of Citium (fourth century B.C.) to Panaetius of Rhodes (second century B.C.) to Marcus Aurelius (second century A.D.).

*The Stoic Doctrine of Providence* is key reading for anyone interested in Ancient Stoicism or the study of divine providence in a philosophical setting.

**Bernard Collette** is Associate Professor of Ancient Philosophy at Laval University, Quebec, Canada. He is the co-editor of *L'esprit critique dans l'Antiquité I. Critique et licence dans l'Antiquité* (2019), and the author of books and articles on Neoplatonism and Stoicism. He is editor at the *Laval théologique et philosophique*.

## Issues in Ancient Philosophy

*Series editor: George Boys-Stones, University of Toronto, Canada*

Routledge's *Issues in Ancient Philosophy* exists to bring fresh light to the central themes of ancient philosophy through original studies which focus especially on texts and authors which lie outside the central 'canon'. Contributions to the series are characterised by rigorous scholarship presented in an accessible manner; they are designed to be essential and invigorating reading for all advanced students in the field of ancient philosophy.

**Forms, Souls, and Embryos**
Neoplatonists on Human Reproduction
*James Wilberding*

**Epicurus on the Self**
*Attila Németh*

**The Hieroglyphics of Horapollo Nilous**
Hieroglyphic Semantics in Late Antiquity
*Mark Wildish*

**Taurus of Beirut**
The Other Side of Middle Platonism
*Federico M. Petrucci*

**Ancient Logic, Language, and Metaphysics**
Selected Essays by Mario Mignucci
*Edited by Andrea Falcon and Pierdaniele Giaretta*

**The Stoic Doctrine of Providence**
A Study of its Development and of Some of its Major Issues
*Bernard Collette*

https://www.routledge.com/Issues-in-Ancient-Philosophy/book-series/ANCIENTPHIL

# The Stoic Doctrine of Providence

## A Study of its Development and of Some of its Major Issues

**Bernard Collette**

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2022
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*



*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*
A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-1-138-12516-2 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-032-04908-3 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-64767-8 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781315647678

Typeset in Times New Roman
by codeMantra

*Nature produces her fruits, and does not reject them*
**(Sen. *Ep.* 121.18)**

**To my mum, Monique Peret**

# Contents

# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| Ach. Tat. | Achilles Tatius |
| *Introd. Arat.* | *Introductio in Aratum* (*Introduction to the Phaenomena of Aratus*) |
| Alex. | Alexander of Aphrodisias |
| *Fat.* | *De fato* (*On Fate*) |
| *In An. pr.* | *In Aristotelis Analyticorum priorum librum I commentarius* (*On Aristotle's Prior Analytics*) |
| *Meteorol.* | *In Aristotelis meteorologicorum libros commentaria* (*On Aristotle's Meteorology*) |
| *Mixt.* | *De mixtione* (*On Mixture*) |
| *Prov.* | *De providentia* (*On Providence*) |
| *Quaest.* | *Quaestiones* (*Problems and Solutions*) |
| Alex. Lyc. | Alexander of Lycopolis |
| *Man.* | *Contra Manichaei opiniones disputatio* (*Against the Manicheans*) |
| Am. | Ammonius |
| *In Ar. An. pr.* | *In Aristotelis Analyticum priorum* (*On Aristotle's Prior Analytics*) |
| Ap. | Apuleius |
| *De Platone* | *De Platone et dogmate eius* (*On Plato and his Doctrine*) |
| Ar. | Aristotle |
| *Cael.* | *De caelo* (*On the Heavens*) |
| *De an.* | *De anima* (*On the Soul*) |
| *EE* | *Ethica Eudemia (Eudemian Ethics)* |
| *EN* | *Ethica Nicomachea* (*Nicomachean Ethics*) |
| *GA* | *De generatione animalium* (*On the Generation of Animals*) |
| *Met.* | *Metaphysica* (*Metaphysics*) |
| *Meteor.* | *Meteorologica* (*Meteorology*) |
| *PA* | *De partibus animalium* (*On the Parts of Animals*) |
| *Phys.* | *Physica* (*Physics*) |
| *Pol.* | *Politica* (*Politics*) |
| *Top.* | *Topica* (*Topics*) |
| Ath. | Athenaeus of Naucratis |
| *Deip.* | *Deipnosophistae* (*The Learned Banqueters*) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Aug. | Augustine |
| *Contra Jul.* | *Contra Julianum* (*Against Julian of Eclanum*) |
| *De civ. Dei* | *De civitate Dei* (*The City of God*) |
| Aul. Gel. | Aulus Gellius |
| *NA* | *Noctes Atticae* (*Attic Nights*) |
| Calc. | Calcidius |
| *In Tim.* | *In Platonis Timaeum commentarius* (*On Plato's Timaeus*) |
| Cic. | Cicero |
| *Ad Att.* | *Epistulae ad Atticum* (*Letters to Atticus*) |
| *Brut.* | *Brutus* |
| *De leg.* | *De legibus* (*On Laws*) |
| *De re pub.* | *De re publica* (*Republic*) |
| *Div.* | *De divinatione* (*On Divination*) |
| *Fat.* | *De fato* (*On Fate*) |
| *Fin.* | *De finibus* (*On Ends*) |
| *Luc.* | *Lucullus* (book II of *Academica Priora* or *Prior Academics*) |
| *Mur.* | *Pro Murena* (*For Lucius Murena*) |
| *ND* | *De natura Deorum* (*On the Nature of the Gods*) |
| *Off.* | *De officiis* (*On Appropriate Actions*) |
| *Parad.* | *Paradoxa Stoicorum* (*Paradoxes of the Stoics*) |
| *Top.* | *Topica* (*Topics*) |
| *Tusc.* | *Tusculanae disputationes* (*Tusculan Disputations*) |
| *Var.* | *Varro* (book I of *Academica Posteriora* or *Posterior Academics*) |
| Clem. | Clement of Alexandria |
| *Strom.* | *Stromata* (*Miscellanies*) |
| Cleom. | Cleomedes, *Caelestia* (*On the Heavens*) |
| Cyril | Cyril of Alexandria |
| *Cont. Jul.* | *Contra Julianum* (*Against Julian*) |
| Damascius | Damascius |
| *In Phd.* | *In Phaedonem I* (*On Plato's Phaedo – Lecture I*) |
| D.-K. | H. Diels and W. Kranz (eds.), *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th edition. Berlin. 1952. |
| D.L. | Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of the Philosophers.* |
| E.-K. | L. Edelstein and I. G. Kidd (eds.), *Posidonius: volume I, The Fragments*. Cambridge. 1972. |
| Epic. | Epicurus |
| *Ep. Hdt.* | *Epistula ad Herodotum* (*Letter to Herodotus*) |
| *Ep. Men.* | *Epistula ad Menoeceum* (*Letter to Menoeceus*) |
| *KD* | *Kuriai doxai* (*Principal Doctrines*) |
| *SV* | *Sententiae Vaticanae* (*Vatican Sayings*) |
| Epict. | Epictetus |
| *D.* | *Dissertationes* (*Discourses*) |
| *Ench.* | *Enchiridion* (*Handbook*) |
| Epiphanius | Epiphanius of Salamis |
| *Fid.* | *De fide* (*On Faith*) |
| Eus. | Eusebius of Caesarea |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | *PE* | *Praeparatio evangelica* (*Preparation for the Gospels*) |
| *FDS* | | K. Hülser (ed.), *Die Fragmente zur Dialektik der Stoiker. Neue Sammlung der Texte mit deutscher Übersetzung und Kommentaren*, 4 Bde. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt. 1987–1988. |
| Fron. | | Fronto |
| | *Ad M. Caes.* | *Epistulae ad M. Caesarem et invicem* (*Correspondence*) |
| | *Ad Verum* | *Epistulae ad Verum Imperator* (*Correspondence*) |
| Gal. | | Galen |
| | *De usu part.* | *De usu partium* (*On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*) |
| | *Foet.* | *De foetuum formatione* (*On the Formation of the Fœtus*) |
| | *Hipp. off. med.* | *In Hippocratis de officina medici* (*On Hippocrates' Surgery*) |
| | *PHP* | *De Platicis Hippocratis et Platonis* (*On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*) |
| | *Plen.* | *De plenitudine* (*On Bodily Mass*) |
| | *Quod animi mores* | *Quod animi mores temperamenta corporis sequuntur* (*That the Capacities of the Soul Depend on the Mixtures of the Body*) |
| Hdt. | | Herodotus, *Historiae* (*Histories*) |
| Hes. | | Hesiod |
| | *WD* | *Works and Days* |
| Hier. | | Hierocles |
| | *El. eth.* | *Elementa ethica* (*Elements of Ethics*) |
| Hipp. | | Hippolytus of Rome |
| | *Ref.* | *Refutatio omnium haeresium* (*The Refutation of All Heresies*) |
| Justin | | Justin Martyr |
| | *II Apol.* | *Apologia secunda* (*Second Apology*) |
| L.-S. | | A. A. Long and D. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols. Cambridge. 1987. |
| Lact. | | Lactantius |
| | *De ira* | *De ira Dei* (*On the Wrath of God*) |
| | *Div. inst.* | *Institutiones divinae* (*Divine Institutions*) |
| Lucr. | | Lucretius, *De rerum natura* (*On the Nature of Things*). |
| M.A. | | Marcus Aurelius |
| | *Med.* | *Meditationes* (*Meditations*) |
| Macr. | | Macrobius |
| | *Sat.* | *Saturnalia* |
| M.-R. | | J. Mansfeld and D. T. Runia (eds.), *Aëtiana V. An Edition of the Reconstructed Text of the Placita with a Commentary and a Collection of Related Texts*. Leiden and Boston. 2020. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Musonius | | Musonius Rufus |
| | *Diss.* | *Dissertationum a Lucio digestarum reliquiae* (*Remains of Discourses Reported by Lucius*) |
| Nem. | | Nemesius of Emesa |
| | *Nat. hom.* | *De natura hominis* (*On the Nature of Humans*) |
| *OLD* | | P. G. W. Glare (ed.), *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 2 vols. Oxford. 2012. |
| Origen | | Origen of Alexandria |
| | *Comm. in Io.* | *Commentarii in evangelium Ioannis* (*Commentary on the Gospel of John*) |
| | *Princ.* | *De principiis* (*On the First Principles*) |
| Phil. | | Philo of Alexandria |
| | *Aet. mundi* | *De aeternitate mundi* (*On the Eternity of the World*) |
| | *Prov.* | *De providentia* (*On Providence*) |
| | *Probus* | *Quod omnis probus liber sit* (*Every Good Man is Free*) |
| | *Immut.* | *Quod Deus immutabilis sit* (*On Divine Immutability*) |
| Philod. | | Philodemus |
| | *Piet.* | *De pietate* (*On Piety*) |
| | *Stoic.* | *Stoicorum historia* (*History of the Stoics*) |
| Pl. | | Plato |
| | *Apol.* | *Apologia Socratis* (*Apology of Socrates*) |
| | *Euthd.* | *Euthydemus* |
| | *Gorg.* | *Gorgias* |
| | *Leg.* | *Leges* (*Laws*) |
| | *Parm.* | *Parmenides* |
| | *Phd.* | *Phaedo* |
| | *Phdr.* | *Phaedrus* |
| | *Prot.* | *Protagoras* |
| | *Rep.* | *Republic* |
| | *Tht.* | *Theaetetus* |
| | *Tim.* | *Timaeus* |
| Pliny | | Pliny the Elder |
| | *Nat.* | *Naturalis historia* (*Natural History*) |
| Plut. | | Plutarch |
| | *Com. not.* | *De communibus notitiis* (*Against the Stoics on Common Conceptions*) |
| | *Fac.* | *De facie in orbe lunae* (*Concerning the Face Which Appears in the Orb of the Moon*) |
| | *St. rep.* | *De Stoicorum repugnantiis* (*On Stoic Self-Contradictions*) |
| Porph. | | Porphyry |
| | *De abst.* | *De abstinentia* (*On Abstinence from Killing Animals*) |
| Procl. | | Proclus |
| | *In Alc.* | *In Alcibiadem* (*Commentary on the First Alcibiades of Plato*) |
| | *In Eucl.* | *In Euclidem* (*Commentary on Euclid's Elements*) |
| Ps.-Andronicus | | Pseudo-Andronicus of Rhodes |
| | *De pass.* | *De passionibus* (*On Emotions*) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ps.-Galen | | Pseudo-Galen |
| | *Histor. philos.* | *De historia philosophica* (*On the History of Philosophy*) |
| Ps.-Plutarch | | Pseudo-Plutarch |
| | *Placita* | *Placita philosophorum* (*Opinions of the Philosophers*) |
| S.E. | | Sextus Empiricus |
| | *M* | *Adversus mathematicos* (*Against the Mathematicians*) |
| | *PH* | *Pyrrhôneioi hypotypôseis* (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*) |
| Sen. | | Seneca |
| | *Ben.* | *De beneficiis* (*On Benefits*) |
| | *Clem.* | *De clementia* (*On Clemency*) |
| | *Ep.* | *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* (*Letters*) |
| | *NQ* | *Naturales quaestiones* (*Natural Questions*) |
| | *Ot.* | |
| | *Prov.* | *De providentia* (*On Providence*) |
| SHA | | *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (*Augustan History*) |
| | *Vita Marci* | *Vita Marci Antonini philosophi* (*Life of Marcus Antoninus the Philosopher*) |
| Simp. | | Simplicius |
| | *In Cat.* | *In Aristotelis Categorias commentarium* (*On Aristotle's Categories*) |
| Stob. | | Stobaeus |
| | *Ecl.* | *Eclogae* |
| Strab. | | Strabo |
| | *Geo.* | *Geographica* |
| *SVF* | | H. von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, 4 vols. Leipzig: 1903–1924. |
| Xen. | | Xenophon |
| | *Mem.* | *Memorabilia* (*Memoirs of Socrates*) |

# Acknowledgements

This book has been long in the making. My first works on the topic date back to 2009–2010, when I received a postdoctoral grant from the city of Paris and had the chance to work at the Centre Léon Robin under the guidance of Jean-Baptiste Gourinat and meet with other specialists of the Stoa, in particular Thomas Bénatouïl. I was able to make significant progress from 2012 to 2014, thanks to a stipendiat granted by the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung, which enabled me to do research in Cologne, Milan and Cambridge, and to benefit from discussions with many scholars, in particular Christoph Helmig, Marcel van Ackeren, Roberto Radice, Emmanuele Vimercati and David Sedley. Other projects then demanded my attention, and I was able to work on the book only occasionally, until a sabbatical leave (spent in Cambridge and Liège) granted by the Université Laval (in winters of 2017 and 2018) allowed me to write a nearly first full version of the text.

I would like to thank the Humboldt-Stiftung, the Université Laval and all those who encouraged me to start and complete this research, especially George Boys-Stones, who has been, as always, extremely supportive. I also want to thank Victor Thibaudeau, the former dean of the philosophy faculty at the Université Laval, who made it possible for me to adapt my teaching schedule so that I could carry out my research in Europe when I received the Humboldt fellowship. I would also like to thank those kind souls who undertook the imposing task of revising my English, in particular Simon Fortier, Timothy Riggs and Donald Landes. Finally, I would like to thank my friend Marc-Antoine Gavray, who has always made me feel welcome at the Département de philosophie of the Université de Liège and made my research stays there very enjoyable.

# Introduction

The Stoic doctrine of providence (πρόνοια) has been largely overlooked by modern scholarship.[1] What is behind this neglect? At least two reasons suggest themselves. The first is that providence seems to have been largely eclipsed in the modern scholarly debate by its sister concept, fate. The Stoics held that providence and fate are two different names of god,[2] and this may have given the false impression that there is little or no difference between them. Because of the perennial questions that it cannot fail to raise (such as those relating to determinism and human responsibility, to name only the most obvious), the idea of fate has long exerted a particular fascination on the human mind and continues to do so, occupying those working in many fields, from analytical philosophy to neuroscience. Given that the Stoics maintained that 'everything happens in accordance with fate', a notion which has never lost its philosophical relevance, it is unsurprising that this theme continues to be an object of keen interest among specialists of the Stoa.[3] The idea of providence, on the other hand, – and I turn now to the second reason – is, at least for the contemporary mind, far less obviously a philosophical question than fate. Rather, providence's historical association with theology and religion may suggest that its study should be left to scholars specializing in the history of religion.

## 1 Why study Stoic providence?

It is not my intention here to mount a fully fledged defence of the question of providence and its philosophical relevance. Still, I think it would not be out of place to begin by providing a general survey of its importance for the Stoics and, therefore, the need to study it in order to get a better understanding of Stoicism.

The Stoa, as is well known, divided philosophy into three parts[4]: logic, physics and ethics. In whichever one we look, we find the question of providence. Let us start with the most obvious part: physics, to which theology belongs, according to the Stoics (more on this later). As we shall see in what follows, it is in this area that the first Stoic thoughts on divine providence, it seems, were born. One particular subject on which the Stoics focused was

DOI: 10.4324/9781315647678

fire, the form that god (the active principle) takes when it is mixed with primordial matter (the passive principle). From the beginning, the idea of a providential god (which we may take to mean, at this stage, simply good and beneficial) led Zeno of Citium (the founder of the Stoa), and then his successors, to defend the existence of a kind of fire that is by nature constructive rather than destructive. According to him, this type of fire – which he calls 'craftsmanlike' – is what eventually explains the perfection of the world and its (relative) sustainability. However, we will see that the hypothesis of a craftsmanlike fire raises serious issues of doctrinal consistency. Indeed, a difficulty posed by the Stoic explanation of the generation and preservation of the world by means of the action of a beneficial fire is that this fire does not, in spite of everything, prevent the conflagration – and thus also the destruction – of the world. Worse, it may even be argued that this fire is actually responsible for said conflagration (albeit indirectly and unintentionally), since any fire requires some kind of fuel, and this is what ultimately leads the world to its destruction. In this book, we will see how this difficulty led different Stoics to different solutions, some (Chrysippus in particular) arguing that the destruction of the world does not imply its death, others (Panaetius and his supporters) simply abandoning the doctrine of the destructibility of the world.

Let us now move to the logical part of philosophy, the part that deals with the study of *logos* (understood as reason and discourse).[5] Logic occupies a special place in the tripartition of philosophy. While physics is akin to the study of 'divine matters' and ethics to that of 'human affairs' (the two specific domains of wisdom, for a Stoic),[6] logic, for its part, forms the link between the human and the divine. From a Stoic point of view, this link can be explained by the fact that reason is what gods and human beings share, a sharing which is itself a product of divine providence. Indeed, the existence of reason in human beings – a faculty considered to be superior and naturally beneficial – is interpreted by the Stoics as a divine gift, the human soul (or rather its directing part, the ἡγεμονικόν) being a detached part (ἀπόσπασμα) of god.[7] So, it is divine philanthropy (to which we will return a little later) – the love of god for human beings – that explains the presence of reason in humans.

Reason includes remarkable epistemological characteristics which make it advantageous to human beings in their quest for knowledge of both nature and the happy life (the two being intrinsically linked). One can isolate two of these characteristics, both of which show how reason differs from sense-perception. The first is that reason accurately grasps its object, which allows it to constitute an objective measure of things. This is an argument put forward in particular by Posidonius, in his critique of Epicurus (who defended the view that all sense impressions are true).[8] Reason thus enables us to study (and measure) the cosmos and to understand how it is organized and governed. The second characteristic relates to the fact that reason is

a faculty of foreseeing and anticipation (a point defended in particular by Panaetius).[9] Unlike sense-perception, reason is not limited to (and by) the present and comprehends all three temporal dimensions, allowing human beings to anticipate the consequences of their actions and to plot out how they shall achieve a happy life. This life, which Zeno presented as a 'smooth flow' (εὔροια),[10] is a life freed of any external obstacles.

We come, finally, to ethics. The importance of providence in this part of philosophy is considerable, and here again I will limit myself to highlighting only certain aspects of it, amongst the most important. The Stoics maintain that the possession of reason is what explains the social and political nature of human beings.[11] As we have just seen, reason is both a gift from god and what is most advantageous for humans. It is therefore not difficult to see the link that the Stoics make between providence, human society and the political administration of this society. The recognition by a human being that he or she is a child of god (a detached part of the cosmic soul) necessarily entails a form of respect or reverence with regard to the reason which he or she possesses (insofar as it is divine, therefore superior), which, in turn, leads to love and care for all other human beings, recognized as members of one, unique family.

Such care is made manifest in two major Stoic theses. The first is that which holds that the starting point for the formation of human communities lies in the love of parents for their children (φιλοστοργία). Parental love, which the Stoics take to be natural (unlike the Epicureans), is interpreted as the product of divine deliberation: the granting to parents a strong affection for their children is part of a divine plan to foster the generation of communities, without which human beings could not fulfil the demands of their social nature. The second thesis is concerned with the clemency which the *princeps* must show towards the people placed under his authority and protection. This is a thesis developed by Seneca in his *On Clemency*, but we will see that a version of it can also be found in the writings of Marcus Aurelius.[12] The clemency of the *princeps* (or his 'goodness' in Marcus Aurelius) is the form which divine philanthropy takes when it is expressed in the administration of human societies. It represents a rational form of care which respects humans as humans, i.e. as rational and free. The *princeps* is like a viceroy, representative of god on earth, and the care he has for the people is ultimately modelled on god's love for humans.

## 2 Was Stoicism a philosophy or a religion?

The philosophical importance of the idea of providence in the Stoa is clear. Still, one might wonder whether Stoic philosophy does not depend entirely on theology. Is it not true that, if human beings have been endowed with reason, and if, thanks to reason, they are able to lead a happy life, devoid of any form of impediment, that is because god is provident and that, in his

providence, he granted humans with reason? Should we not therefore think that it is the Stoics' conception of god that explains their philosophy (and in particular the importance they give to reason) and that, in the end, Stoicism is more a theology – some might even speak of a religion (see below) – than a philosophy? One might perhaps reply that the question is badly put as it supposes a strong and clear opposition between philosophy and theology, which is foreign to Stoicism and, in general, to most of the ancient philosophical schools of thought. This objection, however, does not solve the issue: if the Stoics did not see an opposition between philosophy and theology, is it not precisely because their philosophy is a theology?

Such a position, even if it is not defended by the specialists of the Stoa,[13] is not foreign to the academic world. In a lecture titled *The Stoic Philosophy*, given in 1915, Gilbert Murray – a scholar of ancient Greek literature who also wrote on Greek religion – claimed that 'Stoicism may be called either a philosophy or a religion',[14] and that 'Stoicism, like Christianity, was primarily a religion for the oppressed, a religion of defense and defiance'.[15] A century later, Francesc Casadesús, in an article that studies the appropriation of the language of mystery cults in ancient philosophy, writes that 'The Stoics (…) went a step beyond earlier philosophers by conceiving of their own philosophy as a form of *religio* in which they performed the fundamental role of interpreters of the divine will'.[16] He concludes his study by writing that 'the novelty in the case of Stoic philosophers was that they became priests who transformed their philosophy into theology'.[17] The author bases his interpretation on a series of Stoic texts, most of them well known, and I think it is useful to show here why we must reject his conclusions. This will also be an opportunity to introduce ourselves to some important texts relating to the Stoic account of sagehood and the place of theology within Stoic philosophy.

One can identify at least two main sets of texts in the study of Casadesús: the first includes fragments relating to the Stoic conception of the sage (σοφός), and the second includes texts testifying to a Stoic use of the vocabulary employed in mystery cults. Let us start with the first group, and the text cited first by the author (to which I add the translation of the sentences that directly precede and follow it):

> **T1** [The Greeks used some doctrines called 'paradoxes' that, based on proofs or apparent proofs, attribute a great variety of things (πλεῖστα) to the one who, according to them, is a sage (τῷ κατ' αὐτοὺς σοφῷ).] They say that only the sage – and every sage – is a priest (ἱερέα), because only the sage – and every sage – has the knowledge of the worship of god (καθ' ἅ φασι μόνον καὶ πάντα τὸν σοφὸν εἶναι ἱερέα, τῷ μόνον καὶ πάντα τὸν σοφὸν ἐπιστήμην ἔχειν τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ θεραπείας); [that only the sage – and every sage – is free, etc.]
>
> (Origen, *Comm. in Io.* 2.16.112 = *SVF* 3.544)

Casadesús' commentary on this first passage illustrates his general position well:

> **T2** Stoic philosophers postulated the existence of an almighty god that eternally governs the destiny of the entire universe with his intellect. Given the ignorance of the common man, who is oblivious of the divine structure of the cosmos, the Stoics felt compelled to teach it to their contemporaries. Hence, they presented themselves as the only specialists in divine issues, as opposed to the mass of men who were ignorant of such knowledge.
>
> (Casadesús 2016: 20)

Casadesús' error is twofold. First, he attributes to the Stoics the characteristics that they attribute to the sage, apparently ignoring that the Stoics never considered themselves wise[18] and that the sage, as described by the Stoa, is well-known for his rarity.[19] Second, the Stoic doctrine of the sage is not limited – far from it actually – to the attribution of priesthood to the sage: as the context of T1 indicates, the Stoics ascribed to the sage a great number (πλεῖστα) of skills and perfections, claiming that only the wise person is free,[20] only he is a citizen,[21] only he is king,[22] only he is a magistrate, a judge and an orator, and so forth.[23] It is therefore, at the very least, misleading to dwell on only one competence – priesthood – since it gives the false impression that the Stoics gave it special importance and sought to emphasize the exceptional religiosity of the sage.

Let us now move on to the second group of texts cited by Casadesús. They relate to the use of the vocabulary employed in mystery cults. I shall focus on two of those texts, and add a third parallel one:

> **T3** First of all, in my opinion, which corresponds to the correct statements by the ancients, there are three kinds of philosopher's theorems, logical, ethical and physical. Secondly, what should be ranked first of these are the logical, next the ethical, and third the physical; and what should come last (ἔσχατος) in the physical theorems is the doctrine on the gods (ὁ περὶ τῶν θεῶν λόγος). Hence its transmission (τὰς τούτου παραδόσεις) has been called 'initiation' (τελετὰς ἠγόρευσαν).
>
> (Chrysippus, *On Lives*, book iv, apud Plut. *St. rep.* 9.1035A = *SVF* 2.42 and 26C L.-S., trans. Long and Sedley, adapted)

> **T4** Chrysippus says that the doctrines on divine things (τοὺς περὶ θείων λόγους) are rightly called 'initiations' (εἰκότως καλεῖσθαι τελετάς): for these should be the last things (τελευταίους) to be taught, when the soul has found its stability and has become in control, and is capable of keeping silent towards the uninitiated. For it is a great reward to hear

> the correct things about the gods and to gain control (μέγα γὰρ εἶναι τὸ ἆθλον ὑπὲρ θεῶν ἀκοῦσαί τε ὀρθὰ καὶ ἐγκρατεῖς γενέσθαι αὐτῶν).
>
> (*Etymologicum magnum* 751.16–22 s.v. τελετή = *SVF* 2.1008, trans. Brouwer 2014)

> **T5** The Stoics, too, say that logical matters lead, that ethical matters take second place, and that physical matters come last in order (τελευταῖα δὲ τετάχθαι τὰ φυσικά). For they hold that the intellect must first be fortified, with a view to making its guard of what is transmitted hard to shake off (εἰς δυσέκκρουστον τῶν παραδιδομένων φυλακήν), and that the area of dialectic tends to strengthen one's thinking (ὀχυρωτικὸν δὲ εἶναι τῆς διανοίας); that, second, one must add ethical reflection with a view to the improvement of character traits (πρὸς βελτίωσιν τῶν ἠθῶν), for the acquisition of this on top of the already present logical ability holds no danger; and that one must bring in physical reflection last (τελευταίαν), for it is more divine and needs deeper attention (θειοτέρα γάρ ἐστι καὶ βαθυτέρας δεῖται τῆς ἐπιστάσεως).
>
> (S.E. *M* 7.22–23 = *SVF* 2.44, trans. Bett)

We have here three excerpts, from different sources, apparently reporting the same Stoic doctrine. The three texts inform us of the position adopted by Chrysippus concerning the order in which the three parts of philosophy, and one of their subsections, should be taught. In his book *On Lives*, Chrysippus argued that logical theorems must be taught first, then the ethical ones and only then the physical theorems, and that within physics one must leave the teaching of theology for the very end. In the second and third texts quoted, it is explained that a correct understanding of theology takes a great deal of preparation and effort on the part of the student, and that is why it should be reserved for the end.[24]

There is, however, a difference between those texts as the first two include a reference to the vocabulary in use in the mystery cults, a reference that is not found in Sextus Empiricus' passage. So, let us have a closer look at them. What exactly is Chrysippus trying to do here? Both texts state that the transmission (παράδοσις) of the doctrines on divine matters has been 'called' (ἠγόρευσαν, καλεῖσθαι), rightly so, 'initiations' (τελεταί). Now, it is important here to understand that when Chrysippus talks of 'doctrines on divine things', in this particular context, he cannot be talking about Stoic theology *per se*, at least not initially. He is simply saying that the Greeks were right to call the teachings of theological matters 'τελεταί', as they do in the context of the rites performed in mystery cults. And it is in order to show the appropriateness of that word that he is resorting to the way the Stoics teach philosophy (the account of which is presented, in its naked, unreligious form, in our T5): they start with logic, then continue with ethics and only then, at the end, do they teach physics and theology. The reason for

this, as explained earlier, is that theology requires 'deeper attention' and the strengthening of the logical and ethical aptitudes of the student.

Finally, T4 shows that Chrysippus relied on the Stoic practice of etymology[25] in order to show the aptness of the word 'τελετή', a word that is close to 'τελευτή' ('completion', 'end'), and so also to its adjectival form 'τελευταῖος' (found in both T4 and T5), which means final, occurring at the last stage. In a nutshell, Chrysippus thought that the Greeks were right to call the transmission of theological doctrines 'τελετή' ('initiation'), a word that etymologically means (in his view) 'final', and he showed the appropriateness of this word by referring to the Stoic practice of teaching theology last.

Now, if Chrysippus thought that τελετή was a well-chosen word to refer to the teaching of theological matters generally conceived, he must have had no problem using it also to refer to the teaching of *Stoic* theology.[26] But it is important to understand that the aptness of this word has first been philosophically vetted: Chrysippus is not blindly adopting religious terminology but rather philosophically appropriating it, and he is certainly not transforming philosophy into *religio* when he says that the transmission of theology, coming last, can be called an 'initiation'.

Besides, Chrysippus was not the first philosopher to make use of the religious vocabulary of the mystery cults in a philosophical context. Casadesús is well aware of these precedents and devotes a large part of his study to well-known texts of Plato, found in the *Phaedrus*, the *Symposium* and other dialogues,[27] where one can already observe this type of philosophical appropriation. However, he refuses to say of Plato that he conceived of his philosophy as a form of *religio* or that he transformed it into a theology, while he supports this interpretation in the case of Stoicism. The reason for that, as already pointed out, is the confusion Casadesús makes between being wise and being a Stoic, a confusion that leads him to think that the Stoics looked at themselves literally as priests (T2). But this is not his only mistake.

The texts we have just examined inform us only partially about the true position of Chrysippus, a point that Casadesús fails to recall. Our T3 passage is taken from a work by Plutarch called *On Stoic Self-Contradictions*, in which the author seeks to prove the inconsistency of the Stoics by opposing quotations or doctrines deemed to be contradictory and incompatible. When it comes to Chrysippus' account of the order in which the three parts of philosophy should be taught, Plutarch opposes our T3 to the doctrine, also supported by Chrysippus, that one should study physics *before* ethics:

> **T6** Again in his *Physical Postulates* he [Chrysippus] says, 'There is no other or more appropriate way of approaching the theory of good and bad things or the virtues or happiness than from universal nature and from the administration of the world (ἀλλ' <ἢ> ἀπὸ τῆς κοινῆς φύσεως καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου διοικήσεως).' And later: 'For the theory of good and bad things must be attached to these, since there is no other

> starting point or reference for them that is better (οὐκ οὔσης ἄλλης ἀρχῆς αὐτῶν ἀμείνονος οὐδ' ἀναφορᾶς), and physical speculation is to be adopted for no other purpose than for the differentiation of good and bad things.'
>
> (Plut. *St. rep.* 9.1035C-D = *SVF* 3.68 and 60A L.-S., trans. Long and Sedley)

So, in his *Physical Postulates*, Chrysippus upheld the view that the study of physics must precede that of ethics because physics is the starting point for the study of ethics and has no other end than the distinction between what is good and bad.

Plutarch's testimony and his quotations from Chrysippus show us that the latter's position was far more complex and nuanced than T3 suggests, a point that specialists of the Stoa have long noted. In his studies, Pierre Hadot clearly highlighted the 'didactic and pedagogical' perspective of all these passages.[28] According to him, when Chrysippus defends the anteriority of physics over ethics, he has in view a logical and theoretical type of anteriority, a notional order that reflects the systematicity of the Stoic doctrines: 'physics must precede ethics to give it its reasons'.[29] On the other hand, when Chrysippus defends the anteriority of ethics over physics, it is a psychological form of anteriority, which takes into account the state of the student's soul and his moral progress. This is indeed what T4 and T5 clearly indicate by explaining that the soul must first have been strengthened by the study of logic, and then by that of ethics, in order to be able to fully understand the teachings on divine things included in physics.

In addition to Pierre Hadot's interpretation, one can also point to a further difference between the two perspectives adopted by Chrysippus. In our sources, several passages suggest that when he defends the anteriority of physics over ethics, he has in mind a virtually divine form of teaching. It is here important to understand that, before being an object of study, nature is, for a Stoic, the moral educator of human beings. In principle, any human can achieve happiness if he or she listens to nature, and in particular to the human nature that he or she possesses.[30] This is well shown in the following two passages, which again relate the words of Chrysippus:

> **T7** He [Chrysippus] says: 'What am I to begin from (Πόθεν οὖν … ἄρξωμαι), and what am I to take as the foundation of the appropriate action (τοῦ καθήκοντος ἀρχήν) and the material of virtue if I pass over nature and what accords with nature (τὴν φύσιν καὶ τὸ κατὰ φύσιν)?'
>
> (Plut. *Com. not.* 23.1069E = *SVF* 3.491 and 59A L.-S., trans. Long and Sedley, adapted)

> **T8** [Chrysippus:] As long as the future is uncertain to me, I always hold to those things which are better adapted to obtaining the things in accordance with nature (τῶν κατὰ φύσιν); for god himself has made me

> disposed to select these (αὐτὸς γάρ μ' ὁ θεὸς ἐποίησεν τούτων ἐκλεκτικόν). But if I actually knew that I was fated now to be ill, I would even have an impulse to be ill. For my foot too, if it had intelligence, would have an impulse to get muddy.
>
> (Chrysippus *apud* Epict. *D.* 2.6.9 = *SVF* 3.191 and 58J L.-S., trans. Long and Sedley)

The Stoics maintain that one can come to act rightly (virtuously) through the performance of actions appropriate to our nature, which they call καθήκοντα. Now, as the quotations from Chrysippus indicate, nature itself teaches us to act appropriately by means of impulses which direct us towards acquiring things which are in accordance with our nature (what the Stoics call 'preferable indifferents'), and which make us reject those which are contrary to our nature (the 'dispreferred indifferents'). As T8 indicates, it is god who gave human beings those impulses which, if no external obstacle gets in their way,[31] will naturally lead humans to a happy life, a life that is in accordance with nature. This accord or harmony implies that human beings recognize themselves as parts of the cosmos (rather than as separate and independent substances). This is the meaning of the analogy with the foot in T8: just as a foot must act for the good of the body of which it is a part, so humans must strive after the good of the whole to which they belong.[32] However, to come to that understanding, humans have to study physics and, in particular, the cosmos. For the Stoics looked at the cosmos as a city and considered gods and human beings as its citizens. This is why, in the final analysis, the study of physics must precede that of ethics: in order to live a happy life, human beings must study the cosmos, become aware of its political administration and discover the role of citizen that they play within the cosmic city. It should be noted that it is exactly what Chrysippus says in the quote reported by Plutarch in T6: 'There is no other or more appropriate way of approaching the theory of good and bad things or the virtues or happiness than from universal nature and *from the administration of the world*'.

Contrary to what T3 suggests – at least when it is read without contextualizing it – theology is not an end in itself for the Stoa. The study of physics – and the knowledge of the world and of god that it implies – is actually a necessary means to attain the knowledge of good and evil and to become virtuous. Still, it would not be fair to take ethics for the highest and most important part of philosophy, since the Stoics seem to have refused to organize the three parts of philosophy into a strict hierarchy.[33] Rather,[34] they upheld that each part of philosophy corresponds to a virtue,[35] and also that virtues, in the sage, are inter-entailing (ἀντακολουθεῖν) and thus not separable.[36]

In Stoicism, philosophy does not depend on (nor identify with) theology, and the Stoics were not priests claiming to initiate their followers into mysteries. Like in all of the other philosophical schools in antiquity, the concept of god plays a pivotal role in Stoicism. Still, it is important to understand

that this concept was itself fundamentally informed by the philosophy of the Stoa.[37] A quick comparison between Stoicism and Epicureanism will help us better understand the cause and effect relationship that exists between philosophy and theology.

A study of David Sedley has shown how,[38] for Epicurus, the notion of god is a naturally produced mental construction that is shaped through the desire for perfection at work in the human nature. It is therefore not surprising to observe that the Epicurean god embodies the fulfilment of the hedonistic *telos* that the Epicureans defended: the common notion of god, they say, contains only two features[39] – being blessed and imperishable – and it excludes being provident on the grounds that any form of intervention or political action on the part of god would imply disturbances, and would therefore clash with god's blessedness.[40]

The Stoics, for their part, maintained that the notion of god includes providence.[41] This is understandable given that the idea of god embodies in Stoicism – again, like in Epicureanism and other major philosophical school of the time – an ideal of philosophical perfection,[42] an ideal which therefore closely echoes the way in which the Stoics conceived the human nature and what is good. In the Stoa, the happy life depends entirely on the possession of reason, and, as we have seen, reason is a naturally beneficial and provident faculty. The god of the Stoics, himself identified with reason, must therefore be conceived as naturally provident too.

## 3 Stoic providence in context

In our ancient sources, it is sometimes recalled – often as a means of diminishing its achievements – that the Stoa is a relatively 'young' philosophical school, that is to say, that it came after, and thus depends upon, the founding fathers of philosophy that were Plato and Aristotle.[43] The polemical intention of such a presentation of the Stoa notwithstanding, it is indeed important to remember that Stoicism did not emerge from nothing and that its conception of providence owes not a little to some of its predecessors, Plato in particular.[44]

Within the Stoa, however, Plato was a controversial figure, and it took several generations before Stoics could openly profess their admiration for his philosophy, as was the case for Panaetius of Rhodes and his pupil, Posidonius of Apamea.[45] The Stoics saw themselves, above all, as Socratics and agreed with Plato when they believed he was reporting Socrates' thought. That does not mean that they deliberately limited themselves to what specialists today see as Plato's earliest productions – the so-called Socratic dialogues – for they, from the start, acknowledged the importance of the *Timaeus*, a later work of Plato. After Socrates' death, various branches of Socraticism emerged, some attributing to Socrates an interest in ethics only,[46] others claiming he was equally interested in physics. Plato himself appears to have drawn a line between what, in his view, was Socrates' genuine field

of interest (ethics broadly construed, that is to say, politics)[47] and what Socrates eventually refused to get involved into, namely physics, not because he was opposed to the study of the subject, but because, apparently, he found out that he was not able to understand it by himself or with the help of others.[48] This left Plato with the freedom to engage in the study of nature in a way that was Socratically acceptable, as shown by the fact that Timaeus' account of the creation of the world by a divine and providential[49] demiurge is presented, in the *Timaeus*, as a gift (a 'feast') to Socrates.[50] Therefore, it was not difficult for the Stoics, who themselves saw physics as an integral part of philosophy, to look at Plato's *Timaeus* as Socratically acceptable too, although they, of course, interpreted it in their own way (which did not include Platonic Forms, among other things).

In many ways, the Stoics were drawn to physics for the same reasons as those mentioned by Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo*. Here is what he says there about Anaxagoras' cosmic intelligence or νοῦς:

> **T9** 'One day I heard somebody reading from what he said was a book by Anaxagoras, and saying that it turns out to be intelligence that both orders things and is cause of everything (ὡς ἄρα νοῦς ἐστιν ὁ διακοσμῶν τε καὶ πάντων αἴτιος). I was pleased with this cause, and it struck me that in a way it is good that intelligence should be cause of everything, and I supposed that, if this is the case, when intelligence is doing the ordering it orders everything and assigns each thing in whatever way is best (πάντα κοσμεῖν καὶ ἕκαστον τιθέναι ταύτῃ ὅπῃ ἂν βέλτιστα ἔχῃ). So, I thought, should someone want to discover the cause of how each thing comes to be, perishes, or is, this is what he must find out about it: how it is best for it (ὅπῃ βέλτιστον αὐτῷ) either to be, or to act or be acted upon in any other respect whatsoever. What is more, on this theory a human being should consider nothing other than what is optimal or best (τὸ ἄριστον καὶ τὸ βέλτιστον), concerning both that thing itself and everything else. The same person is bound to know the worse (τὸ χεῖρον εἰδέναι) too, for it is the same knowledge that concerns them both.'
>
> (Pl. *Phd*. 97b-d, trans. Long)

Socrates sees intelligence as naturally and intrinsically connected to what is best (hence to goodness). If intelligence is the cause of everything, as Anaxagoras seemed to argue, then everything must be said to be ordered in the best possible way: each thing in the cosmos is in the state it is in because it is the best state for that thing and for the cosmos as a whole. The study of nature, therefore, is not separable from the study of what is good and bad, and it is not difficult to see that it is for that reason that Plato's Socrates initially took an interest in it.

As we know, the Stoics held too that intelligence or reason is intrinsically good and, recognizing the perfect order of the world, they then defended the view that only a divine and provident intelligence could account for it.

In many ways – and there will be other occasions to underscore this point in what follows – the Stoics had a conception of providence that was very close to Plato's, so much so that their doctrines have sometimes been confused with one another, even by ancient philosophers. But there were differences too, as we will see. Besides, the long and rich history of the Stoa enabled it to regularly revisit and revivify that subject and eventually to provide a unique perspective on it, as I hope to show in this book.

* * *

Before concluding this introduction, I shall offer a presentation of some of the points discussed in the chapters that compose this book. This may help the reader in getting a unifying view of its content.

Chapter 1 focuses on the doctrine of providence in Zeno of Citium, founding father of the Stoa. It examines several aspects of his account: that providence is one of the names of god, that nature should be conceived as a craftsmanlike fire (one that is maintaining life rather than destroying it) and that providence can be proved by divination. It also looks into one ancient account that ascribes to Zeno the thought that god cares for everything, including the slightest of things, and shows that it was probably not a view he in fact defended.

Chapter 2 looks into Cleanthes' doctrine of providence. Like Zeno, Cleanthes put forward the view of a divine mind governing the world. Alongside it, he appears to have attacked the mechanistic, chance-based account of the world defended by Democritus. His account of the world shows how vital for the preservation of the cosmos the sun and the earth are. But it also raises the question of the compatibility of the eventual cosmic conflagration with divine providence. Cleanthes disagreed with Zeno on the question of theodicy, arguing that providence does not account for everything that happens according to fate, since that would make god responsible for the existence of evils. The chapter ends with an examination of Cleanthes' doctrine of human nature and the 'starting points towards virtue' it has been granted by god.

Chapter 3 is an attempt at reconstructing the general outline and partial content of Chrysippus' treatise *On Providence*. Using most of the extant fragments about that text, it focuses on two books in particular. In book I, after having defended the view that the world is a rational and intelligent animal, Chrysippus then tackles the difficult question of the preservation of the world (during its conflagration) and argues that the world 'shall not die'. As for book IV, it is concerned with the important question of theodicy and the compatibility between good and evil in the world. Chrysippus' *On Providence* appears also to have touched on the compatibility between fate (understood in the popular sense of external misfortunes falling upon helpless people) and moral responsibility and showed that god provided human beings with a nature that helps them avoid the effects of external misfortunes.

Chapter 4 focuses on Panaetius of Rhodes' doctrine of providence. After investigating what may have been included in his own *On Providence*, it examines the particular stance Panaetius took on some related issues: the destructibility of the world, which he denied, the existence of divination, which he doubted, and astrology, which he also rejected. After looking into Panaetius' definition of the human *telos*, presented as 'living in accordance with the starting points towards virtue bestowed upon us by nature' (or god), the chapter ends with an examination of the importance of reason in humans and how, according to Panaetius, reason serves as god's instrument for human beings to achieve their *telos* through the formation of political communities.

Chapter 5 examines Posidonius' doctrine of providence through an analysis of his promotion of reason, presented as an inner dwelling god whose role is to lead human beings towards happiness. The importance of reason is apparent in Posidonius' definition of the *telos*, his epistemology and in his criticism of Epicureanism (which neglects, in his view, the use of reason in both physics and ethics). The last part of the chapter looks into the importance Posidonius gives to reason in his depiction of the condition of the first human beings, and shows the decisive role reason plays in the formation of early political societies (governed by philosophers).

Chapter 6 focuses on Seneca and starts with his presentation of providence as the deliberation of god and the provision he made for the world to 'freely advance and unfold'. The idea of a smooth, unhindered flow of life was already how Zeno characterized happiness, which requires the possession of reason and wisdom. His account explains how human nature is part of a larger divine plan for the world and the humankind to both reach their *telos*: curiosity (impulse towards knowledge) has been instilled in the human nature by god so that human beings can eventually become the spectators of his work. Like Panaetius before him, Seneca emphasized the political dimension of contemplation, which explains why, even when there are major obstacles preventing a philosopher from entering into politics, he can still fulfil the demands of his human nature by living a life of 'studious leisure' or *otium*. The chapter ends with a study of how Seneca uses divine providence as a model of political leadership in his *On Clemency*.

Chapter 7 looks into Epictetus' account of providence, in particular his enquiry into the reasons why some human beings either fail to acknowledge the existence of divine providence or, when they do, still remain ungrateful. This has led Epictetus to a fascinating study of the root cause of evil, that is, what the Stoics refer to as the perversion (*diastrophê*) of human nature. Lack of self-respect is ultimately what leads human beings to blame god for what they see as unjust misfortunes. Hence Epictetus' emphasis on the need for humans to understand their divine kinship. Only then will they be able to benefit from the gift of reason, which will help them overcome any external misfortunes. The last part of the chapter shows how *philostorgia* (parental love for children) is understood by Epictetus as being a means for

god to foster the generation of human societies and thus fulfil the demands of human nature.

Chapter 8 focuses on Marcus Aurelius' account of providence: his defence of the perfection of the world and of the compatibility between good and evil; how god has given humans both the power not to fall into evil and the right to self-correct; and what light the Stoic doctrine of the principles can shed on providence. The chapter ends with a study of god's benevolence towards human beings (in particular those that are bad and ungrateful) and how this is used as a model of perfect political leadership by Marcus.

The two final chapters give an in-depth account of some important themes that have appeared in the rest of the book, in particular οἰκείωσις and personal providence.

Chapter 9 explores the link between divine providence and the impulse towards self-preservation that is present in animals and human beings at birth. It shows that *oikeiôsis* or familiarization with oneself is part of an elaborate plan by god to ensure the preservation of the particular natures that are parts of the world. The chapter provides an analysis of Stoic *oikeiôsis* and explains what roles it plays in self-preservation.

Chapter 10 looks into the Stoic doctrine of personal providence (according to which god cares not only for human beings conceived generally but also for individuals) and how it is ultimately based on god's care for the world (which is god's primary concern), that is to say, for himself (given the Stoic identification of the world to god). It shows that it is because the world is conceived by the Stoics as an animal (with impulses directed towards self-preservation) that divine providence for the world naturally leads to a concern for human beings (which are, by their souls, detached parts of god).

* * *

Throughout this book, my focus has been to present the issues related to the Stoic doctrine of providence in a thorough yet accessible manner. I consider it very important for the readers to have access to ancient texts so that they might make their own minds about them. All the major passages quoted are therefore numbered in a way that makes it easy to recall them over the course of the book. In general, I have relied on previously existing English translations and adapted or corrected them only when necessary.

## Notes

1 One noteworthy exception is the work of Myrto Dragona-Monachou. See especially Dragona-Monachou 1973, 1976 and 1994. On the other hand, studies on Stoic theology, broadly conceived, are not lacking: Sedley 2002, Algra 2003 and 2007, Thom 2005, Meijer 2007, Salles 2009a and Boys-Stones 2018a. See also the important book by Pià Comella 2014, although it focuses more on religion than theology *per se*.

2 See especially Stob. *Ecl.* 1.78.18–20 = *SVF* 1.176.1 (quoted in T1-1).

3 The list of publications on fate and determinism in the Stoa is too long to be given here. Suffice to recall the now classic study on Bobzien 1998, as well as Gourinat 2005a, Sauvé Meyer 2009, Koch 2011, Mikeš 2016 and O'Keefe 2017.
4 See D.L. 7.39, and other fragments quoted in Long and Sedley 1987, Chapter 26.
5 See texts quoted in Long and Sedley 1987, Chapter 31.
6 See Ps.-Plutarch, *Placita* 1.874E = *SVF* 2.35 and 26A L.-S, and Ps.-Galen, *On the History of Philosophy*, 5, 602.19–3.2 Diels (quoted in T4-16 and T4-17).
7 Epict. *D.* 2.8.11.
8 See below, Chapter 5, sections 2 and 4.
9 See Cic. *Off.* 1.11 (quoted in T4-13b).
10 Stob. *Ecl.* 2.77.21.
11 See below, Chapter 4, section 6.
12 See below, Chapter 6, section 4.2, and Chapter 8, sections 4.2–4.3.
13 There is, however, a tendency, among some scholars, to suspect a shift towards an ever-greater religiosity in the thought of later Roman Stoics. For such a view in relation to Marcus Aurelius, see Pià Comella 2014: 470–475. For a fair-minded assessment of Epictetus' 'religious sympathies', see Long 2002: 180–206.
14 Murray 1915: 14.
15 Murray 1915: 16–17.
16 Casadesús 2016: 22.
17 Casadesús 2016: 24.
18 The issue has been thoroughly studied by Brouwer (2014: 92–135), who concludes, convincingly, that none of the Stoics considered themselves sages.
19 In our ancient sources, the Stoic sage is presented as 'rarer than the Ethiopians' phoenix' (Alex. *Fat.* 199.18 = *SVF* 3.658). See again Brouwer 2014: 106–112.
20 In addition to T1, see D.L. 7.121 = *SVF* 3.355 and 67M L.-S., Cic. *Parad.* 5.33–41, and Phil. *Probus*.
21 D.L. 7.33.
22 D.L. 7.122 (quoted in T5-19b).
23 D.L. 7.122.
24 I am not convinced by Brouwer's interpretation of T4 (in Brouwer 2014: 87), namely, that learning the doctrines on divine things is simply what makes the sage become *aware* of being a sage (i.e. of possessing wisdom). If true, that would render learning theology insignificant (especially so since, according to Brouwer himself, what makes a sage is the possession of wisdom, not the awareness of it). Chrysippus' main point, in my view, is that learning theology is a difficult task that requires preparation (this is confirmed by T5). It demands some level of stability and strength acquired through learning logic and ethics, but, as the last sentence shows, full strength and control are only 'gained' (γενέσθαι) through theology, which makes the study of this discipline so rewarding.
25 Our T4 is the first example of Stoic etymology among those collected by Karlheinz Hülser in his *FDS*. Still, it seems to me that the full significance of that fact is in general not adequately acknowledged in the interpretation of that passage. For the importance of etymology in Stoicism, see in particular Allen 2005. See also Most 2016.
26 Cleanthes, the former teacher of Chrysippus and his predecessor as head of the Stoa, is reported to have said that 'those who are possessed by the gods are initiates' (τοὺς κατόχους τῶν θείων τελεστὰς ἔλεγε). See Epiphanius, *Fid.* 9.41 = *SVF* 1.538. This suggests that Cleanthes employed the vocabulary of mystery cults in relation to the sage. For sages as divine beings, see D.L. 7.119 = *SVF* 3.606 ('They are also godlike: for they have god in themselves, as it were'), and Brouwer 2014: 62–67.
27 Casadesús 2016: 20.

28 See Hadot 1979: 213, and Hadot 1991: 210.
29 Hadot 1991: 211.
30 On this topic, see below, Chapter 2, section 5.2, and Chapter 4, section 5.
31 Those external obstacles are thought to be the source of the perversion (διαστροφή) of the human nature. On this topic, see Chapter 3, section 3.2, and Chapter 7, section 1.2.
32 On this, see commentary on T6-29 and T6-30.
33 This is stated of some Stoics at least (in D.L. 7.40 = *SVF* 2.41 and 26B4 L.-S.), and Chrysippus may have been one of them. See Hadot 1991: 213.
34 The point is made by Hadot 1991: 208–209.
35 See Ps.-Plutarch, *Placita* 1.874E = Aëtius**,** *Placita* 1.Proœmium.2, p. 131 M.-R, *SVF* 2.35 and 26A L.-S (quoted in T4-16).
36 See Plut. *St. rep.* 27.1046E = *SVF* 3.299 and 61F L.-S., Stob. *Ecl.* 2.63.6–24 = *SVF* 3.280 and 61D L.-S., and Cic. *Off.* 1.15 = 59P L.-S.
37 On this, see Delcomminette 2019: 162–166.
38 See Sedley 2011.
39 Epic. *Ep. Men*. 123 = 23B1 L.-S.
40 Epic. *Ep. Hdt*. 76 = 23C1 L.-S., trans. Long and Sedley:

> Among celestial phenomena movement, turning, eclipse, rising, setting and the like should not be thought to come about through the ministry and present or future arrangements of some individual who at the same time possesses the combination of total blessedness and imperishability (τὴν πᾶσαν μακαριότητα ἔχοντος μετὰ ἀφθαρσίας). For trouble, concern, anger and favour (πραγματεῖαι καὶ φροντίδες καὶ ὀργαὶ καὶ χάριτες) are incompatible with blessedness, but have their origin in weakness, fear and dependence on neighbours.

41 Plut. *Com. Not*. 32, 1075E = 54K L.-S., trans. Long and Sedley, slightly adapted: '[G]od is preconceived and thought of not only as immortal and blessed but also as philanthropic, caring and beneficent (φιλάνθρωπον καὶ κηδεμονικὸν καὶ ὠφέλιμον)'.
42 The point is well made by Sylvain Delcomminette (2019: 144), who explains how the concept of god, in ancient philosophy, 'ceased to be a concept *of object*, which immediately designates certain entities whose divine status is straightaway presupposed, to become an *operational* concept ["un concept *opératoire*"], that is to say a concept which crystallizes certain characteristics and requirements from which only the corresponding type of entity can be determined'.
43 The presentation of Stoicism as a younger school is part of an attempt of the Academic Antiochus of Ascalon to demonstrate the lack of philosophical originality of the Stoa. See Cicero's *Academica* and *De finibus*, where Antiochus' history of philosophy is presented.
44 The influence of Aristotle's thought on the Stoic conception of providence was essentially negative. First, as that is well known, Aristotle himself never produced a doctrine of divine providence (see Koch 2019: 121–130). It took several centuries for the Peripatetic school to develop an official doctrine on the subject, the one eventually proposed by Alexander of Aphrodisias (see Koch 2019: 130–147). Secondly, we know that Zeno denied the existence of Aristotle's fifth element (one that is found only in the perfect and divine celestial realm of the cosmos), probably because he saw it as incompatible with providence rightly conceived (one that is not limited to celestial bodies but extend down to human beings). On this last point, see below, Chapter 1, section 2.2.
45 I discuss that point below in Chapters 4 and 5.

46 This is the view attributed to Socrates by Xenophon (*Mem*. 1.1.11–16). Later, Cicero himself will adopt that interpretation regarding Socrates' field of interest (see Cic. *Tusc*. 5.10–11).
47 See especially *Apol*. 30a-b (where Socrates says his only business is that of convincing Athenians to take care of their soul and become virtuous) and *Gorg*. 521d (where Socrates says that he is one of very few people in Athens actually engaged in politics, conceived of as care of the soul).
48 See the 'auto-biographical' section of the *Phaedo* and the conclusion Socrates drew from his failed attempt at understanding physics in *Phd*. 99c-d.
49 Pl. *Tim*. 20c.
50 Pl. *Tim*. 30c.

# 1 Zeno on providence

Although no Stoic before Chrysippus would pen a treatise specifically dedicated to the subject of divine providence (see Chapter 3), a study of the extant fragments of Zeno of Citium (334/3–262/1 B.C.),[1] founder of the Stoa, reveals that divine providence was, from the outset, already an important topic for the Stoics. In this chapter, we will focus on some key passages related to Zeno's thought that shall help us get a first grasp of the Stoic notion of providence. As we are going to see, Zeno's account of providence, although it can be only very partially reconstructed, appears to already establish some of the most distinctive features of the Stoic doctrine of providence, namely that god's providence permeates everything that happens in the world (even what one would think is unfortunate or even bad), that it can be proved by divination and that it implies a genuine concern for human beings. A study of Zeno's fragments also reveals that the Stoic doctrine of providence was initially established through revising or rejecting parts of Plato's (and Aristotle's) views on nature and the divine.

## 1 Providence as one of god's names

An initial fragment, found in Stobeaus' anthology, indicates that Zeno discussed providence in a book on physics (one of the three parts of the Stoic philosophy) and that he thought that 'providence' was one of the various names of the 'motive power of matter':

> **T1-1** Zeno the Stoic, in his *On Nature* (ἐν τῷ Περὶ φύσεως), calls 'fate' (εἱμαρμένην) the motive power of matter (δύναμιν κινητικὴν τῆς ὕλης), which <moves it> in the same unchanging way (κατὰ ταὐτὰ καὶ ὡσαύτως), <and says> that it is not different from (μὴ διαφέρειν) providence and nature (πρόνοιαν καὶ φύσιν).
>
> (Stob. *Ecl.* 1.78.18–20 = *SVF* 1.176.1. See also *SVF* 1.176.2)

That Zeno should write about providence in a book on nature is understandable, given that the Stoics held theology, which encompasses the subject of divine providence, to be a branch of physics. More intriguing, however, is

DOI: 10.4324/9781315647678-1

the idea that providence is one of the various possible names for the 'motive power of matter'.

Stoic physics recognizes the existence of two principles, one which is completely active (τὸ ποιοῦν, 'that which acts') and the other completely passive (τὸ πάσχον, 'that which is acted upon'): god (or reason) and matter, respectively.[2] The passivity of matter explains why it is, by itself, motionless, and why every movement in the world (i.e. everything that happens) must ultimately be explained with reference to the other principle, god, who is held to be 'self-moving' (αὐτοκίνητός).[3]

When Zeno says that providence is a name of the 'motive power of matter', he therefore simply means that 'providence' is another name for god, like 'fate' (εἱμαρμένη) or 'nature' (φύσις). Nevertheless, while providence and fate may refer to the same thing, each name carries a distinct meaning. These meanings cannot be mutually exclusive, but they may differ in some significant ways. According to an important testimony by Calcidius, which we shall examine below (T2-17), providence is god's will (*dei uoluntas*) and god's will refers to 'a series of causes' (*series causarum*), a common Stoic definition of fate. In other words, providence implies a will or intention to achieve a goal or an end (the good), whereas fate refers to the actual series of steps needed to achieve that goal.

Zeno's virtual identification of providence and fate has two important consequences. The first of these is that everything that happens according to providence also happens according to fate: there is a kind of unavoidable necessity to god's will. Indeed, as we have seen, the other principle, matter, is completely passive, and therefore malleable and compliant. For that reason, god's will can be carried out in a strictly ordered and rational way, without any obstacles, and this order manifests itself through the 'unchanging way' (κατὰ ταὐτὰ καὶ ὡσαύτως) in which matter is moved. The other consequence is that everything that happens according to fate also happens according to providence: whatever happens, even what is or is perceived to be wicked or unjust, is connected, one way or another, to god's will. This second consequence leads to a number of serious philosophical problems, and was therefore not unanimously accepted by every member of the Stoa, as we shall see in the case of Cleanthes (in Chapter 2, section 4).

## 2 Providence and nature

### *2.1 Nature as a craftsmanlike fire*

Nature is another one of god's names, and it must therefore also be closely linked with providence. This affinity between nature and providence appears in a passage from Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods*. The initial part of the passage runs as follows:

> **T1-2** Now Zeno gives this definition of nature: 'nature is a craftsmanlike fire (*ignem… artificiosum*), proceeding methodically towards generation