

## The Agency of the World

[Abstract] The chapter explores how the Stoics account for the totality of movement in the cosmos—in other words, the agency of the world. The Stoics take the world to be a complex and divine living-being. Their physics combines what today we might call physics, biology, and theology.

The Stoics put forward two premises that appear to be in tension. First, they claim that the active principle is the sole source of movement and cause of everything. Second, they offer a *scala naturae* according to which kinds of entities differ by the way in which they move and jointly co-cause all movement in the world. This One-Many Problem is the Stoic version of what is later called the problem of free will and determinism, or so I argue. As the Stoics conceive of the problem, the challenge consists in showing how both premises—One Cause and Many Causes—are true.

The Stoic approach strikes me as attractive, both because it looks at humans together with animals and other parts of the world and because of its upshot for human agency. Our reasoning, including our decision making, constitutes some of the causes that co-cause the world's overall movements. What remains puzzling, however, is that our reasoning is subject to norms. Ultimately, I argue, the puzzle is how norms for practical reasoning fit into the physical world. This reconstruction does justice to the evidence. It recognizes that the Stoics address human movement in the context of a *scala naturae*. And it predicts what indeed we find: a wide range of texts about the status of human assent, indicative of the awareness that this is not an easy topic.

### 1. Introduction

The Stoics put forward two premises that appear to be in tension. First, they claim that the active principle is the sole source of movement and cause of everything. Second, they offer a *scala naturae* according to which kinds of entities differ by the way in which they move and jointly co-cause all movement in the world.

ONE CAUSE: There is one cause, namely god, which is the cause of everything.

MANY CAUSES: Compounds, which are parts of the world, jointly co-cause the world's movement.

This One-Many Problem is the Stoic version of what is later called the problem of free will and determinism, or so I argue. As the Stoics conceive of the problem, the challenge consists in showing how both premises—One Cause and Many Causes—are true. The plan for this paper is not to reconstruct Stoic solutions to their

version of the free will/determinism problem. Instead, my goal is to defend my reconstruction of what, for the early Stoics, the problem is.<sup>1</sup> It is easy to go wrong here, in particular since the Stoic notion of causality differs in a number of deep ways from ours.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, my aim is not merely to get clear about differences between Stoic and later ideas. I argue that the Stoics get crucial ideas right. The puzzle, as they see it, does not place human reasoners in a natural world, as if human agency was the exception in a domain otherwise regulated by the laws of physics. *Many Causes* makes this explicit: human beings are only some of the many parts of the world that jointly co-cause its movements. Human reason, animal and plant souls, and the so-called tension that individuates sticks and stones are literally portions of the world's reason. The movement by which all these compounds move does not compete with—or in any other way add to—the movements of the active principle. Hence the impression that *One Cause and Many Causes* are in tension dissolves. The Stoic proposal, though phrased in historically distant terms, strikes me as attractive, both because it looks at humans together with animals and other parts of the world and because of its upshot for human agency. Our reasoning, including our decision making by which we set ourselves in motion when we act, constitutes some of the causes that co-cause the world's overall movements.

What remains puzzling, however, is that our reasoning is subject to norms. When we think about what to do, presumably we should aim to figure out what is, on consideration, right. We should think carefully, not assent rashly, and so on. If our reasoning, however, is some of the movement that is under way in the corporeal world, then it is not clear how these norms fit into the picture. Ultimately, the puzzle is how norms for practical reasoning fit into the physical world.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the paper, I focus on early Stoic philosophy. I set aside, for example, Epictetus.

<sup>2</sup> My argument is indebted to the work of others, in particular Bobzien 1998; Coope 2007; Sauvé-Meyer's contrasting of the Stoic notion of causality with modern notions (2009); Frede 2011; one sentence by Cooper in which he signals that, if there is to be a solution to the Stoic analogue of the problem of freedom and determinism, it must rely on the fact that the reason of each human being is a portion of God's reason (2004: 240); and finally, Schaffer 2010 and 2013.

This reconstruction, I submit, has the virtue that it does justice to a wide range of evidence. It recognizes that the Stoics address human movement in the context of a *scala naturae*, that is, in a theory about the movements of all macroscopic compounds in the world: stones (and what is like them), plants, animals, people. And it predicts what indeed we find: a wide range of texts about the status of human assent, indicative of the awareness that this is not an easy topic.

After some remarks on how we should not describe the Stoic puzzle (section 2), I turn to One Cause (sections 3) and Many Causes (section 4). The rest of the paper is spent with a reconstruction of how One Cause and Many Causes fit together (section 5), and a concluding discussion of which problems, if any, remain (section 6).

## **2. How Not to Describe the Stoic Puzzle**

One thing is fairly clear: there is no such thing as a “will” in Stoic philosophy, and *a fortiori* there is no free will.<sup>3</sup> This means, first of all, that the Stoics do not conceive of a faculty that they call the will or that we could plausibly identify as the kind of faculty other philosophers call the will. It also means that the Stoics do not take themselves to address the kind of scenario that is later described in terms of alternate (or alternative) possibilities.<sup>4</sup> In the alternate possibilities scenario, an agent stands, as it were, at a crossroads. She considers several courses of action as options and assents to one of them, thereby deciding to perform this action rather than another. The agent is free, the thought goes, insofar as she can do either. Contrary to this type of picture, the Stoics think that an agent’s assent reflects her current state of mind. Given who an agent is, such-and-such is what she is going to do. When we praise an agent, it is not because she chose the better course of action over the worse; it is because she was such as to perform a good action.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Frede 2011, Bobzien 1998 and 1999, Cooper 2004, Vogt 2008: 185-189, Vogt 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Frankfurt 1969.

<sup>5</sup> Frede 2011: 81-82.

Suppose, then, that the Stoics do not conceive of a free will. Do the Stoics conceive of determinism? Let me stipulate a conception of determinism: determinism says that the state of the world at a given time  $t_1$  plus the laws of nature, understood as the laws of physics, “fix” the way things go thereafter. Understood this way, determinism is alien to Stoic physics in at least two ways: with respect to the relevant notion of physics, and by extension with respect to the relevant notion of laws.<sup>6</sup> Both differences run deep. Put simply, Stoic *phusikê*—Stoic study of nature—is a kind of biology, or at any rate, it is in important respects a kind of biology, perhaps even a kind of theology.<sup>7</sup>

With a view to scholarly conventions, I continue to refer to Stoic *phusikê* as Stoic physics. But I construe this notion broadly, to accommodate that Stoic physics is a distinctive kind of enterprise. Let us stipulate that, whatever else biology is, it is the science of living beings. The Stoics take it that the world is a large-scale, complex living being.<sup>8</sup> This living being has a biography, a life cycle. Moreover, this living being has a commanding-faculty, a *hegemonikon*, which guides its movements.<sup>9</sup> This makes it seem rather like other living beings, whose movements are governed by the kinds of souls they have. The world, according to the Stoics, is the best living being, indeed, a divine living being.<sup>10</sup> Stoic physics, then, is a distinctive approach to nature, where physics, biology, and theology blend.<sup>11</sup> It is rather unlike the physics that modern philosophers have in mind when referring, in discussions of determinism, to the laws of physics.

What, then, about the notion of the law? The Stoics speak of the law of the world. Should we assume that they conceive of deterministic laws of biology, laws that govern the behavior of a living being? Arguably,

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Maudlin 2007 on the relevant conception of laws: laws make things happen in a certain way and their existence enables us to explain why things happen in these ways.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. for example Diogenes Laertius 7.147 (LS 54A) and Cicero, *On the nature of the gods* 1.39 (LS 54B). Cf. Sattler, chapter 2 in this volume, on cosmology as biology and theology in Plato’s *Timaeus*.

<sup>8</sup> On Stoic conceptions of god and the cosmos, cf. Salles ed. 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Salles 2018. The questions of how the *hēgemonikon* relates to the world’s reason and divinity as described in other contexts need not be resolved for present purposes. Cf. for example Diogenes Laertius 7.147 (54A) on various Stoic ways to describe god.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Sedley 2007, Chapter VII “The Stoics” on the world as a divine living being.

<sup>11</sup> On ancestors in Plato and resonances with Plato’s arguments, cf. Sattler, chapter 2 in this volume, and Salles 2018 as well as chapter 10 in this volume.

the answer is “no.” The Stoics refer to the active principle as god, reason, law, and more. Each of these designations picks out a dimension that interests the Stoics in a given philosophical context. The claim that the world is governed by law takes pride of place in political philosophy. The law, as the Stoics conceive of it, governs how we should relate to other parts of the world, and in particular to fellow human beings. The Stoics are literal cosmopolitans: the world is our only real home.<sup>12</sup> The law that we are most fundamentally subject to is the law of the world.<sup>13</sup> This law (singular) is about the ways in which we should relate to all other parts of the world, including all other human beings. It is thus rather unlike the laws (plural) of nature as they come to be understood in the context of the natural sciences.

To take stock, the basic notions of the problem of free will and determinism are alien to the Stoic framework. The Stoics do not conceive of a free will, of physics in the sense in which physical determinism understands it, and of the laws of physics (or even, the laws of biology). It should be plain, then, that the Stoics do not conceive of the problem of free will and determinism. It is also plain, however, that they conceive of something in the proximity. Otherwise it is hard to make sense of the fact that the Stoics discuss—seemingly in great detail—how assent is “up to” agents, to the effect that they are the authors of their own actions.<sup>14</sup> The stage is set, then, for asking what the Stoic version of the problem looks like.

A final preparatory disclaimer: Stoic proposals can seem alien, perhaps even obscure, not least insofar as the Stoics propose that the world’s biography recurs identically in eternal cycles.<sup>15</sup> Doesn’t the theory of eternal recurrence dissolve any grip one may have on the notions of time, past, present, and future? Aren’t these notions basic to any understanding of agency, assuming that agents don’t predict their actions but deliberate

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<sup>12</sup> Details of Stoic cosmopolitanism are contested, in particular with respect to whether the cosmic city is thought to be populated merely by a smallish group of sages; cf. Schofield 1999. In Vogt 2008, I argue that according to the Stoics all human beings share the world as their home. This means that we are subject to demanding norms. We ought to live up to the ideals of relating to everyone as a fellow-citizen. Cf. Clem. Strom. 4.26 (= SVF 3.327) on the universe as the only real city governed by law.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Vogt 2008 on the Stoic conception of the law.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Vogt 2014. I say “seemingly” because, given the state of the evidence on Stoic philosophy it is difficult to judge the extent to which the Stoics were interested in some questions as compared to other questions. The fact that much material on assent survives may also be reflective of the interests of source authors.

<sup>15</sup> Salles 2003.

about what to do?<sup>16</sup> Along these lines, one might hold that Stoic views are not just different from other philosophical outlooks. Worse than that, one might think, they are so outlandish that my method, which aims to make sense of Stoic philosophy, is misguided.

Against this line of thought, one may argue that contemporary physics can also seem to dissolve our ordinary, agential grip on time. Today it remains a difficult task even to describe the problem of how agency fits into the natural world in compelling terms. The presumed obscurity of Stoic premises should not keep us from taking their views seriously.

### 3. One Cause: The Active Principle

It is often said that there are several Greek terms that can be translated as cause. These terms—*archê*, *aitia*, *aition*, and more—have a range of uses or meanings, one of them being cause. The flip side of this observation is less often noted: there is no one word in ancient Greek philosophy that maps onto our term cause. These considerations bear on the foundational premise of Stoic physics, according to which there are two so-called “principles.” So far, this may seem to accord to a familiar pattern in ancient philosophy: one or two or more “principles” are appealed to as fundamental to all of reality. The way in which the Stoics think of the two principles, however, is anything but familiar.<sup>17</sup> Here are two relevant texts<sup>18</sup>:

**T1** The Stoics think that there are two principles of the whole, 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 all of it. (DL 7.134 = LS44B)

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<sup>16</sup> This is a slogan formulated and discussed by Levi 1997: “prediction crowds out deliberation.”

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Vogt 2018 on Stoics theory of causality.

<sup>18</sup> I render all fragments that are included in Long and Sedley 1987 in their translation, at times with changes by KMV.

**T2** They [the Stoics] say that god is mixed with matter, pervading all of it and so configuring it, shaping it, and making it into the world. (Alexander, *On mixture* 225,1-2 = LS45H)

According to these texts, there are two principles: god, also called active principle or reason; and matter, also called passive principle. Together, they constitute the universe, conceived of by the Stoics as a “whole” (*holon*). Both principles are everlasting, ungenerated and indestructible.<sup>19</sup> Both are corporeals and qua corporeals, they are existents. Existence here contrasts with mere subsistence, which is the ontological status the Stoics ascribe to non-corporeals. Both principles are three-dimensional and offer resistance.<sup>20</sup> Matter, the passive principle, is entirely unqualified, but at every given point in time it is inseparably connected to some quality or other. It is through the active principle, which pervades matter, that bodies are individuated and qualified.<sup>21</sup> Matter is divisible but does not by itself divide up into parts.<sup>22</sup> It is because matter is subject to various ways of being qualified by the active principle that there are compounds. Compounds, on this picture, are the elements (fire, air, water, earth) and eventually ordinary bodies as we encounter them on a macroscopic level (stones, plants, animals, people, etc). Here is a complete list of compounds, as the Stoics conceive of them: the elements (already qualified), soul in the sense of fiery breath, ordinary objects, and the world as a whole.

This summary contains, in condensed form, much of Stoic physics, and I elaborate on some of it below. For now, I want to turn to the notion of a principle. What is translated here as principle is in Greek *archê*, and though *archê* can mean cause it does not mean cause in Stoic philosophy. The fact that there are two principles does not mean that there are two causal powers. It means that there are two sources—or beginnings or

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<sup>19</sup> DL 7.134; SE M 9.75-6 (= SVF 2.311 = LS 44C); Calcidius 292 (= SVF 1.88, part = LS 44D); Calcidius 293 (= LS 44E).

<sup>20</sup> On corporeals being three-dimensional, see DL 7.135 (= SVF 3 Apollodorus 6, part = LS 45E). On resistance, cf. Galen, *On Incorporeal Qualities* (SVF 2.381 = LS 45F). It is difficult to know whether the Stoics agreed on corporeals offering resistance. Cf. Brunschwig 1999, 210-11; Cooper 2009, esp. notes 10 and 11; and Marmodoro 2017, ch. 6 “Stoic Gunk” and Marmodoro forthcoming.

<sup>21</sup> 7.134; Calcidius 292; Calcidius 293.

<sup>22</sup> This is a distinctive Stoic proposal: there are no basic material constituents—particles, atoms, or anything of this sort. Cf. Marmodoro 2017, ch. 6 “Stoic Gunk”; Marmodoro 2017b.

starting-points—of the universe. The upshot of this line of thought is significant: if the active principle is a cause, it is not a cause qua being a principle; for otherwise the passive principle would also be a cause, and it is not. To be a principle, thus, is something other than, and more fundamental than, being a cause.

Both principles are corporeal. Corporeality is necessary for being a cause, or in other words, for acting. But it is not sufficient. Matter is corporeal insofar as it is acted upon. God is corporeal insofar as he acts. Compounds are corporeal insofar as they act and are acted upon. The active and passive principles are blended through and through, without thereby one of the principles losing its nature as active or passive.<sup>23</sup>

What is standardly translated as “the active [principle]” is *to poioun*, literally “the making principle.” Instead of saying that there are two principles, that which acts and that which is acted upon, one could say that there are two principles, that which makes and that which is affected, *to paschon*. In these terms, god is the making principle.

I take it that scholars have refrained from this translation because it might be misleading: it might suggest, falsely, that *to poioun* makes *to paschon*—that it makes matter. This is not the Stoic proposal. Instead, the proposal is that *to poioun* makes everything in the sense of making all compounds, everything that is a blend of active and passive principles, namely the elements and macroscopic entities of all sorts. The active principle constructs and thereby individuates each part of the world. In this kind of making, the material is available to the maker. The making consists in configuration and shaping, thereby making each part of the world what it is.

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<sup>23</sup> The Stoics conceive of three kinds of mix: juxtapositions (*parenthesis*), like beans and rice, every bit touches other bits, but none loses its integrity; fusion (*sunchusis*) when two things intermix to the extent that they go out of existence and make up some new body; blending (*krasis*), complete reciprocal pervasion and co-extension, but both bodies retain their natures. The argument works by elimination. God and matter aren't fused; they are either juxtaposed or blended; they are not juxtaposed; they are blended. Alexander, *On mixture* 216,14-218,6 (LS 48C).



The term *to poioun* arguably exploits several dimensions of the verb *poiein*: it can mean “to bring about, to cause” and it can mean “to make something so-and-so.” This latter meaning is suggestive for current purposes. The Stoics claim that matter, on which *to poioun* acts, is entirely unqualified. It is never actually in existence in this unqualified way: it is always acted upon and qualified—made so-and-so, in Greek, *poion*—by *to poioun*. Literally, the “how-maker” makes things “so-and-so.” Another way in which one might refer to *to poioun*, then, is “the qualifying principle.” Arguably, this captures rather well what *to poioun* does. Its disadvantage is that it may sound too weak, as if the active principle was merely a modifying cause.

The active principle, further, is a self-moving power (*dunamis*) and moves everything else:

**T3** ... So there exists a power which in itself is self-moving, and this must be divine and everlasting. For either it will be in motion from eternity or from a given time. But it will not be in motion from a given time; for there will be no cause of its motion from a given time. So, then, the power which moves matter and guides it in due order into generations and changes is everlasting. So this power would be god. (SE M 9.76 = LS44C)

Let me summarize the ideas we covered so far in two premises, Making and Moving.

Making: The active principle qualifies matter and thereby individuates entities in the world.

Moving: The active principle imparts movement on matter and on the entities in the world that it makes.

Making and Moving are diachronic *and* synchronic. This combination is captured in sources that describe the Stoic god both as “proceeding” a certain way in “creating” the world, and at the same time as “pervading” the world in ways that individuate the compounds which are the parts of the world:

**T4** The Stoics made god out to be intelligent, a designing fire which methodically proceeds toward creation of the world, and encompasses all the seminal principles according to which everything comes about according to fate, and a breath (*pneuma*) pervading the whole world, which takes on different names owing to the alterations of the matter through which it passes. (Aetius 1.7.33 = LS 46A).<sup>24</sup>

Making and Moving are diachronic insofar as the active principle causes the biography of the cosmos. The world is a living being with a recurring life-span, beginning and end.<sup>25</sup> This is especially salient in texts that describe the beginnings of a world cycle, where the active principle qua designing fire makes the elements, and in texts that describe conflagration as the world's periodic end.<sup>26</sup> But the diachronic dimension of Making and Moving is not limited to the beginnings and ends of world-cycles. Throughout each cycle, the world is a living being with a life that proceeds temporally. Diachronic causality, hence, is a stable dimension of the active principle's Making and Moving.

And yet it is not the case that the active principle *first* makes the parts of the world and imparts movement on them, and then these parts are by themselves the sources of movement in the world. Instead, the active principle continuously makes, moves, and imparts the power of movement on the parts of the world that it makes. Making and Moving are synchronic insofar as all parts of the world and their activities co-cause the total activity of the world. Synchronic causality is contemporaneous with diachronic causality at all times other than beginning and end of each world cycle, for at these times compounds do not exist.

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<sup>24</sup> Similar claims are made about the commanding-faculty (*hêgemonikon*). According to SE M9.102, the beginning of motion in every living being proceeds from its commanding-faculty. This beginning, however, is not simply temporal priority. When a living being moves and the movement originates in its soul, then the living being's motion is contemporaneous with the commanding-faculty's "initiation" of the movement. On this and related passages, cf. Salles (2018).

<sup>25</sup> On fate cf. Sauv  Meyer 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Many of the key texts are in chapter 46 of LS. Cf. especially Aristocles (Eusebius, *Evangelical preparation* 15.14.2) = LS 46G and Cicero, *On divination* 1.125–6 = LS 55L.

#### 4. Many Causes: Compounds

All entities in the world are connected with each other in what we might call a physically, or biologically, “real” way.<sup>27</sup> Each entity in the world is individuated *as well as* connected to all other entities in the world by the active principle, which in this context is described as designing fire and breath. It is on account of the way in which the active principle pervades everything that the world is one and whole, its parts being inseparable and mutually coherent.<sup>28</sup> The world is a whole with parts: all compounds in the world, including human beings, have the status of parts of a whole. Let me, accordingly, formulate Making and Moving with a view to this part-whole relationship.

Making(part): The active principle qualifies matter and thereby individuates parts of the whole.

Moving(part): The active principle imparts movement on matter and on the parts of the whole that it makes.

The active principle, then, is the Maker (individuator) and Mover (that which imparts movement) both on the level of elements and on the level of compounds such as stones, plants, animals, and people. For present purposes, I set aside how individuation and movement work on the level of the elements.<sup>29</sup> My focus is, instead, on compounds that we may call ordinary bodies, or macroscopic compounds: sticks and stones and the like, artifacts, plants, animals, and human beings. By pervading parts of the whole—the world—in distinctive ways, the active principle makes compounds the kinds of compounds they are. This is how the Stoic *scala naturae* is organized. It proceeds via the dimensions of Making and Moving, now considered with respect to the kinds of entities there are in the world:

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<sup>27</sup> Sauv  Meyer 2009; Marmodoro 2017 ch. 6 “Stoic Gunk” and Marmodoro 2017b.

<sup>28</sup> Aetius 1.7.33 = LS 46A; Calcidius 293 = LS44E.

<sup>29</sup> Qua designing fire, the active principle first creates the four elements. Cf. LS 46, Cooper 2009, Salles 2009.

**T4** Of that which moves, some have the cause (*aitia*) of movement in themselves, while others are moved only from outside. That which is moved only from the outside is transportable, like logs and stones and every material thing which is sustained by tenor alone...

Animals and plants have the cause of movement in (*en*) themselves, and so, quite simply, does everything sustained by physique or soul, which they say also includes metals...

Some things of this kind, they say, are moved out of (*ex*) themselves, and others by (*aph'*) themselves: the former are the soulless things, the latter are the ensouled.

Ensouled things are moved by themselves when an impression occurs within them which calls forth an impulse...

A rational animal, however, in addition to its impressionistic nature, has reason which passes judgment on impressions, rejecting some of these and accepting others, in order that the animal may be guided accordingly.

(Origen, *On principles* 3.1.2-3 = SVF 2.988 = LS 53A).

Stones and similar compounds are individuated by a given tenor; they can only be moved from outside. Plants are individuated by natures; they have the cause of movement in themselves, where this means they move out of themselves, with the movement of growth. Animals are individuated by souls; they have the cause of movement in themselves, where this means they move by themselves, namely via impressions and impulse. Rational beings are individuated by reason; they have *logos* in addition to impressions and impulse, and their conduct is guided by assent to and rejection of impressions. This provides us with another dimension of Making and Moving, one that attends to kinds of compounds.

Making(kinds): Compounds are qualified such as to be compounds of a certain kind via the kind of presence the active principle has in them.

Moving(kinds): Depending on the kind of presence of the active principle in them, compounds play a certain role in the overall movement of the world.

The Stoic *scala naturae*, it turns out, is at the center of their theory of causality. It ascribes to each kind of compound a kind of movement that is reflective of its nature. In effect, the Stoics offer a version of a distinctively ancient take on causality. Rather than locate causality in cause-effect chains or in laws that govern chains of causes, causality is located in the natures of entities.<sup>30</sup> On the Stoic account, then, *all* compounds contribute to the world's overall movement. Why? Or, to be more precise, why not only those that are in one way or another moving "out of" or "by" themselves? While stones, logs, and so on do not have a source of movement in themselves, they are nevertheless pervaded by the active principle. Thereby they are part of an interconnected whole, and they are such that they can be moved. To be movable is not the same as to be able to move or to act, but it is sufficient for participation in causal relations.

Though artifacts are no natural entities, and hence not included in a scale of nature, we may note that they too participate in the causal nexus among all compounds. In this respect a knife is like a stone: moveable from the outside. A person may use the knife to cut paper, just as she may take a stone and put it on paper, using the stone as a paperweight. Via these routes, artifacts participate in the causal connections between all compounds in the world.

## 5. The Stoic Puzzle

At this point we have sketches of both sides of the One-Many Problem with which I began. According to my proposal, the Stoic version of the problem that is later discussed in terms of free will and determinism is a One-Many Problem. It can be formulated in terms of causes:

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<sup>30</sup> On cause-effect chains cf. Sauv -Meyer 2009. Frede puts things as follows: "Perhaps the most crucial difference is that nobody in antiquity had the notion of laws of nature, meaning a body of laws which govern and explain the behavior of all objects, irrespective of their kind. For the most part, at least, philosophers believed [...] that the most important factor for one's understanding of the way things behave is the nature of an object." (2011: 15) Cf. Sedley 1998 on Platonic causes and Coope 2007 on Aristotle's conception of agents as causes.

ONE CAUSE: There is one cause, namely god, to the effect that this cause is the cause of everything.

MANY CAUSES: Compounds, which are parts of the world, jointly co-cause the world's movement.

and in terms of agency:

ONE AGENT: There is one agent, namely, god.

MANY AGENTS: Components of the world, notably stones/etc. plants, animals, and human beings, move by being moved, by themselves, through themselves, or via their reasoning; they are thereby agents to lesser or higher degrees.

Both formulations highlight a feature of Stoic theory that is so far under-appreciated in the literature.<sup>31</sup> The Stoics are not, from the get-go, focusing on how human agency fits into the world. Their question is not how the movements of one privileged kind of entity—human beings—relate to the physical world. Instead they ask how the movements of *all compound entities* relate to the *one* cause of everything: the active principle.

Consider Mara who has a dog named Fred. A Stoic philosopher may ask “how does Fred’s running to the door when Fred hears Mara come home fit into the physical world?” just as she may ask “how does Mara’s concern for Fred, which makes her come home early, fit into the physical world?” Along similar lines, she may ask how it fits into the natural world that the trees in the nearby park grow, or that when Mara throws a stick Fred runs and brings the stick back to her. The best that a modern reply to the problem of free will and determinism can do, it might seem, is to explain how Mara sets herself in motion. The Stoics find this insufficient. They seek an account of causality that makes sense not only of Mara’s, but also of Fred’s, the tree’s, and the stick’s movements. That is, the Stoic One-Many problem genuinely addresses how it is that, while there is one cause for everything, there are many causes.

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<sup>31</sup> For example, even though Frede (2011) discusses how ancient philosophers locate causality in the natures of entities, he adopts the perspective of later authors who are interested specifically in human agency.

On this picture, human action is not as special a case as later philosophy makes it seem. Like other philosophers, the Stoics are interested in human action. But human action, for them, is not the sole exception in a world of physical determinism. Instead, human action is, as the Stoic *scala naturae* has it, at one end of a scale. The scale is organized according to the extent to which parts of the world are themselves sources of their movements. Sticks have a source of movement in themselves only to the extent that the tension which makes something a stick also makes this stick an object that can be moved from the outside: carried by a dog, for example. Plants have the source of their movement in themselves insofar as they grow and decay. Animals have the source of their movement in themselves insofar as their movements are guided by perception, as when Fred hears Mara approach the door and runs to the door. Finally, human beings have the source of movement in themselves to the extent that they rationally respond—assent or reject—to impressions, thereby setting off the impulses for their actions. For example, Mara’s assent to “I should get home to feed Fred” sets off her action of going home to feed Fred.

According to the Stoics, compounds move with movement that is imparted on them from the active principle. Their movements co-cause the movements of the world. Their ability to move resides in the way in which the active principle pervades and individuates them: as tenor (sticks and stones, papers and knives), soul (animals, plants), or reason (humans). One way to put this, in the case of humans, is that every human being’s reason is a portion of the world’s reason. This formulation hones in on why the Stoics do not face the question of how human beings can be the authors of their own actions: human reason is literally a portion of the world’s reason. Whatever problems the Stoics run into, it is not the case, on their picture, that the active principle (god/reason/etc.) is something over and above or separate from the reasoning of human agents. The Stoics, as is plain also in this respect, do not run into the problem that is later discussed in terms of free will and determinism.

Relatedly, the Stoics do not encounter the question of how a “mental” cause—a human being’s deliberation, decision, and the like—fits into the otherwise physical world. Stoic corporealism cuts across distinctions that are fundamental to later philosophy of mind, distinctions between the material and immaterial, the physical and the mental. According to the Stoics, all movement in the world is due to the world’s reason. Portions of the world’s reason make parts of the world causes of movement (and in the case of objects like stones, such that they can be moved from the outside).<sup>32</sup> A later philosopher might infer that, for the Stoics, all causes are mental. But this would be a mistake, for the mental, in later traditions, is thought to be *not* physical. For the Stoics, reason—god, the active principle—is corporeal, and so is the reason of humans, the souls of animals and plants, and so on.<sup>33</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Human beings are some of the many compound causes that co-cause the movements of the world. There is, however, one respect in which human beings are the exception. They are the only entities in the universe, as the Stoics conceive of it, whose movements are subjects to norms of reasoning. Perhaps the faculties and psychology of some animals include aiming to do better at some task. Conceivably Fred the dog aims to do well—run fast, etc.—in carrying the stick back to Mara. However, whatever norms apply to animals or other non-human compounds are not norms of their own reasoning. Only humans, the Stoics hold, assent to and reject impressions concerning what to do, so only humans are subject to norms of assent.

According to the Stoics, this is how human beings are genuinely and fully agents: they are self-moving via their reasoning. They are not, thereby, self-moving in the best kind of way, for they can fail to live up to

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<sup>32</sup> On Stoic proofs for the intelligence of the world and Platonic ancestors of these proofs, cf. Salles, chapter 10 in this volume.

<sup>33</sup> This does not mean that Stoic accounts of thinking do without any incorporeal items. Thoughts have incorporeal linguistic counterparts, *lekta* (‘sayables’). But the role of *lekta* is not such that the Stoics face the kind of problem that is later discussed in terms of mental causation. *Lekta* are effects, not causes. As effects, they are incorporeal, and outside of causal relations. The world’s parts are interrelated causes that co-cause everything that can be truly thought or said about the world.



norms. The perfect reason of the sage and of god prescribe what is to be done. In this sense, even god is subject to norms (Marcian 1 = SVF 3.314 = LS 67R).<sup>34</sup> In god's and the sage's case, however, this does not mean that there can be failure to live up to norms. For them, perfect action reflects the state of mind the agent is already in. This is what the Stoics call self-action, *autopraxia*, and freedom (DL 7.121 = LS 67M).

Among the “many” causes that jointly cause the movements of the world, human beings play a special role after all. To repeat, they do not play a special role because, qua imperfect reasoners, they may go for the worse alternative between two possible courses of action. To the Stoics, this would appear to be an odd and unattractive notion, comparable to arriving at a conclusion that has nothing to do with the considerations one was thinking through. As the Stoics see it, the totality of one's state of mind at a given time does not permit that one does anything other than what one does.<sup>35</sup> Human beings are imperfect reasoners, then, because their state of mind typically falls short of that of the wise person. One's current state of mind reflects one's past thinking. In the past, an agent may have adhered only imperfectly to epistemic norms, which makes it even harder to become better and to assent only as one should.

It was not my aim in this paper to present the Stoic solution for their analogue to the problem of free will and determinism. It is not my aim, therefore, to explore in any detail how the Stoics conceive of norms of assent and their role in agency. Instead, it has been my aim throughout to get clear about the contours of the problem the Stoics face. To this end, a question that is genuinely hard must be identified; an analysis of the Stoic view which makes the problem disappear is not satisfactory. Why? Because as much as the Stoics do not face the problem of free will and determinism, and as much as human beings are qua parts of the world genuine agents, there *must* be a problem which the Stoics recognize—otherwise they would not go to such lengths discussing related matters, and otherwise it is unlikely that later authors would engage with the Stoics as contributors to this debate to the extent that they do.

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<sup>34</sup> Analogously, virtuous people are simultaneously ruling and complying with rule (Stobaeus 2.102,13–16).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Bobzien 1998: 276–301; Frede 2011; Vogt 2012.

Rather than make the problem disappear, my reconstruction locates the problem. A version of the problem of free will and determinism shows up in Stoic philosophy because, though a human being's reason is a portion of the world's reasoning, human reasoning is not straightforwardly an instance of the world's (and that is, god's) reasoning. It is not as if, according to the Stoics, god reasons through us, as it were via the reasoning in our minds. Instead, the way in which reason (god, the active principle) individuates a human being and constitutes her reasoning faculties reflects that compared to god we are lesser entities. We are not as far removed from god as other compounds, for after all we are reasoners. But human reasoning is subject to norms and thereby it differs from god's reasoning. In Stoic philosophy, the notion of freedom comes up here: only a wise person is free, and the wise person's state of mind is not inferior to god's. A wise person's reason is perfect.<sup>36</sup>

Perfect reasoning translates into perfect action. Human beings can do better and worse in the ways in which they assent to impressions, thereby generating what the Stoics call impulses (*hormai*) for their actions. Impulses are movements of the corporeal mind. They are, as it were, the conclusions of thought about what to do. If there is no external impediment, impulse sets off action.<sup>37</sup> A wise person is the best part of the world one can possibly be, both with respect to her thinking and with respect to the actions her thinking sets off.

The hardest task for the Stoics, I propose, lies here: in accounting for norms of assent—and for the way in which imperfect reasoning, reasoning that needs to adhere to norms, is a portion of perfect reasoning. Though the testimony is in many ways inconclusive, one thing is plain. The Stoics put much effort into discussing assent to impressions and how this assent is in an agent's power—or, as they put it, how assent is up to us.<sup>38</sup> The sources, I conclude, confirm my proposal: the “hard” puzzle, for the Stoics, is how norms fit into a corporeal world.

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Vogt, 2008, chapter 3 “Wisdom: Sages and Gods”; Frede 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Inwood 1985; Vogt 2008, pp. 168-78.

<sup>38</sup> This notion—up to us—is at the heart of Stoic and later discussions. Cf. Destrée, Salles, and Zingano 2014; Vogt 2014.

Despite this remaining puzzle, the Stoic outlook as I described it seems inherently attractive. A plausible theory of human agency, we may agree with the Stoics, approaches human movement alongside the movements of other living beings. The Stoic outlook may also seem attractive *because* of the problem that remains. A philosophical theory can be compelling not only via the answers it offers to questions; it can also be compelling in where it locates and how it conceives of the hardest questions. It seems true, or at any rate it seems to many philosophers today, that it is one of the hardest tasks to find out how norms fit into the physical world.

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