

STOICS AND SCEPTICS

OXFORD UNIVERSITY TRESS

LONDON EDINBURGH GLASGOW NEW YORK

TORONTO MELBOURNE BOMBAY

HUMPHREY MILFORD M.A.

PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY

STOICS AND SCEPTICS

FOUR LECTURES DELIVERED IN OXFORD

DURING HILARY TERM 1913 FOR THE

COMMON UNIVERSITY FUND

BY

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OXFORD

AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
1913

PREFACE

THE following four lectures make no pretence of being an exhaustive account of ancient Stoicism and Scepticism. If they attain any measure of success, it

is
rather as an impressionist sketch than as a photograph. How far the picture is a true one can be judged only by the impression which other people get, looking at the documents as a whole. One hopes, of course, that to some people who come to the fragmentary records of these two schools for the first time, such a sketch may be useful, as giving them a point of view and some general notion of what to look for. Would it be too ambitious to hope that some people familiar already with the ancient philosophies might go back to the documents and find some things stand out in a fresh light ?

For those unfamiliar with the field, who may wish to pursue the subject further than four brief lectures can take them, some indication of the books I have found useful may be welcome. The fundamental Zeller goes without saying. The best books or what appear such to me upon Stoicism are German: A. Bonhoffer's Epictet und die Stoa and Die Ethik des Stoikers Epictet.

These two are practically two volumes of one work, with an index in common. Bonhoffer has supplemented them by a third smaller book, Epictet und das Neue

PREFACE

t^ which may be recommended to any one interested in the question, What did primitive Christianity owe to its Hellenistic environment ? a vexed question nowadays. The worst book upon Stoicism which I know is also German, L. Stein's Die Psychologie der Stoa. Its badness is in part the consequence of the very uncertain hold its author has upon the Greek language. Curiously enough, this book seems to be one to which English writers on Stoicism refer particularly often as an authority, under the impression perhaps that anything written in German has standard worth. Those beginning the study of the subject should be warned. The exposition of Stoicism in these lectures owes a good deal to Heinrich Gomperz's book Die Lebensauffassung der griechischen Philosophen. This is.

a vigorous and interesting defence of a certain attitude to the world. When Gomperz represents that attitude

as being precisely the attitude of the ancient Stoics, he is, I think, open to criticism, but, even so, it seems to me that he has helped me to understand the true inwardness of ancient Stoicism better than I should have done otherwise. For Posidonius and the Middle Stoa, A. Schmekel's *Die Philosophic der mittleren Stoa* (1892) is now the book. In French there is a readable monograph by F. Ogereau, *Essai sur le systime philosophique des Stoiciens* (1885). In English, two books on Stoicism have been produced in recent years, Professor W. L. Davidson's *The Stoic Creed* (1907) and Professor E. Vernon Arnold's *Roman Stoicism* (1911). If the only references to them in the following lectures express dissent, I hope I shall not be understood to deny the

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merits of either work. The points on which one feels in disagreement are naturally the points where one is moved to speak. When one assents, no remark seems called for. Mr. St. George Stock's little book, *Stoicism*, in Constable's *Philosophies Ancient and Modern*, and Mr. R. D. Hicks's *Stoic and Epicurean* (1910) in the *Epochs of Philosophy* series (Longmans), may also be read with profit. On the subject of Posidonius and the later Hellenistic theology, Professor Gilbert Murray's third lecture in his recently published book, *Four Stages of Greek Religion*, should by no means be overlooked. It will take many people for the first time into a dim world which is only beginning to be explored, and they could have no more delightful *mystagogos* than Professor Murray. A pupil is not in a position to dispense praise to his master, but he may express gratitude. The texts upon which a study of the Old Stoa must be based have been collected by Hans von Arnim (*Stoicorum velerum fragment^e Leipzig*, vol. i, 1 905 ; vols. ii and iii, 1 903). There is an earlier collection of the fragments of Zeno and Cleanthes, by A. C. Pearson (Cambridge University Press, 1891), still useful because of the commentary by which the texts are accompanied. References to earlier writers on

Stoicism (Ravaisson, Hirzel, &c.) will be furnished in the works I have mentioned to those who wish to push their studies into the older literature of the subject.

So much for the Stoics. For the Sceptics, Zeller again of course. A recent book dealing specially with the Sceptics is A. Goedeckmeyer's *Geschichte des griechischen Skeptizismus* (Leipzig, 1905). The book is somewhat

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pedantic in its classifications and wayward in the position which it assigns to Cicero, but apart from that its judgements seem to me sound, and it puts together the material in a form which workers in this part of the field are likely to find signally helpful.

Besides monographs devoted specially to Stoicism or Scepticism there are, of course, numerous works of larger compass dealing with these schools as part of their subject. Zeller has been already referred to. One may also recommend students to consult the histories of philosophy by Doring (1903), Windelband (3rd ed. 1912), and Ueberweg (10th ed. 1909), the relevant part of Hans von Arnim's contribution to Hinneberg's *Kultur der Gegenwart* (Teil i, Abtheilung v, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie* 1909), P. Wendland's *Die hellenistisch-romische Kultur* (1907), and Chapter II in Mr. T. R. Glover's *The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire* (1909).

It remains only for me to express my sense of the honour done me by the Delegates of the Common University Fund, to whose invitation it was due that these lectures were delivered, and my sense of obligation to those friends without whose encouragement they would never have seen the light.

February ', 1913.

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LECTURE I

ZENO AND THE STOA

LECTURE I

ZENO AND THE STOA

THERE is a scene familiar to our imaginations from childhood. We see a wandering Semitic teacher arraigned before the clever, inquisitive people of Athens.

Somewhere in the background are the great Periclean buildings which crown the Acropolis. The Semite is declaring to the men of Athens that the Deity dwells not in temples made with hands, is not confined in His dealings to one race, but is the Father of all mankind an atmosphere, as it were, in which they live and move about and exist, without any such material shape as can be portrayed in metal or stone, the work of human art. About 350 years before Paul of Tarsus passed through Athens, another Semitic teacher, coming from a country close to Cilicia from Cyprus, and from a city which, like Tarsus, was an old Oriental city penetrated by Hellenism had gone

about among the people of Athens, as clever and inquisitive in that age as in the days of Paul, and had declared to them that the Deity was One Power, pervading the Universe, and dwelling in all men everywhere, without distinction of race, and that in the ideal city there would be no temples, because no temple, the work of builders and artificers, could be worthy of

i 4 ZENO AND PAUL

God. 1 It is a remarkable case of history repeating itself the same background and so great similarity between the actors three and a half centuries apart. Of course the resemblance between Zeno, the Hellenized Phoenician of Citium, and Paul, the Hellenized Hebrew of Tarsus, is not purely accidental. The author of the Acts has assuredly put into the mouth of his Paul, with deliberate purpose, phrases characteristic of the teaching which went back to Zeno. Nor is the connexion made by the writer an arbitrary one; it is the index of a great fact the actual connexion in history between Stoicism and Christianity. Looking back, we can see more fully than was possible at the moment when the Acts was written, to what an extent the Stoic teaching had prepared the ground in the Mediterranean lands for the Christian, what large elements of the Stoic tradition were destined to be taken up into Christianity. It remains, all the same, something of a strange coincidence that the founder of Stoicism should have come of a race whose language was almost identical with Hebrew, and from a Greek-Oriental city so near to Tarsus. The connexion of Stoicism with that region was always a close one. Chrysippus, the second Founder of Stoicism, as he has been called, came from Cilicia, and his successor, another Zeno, from Tarsus itself. When Paul lived in Tarsus, as a young man, it was still one of the chief seats of the Stoic philosophy.

Citium in Cyprus, the native place of Zeno, had a

TC otKoSo/xetV ovbfv Sfrjcrti' iepov yap ovSev %pr)
i/o/xt^cti/ ovSc
aiov Kal ayiov otKo8ofiwv re cpyov KCU ^avavVcov.
Arnim,
Stoicorum vcterumfragm. vol. i, fr. 265.

I FROM CITIUM TO ATHENS 15

population which was largely Phoenician in blood. It was ruled by a dynasty of Phoenician petty kings, whose names figure in the Punic inscriptions found on the spot from 361 to 312 B.C., within which period the first twenty years of Zeno's life probably fall, its king was Pumi-yathon the son of Milk-yathon the son of Baal-ram. 1 That Zeno himself was a Phoenician is implied, I think, in our records. <E>oii'ijaStoi' he is called familiarly by his master Krates in one anecdote. 2 Timon the satirist depicts him as an old Phoenician woman. 3 When the charge was brought against him of stealing the doctrines of other schools, his enemies were apt to add c like a Phoenician '. 4 A group of shrewd Semitic families domiciled in Citium, and doing business round the shores of the Levant such, we may divine, was the milieu whence Zeno came in his youth to fourth-century Athens. It is impossible to harmonize all the stories current in the later tradition about his conversion to philosophy ; but one may take as historical, I suppose, the assertion that he first came to Athens on some mercantile enterprise bringing a cargo of purple from Phoenicia, says one account. At Athens a new world opens for the young man ; people here are talking about things larger than commercial gain and loss, and we are shown Zeno going ardently from one philosophic school to another. The atmosphere of Athens at that moment is alive with the philosophic

1 G. A. Cook, North Semitic Inscriptions, p. 55 f.
2 Diog. Laert. vii. 3.

3 Timon Philiastus, Sill. frag. 20, Wachtmuth.

4 Diog. Laert. vii. 25.

1 6 ZENO IN ATHENS

movement initiated a few generations before by Socrates.

Plato has probably been dead only some thirty years ; and the impression of his personality is still preserved

by men who knew the Master's living presence.

The rivalry between the different schools keeps discussion keen. And Zeno seems to have given them all a hearing Crates the Cynic, Stilpo the Megarian, the successors of Plato in the Academy. At last he came to feel that he himself had a message to deliver, and we

are shown him walking up and down the Painted Porch, arguing energetically and somewhat annoyed at the people who impeded his progress. He is reported on one occasion to have pointed to the wooden basis of an altar which was visible at the extremity of the Stoa. c This once stood in the middle of the Stoa ; it was removed out there, because it got in people's way ; please apply the principle to yourselves.' 1

Zeno made Athens his second home : he lived there as a metoikos to a good old age ; but he felt a bond of piety still tie him, we are told, to the old city in Cyprus whence he had come ; when his name was put up in some public inscription at Athens as c Zeno the philosopher', they added <of Citium' at his own request. 2

He felt that his duty to Citium made it incumbent upon him to refuse the citizenship which Athens was ready to bestow. 3 Of the books which he wrote nothing survives but the titles and a few detached phrases ; our knowledge of his life is confined to a number of miscellaneous anecdotes, in which the inventiveness of the Athenian

1 Diog. Laert. vii. 14. 2 Diog. Laert. vii. 12.

3 Plut. De Sto. Rep. 4.

story-tellers may have had a part impossible now to check. Yet even an invented story will probably have been ben trovato, and through our fragmentary record we may still, I think, get the impression of a real man.

The Stoic tradition, which counted for so much in the world of later antiquity, was like other movements of the human spirit in this also : although its development and success can be in large measure accounted for by the conditions of the time, by the receptiveness of the world at that particular moment for that particular thing, still it owed its first impulse not to any conjunction of impersonal causes, but to a human person of singular individuality and force.

It is obvious that Zeno in the later part of his life was one of the considerable figures at Athens, a man to whom the city as a whole turned in political emergencies, to whom kings like Antigonus and Ptolemy paid court. Something un-Hellenic there must have been in his appearance to the end, an Asiatic darkness of skin, a long, stragglng, ungainly body, noticeable among men who had been shaped from youth up by the exercises of the gymnasium. Among all the Greek teachers it was the Cynics whom he had found most congenial, the men who had set themselves rudely against all that adornment and amenity of life which went with the Hellenic spirit, and had proclaimed every distinction between man and man conventional and worthless. In a society where pleasure was pursued with artistic elaborations and refinements, there was something bare and gaunt 1 or

/cat
Diog. Laert. vii. 1 6.

B

was it something impressively plain ? in the life of the man whose food was so spare that the comedians said he taught his disciples to be hungry, and who seemed to have no use for the services of slaves. c More self-restrained than Zeno ' (Z[^]co[^]os ey/cpareWe/oos) became a proverbial phrase in Athens. 1 But it was rather the reduction of life to a homely simplicity than any set mortification of the flesh, for Zeno was ready to grow genial over the wine-cups, observing that there was a bitter sort of beans which became pleasant when moistened.-

From some of the little characteristics recorded of him we may, I think, realize his individuality. He had learned from the Cynics a bluntness of speech which outraged polite convention. And he delivered himself with a dogmatic conviction, having a peculiar way of throwing his assertions into the form of short compact arguments, of hard syllogisms, which gave them an appearance of mathematical certainty. (Jf is reasonable to honour the gods : it would not be reasonable to honour beings which did not exist : therefore the gods exist.' 3 c Nothing destitute of consciousness and reason can produce out of itself beings endowed with consciousness and reason : the Universe produces beings endowed with consciousness and reason : therefore the Universe is itself not destitute of consciousness and reason/ 4 He

1 Diog. Laert. vii. 27.

Kat 01 6lpfj.oi TTiKpol tWes ^c^o/xcvot y\.VKcuvovrai. Arnlm, Stoicorum veterum fragm. vol. i, fr. 285.

8 Sext. Emp. adv. math. ix. 133 = frag. 152, Arnim.
4 Nihil quod animi quodque rationis est ex se, id generare ex se

I ZENO AND CHRYSIPPUS 19

used the Greek language with little regard for Attic

sensi-
bilities whether because he had never quite acquired
the fine instinct of a native or because he scorned
grace
of speech forcing strange new terms to carry the
thoughts which had somehow to be uttered. One
thinks of Carlyle, only this was a Carlyle with con-
centration instead of diffuseness. His huge earnestness
expressed itself in vigorous gesture. We are told how
he used to illustrate the *kataliptike phantasia*¹ the im-
pression which gets a grasp on reality, by clenching
his
fist. 1

It is impossible to give such an account of Stoicism
as shall separate clearly the teaching of the founder
from later developments, because any characteristic of
the
Stoic tradition was apt to be loosely ascribed to Zeno,
and we cannot now disentangle the original teaching
from the new elements incorporated with it by his suc-
cessors, especially by the great persevering
systematizer,
Chrysippus. The titles of Zeno's works cover a wide
field metaphysics, logic, physics, ethics, rhetoric and
this implies a solid body of positive doctrine to which
the later teaching upon a large number of cardinal
points
must have remained tied down. But one knows how a
difference of emphasis, of tone, may utterly change any
statement, and one may suspect that Stoicism, seen, as
we must see it, through the somewhat pedantic medium
of Chrysippus, is not quite what it would appear to us,

potest animantem compotemque rationis. Mundus autem
general
animantes compotesque rationis. Animans est igitur
mundus composque
rationis.' Cic. 1) *de nat. deor.* ii. 22.

1 Cic. Acad. Pr. ii. 144 = frag. 66, Arnim.

20 WAS STOICISM UNHELLENIC?

if we could recover the writings of the founder and
understand in what context of thought and emotion

those phrases were first flung forth, out of which the well-known Stoic paradoxes were framed. We must be content, as it is, to take the Stoic teaching in the form in which it issued from the laboratory of Chrysippus, as a whole, without hoping to distinguish, except very conjecturally, what it was at its first beginning, with Zeno, with Cleanthes.

There is one question about it which naturally suggests itself at the outset, and which has been repeatedly asked : Was the teaching of Zeno a pure development of Hellenic philosophy, or did it owe elements to his Phoenician home ? Those who maintain that the philosophy of Zeno was purely Hellenic can no doubt show how each part of it was connected with the previous philosophic tradition in Greece, and according to the stories, of course, the impulse which turned the young merchant into a philosopher came not from his home influences, but from the Athenian schools. Everybody would nevertheless admit some new and distinctive element in Zeno's teaching, and it may be asked whether this distinctive element had affinities with Eastern lore.

Personally, I do not think that the question can ever be answered, for the simple reason that we do not know anything about the wisdom of the Phoenicians. It is idle to discuss whether a child resembles its mother, if there is no means of finding out what the mother was like. Men indeed had thought about life and written books for centuries in the Nearer East : we have Babylonian and Assyrian clay-tablets, we have numerous

I 'ORIENTAL' WISDOM 21

sacred writings of the Hebrews ; and this may be enough to enable the people who operate with the vague and unserviceable concept of (Oriental ' to theorize confidently about a non-Hellenic element in Stoicism. It would, however, be most unsafe to deduce the prevalent conceptions among the Phoenicians in the fourth century B.C. from the fragments of cuneiform writings ; and the Hebrews, we know, felt themselves in many ways

the antithesis of the surrounding peoples. That the Phoenicians had a traditional wisdom of their own is indeed probable ; such c Wisdom ' literature as is exem-

plified among the Hebrews by the Book of Proverbs or Job may have had parallels among the Northern Semites. But it would not be wise to build much upon such a mere possibility.

But if we are unable to show that the matter of Zeno's teaching owed anything to a Semitic tradition, we may, I think, see something in the manner of it which makes Zeno differ from the established type of Greek philosopher by an approximation to the Eastern prophet. Or perhaps one should not say Eastern prophet, because the Greek philosopher was a peculiar product of Hellenism within the last two or three centuries, and the other, the prophetic type of teacher, was found generally among mankind outside the Hellenic sphere, even to some extent within it, if we may take Pythagoras, for instance, or Empedocles as an example. One only calls the type Eastern because in the Near East it remained the standard type of teacher, whereas it was superseded in Hellenism by the philosopher. The prophets are those, to quote Seeley's description in Ecce

22 ZENO AS PROPHET

Homo, ' who have seemed to themselves to discover truth, not so much by a process of reasoning as by an intense gaze, and who have announced their conclusions in the voice of a herald, using the name of God and giving no reasons.' The Greek type of philosopher had reached its completion in Socrates and Plato with their eironeia, their apparent tentativeness of assertion, their placing themselves on a common footing with their hearers. Plato characteristically represented the discovery of truth not as a process in which one proclaimed and the other believed, but as a conversation in which truth, latent in the mind, was elicited by rational argument. This is the very opposite of the prophet's c Thus saith the Lord \ The prophet and philosopher speak in quite different tones of voice. Now the curious

thing about Zeno, it seems to me, is that while his message was Hellenic, his tone of voice was that of the prophet. He had something positive to say, something he wished men to believe, and he conformed to the Hellenic requirements in throwing his message, as we have seen, into the form of brief syllogistic arguments.

But one has only to look at those laconic, clenched syllogisms to see that they have by themselves no cogency. They were merely a vehicle for the intense convictions of the teacher. His teaching was - essentially dogmatic, authoritative. He named Reason, yes : but in what manner ? One might perhaps express the singular combination of manner and matter in his message by saying that its burden was ' Thus saith Reason '. If men received it, it was not because they were convinced in a cold intellectual way, but because behind his affirm-

I STOIC DOGMATISM 23

mations there was a tremendous personal force, because something deep in their own hearts rose up to bear witness to the things he affirmed. It was the way of faith.

We cannot make Zeno himself responsible for the great scholastic system framed by Chrysippus, for all the dogmas and paradoxes which were part of the stereotyped Stoic doctrine later on, but we have every reason to believe that the peculiar features which distinguished Stoicism were due to Zeno, and that the founder's teaching was essentially dogmatic and paradoxical. It seems to me a mistake when, in order to accommodate it to our ways of thinking, its peculiarities are minimized and its characteristics toned down, as if what it meant were really something quite ordinary and common sense. I think it really meant something violent : only its violence may be sympathetically construed, if we understand the urgency which lay upon it. Dogma in our days suggests an unnecessary intellectual garment which trammels and incommodes the mind : we hardly realize the bitter need for dogma felt by minds which have been stripped shivering naked. We must consider at what a moment in the history of

ancient
civilization Zeno of Citium appeared.

The culture of the Greeks was a development of the last two or three centuries only. Mankind had been many thousands of years on the earth, and for the last few thousand years there had been great civilizations, with arts and literatures and laws. But in these last ten generations, with the Hellenes, a new thing had come to exist, or rather a quality in human nature had been developed to an effectiveness and power never known

24 GREEK RATIONALISM

before the quality which we describe as Rationalism, The ancestors of the Hellenes, like the rest of mankind, had lived in societies each of which maintained a firm tradition for its members as to the powers operative in the world and as to the binding rules of conduct. To say that every individual had accepted, as a matter of course, the view of the world and the rules of conduct prevalent in his society would be too much ; for there had always, no doubt, been individuals who questioned points in the tradition and opposed or evaded particular rules. But among the Greeks such questioning had come to be systematic and extensive ; it was not the case of an individual revolting, but of a new tradition of free inquiry growing up in the midst of the society, a recognition of Reason as superseding tradition in all departments of life, a clearer distinction between the real facts of the world and the work of human imagination than had ever been made before. It had begun, of course, with a few eager spirits, and the new ferment had been confined at first to little groups of inquirers and disciples, but with the Sophistic movement in the fifth century B.C. it had run everywhere through the Greek world. You know how that made everything seem in flux, everything uncertain. Even the ordinary man in fifth-century Athens became aware that clever people no longer believed in his old gods and his old standards

of
right and wrong. And in the time of Zeno, scepticism was not only an abstract theory. Those were the days of the Greek conquest of the East, when the individual adventurer was finding larger and larger scope ; there was plenty of the practical scepticism of the man who had

I THE UNSOLVED ENIGMA 25

no pretensions to being a philosopher, but only knew that he could follow his egoistic will without troubling himself about the gods. Socrates, indeed, and Plato had seemed to lay in the midst of this confusion the foundation for new positive knowledge and morality. But one must not suppose that the Socratic schools had put an end to the Sophistic unrest. To meet a wide popular need, Platonism was too fine-drawn, too abstruse, too tentative. Such a general break-up of tradition was one of the things which this new Rationalism in the Greek world had brought about. The situation was one which no human society, I think we may say, had before in the world's history been called upon to face.

We must consider that the tradition which in old days had enclosed each individual from his birth up, fashioning his ideas of the world, giving him fixed rules for conduct, had supplied a need. And the need remained. It was not merely that the explanation of the world contained in the old mythology had been found absurd, and that man was left confronted with an unsolved enigma. That might in itself be unpleasant ; man has a disinterested curiosity ; and an unsolved enigma means intellectual discomfort. But man might have put up with that and acquiesced in agnosticism, if the problem had been stationary, simply to understand what the world is here and now. It was Time which made the poignancy of the need. The reality with which men were confronted was a moving one ; they were being carried onward, each one into a future of unknown possibilities, and whatever might lie on the other side of

death, the possibilities on the hither side were disquieting

26 THE GREAT FEAR

enough in the fourth century B.C. Even in our firmly ordered and peaceful society, hideous accidents may befall the individual ; but in those days, when the world showed only despotic monarchies and warring city-states, one must remember that slavery and torture were contingencies which no one could be sure that the future did not contain for him. Now the old tradition had made man feel that this movement, in which he was borne along, was subject to the will of beings kindred to himself. The gods might be envious and vindictive, but there was a mind and heart there to appeal to, not altogether unlike the human there was something with which man might establish friendly relations and be at peace. If all that faded into an empty dream, man found himself left naked to fortune. With the mass, of passionate desires and loves he carried in his heart, the unknown chances of the future meant ever-present fear. Unless he could find his good and possess it in such a way that no conceivable horror which might spring upon him out of that Unknown could touch it, fear must be always there, in the background of his thoughts. This Fear, as we shall see, was one of the constituents of human misery specially noted in the Stoic school, one of the things from which Zeno promised deliverance.

But it was something more than relative security in looking forward into the future which the old tradition had afforded. Besides giving a certain view of the world, it had given rules of conduct, standards of behaviour. And the most imperative reason why man could not simply discard the old tradition and remain contentedly agnostic is found here. It was not only

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