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# Stoic Echoes in non-Stoic Sources: Exploring Stoic Influence in the First and Second Centuries CE

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This article examines David Hahm's claim that "more people in the Mediterranean world would have held a more or less Stoic conception of the world than any other from the third century BCE to the second century CE". If this is so, most New Testament studies do not take this adequately into account. Focussing on the first and second centuries CE, this paper addresses the barriers to an accurate assessment of this claim, then considers the approach of two scholars in this area. Then three geographically diverse texts of the period specifically not written by Stoic adherents are examined for evidence of Stoic influence (Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, Ch. 2; Philo's *De aeternitate mundi*, paragraph 24, & *Acts* 17.15–34). What these analyses show is that Stoic ideas were known and discussed in this period among those who were not Stoic proponents, strengthening the case for widespread Stoic influence.

In 1977, David Hahm published a study called *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology* in which he stated that

For half a millennium Stoicism was very likely the most widely accepted world view in the Western world. Although there was, of course, never a single all-pervasive world view in antiquity, yet from the third century B.C. to the second century A.D. more people in the Mediterranean world seem to have held a more or less Stoic conception of the world than any other. (Hahm, 1977:xiii)

This claim, which functions as the platform for Hahm's systematic study of the formative influences on Stoic physics, has not been explicitly refuted, yet neither has it been taken sufficiently seriously.

For the field of New Testament studies, this claim is both intriguing and important. What makes it controversial for the study of Judaeo-Christian history is the fact that the rise of Christian Neo-Platonism masks what influence Stoicism may have had on early Christian thought. If true, it would run against the widely-accepted assumption

that the Christian proclamation was received positively among pagan groups due to their contact and association with synagogues as God-fearers, or due to Platonic influences that were later embraced as Neo-Platonism. My own research interest in the influence of Stoic thought on early Christian theology arises from the significant parallels between the Pauline Letter to the Colossians and Stoic ideas (Balabanski, 2008, 2010a, 2010b).

This paper explores how one might give further evidence for Hahm's claim that Stoicism was considered the pre-eminent path to wisdom by seeing if this influence is apparent outside the circles of Stoicism's own adherents in the first and second centuries CE. The claim is plausible, *prima facie*, for the period of the late Stoa. In the first and second centuries CE we have notable Stoics including Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE), Musonius Rufus, (c. 20–30 to c. 101 CE), Epictetus (c. 55–135 CE) — a Phrygian slave and later freedman whose master had him study under the Stoic Musonius Rufus and who subsequently influenced not only his student Arrian (c. 86–160 CE) but also Emperor Hadrian (76–138 CE)<sup>1</sup> and Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180 CE), the most famous Stoic of the period under scrutiny. We also know of other Stoic philosophers in these centuries — for example, Lucius Annaeus Cornutus, Publius Egnatius Celer and Hierocles the Stoic. Even considering just the best-known Stoics of the first and second centuries CE, we can see that the influence of Stoic philosophy was not limited to Athens or Rome, but was also current in Asia Minor (through at least Epictetus and Arrian). So it is plausible that the influence of Stoicism was widespread in this period.

But how does one move beyond the *prima facie* position proposed by Hahm and demonstrate that it is not just plausible but probable that Stoic ideas were highly influential, even pre-eminent, in this period? How does one establish the relative influence of Stoic thought (in comparison with other philosophical schools) in a particular period or region? In this paper, I define as Stoic influence either explicit reference to Stoic philosophy or philosophers, or a positive or negative refraction of a distinctively Stoic concept,<sup>2</sup> or an aspect of the tripartite Stoic “system” — Physics, Ethics and Logic (Diogenes Laertius 7.39–41, in Long & Sedley, vol. 1:158).

In order to address this question of Stoic influence, I will first review the barriers to an accurate assessment, and then consider the approaches of two scholars whose work sheds some light on this question. Then I consider three Greek sources as case-studies from diverse locations and religious affiliations which are not from self-professed Stoic writers. If Stoicism was indeed influential, it must have influenced writers beyond its

<sup>1</sup> Aelius Spartianus describes Hadrian as treating with the “greatest friendship the philosophers Epictetus and Heliodorus”, in *The Life of Hadrian*, 16.

<sup>2</sup> The following key terms are associated with Stoic philosophy, listed in alphabetical order: *adiaphora*, *apatheia*, *apokatastasis*, *ataraxia*, *diairesis*, *eudaimonia*, *heimarmenē*, *homologia*, *katalepsis*, *kathekon*, *logos*, *oikeiosis*, *physis*, *pneuma*, *prohaeresis*. Other key terms are shared with other philosophical schools, including *diairesis*, *hexis*, *hulē* or *ousia*, *pneuma*, *prokopē*, *Sophos*.

own adherents. But by choosing sources that are not explicitly Stoic, I am also looking for ones that are not explicitly promoting another philosophical school.

In this paper, of the three sources I have selected, two are Christians and one is Jewish.

- 1) Justin Martyr (Flavia Neapolis in Samaria, in the Roman province of Judea) *Dialogue with Trypho*, Ch. 2. (Justin's dates are c. 100–165 CE; *Dialogue* was written c. 150–160 CE).
- 2) Philo (Alexandria) *De aeternitate mundi*, paragraph 24.
- 3) Luke's depiction of Paul in Athens, *Acts* 17.15–34 (which reflects traditions from Syrian Antioch and other parts of the Roman Empire).

In their search for wisdom, each of these writers identified their religious affiliation as primary rather than any particular philosophical school. All of these are (arguably)<sup>3</sup> first and second century CE sources, predating the imperial benefaction of the chair in Stoic philosophy in 174 CE by Marcus Aurelius. My treatment of them makes no claims to being comprehensive. Instead, I take a sounding of them, seeking evidence for Stoic ideas. I conclude that each of these writers enables us to observe Stoic influence extending beyond the sphere of Stoic adherents.

## Factors that render it difficult to assess Stoic influence in this period

There are several reasons why this endeavour is by no means straightforward. The first reason is an obvious one — the very fragmentary preservation of most Stoic sources. Despite the considerable body of Stoic material we do have, only a tiny fraction — not even one percent — of the writings of Hellenistic philosophy which existed in the first century CE has been preserved into the present.<sup>4</sup> Most of what has been preserved of the early Stoics is embedded in the writings of others who did not share their views, and wished to refute them. Hence, all reconstructions of early Stoic doctrine must rely on second and third-hand reports, or on later Stoic writers. Today we rely on collections of sources, in particular, the *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta (SVF)*, the two-volume collection by A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley under the title *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, and B. Inwood and L. Gerson's *Hellenistic Philosophy*. Our reliance on such collections, excellent though they may be, may give the impression that Stoic philosophy was long — perhaps always — overshadowed by its debating partners.

<sup>3</sup> The dating of *Acts* is contested. Richard I. Pervo argues that the widely-held dating of *Acts* to the late first century is inaccurate, and dates it to c. 115 CE (Pervo, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> "Epicurus and Chrysippus wrote, between them, works amounting to more than a thousand books (i.e. scrolls of papyrus). So the total literary output of Hellenistic philosophy must have run into many thousands of books. From these, all that survive intact are three epitomes and a set of maxims by Epicurus, and a hymn by Cleanthes" (Long & Sedley, vol. 1:8).

Preservation of, and access to, Stoic sources is not just a contemporary issue, but one already present by the fourth century CE. Ilaria Ramelli writes that

in Origen's day [185–254 CE] Stoic sources were still available ... Shortly before Origen's birth, Marcus Aurelius, the last major Imperial Stoic, in 176 CE endowed four chairs of philosophy in Athens, one of which was Stoic. By the time of Gregory [of Nyssa], in the second half of the fourth century [c. 335–394], the availability of Old Stoic texts seems to have become scanty.<sup>1</sup> According to Themistius, these were available in public libraries but were rare. Themistius explicitly speaks of the works of Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus, besides Aristotelian and Platonic works, as available in the library of Constantinople and thereby saved from a total vanishing precisely by being kept there (Or. 4.13.60B). (Ramelli, 2014:136)

Ramelli goes on to write that while Plato's and Aristotle's texts were still owned by private citizens in their libraries, those of the [Hellenistic] Stoics were only available in public libraries (Ramelli, 2014:136).

This state of affairs suggests that by the mid to late fourth century in Constantinople, Old Stoic texts were not being copied or taught as part of the educational curriculum. The mid-third to mid-fourth centuries CE witnessed the major cultural and religious changes associated with Diocletian's Great Persecution, the rise of Constantine I and the first Council of Nicaea. In terms of influential philosophers in this period, we can name Lactantius (c. 250–c. 325), whose lectures may have been heard by Constantine (Barnes, 1981:47, 73–74; Fowden, 1988:175–176). Lactantius writes in praise of Socrates and Plato in *De Ira Dei* and against Epicureans and slightly more mildly against Stoics (*De Ira Dei*, Ch. 5:261–262). Thus, we can say that due to the political, cultural and religious shifts of the mid to late fourth century, and the rise of Neo-Platonism, Old Stoic texts were becoming less influential than they had been in the second century.

A second difficulty in assessing the relative influence of Stoic thought is the difference between philosophical schools deriving from a founding figure whose writings formed the foundational curriculum (Plato, Aristotle and Epicurus) and a school whose founder was not the main source of what came to be the curriculum (Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus). Not a single complete treatise of any of the early Stoics survives intact.<sup>2</sup> The later Stoics themselves are in part responsible for this, with their emphasis on philosophy as ethics and their downplaying of philosophy as logic and physics. They seldom record the philosophical differences between these three heads of the Stoa in the third century BCE. Therefore, it is not possible to reconstruct all aspects of Zeno's philosophy, nor to ascertain with certainty the innovations of Cleanthes or Chrysippus. The lack of focus on the founding figures' writings sets Stoicism

<sup>1</sup> Citing Jean-Baptiste Gourinat (1996:13–28) and Jean-Baptiste Gourinat and Jonathan Barnes (2009:10–12).

<sup>2</sup> Cleanthes' Hymn is a precious glimpse into the Old Stoa and makes us long to know what his philosophical treatises would have looked like.

apart from Platonism, the Peripatetics and Epicureanism, whose founding figures and their writings were not so profoundly eclipsed by their later schools, even as they were interpreted and reinterpreted.

A third difficulty in assessing the relative influence of Stoicism is the syncretism of ideas in the first and second centuries of the Common Era. It is hard to ascertain to what extent Stoic concepts may have been acculturated into philosophical discourse and were no longer distinctively Stoic in the period known as Middle Platonism. This can function to obscure Stoicism as well.

To this list of three we can add three further, interrelated contributions to the set of problems:

- 1) The early Christian view was that philosophy's significance was circumscribed by God for a certain time and culture. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215 CE), for instance, claimed that philosophy was “a direct gift of God to the Greeks before the Lord extended his appeal to the Greeks. ... So philosophy is a preparatory process; it opens the road for the person whom Christ brings to his final goal” (Clement, *Stromateis*, Book I, Ch. V (28.3): 42). Later Christian tradition, overlooking the statement's rhetorical function, took this to mean that the time for philosophy was essentially over. Yet it reflects a context in which philosophy continues to be highly influential. Clement's name is often associated with Platonism; however, his *Paedagogus* incorporates a great deal of Stoic thought, to the extent that it has been discussed as a Christianised version of a lost work by Musonius (Pomeroy Parker, 1901:191–200). Clement's view has inadvertently contributed to the difficulty in reaching an accurate assessment of the significance of philosophy in the second century in general, and in particular in reaching an assessment of the influence of Stoic thought.
- 2) Our view of Stoicism is filtered through the rise of Christian Platonism, particularly by the work of Origen, so that what later came to be the “winning side” obscures the earlier philosophical landscape. In the view of Christian Platonism, Stoic theology is neither deemed to be personal nor transcendent, as Origen implies when he writes: “The god of the Stoics, in as much as he is a body, sometimes has the whole substance as his commanding faculty; this is whenever the conflagration is in being; at other times, when world-order [*diakosmēsis*] exists, he comes to be in a part of substance” (Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.14, in Long & Sedley, vol. 1:276).

Yet Cleanthes' “Hymn to Zeus” is both personal and arguably transcendent. One wonders whether Origen knew it. Certainly Origen chooses primarily to mention Stoic concepts which allow scope for polemical refutation.

- 3) Finally, more recent caricatures present a challenge to an accurate assessment of Stoicism. J. B. Lightfoot wrote in 1868:

Like all the later systems of Greek philosophy, Stoicism was the offspring of despair... The sublime intuitions of Plato had been found too vague and unsubstantial, and the subtle analyses of Aristotle too hard and cold, to satisfy the natural craving of man [sic] for some guidance which should teach him how to live and to die. (Lightfoot, 1868:271–272)

Even as recently as 2013, the Cambridge scholar Andrew Davison writes: “The Stoics differ markedly from Aristotle, and Plato before him, for the relatively modest scope of their interests. Not for them sweeping metaphysical questions about the nature of being or the structure of knowledge...” (Davison, 2013:70).

Such caricatures are not just a Christian contribution. Peter Green also offers something of this view by downplaying any consistent content to Stoic philosophy. He emphasises the way in which Stoicism lent itself to being co-opted by the self-interests of the elite, and to serve as a superficial catch-all for a population needing to give meaning to everyday trials and triumphs — all of which served the preservation of the status quo (Green, 1990:631). Legitimate as these observations may be, they are retrospective, and thus cannot do justice to the minds of Stoic adherents nor those of the people they directly influenced, and with this static around, we end up not being able to encounter Stoicism on its own terms.

To this list of challenges, one could add textual and diachronic issues. However, the issues set out above sufficiently demonstrate that the challenges to giving an accurate assessment of Stoic influence are considerable. But now I will discuss the work of two scholars who have gone some way along this path.

## Strategies to evaluate the significance of Stoicism

One can endeavour to show the presence and thus influence of Stoic philosophy by focussing on a distinctively Stoic concept (such as *oikeiosis*) and tracing its reception, development and adaptation. Particularly when this reception can be shown to cross confessional boundaries (pagan, Jewish, Christian), it suggests the influence or impact of the philosophy. This is Ramelli’s approach. She examines the works of Origen of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa as the two main Patristic philosophers, regarding Origen as the one who Christianised the *oikeiosis* doctrine, and Gregory as the one who identified *apokatastasis* (recapitulation – restoration) as the Godhead’s *oikeiosis* or re-appropriation of all beings. She contends that “these Christian Platonists and other early Christian sources can help to clarify the Stoic *oikeiosis* doctrine itself” (Ramelli, 2014:116, 137). Her study certainly suggests a widespread early influence of Stoic ideas which were adapted to a Christian Platonic framework.

Another approach is that of Troels Engberg-Pedersen, who does not work primarily with comparisons of particular Stoic concepts or terms and other philosophical uses of them, but rather seeks to compare “whole patterns of thought” (Engberg-Pedersen, 2000:45). In *Paul and the Stoics*, Engberg-Pedersen argues that the foundational structure of Stoic ethics is directly comparable with Paul’s concept of conversion and

the Christian life. Both Paul and the Stoics share a belief that the goal of human life is to be reached only through a conversion (through a crucial event or decision) from an individual, self-focussed, limited state of being to a state of being in which one is free to live a virtuous, altruistic, good life. Both systems recognise the reality (articulated earlier by Aristotle) that a fundamental weakness of will prevents us from living fully virtuous lives, and both recognise that a fundamental change must take place so that we may live in a way fully in keeping with the ultimate Good.

Engberg-Pedersen shows that the “crucial event or decision” for the Stoics is the decision to live according to Logos or Reason — called *homologia* — and so move from a way of life characterised by self-centredness to a way of life that is devoted to the common good through the love and practice of wisdom. For Paul, the “crucial event or decision” is a conversion to Christ and finding in Christ the freedom to live for the common good. Different though they may be, both pathways are focused on “the phenomenon of conversion conceptualised as a story” (Engberg-Pedersen, 2000:36). Both systems involve a profound shift in what a person values and both see this conversion as a change of identity (Engberg-Pedersen, 2000:65). Both also see this as a move from babyhood to adulthood and envisage the formation of an ideal community where all socially based distinctions between people are abolished (Engberg-Pedersen, 2000:62, 78–79).

There is not scope within this article to do justice to Engberg-Pedersen’s argument, to the subsequent work he has published and his scholarly influence, nor to his critics. Despite the fact that not all his reviewers are persuaded that what he describes as a Stoic pattern of thought is distinctively Stoic,<sup>3</sup> he nevertheless builds a very plausible case that key aspects of Paul’s thought are remarkably similar to what we know of Stoic ideas and patterns of thought.

Both Ramelli’s and Engberg-Pedersen’s approaches offer insights that are significant for establishing that Stoic thought was influential in the first two centuries of the Common Era. More data is needed, however, to establish its *relative* influence vis à vis other philosophical schools. Given the difficulties I have outlined, we can see that this is methodologically challenging. The following three case studies offer insights into the relative significance of Stoic thought by examining the evidence for Stoic influence in non-Stoic writings.

### First case study

Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* is set in Greece in the period directly after the Bar Kochba revolt (second Jewish war with Rome [132–135 CE]) and depicts

<sup>3</sup> Kathy Gaca, a classicist, thinks that this model outlines the dynamics of conversion and group identity more generally, and might describe various groups — Stoics and Pauline Christians, but also Epicureans, Isis-worshippers or others. For her, Engberg-Pedersen did not sufficiently rule out other contenders who fit the model in antiquity and could have been Paul’s sources, such as the Epicureans and mystery religions (*RBL* 9/2002). Engberg-Pedersen has responded to this criticism, but this lies outside the scope of this study.



a respectful disputation between Justin as a Christian philosopher and a Jewish Rabbi called Trypho. Justin is an admirer of Plato, whom he cites at various points in *Dialogue* and whom he describes as furnishing his “mind with wings” (*Dial.* 2.6). Justin describes to Trypho his studies in philosophy. He began with a Stoic teacher, with whom he spent a considerable amount of time (*Dial.* 2.3), then moved on to a Peripatetic, then a Pythagorean, and finally a Platonist. This moving around was, in itself, not an uncommon phenomenon during the second Sophistic. Justin is describing a time when, as a pagan, he was seeking wisdom, though as a Christian he now



Saint Justin Martyr (André Thevet, *Les vrais portraits et vies des hommes illustres grecz, latins et payens* [1584]) (Wikimedia Commons)

describes this as a search for God. It is not stated in *Dialogue* that this took place in Flavia Neapolis. Nevertheless, the fact that this took place in Justin’s young adulthood and that Justin describes the Platonic philosopher as having lately settled in “our city”, it is not unreasonable to assume that these teachers were available in his hometown.

As we see in Chapters 1–2 of *Dialogue*, Justin is describing an encounter in the late thirties of the second century. Justin presents himself as a philosopher, or more specifically as a Christian philosopher. From this vantage point, he claims that the path to wisdom which led him to the Christian faith is the same as the path which led him to study philosophy in the first place; philosophical knowledge is one:  $\mu\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$

$\omicron\upsilon\sigma\eta\varsigma$  ταύτης ἐπιστήμης. It has, however, been diversified or factionalised by those who have prioritised loyalty to the philosophical schools’ founders as though that were the truth.

Platonism is the philosophy most prized by Justin, and he cites Plato with approval in *Dialogue*, Chapters 3–6 and 8.<sup>4</sup> There are 142 chapters in *Dialogue*, so most of it is not about philosophy as such but is focussed on interpreting Scripture to Trypho and his friends, in order to persuade them of a Christian interpretation. Nevertheless, philosophy has functioned as Justin’s point of connection with Trypho.

<sup>4</sup> For example, *Dialogue* 3.7: “Then how,” [Trypho] said, “could the philosophers think or say anything true about God, since they have no science of him, having neither seen nor heard him?” “But sir,” I said, “it is not with the eyes that the divine is visible to [philosophers], as other living things are. Rather it can be grasped only by the mind. So Plato says, and I believe him.”

Chapter 2 gives us some interesting information about Justin's pre-Christian formation. While it cannot be ruled out that factors of convenience played a role in his choice, selecting a path to wisdom would be an important and carefully considered decision. For our purposes, it is significant that Justin turned in the first instance to a Stoic for education in philosophy.

Second, it indicates that this mentoring was of some duration. Justin sets out two reasons for his dissatisfaction with the Stoic philosopher; first, that he did not know/understand God (ἠπίστατο, imperfect indicative middle, 3rd person singular — an ongoing state), and second, that the philosopher held that such instruction was unnecessary. It is interesting that theology was not deemed (by this instructor) to be a core part of the Stoic philosophical curriculum. It had been during the early Stoa, particularly — but not exclusively — during the period of Cleanthes.<sup>5</sup> For Justin's instructor at least, theology was deemed unnecessary.<sup>6</sup> We cannot know for certain how widespread this view was.

We get another glimpse of Justin's concept of Stoic theology in his *Second Apology*, 7:8–9:

8 Even the Stoic philosophers, in their doctrine of morals, steadily honour the same things, so that it is evident that they are not very felicitous in what they say about principles and incorporeal things.

9 For if they say that human actions come to pass by fate, they will maintain either that God is nothing else than the things which are ever turning, and altering, and dissolving into the same things, and will appear to have had a comprehension only of things that are destructible, and to have looked on God Himself as emerging both in part and in whole in every wickedness; or that neither vice nor virtue is anything; which is contrary to every sound idea, reason, and sense. (trans. Blunt, 190–191)

In this view, God and fate seem indistinguishable. Here Justin is aligning himself with other opponents of Stoic thought who offer similar critiques (e.g. Calcidius 204, Long & Sedley, vol. 1:331, Plutarch *On Stoic Self-Contradictions* 1056 B–C, Long & Sedley, vol. 1:339). However, fate was understood by the Stoics as an intricate network of causality (Aetius 1.28.4, Long & Sedley, vol. 1:336), whereas the divine was providential, transcending human mind, reason, strength and power (Cicero *On the nature of the gods* 2.16, Long & Sedley, vol. 1:324–325), and — at least for Cleanthes — personal (*Hymn to Zeus*, Long & Sedley, vol. 1:326–327). Diogenes Laertius summarises Stoic theology this way:

They [the Stoics] say that god is a living being (ζῶον) which is immortal and rational or intelligent, perfect in happiness, not admitting of any evil, provident towards the

<sup>5</sup> Gellius 7.1.1–13 (Long & Sedley, vol. 1:329) cites a lost work by Chrysippus called *On Providence*.

<sup>6</sup> Lactantius (c. 250–c. 325) mentions a dispute between the Academics and the Stoics about the gods as though it is a current debate, which suggests that at least some Stoics continued to teach theology. However the issue he mentions is as much about the providential nature of the world and hence physics as it is about theology. Lactantius, *On the Anger of God* 13:9–10 (Long & Sedley, vol. 1:330).

world and its occupants, but not anthropomorphic. He is the creator of the whole and, as it were, the father of all, both generally and, in particular, that part of him which pervades all things, which is called by many descriptions according to his powers... (Long & Sedley, vol. 1:323, modified)<sup>7</sup>

One wonders whether the influence of Stoic theology on early Christian thought would have been as thoroughly eclipsed as it has been if Justin's first teacher had taken more of an interest in discussing Chrysippus' treatise *On Providence* or Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*.

What we glean from this first case study is that in the first quarter of the second century, probably in the Roman city of Flavia Neapolis (modern Nablus in the West Bank), Stoic philosophy was not only being taught but was the first port of call for a young man seeking to further his education in philosophy. While Justin went on to become a Christian philosopher primarily in dialogue with Platonic thought, the Stoic influence did not disappear, as he is known as the early Christian philosopher of the Logos.<sup>8</sup> He saw the seed of the Logos as implanted in all those who have a share in the spermatoc word.<sup>9</sup> Justin is the earliest writer of what we might call Christian Platonic apologetics,<sup>10</sup> though Justin himself was critical of philosophical factions and may not have owned the designation.

## Second case study

I now turn to Philo's treatise entitled *De aeternitate mundi* (*On the indestructibility of the world*). In this treatise, Stoic philosophy is addressed explicitly and quite extensively.<sup>11</sup> Particular Stoic philosophers are named in it, including Cleanthes (1.90) and Chrysippus (1.48, 90, 94), whom Philo describes as "the most celebrated philosopher among them" (1.48); also Diogenes of Babylon, Boethus, Posidonius and Panaetius.

Philo was an elite educated Alexandrian Jew who drew eclectically on various philosophical traditions, primarily middle Platonism (Runia, 1986:495), but with both Stoic and Aristotelian influences. This treatise has a number of critical issues that make placing it firmly within Philo's intellectual output difficult. The two key difficulties are, first, that as a philosophical treatise, it differs from most of his other writings, which endeavour to interpret Jewish Scripture and thought through Greek philosophical categories, while remaining true to the practice of Judaism. Second, the

<sup>7</sup> Long and Sedley use the translation "an animal" for the term ζῷον. While this can be an accurate translation of the term, in this context it appears to me to contradict the subsequent assertion that anthropomorphism (and hence also zoomorphism) is inadequate to describe God.

<sup>8</sup> *First Apology*, Ch. 32, speaks of "the seed of God, the Word".

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, he doesn't include the Epicureans in this grouping, as we see in the *Second Apology*, Ch. 15. Cf. *Second Apology*, Ch. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Earlier examples of apologetics include Quadratus and Aristides, while Aristo of Pella was approximately Justin's contemporary.

<sup>11</sup> 1.4, 8, 18, 48, 78, 89, 90, 94, 102.

case which is argued for the eternity of the world appears to contradict Philo's foundational conviction that God is the Creator of the world. The most extended recent treatment of this treatise is by David Runia (Runia, 1981), who argues persuasively that this is the work of Philo himself and that he is making the case philosophically both for a Creator God and for the eternity of the world.<sup>12</sup>

For the purposes of this discussion, I will focus on just one aspect of the treatise, namely a section of paragraph 24:

But some of those who used to hold a different opinion, being overpowered by truth, have changed their doctrine; for beauty has a power which is very attractive, and the truth is beyond all things beautiful, as falsehood on the contrary is enormously ugly; therefore Boethus, and Posidonius, and Panaetius, men of great learning in the Stoic doctrines, as if seized with a sudden inspiration, abandoning all the stories about conflagrations and regeneration, have come over to the more divine doctrine of the incorruptibility of the world.

Philo is celebrating the fact that key Stoic thinkers (Boethus of Sidon, second century BCE, Posidonius, c. 135–c. 50 BCE, based in Rhodes, and his teacher Panaetius of Rhodes, c. 185–c. 110) had come to deny the Stoic doctrine of conflagration and regeneration. (Later in the treatise [76–77] he adds Diogenes [of Babylon, early to mid-second century BCE] to the list of those who reject this doctrine.) From Philo's delight at this "defection" we learn a number of things. First, these Stoic philosophers were known and were influential in Alexandria;<sup>13</sup> we might also expect this to be the case in other centres of philosophical learning. Second, by the first century CE, some aspects of the Stoic curriculum were more influential than others. What we might term "cosmology", "cosmogony" or "eschatology" were shifting concepts among some important Stoics, even while other aspects of physics — God in matter — continued to be highly influential through



Philo of Alexandria (André Thevet, *Les vrais portraits et vies des hommes illustres grecz, latins et payens* (1584) (Wikimedia Commons)

<sup>12</sup> Philo, *De aeternitate mundi* 1.44 "...the works of us who are but mortal men may very appropriately be perishable, but the works of the immortal must in all consistency and reason be likewise imperishable, for it is natural that what is made should resemble the nature of the maker."

<sup>13</sup> In the sense of my definition of Stoic influence being visible in "a positive or negative refraction of a distinctively Stoic concept".

the concept of the Logos (Long & Sedley, vol. 1: 277–279). Origen, in *Against Celsus* 4.14, dated in the mid-third century in Alexandria, commented on the Stoic concept of conflagration, so it had not disappeared in the intervening two centuries after Philo's treatise.

This case study suggests a number of things. First, Stoic views were known and discussed by the educated elite in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, so that someone like Philo could rejoice in rapprochement between certain Stoics' cosmological views and those of Aristotle. Second, these views continued to be debated during the middle and late Stoa. Third, there was already scope among Stoics of the middle period to incorporate logical and cosmological concepts from elsewhere, without losing the designation "Stoic".

### Third case study

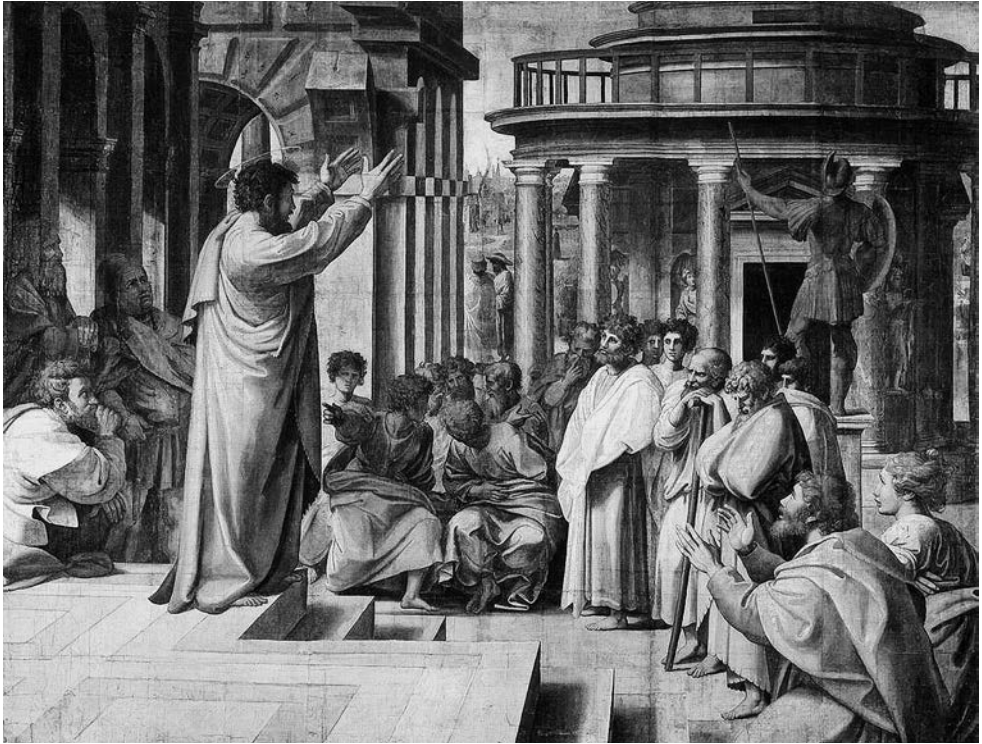
My final case study is a late first or early second century text set in Athens, namely Luke's description of Paul's visit to Athens in *Acts* 17.15–34. The provenance of this account is uncertain. In it we find that Paul encountered and disputed with both Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in Athens (*Acts* 17.18); philosophers representing other schools would have been there too, but are not explicitly mentioned.<sup>14</sup> In Luke's account of Paul's visit to Athens, the Epicureans and Stoics are Paul's audience and debating partners. Stoic and Epicurean philosophy developed in opposition to one another (Keener, 2014:2, 580–595).

Although the Epicureans are mentioned first in v. 18, nevertheless, one can argue that Paul is depicted as addressing himself primarily to the Stoics. The reasons for this are as follows. First, Paul begins his address with reference to an "altar to an unknown god" (v. 23). The Epicureans were known as those who regarded the gods as tranquil, blessed and remote, unaffected by trouble, concern, anger or favour (Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus* 76–77; Lucretius 6.68–79. Long & Sedley, vol. 1:140–141). An additional and, we might say, prophylactic altar was not something that they would have recommended or valued.<sup>15</sup> Second, Paul addresses his audience with phrases that would connect with a Stoic philosophical framework: "For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring'" (v. 28). Paul is shown to use phrases from the Greek poetic

<sup>14</sup> We know for instance of Ammonius of Athens, an expert in Aristotle, who taught Plutarch in the sixties in Athens.

<sup>15</sup> Anonymous Epicurean treatise on theology (POxy. 215) 1.4–24:

... nor, by Zeus, when someone or other speaks instead like this: 'I fear all the gods whom I revere, and wish to make all the burnt offerings and dedications to them'. For although such a person may sometimes be more sophisticated than other individuals, there is not yet, along these lines either, a firm basis for piety. My friend, consider it a matter of supreme blessedness to have discriminated properly the most excellent thing that we can think of among existing things. Marvel at your discrimination of it, and revere it without fear. (Long & Sedley, vol. 1:144)



Raphael, St Paul Preaching in Athens (1515)

(Source: Royal Collection of the United Kingdom) (Wikimedia Commons)

tradition,<sup>16</sup> but in doing so, he is evoking Stoic philosophical ideas best known to us through the (later) work of Marcus Aurelius:

Constantly regard the universe as one living being, having one substance and one soul; and observe how all things have reference to one perception, the perception of this one living being; and how all things act with one movement; and how all things are the cooperating causes of all things that exist; observe too the continuous spinning of the thread and the structure of the web. (*Meditations*, iv. 40)

Of course, Paul (and Luke) did not know this particular articulation of Stoic ideas, but we can see that the choice of the phrase “In him we live and move and have our being” is an apt one for interesting a Stoic audience.

Third, Paul goes on to quote some words from the poem *Phaenomena* by a Greek poet, Aratus (c. 310–245 BCE), though without explicit acknowledgment of their source: “For we too are his offspring.” Here too this phrase is well chosen as a Stoic “teaser” — Aratus was an early Stoic, and his poem articulated Stoic views of divine

<sup>16</sup> J. Rendel Harris argued in a series of articles in the *Expositor* (Oct. 1906, 305–317; April. 1907, 332–337; Oct. 1912, 348–353) that this line — quoted in a 9th-century Syriac commentary on *Acts* by Bishop Ishōdad of Merv — goes back via Theodore of Mopsuestia to a fragment of Epimenides. This claim remains speculative.

providence. So Luke indicates that the Stoics were not only Paul's dialogue partners in *Acts 17* but the ones he hoped to persuade. This suggests that Luke and his audience acknowledged Stoic influence in particular.

To summarise the findings of this brief case-study, we may say that the evidence of *Acts 17* shows that Athens continued to be thought of as a centre of vigorous philosophical and theological debate in the late first century. The depiction of Paul's speech to the Athenians shows a particular interest in Stoic thought. There are at least three indications in *Acts 17.15–34* that Luke saw connections between the Pauline preaching/kerygma and Stoic thought. This suggests not only something about Paul's conceptual framework and approach (as refracted through Luke) but also something about the influence of Stoic thought in this period.

## Conclusion

I have offered three case studies analysing diverse first and second-century CE writings which are not explicitly Stoic and are not promoting Stoic thought, yet clearly contain evidence for the widespread presence of Stoic influence. This evidence from non-Stoic texts is a stronger argument for influence than could be made using only Stoic sources. What these analyses have shown is that Stoic ideas were known and discussed in this period among those who were not Stoic proponents. We learn from these passages that these writings show respect for Stoic ethics, as well as reservations about Stoic cosmological doctrines and theology. Stoic philosophy was the first choice of young Justin in Flavia Neapolis, Judea, in the first quarter of the second century, when he sought a philosophical education. It was topical for Philo in first century Alexandria, and it was depicted in *Acts 17* (late first or early second century) as Paul's primary dialogue and debating partner.

These case studies have given further evidence for Hahn's assertion of the pre-eminence of Stoic philosophy in this period. When seen together with other work which identifies Stoic concepts and patterns of thought in these centuries, the case for Stoic influence is strengthened. The significance of this finding is that the study of early Christianity in particular, which tends to overlook Stoicism, will need to take its influence more seriously. The extent of the influence is likely to depend more on specific context and circumstance than Hahn's claim would imply. But the evidence of this article supports the claim that in disparate contexts in the Roman Empire of the first and second centuries, Stoic ideas — particularly ethical ideas — were both well-known and influential.

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