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**Stoic principles: Bodies? What kind of bodies?**

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**Introduction**: The Stoics apparently used to begin the systematic account of their physics with the topic of bodies. That at least is what Diogenes Laertius says at 7,132 about the Stoic account divided into topics according to species (as opposed to generic division). Unfortunately, no such complete account of the Stoic physics survived. Nor did any less complete but more focused account of bodies. As in other similar cases, we have several more or less rich comments, more or less preserved arguments and more or less offensive remarks of various (more or less trustworthy) provenance. The alleged priority of the subject of bodies has for us merely the value of the information about its importance for the Stoic physics (and by consequence for the rest of the Stoic teaching). We can only imagine what was stated at this starting point. Did it include arguments for the view that whatever in the proper sense is, is corporeal, i.e. that being is bodily? Was there a clear definition of the body? Or was this starting point an occasion to show that everything was more complicated and that, for example, we should distinguish between two or even more fundamental ways of being a body or that there might be different definitions of the body which were not extensionally the same?

These questions are – perhaps surprisingly – difficult to answer: on the one hand we have impression that – let us say – the “essential” corporeality of the Stoic world is a patent and simple fact, but on the other there are parts of the Stoic teaching which show that body is not a simple concept. Such a part of the doctrine is the second alleged topic of the Stoic physical account: principles. I propose in the following to look closely at principles with one simple question: Are principles bodies or not and if they are what kind of bodies are they? One importance of such a question is perhaps obvious. The whole understanding of the Stoic physical world is challenged if we find out that bodies of principles are not like bodies which we see and touch around us. The justifiability of this question is perhaps less obvious, given what we read in our sources. For the moment it might be at least noted that the disagreement which we find in the modern interpretations concerning the principles and/or their corporeality is a strong impulse to raise such a question. In general, disagreements of this sort (which entertain opposite positions) are good signs that a subject is more complex (or at least perhaps more confused at its origin or more corrupted in its transmission).

**Conclusion**: I suggest to understand principles as bodies the corporeality of which would consist only in their being active and passive. The major problem is that we cannot properly imagine the principles, as we could by some strange and vague imagination when they were considered three-dimensional (and resistant). “That which acts” and “that which is acted upon” deprived of three-dimensionality seem to be unsubstantial, and it is not obvious how they differ from mere aspects as some interpreters wanted to see them. We should admit that with this understanding we are on the borderline of any conceivable corporeality. But this is perhaps a sign that we are pointing in the right direction because “quality-less being” (*apoios ousia*), that is the first principle thought on its own, is itself on the borderline of corporeality. If the Stoics say that principles are bodies, we can see in this a decision to save the unity in the cosmos. The principles are dependent on each other and they make each other different. *Ousia* is always qualified and god is always god of this whole *ousia*. By making each other different they create something which is distinguishable from both of them: the element and its further modification. To see the principles as mere aspects would confuse the order of priority. The first thing which would not be explicable through itself would not be intelligible. I think it is not unreasonable to conceive of principles as two bodies which do not blend but are together like parts of the *idios poios*. The difference is that behind this *poios* is not *poiotes* which is an aspect of the *pneuma* – an independent body. Behind this *poios* is a principle – a most simple body, which is a fundament of any further *poiotes*. And both principles are bodies, in the end, because nothing else than two things of the same order could be together, and because nothing else than two bodies could establish this corporeal world.

**Principles: bodies v. incorporeal**

**A.** Diogenes Laertius 7,134:

They think that there are two principles of the universe, that which acts and that which is acted upon. That which is acted upon is unqualified substance, i.e. matter; that which acts is the reason in it, i.e. god. For this, since it is everlasting, constructs every single thing throughout the matter...

...They hold that principles differ from elements. The former do not come about nor perish, the latter are destroyed in the conflagration. The principles are bodies without form, but the elements are endowed with form.

[134] δοκεῖ δ’ αὐτοῖς ἀρχὰς εἶναι τῶν ὅλων δύο, τὸ ποιοῦν καὶ τὸ πάσχον. τὸ μὲν οὖν πάσχον εἶναι τὴν ἄποιον οὐσίαν, τὴν ὕλην, τὸ δὲ ποιοῦν τὸν ἐν αὐτῇ λόγον, τὸν θεόν·τοῦτον γὰρ ἀΐδιον ὄντα διὰ πάσης αὐτῆς δημιουργεῖν ἕκαστα. τίθησι δὲ τὸ δόγμα τοῦτο Ζήνων μὲν ὁ Κιτιεὺς ἐν τῷ Περὶ οὐσίας, Κλεάνθης δὲ ἐν τῷ Περὶ τῶν ἀτόμων, Χρύσιππος δὲ ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ τῶν Φυσικῶν πρὸς τῷ τέλει, Ἀρχέδημος δ’ ἐν τῷ Περὶ στοιχείων καὶ Ποσειδώνιος ἐν τῷ δευτέρῳ τοῦ Φυσικοῦ λόγου. διαφέρειν δέ φασιν ἀρχὰς καὶ στοιχεῖα· τὰς μὲν γὰρ εἶναι ἀγενήτους καὶ ἀφθάρτους, τὰ δὲ στοιχεῖα κατὰ τὴν ἐκπύρωσιν φθείρεσθαι. ἀλλὰ καὶ σωμάτα εἶναι τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ ἀμόρφους, τὰ δὲ μεμορφῶσθαι.[[1]](#footnote-1)

(I understand the double kai in the last sentence as “they are bodies in the same time as without form”). See R. Goulet for an analysis of the sentence and proposed emendation (‘Les principes stoïciens sont-ils des corps ou sont-ils incorporels?”, in Agonistes: essays in honour of Denis O’Brien, ed. J. Dillon, M. Dixsaut (Aldershot 2005), 157-76). T. Dorandi, in the latest edition of D.L., prints “σωμάτα” (against e.g. R. Hicks’ Loeb edition and von Arnim’s SVF 2.299).

**B.** Suda, s.v. arché, l. 4092 :

<Ἀρχή.> <<ἀρχαὶ τῶν ὅλων δύο> <τὸ ποιοῦν> <καὶ τὸ πάσχον,> <τὸ ποιοῦν δὲ τὸν ἐν> <τὸ μὲν οὖν πάσχον εἶναι> <αὐτῇ λόγον, τὸν θεόν.> <τὴν ἄποιον οὐσίαν, τὴν ὕλην.>> διαφέρει δὲ ἀρχαὶ καὶ στοιχεῖα· τὰς μὲν γὰρ εἶναι ἀγενήτους καὶ ἀφθάρτους, τὰ δὲ στοιχεῖα κατὰ τὴν ἐκπύρωσιν φθείρεσθαι. ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀσωμάτους εἶναι τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ ἀμόρφους, τὰ δὲ μεμορφῶσθαι.

**Principles: three-dimensional bodies with resistance**

**C.** Galen (*Qual. Incorpor*. 19,483,13-16; SVF 2.381; LS 45F): Why... do they [the Stoics] say that what has ‘threefold extension together with resistance’ is a definition of body alone, and do not also apply this definition to colour, flavour, taste and every remaining attribute?[[2]](#footnote-2)

(tr. Long-Sedley) διὰ τί δὲ μόνου, καθάπερ ἔφην, τοῦ σώματος τοῦτον ὅρον εἶναί φασιν, τὸ τριχῇ διαστατὸν μετὰ ἀντιτυπίας, οὐχὶ δὲ καὶ χρόαν καὶ χυλὸν καὶ χυμὸν καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν συμβεβηκότων ἕκαστον οὕτως ὁρίζονται.

**D.** Diogenes Laertius (7.135) ... that which is extended in three dimensions, length, breadth, and depth. This is also called solid body.

(tr. R. Hicks) Σῶμα δ' ἐστίν, ὥς φησιν Ἀπολλόδωρος ἐν τῇ Φυσικῇ, τὸ τριχῆ διαστατόν, εἰς μῆκος, εἰς πλάτος, εἰς βάθος· τοῦτο δὲ καὶ στερεὸν σῶμα καλεῖται.

**alternative definition of body**

**E.** Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. math*. 9,366:

To begin with, then, as against those who conceive body as what is capable of being acted upon or of affecting (and of these it is recorded that Pythagoras was the leader), we have already pretty well abolished body...

(tr. R. G. Bury) Εὐθέως τοίνυν κατὰ μὲν τοὺς σῶμα νοοῦντας τὸ οἷόν τε παθεῖν ἢ διαθεῖναι, ὧν ἀρχηγὸς ἱστορεῖται ὁ Πυθαγόρας, ἤδη σχεδὸν ἀνῃρήκαμεν τὸ σῶμα... *Diatheinai* is not a usual term in pair with *pathein* but Sextus uses *poiein* instead in the following sentence; cf. G. Betegh, *Body: M 9.359-440* [*Body*], in: Sextus Empiricus and Ancient Physics, ed. K. Algra, K. Ierodiakonou (Cambridge 2015), p. 135, n. 9.

**F.** Cicero, *Academica* I, 39: His (i.e. Zeno’s) position on the natural principles was as follows.... A second disagreement with them [old Academy] was his belief that it was quite impossible for anything to be acted on by something entirely without body (which is what Xenocrates, along with his predecessors, had claimed the mind to be): neither what acts nor what it acts on could be noncorporeal.[[3]](#footnote-3)

(tr. Ch. Brittain, in: Cicero, On Academic Scepticism, Indianapolis/Cambridge 2006) De naturis autem sic sentiebat, ... discrepabat etiam ab isdem, quod nullo modo arbitrabatur quicquam effici posse ab ea quae expers esset corporis, cuius generis Xenocrates et superiores etiam animum esse dixerant, nec vero aut quod efficeret aliquid aut quod efficeretur posse esse non corpus.

**principles in cosmogony**

**G.** Calcidius, *In Tim.* 295, 4-6 Waszink (SVF 1.88, LS 44D) : “Zeno says that this very substance is finite and that it is the one common substrate of everything which exists. It is also divisible and continuously subject to change. Its parts are changed, but they do not perish so as to be destroyed from existing into nothing. But as is the case with the innumerable different shapes of was as well, so he thinks there will be no form or shape or any quality at all intrinsic to the matter which is the basis of all things; yet it is always united and inseparably connected with some quality or other.” (tr. Long-Sedley). *Deinde Zeno hanc ipsam essentiam finitam esse dicit unamque eam communem omnium quae sunt esse substantiam, dividuam quoque et usque quaque mutabilem: partes quippe eius verti, sed non interire, ita ut de existentibus consumantur in nihilum. Sed ut innumerabilium diversarum, etiam cerearum, figurarum, sic neque formam neque figuram nec ullam omnino qulitatem propriam fore censet fundamenti rerum omnium silvae, coniunctam tamen esse semper et inseparabiliter cohaerere alicui qualitati.*

**logical conflation of principles**

**H. Plotinus**, **Enn. 42 (6.1), 26, 12-26 (SVF 2.315)**

And God for them comes second after matter: for he is a body, and composed of matter and form. And where did he get his form from? But if [he had it] without having matter, having the nature of a principle and being a rational formative power, God would be bodiless and the creative bodiless. But if even without matter God is composite in his essential nature, in that he is a body, they will be introducing another matter, that of God.

Καὶ ὁ θεὸς δεύτερος αὐτοῖς τῆς ὕλης· καὶ γὰρ σῶμα ἐξ ὕλης ὢν καὶ εἴδους. Καὶ πόθεν αὐτῷ τὸ εἶδος; Εἰ δὲ καὶ ἄνευ τοῦ ὕλην ἔχειν ἀρχοειδὴς ὢν καὶ λόγος, ἀσώματος ἂν εἴη ὁ θεός, καὶ τὸ ποιητικὸν ἀσώματον. Εἰ δὲ καὶ ἄνευ τῆς ὕλης ἐστὶ τὴν οὐσίαν σύνθετος, ἅτε σῶμα ὤν, ἄλλην ὕλην τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσάξουσιν.

**I. Plutarch**, **De communibus notitiis 48, 1085 B 6 – C 7 (SVF 2.313)**

Yet these Stoics by making god, while a principle, an intellectual body, that is intelligence in matter, make him out to be not pure or simple or incomposite but from something else and because of something else. Matter, however, being in itself without rationality and without quality, has simplicity and so the characteristic of a principle ; but god, if in fact he is not incorporeal and not immaterial, has got a share of matter as a participant in a principle.

καὶ μὴν οὗτοι τὸν θεὸν ἀρχὴν ὄντα σῶμα νοερὸν καὶ νοῦν ἐν ὕλῃ ποιοῦντες οὐ καθαρὸν οὐδ' ἁπλοῦν οὐδ' ἀσύνθετον ἀλλ' ἐξ ἑτέρου καὶ δι' ἕτερον ἀποφαίνουσιν· ἡ δ' ὕλη καθ' αὑτὴν ἄλογος οὖσα καὶ ἄποιος τὸ ἁπλοῦν ἔχει καὶ τὸ ἀρχοειδές. ὁ θεὸς δή, εἴπερ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀσώματος οὐδ' ἄυλος, ὡς ἀρχῆς μετέσχηκε τῆς ὕλης

**J. Plutarch, De communibus notitiis 1083 C 2 – 1083 D 7 (tr. Long-Sedley):**

**(1)** When it is stated and proposed in some such way, what is the judgement of these champions of the evident, these yardsticks of our conceptions? That each of us is a pair of twins, two-natured and double – not in the way the poets think of the Molionidae [legendary Siamese twins], joined in some parts but separated in others, but two bodies sharing the same colour, the same shape, the same weight, and the same place, <yet nevertheless double even though> no man previously has seen them. **(2)** But these men alone have seen this combination, this duplicity, this ambiguity, that each of us is two substrates, the one substance, the other <a peculiarly qualified individual> ; and that the one is always in flux and motion, neither growing nor diminishing nor remaining as it is at all, while the other remains and grows and diminishes and undergoes all the opposite affections to the first one – although it is its natural partner, combined and fused with it, and nowhere providing sense-perception with a grasp of the difference.

οὕτω δέ πως τούτων λεγομένων καὶ τιθεμένων, τί ἀξιοῦσιν οἱ πρόδικοι τῆς ἐναργείας οὗτοι καὶ κανόνες τῶν ἐννοιῶν; ἕκαστον ἡμῶν δίδυμον εἶναι καὶ διφυῆ καὶ διττόν – οὐχ ὥσπερ οἱ ποιηταὶ τοὺς Μολιονίδας οἴονται, τοῖς μὲν ἡνωμένους μέρεσι τοῖς δ' ἀποκρινομένους, ἀλλὰ δύο σώματα ταὐτὸν ἔχοντα χρῶμα, ταὐτὸν δὲ σχῆμα, ταὐτὸν δὲ βάρος καὶ τόπον <τὸν αὐτὸν ὅμως δὲ διπλᾶ καίπερ> ὑπὸ μηδενὸς ἀνθρώπων ὁρώμενα πρότερον· ἀλλ' οὗτοι μόνοι εἶδον τὴν σύνθεσιν ταύτην καὶ διπλόην καὶ ἀμφιβολίαν, ὡς δύο ἡμῶν ἕκαστός ἐστιν ὑποκείμενα, τὸ μὲν οὐσία τὸ δὲ <ἰδίως ποιός>· καὶ τὸ μὲν ἀεὶ ῥεῖ καὶ φέρεται, μήτ' αὐξόμενον μήτε μειούμενον, μήθ' ὅλως οἷόν ἐστι διαμένον, τὸ δὲ διαμένει καὶ αὐξάνεται καὶ μειοῦται, καὶ πάντα πάσχει τἀναντία θατέρῳ, συμπεφυκὸς καὶ συνηρμοσμένον καὶ συγκεχυμένον καὶ τῆς διαφορᾶς τῇ αἰσθήσει μηδαμοῦ παρέχον ἅψασθαι.

**K. Stobaeus 1.178,7 - 179,5 Wachsmuth (tr. Long-Sedley)**

**(1)** Of these (*scil*. changes), that by alteration belongs to the substance, while the other three belong to the so-called 'qualified individuals' which come to occupy the substance. And it is along these lines that processes of generation come about. **(2)** The substance neither grows nor diminishes through addition or subtraction, but simply alters, just as in the case of numbers and measures. **(3)** And it follows that it is in the case of peculiarly qualified individuals, such as Dion and Theon, that processes of both growth and diminution arise. **(4)** Therefore each individual’s quality actually remains from its generation to its destruction, in the case of destructible animals, plants and the like. **(5)** In the case of peculiarly qualified individuals they say that there are two receptive parts, the one pertaining to the presence of the substance, the other to that of the qualified individual. For it is the latter, as we have said several times, that is receptive of growth and diminution. **(6)** The peculiarly qualified thing is not the same as the substance out of which it is. Nor on the other hand is it different from it, but is merely non-same; it is because the substance is in the same time a part and occupies the same place as it, whereas whatever is called different from something must be separated from it and not be thought of in terms of parts.

**(1)** Τούτων δὲ τὴν κατ' ἀλλοίωσιν περὶ τὴν οὐσίαν γίνεσθαι, τὰς δ' ἄλλας τρεῖς περὶ τοὺς ποιοὺς λεγομένους τοὺς ἐπὶ τῆς οὐσίας γιγνομένους. Ἀκολούθως δὲ τούτοις καὶ τὰς γενέσεις συμβαίνειν. **(2)** Τὴν γὰρ οὐσίαν οὔτ' αὔξεσθαι οὔτε μειοῦσθαι κατὰ πρόσθεσιν ἢ ἀφαίρεσιν, ἀλλὰ μόνον ἀλλοιοῦσθαι, καθάπερ ἐπ' ἀριθμῶν καὶ μέτρων. **(3)** καὶ συμβαίνειν ἐπὶ τῶν ἰδίως ποιῶν οἷον Δίωνος καὶ Θέωνος καὶ αὐξήσεις καὶ μειώσεις γίνεσθαι. **(4)** Διὸ καὶ παραμένειν τὴν ἑκάστου ποιότητα [τὰ] ἀπὸ τῆς γενέσεως μέχρι τῆς ἀναιρέσεως, ἐπὶ τῶν ἀναίρεσιν ἐπιδεχομένων ζῴων καὶ φυτῶν καὶ τῶν τούτοις παραπλησίων. **(5)** Ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν ἰδίως ποιῶν φησι δύο εἶναι τὰ δεκτικὰ μόρια, τὸ μέν τι κατὰ τὴν τῆς οὐσίας ὑπόστασιν, τὸ δέ <τι> κατὰ τὴν τοῦ ποιοῦ. Τοῦτο γάρ, ὡς πολλάκις ἐλέγομεν, τὴν αὔξησιν καὶ τὴν μείωσιν ἐπιδέχεσθαι· **(6)** μὴ εἶναι δὲ ταὐτὸν τό τε ποιὸν ἰδίως καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν [ὃ] ἐξ ἧς ἔστι τοῦτο, μὴ μέντοι γε μηδ' ἕτερον, ἀλλὰ μόνον οὐ ταὐτὸν διὰ τὸ καὶ μέρος εἶναι τῆν οὐσίαν καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν ἐπέχειν τόπον, τὰ δ' ἕτερα τινῶν λεγόμενα δεῖν καὶ τόπῳ κεχωρίσθαι καὶ μηδ' ἐν μέρει θεωρεῖσθαι.

**physical co-occurrence of principles**

**L.** Alexander of Aphrodisias in *De mixtione* 224,33-225,5 Bruns (= SVF 2.310)

224,33-225,5 Bruns (= SVF 2.310): ...one might reasonable challenge them with also claiming the existence of two universal priniciples, matter and God, of which the latter is active, the former passive; and with saying that God is mixed with matter and pervades the whole of it, in this way shaping and forming it and creating the universe. For if God is on their view body – an intelligent and eternal pneuma – and matter is body, first there will again be body going through body (tr. R. Todd)

καὶ τὸ δύο ἀρχὰς τῶν πάντων λέγοντας εἶναι ὕλην τε καὶ θεόν, ὧν τὸν μὲν ποιοῦντα εἶναι τὴν δὲ πάσχουσαν, μεμῖχθαι τῇ ὕλῃ λέγειν τὸν θεόν, διὰ πάσης αὐτῆς διήκοντα καὶ σχηματίζοντα αὐτήν, καὶ μορφοῦντα καὶ κοσμοποιοῦντα τούτῳ τῷ τρόπῳ. εἰ γὰρ θεὸς κατ' αὐτοὺς σῶμα, πνεῦμα ὢν νοερόν τε καὶ ἀίδιον, καὶ ἡ ὕλη δὲ σῶμα, πρῶτον μὲν ἔσται πάλιν διῆκον σῶμα διὰ σώματος.

**M. Diogenes Laertios**

**a)** **7.136**: God is one and the same with the intellect, fate, and Zeus; he is also called by many other names. In the beginning he was by himself; he transformed the whole of substance through air into water...

Ἕν τ' εἶναι θεὸν καὶ νοῦν καὶ εἱμαρμένην καὶ Δία· πολλαῖς τ' ἑτέραις ὀνομασίαις προσονομάζεσθαι. κατ' ἀρχὰς μὲν οὖν καθ'αὑτὸν ὄντα τρέπειν τὴν πᾶσαν οὐσίαν δι' ἀέρος εἰς ὕδωρ.

**c)** **7.137**: They use the term cosmos in three ways: of god himself, the peculiarly qualified individual out of (L-S: consisting of) all substance, who is indestructible and ingenerable, since he is the manufacturer of the world-order, at set periods of time consuming all substance into himself and reproducing it again from himself..... cosmos is defined as the peculiarly qualified individual of the whole of substance.

Λέγουσι δὲ κόσμον τριχῶς· αὐτόν τε τὸν θεὸν τὸν ἐκ τῆς ἁπάσης οὐσίας ἰδίως ποιόν, ὃς δὴ ἄφθαρτός ἐστι καὶ ἀγένητος, δημιουργὸς ὢν τῆς διακοσμήσεως, κατὰ χρόνων ποιὰς περιόδους ἀναλίσκων εἰς ἑαυτὸν τὴν ἅπασαν οὐσίαν καὶ πάλιν ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ γεννῶν· ... καὶ ἔστι κόσμος ὁ ἰδίως ποιὸς τῆς τῶν ὅλων οὐσίας.

**d)** **7.142**: The cosmos, they hold, comes into being when the substance has first been converted from fire through air into moisture...

Γίνεσθαι δὲ τὸν κόσμον ὅταν ἐκ πυρὸς ἡ οὐσία τραπῇ δι' ἀέρος εἰς ὑγρότητα

1. Cob. **1090–1091** (**καὶ**—**λόγου**) om. F **1091 φασιν** ex **φησιν** Fx: om.**Φ 1092 ἀγεννήτους** FPxs.l., Suda (codd. GITM) **καὶ** Suda: om. BPF**Φ 1094 σωμάτα** BPF: **ἀσώματα Φ**: **ἀσωμάτους** Suda: **ἀσχηματίστους** dub. Goulet 1183 <**μὲν**> **εἶναι** Marcov. **καὶ ἀμόρφους** BPF**Φ** Suda: **ἄμορφα** [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Monou* cannot be contstructed with *touton horon* as R. Dufour suggests in his translation (Chrysippe, fr. 394): “Pourquoi, comme je le disais, affirment-ils que la définition du corps est seulement celle-ci : “une étendu dans les trois dimensions et accompagnée de résistance”...” (Cf. L. Brisson, Plotin, Traité 42, p. 281, n.321). This would make a very strong claim that the Stoics insisted that *only* this is the definition of body (apparently excluding some alternative one). But Galen does not say that. In fact his very objection against the Stoics makes doubtful that this was the only Stoic definition of body (as we will see later). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. (tr. Ch. Brittain, in: Cicero, On Academic Scepticism, Indianapolis/Cambridge 2006) De naturis autem sic sentiebat, ... discrepabat etiam ab isdem, quod nullo modo arbitrabatur quicquam effici posse ab ea quae expers esset corporis, cuius generis Xenocrates et superiores etiam animum esse dixerant, nec vero aut quod efficeret aliquid aut quod efficeretur posse esse non corpus. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)