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STOICS *stō' īks* (*Στωικοί*). The Stoics are mentioned in Acts 17:18, along with the Epicureans. In verse 28, Paul quotes a Stoic poet, Aratus, "For we are indeed his offspring." Beyond this quotation and the fact that they rejected the idea of a bodily resurrection, Luke gives no information about their views.

The founder of Stoicism was Zeno (342-270 B.C.), a Phoen., who by a chance shipwreck arrived in Athens and was both attracted by the rigorous morality of the Cynics and repelled by their crudities. His successor was Cleanthes, a respectable old gentleman of little philosophic ability. Chrysippus assumed charge of the school from 232-206 B.C., reorganized it, and it on its successful history of four centuries.

The Stoics divided their philosophy into three parts: logic, physics, and ethics.

1. **1. Logic.** Under Logic they elaborated an empirical, sensory epistemology. The soul at birth is without content and sensations impress images upon it. Zeno insisted that the soul was a body, and Cleanthes crudely compared impressions on the soul with the elevations and depressions made by a signet in wax. When it became evident that this made memory difficult to explain, Chrysippus dropped the idea of elevations and depressions and spoke more vaguely of some sort of qualitative change.

Empiricism with its sensory epistemology is always embarrassed in the attempt to distinguish truth from error. The Epicureans had tried to maintain truth by restricting it to sensory images. Man can never be deceived as to what his sensory image is. Deception arises when he supposes, without evidence, that the image resembles an external object.

Since this scheme effectively prevents a knowledge of the external world, the Stoics made a different attempt. Of course, the criterion of truth in an empirical philosophy cannot be the logical consistency of a system. Somehow truth must be perceived immediately in the sensation itself. Many sensations do not accurately reproduce their objects; but, the Stoics claim, "comprehensive representations" do. This type of sensation carries the mark of its own validity; it has been stamped and sealed by an existing object, and so clearly resembles the object that it forces one's assent - man is just incapable of refusing to believe it.

The next important step in producing knowledge is to construct concepts. Many are elaborated by skill and method, but others, called common notions, arise naturally in all men. Men are rational because they have these common notions; and any proposition of physics or ethics is to be proved true by analyzing it into these common notions. Unfortunately, the sources for the teaching of Stoicism are extremely fragmentary at this point.

Though the Stoics wished to avoid skepticism, the process of learning had perhaps not yet arrived at knowledge. Zeno illustrated the scheme by a piece of action: he stretched out his fingers and showed the palm of his hand, saying, "Perception is like this"; then, when he had closed his fingers a little, "Assent is like this"; the closed fist he compared with "comprehension"; and finally, when he grasped the fist by the other hand, he said, "This is knowledge and only the wise man has it." Reference to the wise man anticipates Stoic ethics.

2. Physics. Stoic physics is essentially a return to Heraclitus: all reality is corporeal, composed not of discrete, inanimate atoms, but of living fire. As it appears, the world exhibits dualism of agent and patient: some of the original fire has become inert and formless, the remainder is the moving, molding principle, or God, that permeates all things.

Because the universal substance is fire, Stoic cosmology brings this world to an end in a great conflagration. Everything turns to fire.

The supposition has been made that 2 Peter 3:10-12 borrowed this idea from Stoicism. The similarity, however, is unreal. First, the hylozoistic physics on which the Stoics based their conflagration is absent from the Bible. Stoic pantheism or immanentism is incompatible with creation, and the Bible proposes no analysis of things as being basically fire or any other element. Second, Peter predicted a sudden catastrophe like the Flood; but the Stoics described an ordinary, natural process which is already in progress. The completion is merely the end of the present process. Third, the destruction predicted by Peter is a judgment on sin; the Stoic conflagration is a sort of universal deification. Fourth, this Biblical judgment against sin occurs just once; the Stoics, however, in conformity with the usual Gr. emphasis on natural cycles, taught that the cosmic history repeats itself time and time again forever, not merely with respect to the conflagration at the end of each cycle, but also with respect to every detail in between. Against this theory of eternal recurrence, Augustine later laid the charge of deep pessimism. Clearly, therefore, Peter did not borrow from Stoicism.

To continue with other things which Peter did not borrow, the Stoics held that every individual thing, such as a rock (and the world as a whole) is a composite of this form and matter. Form and matter are both bodies, interpenetrating each other, occupying the same space, forming a "complete mixture." The form or agent is the particular individuating quality, whose mode of action is designated by a term borrowed from morality - tone or tension. It is a spirit or fire or air, more often called a "seminal reason," a small edition of the Reason or Logos that controls the universe. Thus there is but one true cause, God, and also a multiplicity of causes. Their intimate relation ties in with the theory of fate.

3. Fate. Since Reason penetrates all things, every event is dependent on a universal law of Fate, Destiny, or Providence. Cleanthes excepted evil from divine determination, but the other Stoics rejected this inconsistency.

Not only physics but logic as well implies divine determinism. Every proposition is either true or false; therefore, a true proposition in the future tense states something inevitable. In their ignorance men do not know whether "Brutus will assassinate Caesar" is true or false. An omniscient mind knows. In any case, if it is true, the assassination is unavoidable; while, if the statement is false, the assassination is impossible. Since the statement must be either true or false, the future is determined.

The objections antiquity raised against determinism are the same ones that have been repeated ever since. The most popular of these is the so-called "lazy argument": if all events are foreordained, it is useless to exert oneself, for if a man's hope is not predestined, he cannot achieve it, while if predestined, it will occur anyhow.

The Stoics had no trouble disposing of this stupidity. It was fated that Caesar should be assassinated; but it was fated that Caesar should be assassinated by Brutus, and not just anyhow. Therefore Brutus could not sit idly at home and depend on Fate to commit the assassination for him. The means to every end are as much determined as the end itself; so that to modernize the example, a given college student is foreordained to get an A in Gr. philosophy - by studying, and just anyhow.

4. Ethics. The Stoics answered all the other objections against Fate as well, but since a most important one concerns ethics, the others will be skipped. Opponents of determinism, from the Epicureans to the present day, have argued that moral responsibility depends on free will. The denial of free will, by Luther and Calvin as well as by the Stoics, is supposed to cut the nerve of moral endeavor.

It is interesting to note that the Sadducees with their lax morality held to free will, while the Pharisees, who for all their hypocrisy advocated strict living, were determinists, and so also were the still stricter Essenes. The free-will Epicureans, though not so licentious as their enemies have charged, were still no moral giants; but the Stoics strove for rigorous virtue. Luther and Calvin emphasized morality; it was the free-will Romanists who were scandalous.

The Stoics based responsibility on the will. Men are responsible for their voluntary actions. The Epicureans and other opponents mistakenly supposed that anyone who says the will has a cause, says that there is no will. But obviously if one's character causes a volition, the volition surely occurs. How could its being cause conflict with its occurrence?

Therefore, one is responsible for his own voluntary actions - these are "in our power"; but one is not responsible for involuntary actions or states, such as digestion, breathing, reputation (dependent on other people's opinions), or wealth (dependent on many circumstances beyond one's control).

The Stoics rejected the Epicurean ideal of pleasure, and stressed virtue. Instead of persistently avoiding pain, they deemed it worthwhile to run risks in order, for example, to raise a family and discharge civic responsibilities - two activities the Epicureans condemned.

The actual achievement of virtue is difficult. Most men are vicious; most men are foolish; only a few are wise. Just as one can drown in a foot of water as well as in an ocean, and as a man a mile from Athens is as truly outside Athens as a man ten miles away, so he who violates virtue in one point is guilty of all. The change from vice to virtue, from foolishness to wisdom, like entrance into Athens, is a sudden, instantaneous conversion. Unfortunately, few people are converted, and these only late in life after a hard struggle.

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