

The Religious Nature of Stoicism

An Introduction with Scholarly Quotes and References

by Christopher Fisher

"From the first, Stoicism was a religious philosophy..."

~ Edward Caird

"Stoicism has, in short, the inward and outward characteristics of the other great movements we have described, and may claim without presumption to be reckoned amongst the world-religions."

~ Edward Vernon Arnold

The quotes above may surprise many who were introduced to Stoicism by twenty-first century popularizers of the philosophy. The deafening silence regarding the religious nature of Stoicism, which was traditionally understood as a central theme of the philosophy, is largely due to the fact that most modern popularizers are agnostics or atheists. Therefore, they tend to ignore the deeply religious sentiment woven into Stoicism by its founders. They accomplish it by disregarding Stoic physics and theology or by dismissing them as anachronisms from a less enlightened age. This fragmentation of Stoic philosophy is precisely what the founders of Stoicism warned against, and for good reason. Stoicism was designed as a philosophical system. As such, it is comprised of three interdependent and mutually supporting areas of theory and practice—logic, physics, and ethics. As John Sellars wrote, "...each of the three parts of Stoic philosophy depends upon the others and cannot be understood fully without them" (*Stoicism*, 2006, pp. 43-4).

It is understandable that agnostics and atheists who discover an affinity for Stoic ethics may simultaneously object to the providential cosmos of Stoic physics and the religious attitude it inspired in its founders. Moreover, it is a first principle of philosophy that individuals have the right and responsibility to discern truth for themselves. History is replete with examples of thinkers like Spinoza, Descartes, Rousseau, Kant, James, who borrowed from Stoicism those doctrines and practices which they found compelling or useful while ignoring the rest. As Seneca asserted, "Truth lies open to everyone" and new "shorter and easier" roads may yet be discovered by "future generations" (*Let.* 33). Nevertheless, intellectual honesty suggests new roads require new names and new street signs. Moving the old street signs to a new road, to convince others the new road is the same old one is misleading and creates confusion.

Those who rely on Seneca's *Letter* 33 to justify departures from the road of traditional Stoicism would be wise to keep the following in mind. Near the end of this letter, while encouraging Lucilius to digest what he has learned and make it his own rather than simply regurgitating the thoughts of others, Seneca wrote,

I shall use the old road, but if I find a shorter and easier one I shall open it up.

Seneca was an eclectic thinker and it is reasonable to assume he explored and possibly opened up some roads which he considered "shorter and easier" than the old ones. Nonetheless, those new roads did not lead Seneca away from traditional Stoicism. At no time did Seneca disavow or contradict any core Stoic doctrines. He remained devoted to Stoicism and fondly referred to it as "our own school" (*Let.* 8, 9 & 88; Robin Campbell Trans.). Finally, Seneca was so loyal to Stoicism he even saw fit to defend his frequent appropriation of Epicurean aphorisms. He wrote,

I actually make a practice of going over to the enemy's camp - by way of reconnaissance, not as a deserter! (*Let.* 2).

Seneca borrowed wisdom from other schools; yet, he understood the distinction between learning from those schools and abandoning his own school. He remained a Stoic to the end.

In the past, those who created a new synthesis using an established philosophical tradition acknowledged their divergence from the old path and named it accordingly. Significant divergence usually resulted in an appropriately distinct new name. Lesser departures only called for a modification of the original name. We see examples of the later in third century Neo-Platonism and sixteenth century Neo-Stoicism. Unfortunately, some twenty-first century popularizers are not as candid about their divergence from traditional Stoicism. Some are endeavoring to reformulate Stoicism to make it more palatable to their profession (psychology and academia), conformable to their personal metaphysical views (atheism), or easily digestible for the book-buying public.

Such endeavors to modernize and popularize Stoicism would draw less criticism if they simply made their departure from the old road clear and marked their new road accordingly. However, some popularizers are reluctant to do so. Instead, they promote a reformulated version of Stoicism as essentially the same as the traditional version. Ethics was the primary focus of Stoicism they argue; therefore, Stoic physics and theology is unnecessary. Those familiar with traditional Stoicism know better. While it is true that the goal of Stoicism is virtue that does not imply every path to the same goal is equivalent. Different paths to the same goal

are just that—different paths. They should be marked appropriately at the trailhead. Moreover, in the case of Stoicism, where virtue serves as an ideal toward which one progresses rather than a likely achievable destination, the path travelled is what makes the difference in a practitioner's life.

Stoicism was built on a specific worldview which included a divine and providential cosmos. That worldview evoked the type of reverence so clearly evident in the writings of the ancient Stoics. It is a fallacy to suggest the reverential core can be extracted without changing the essence of Stoicism. The references below shine a light on that reverential attitude which the Stoics maintained toward the divine cosmos. Many may find this aspect of Stoicism distasteful, but the evidence is clear; the Stoics considered a providential cosmos essential to their philosophy. So much so that Epictetus considered it the first thing a philosopher must learn:

The philosophers say that the first thing that needs to be learned is the following, that there is a God, and a God who exercises providential care for the universe, and that it is impossible to conceal from him not only our actions, but even our thoughts and intentions. The next thing to be considered is what the gods are like; for whatever they're discovered to be, one who wishes to please and obey them must try to resemble them as far as possible. (*Discourses* 2.14.11)

The religious nature of Stoicism is overwhelmingly evident to any open-minded person who reads the extant texts. Between Epictetus' *Discourses* and *Handbook*, and Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, one will find nearly four hundred mentions of God. Additionally, even within condensed single volume versions of Seneca's writings more than one hundred mentions of God can be found. Finally, as the quotes from scholars below demonstrate, the religious core of Stoicism has been consistently recognized by scholars of philosophy and Hellenistic religion.

This compilation of quotes and references is offered with two purposes in mind. First, it highlights a variety of scholars who have recognized the religious nature of Stoic philosophy. While the list is certainly not exhaustive, it is extensive enough to make the point—Stoicism has an essential religious nature. The second purpose for this compilation is to give students and practitioners of Stoicism a place to begin their own research into the religious nature of Stoicism. Those who assent to the traditional Stoic concepts of a conscious and providential cosmos, and feel a sense of reverence for the same, will find they are supported by a huge body of scholarly work which confirms they travel the same philosophical path as the ancient Stoics trod.

Likewise, those who are compelled to blaze a new path can do so with a better understanding of the traditional one. Without understanding why traditional Stoicism traverses a precipitous and often challenging path, one might mistakenly assume the lush valley is a safer and shorter way to the same goal. This compilation provides some insights about the traditional path of Stoicism which many may not be aware of. Ignorance is never an asset. All travelers who claim to follow the path of the Stoa should be aware of the truth about Stoicism, whether they choose to follow the traditional path or blaze a new one.

Quotes

'From the first, Stoicism was a religious philosophy, as is shown by the great hymn of Cleanthes, the successor of Zeno as head of the school—a hymn which is inspired by the consciousness that it is one spiritual power which penetrates and controls the universe and is the source of every work done under the sun, "except what evil men endeavour in their folly."' (Caird, pp. 76-7)

"Stoicism may be called either a philosophy or a religion. It was a religion in its exalted passion; it was a philosophy inasmuch as it made no pretence to magical powers or supernatural knowledge... I believe that it represents a way of looking at the world and the practical problems of life which possesses still a permanent interest for the human race, and a permanent power of inspiration." (Murray, p. 14-5)

"It would be impossible to give a full account of the philosophy of the Stoics without, at the same time, treating of their theology; for no early system is so closely connected with religion as that of the Stoics. Founded, as the whole view of the world is, upon the theory of one Divine Being... There is hardly a single prominent feature in the Stoic system which is not, more or less, connected with theology." (Zeller, p. 322)

"Stoicism has, in short, the inward and outward characteristics of the other great movements we have described, and may claim without presumption to be reckoned amongst the world-religions." (Arnold, p. 17)

"The Stoic school of philosophy was also profoundly religious. Zeno (335-263 BC), founder of the school, believed, like Socrates and Epicurus, that philosophy should offer a guide to moral conduct, on the basis of a coherent cosmology... Stoics argued that there was only one natural god, which they identified with a rational principle imminent in the world... They were staunch defenders of the existence of god, they also argued that he was a benevolent deity who had a crucial providential role in human affairs. Stoics rejected, like earlier philosophers, the impiety of traditional mythology and the irrationality of anthropomorphic representations of the gods and the idea that traditional cult practices offered any pleasure to the gods or influenced them in anyway. But they also placed greater weight on the value of widespread general notions and defended traditional religious practices." (Price, p. 138)

"...for the Greeks the essence of the *logos* is not exhausted in speech and knowledge. It cannot be said that anything only exists, but that anything must also be. The *logos* does not stop at knowledge, but contains also the drive to act. Only by beginning from this function can we understand why the *logos* became the fundamental notion in the philosophy of Zeno

and held a significance which *nous* could never have achieved. The *logos*, for Zeno, is not only the reason which thinks and knows but also the spiritual principle which gives a rational form to the whole universe according to a strict plan. It impresses on every single being its own purpose. For Zeno as well as for Heraclitus, the *logos* rules both in the cosmos and the human sphere as well as giving us the possibility of grasping not only the meaning of the world but also the sense of our spiritual existence as well and thus of becoming aware of our actual destiny. In this way, it indicated also the way to achieve the comprehension of the cosmic becoming and so to satisfy both the rational thought and religious feeling of Zeno." (Pohlenz, quoted in Reale, 1985, pp. 217-8)

"The Stoic God, according the logic of the system, since he is identical with nature, *cannot be personal*. Consequently it makes no sense to pray to God, if he is impersonal *logos* in nature: beyond that as we will see, man, in order to fulfill his life, has no need of the assistance of God. However, in the history of the Stoa, God will tend to assume more and more spiritual and personal traits, religiousness will tend to permeate more and more strongly the system, and prayer will begin to acquire a precise meaning... The Stoa will turn, especially in the last stage, towards theism, but without arriving at it fully. In any case in the first Stoa, with Cleanthes, a vivid religious sense had already appeared. It found full expression in the well-known *Hymn to Zeus* (the only full, direct fragment which we possess from the ancient Stoa)..." (Reale, 1985, p. 247)

"The characteristics of the philosophy of Epictetus are for the most part the same ones found in Seneca, Musonius, and Marcus Aurelius; a deep and almost exclusive interest in ethics, a marked sense of interiority, a strong sense of the bond between God and man, and a notable religious sensibility." (Reale, 1990, p. 75)

"Epictetus does not reject the immanentistic conception which belongs to the Stoa, but admits into it a very strong spiritual and religious content. But nonetheless he cannot abandon pantheism and Stoic materialism, because he lacked the theoretic conception of the supersensible and the transcendent. And thus the religious ferment which he accepts does not allow him to overcome pantheistic materialism, but it does bring him to a position which is almost a break, in many respects, with the doctrine of ancient Stoa: God is intelligence, his science, his right reason, is good. God is providence, who cares not only about things in general but about each of us in particular. To obey the *logos* and to do good means therefore to be obedient to God, serve God, it means to give praise to God. Liberty coincides with submission to the divine will." (Reale, 1990, p. 83)

"Systems such as Stoicism and Neoplatonism made original contributions of worth to the religious thought of men." (Bevan, p. ix)

"There must at any rate have been in Stoicism from the first a strong religious element. Its basis was a kind of Pantheism... the essential thing for the Stoics was that the world is governed by the providence of a conscious intelligent God" (Bevan, p. xiii)

"...the Hellenistic Stoic philosophers understood the polytheistic *mythos* as an allegorical expression of a single, universal, and natural reality (*logos*) underlying the diversity of religious expression." (Martin, p. 8)

"Thus, from a religious perspective the Stoics were pantheists: everything thing was derived from and participated in the First Principle. The Stoic philosophical goal was to live in harmony with this universal law of nature. To act in accordance with this law was to be free from the capriciousness of chance and to be at home in the world... The Stoics provided a philosophical argument for knowing and accepting the rule of fate, and thereby a philosophical justification for pietistic practice." (Martin, p. 39-40)

"It was most fortunate for Rome that her best and ablest men in the second century B.C. fell into the hands, not of Epicureans, but of Stoics—into the hands, too, of a single Stoic of high standing, fine character, and good sense. For destitute as the Roman was both in regard to God and to Duty, he found in Stoicism an explanation of man's place in the universe,—an explanation relating him directly to the Power manifesting itself therein, and deriving from that relation a binding principle of conduct and duty. This should make the religious character of Stoicism at once apparent. It is perfectly true, as the late Mr. Lecky said long ago, that "Stoicism, taught by Panaetius of Rhodes, and soon after by the Syrian Posidonius, became the true religion of the educated classes. It furnished the principles of virtue, coloured the noblest literature of the time, and guided all the developments of moral enthusiasm." To this I only need to add that it woke in the mind an entirely new idea of Deity, far transcending that of Roman numina and of Greek polytheism, and yet not incapable of being reconciled with these; so that it might be taken as an inpouring of sudden light upon old conceptions of the Power, glorifying and transfiguring them, rather than, like the Epicurean faith, a bitter and contemptuous negation of man's inherited religious instincts." (Fowler, p. 260-1)

"There must have been a core of common beliefs and a common outlook that defined what it was to be a Stoic, even if stances on practical ethical questions were radically contended. That core, I suggest, was formed pivotally by the religious orientation of Stoic ethics. I am convinced that religion is the single most important perspective from which we can understand the specific shape and coherence of Stoic virtue ethics. The observation that the philosophy of the Stoics and a *fortiori* their ethics

were religious through and through is not exactly novel. In his book on Stoic theology, Daniel Babut has called this observation a banality. Banal though it may be, it has not yet been shown in sufficient detail what role religion played in Stoic ethics. In recent literature, we even find tendencies to disregard or downplay the role of religion, particularly in the context of the neo-Aristotelian interpretations of Stoic ethics... such interpretations can perhaps be attributed to a certain embarrassment of hindsight. We should be warned, however, by Plutarch's report that Chrysippus prefaced every one of his ethical treatises with theological doctrines and wrote that it is 'impossible to find a different principle of justice and a different beginning than the one from Zeus and from universal nature'." (Jedan, p. 2)

"It has often been remarked that the Stoic world-view was religious through and through. In order to integrate religion into their philosophical outlook, the Stoics had to strike a balance between three intellectual tendencies pulling in quite different directions. First, the early Stoics stood in the larger context of traditional polytheistic Greek religion which they attempted to integrate in their philosophical system. From the time of Zeno, the Phoenician founder of the Stoic school, a favourable attitude towards conventional polytheistic religion was part of the Stoic world-view. Second, the Stoics stood in the broader context of ancient philosophical theology. While attempting a rapprochement between philosophical theory and traditional religion, philosophical theologies could at the same time be critical of aspects of popular faith and press for an ethical (re-)interpretation of cultic practices. Seeing that traditional religion was under attack or indefensible in parts, they chose to defend it actively by providing a rational, argumentative basis for it, even if this meant that aspects of traditional religion had to be rejected as untenable." (Jedan, p. 9)

"We should regard Stoicism, then, as an important constituent of the prevailing rationalist, teleological, and theological tradition of Greek philosophy." (Long, 1986, p. 146)

"The Stoics, as these instances show, characteristically transmuted and built upon conventional religious ideas and discourse. No more than Plato where they disposed to discard all myth and traditional religion as misguided or superfluous. Their respect for popular beliefs is evident in their concern to incorporate them, wherever possible, within their own science and theology. Though they normally treat the divine as a unitary being, they named it Zeus and accommodated the lesser Greek divinities as references to particular features of the cosmos... The Stoics prided themselves on the coherence of their whole system. As God is a pervasive presence in the world according to their view, so to and their philosophy... (1) God is the designer and agent of everything; (2) the human being is an offshoot and partner of God; and (3) the human beings function is to live in harmony with God. There is an intimate relationship between these three propositions." (Long, 1986, p. 146-7)

"The Stoics' deepest religious intuitions are founded on their doctrine that the human mind, in all its functions - reflecting, sensing, desiring, and initiating action - is part and partner of God... The Stoics conceive of the world as a gigantic organism. God is its life or activating principle, present in every part. The activity of God, however, takes different forms. God structures every part of nature, but only human beings are endowed with reason (*logos*), which is the essence of God himself. Thus, as parts of the world, human beings are related to god in a special way, as his "offshoots" or kin. This relationship between the human beings and God is pictured as a partnership. Our function as human beings is to cultivate our own portion of divine rationality - that is, our own souls - in a way that we achieve complete harmony between what we as individuals desire and seek after and what right reason in general, the universal law embodied in Zeus, prescribes." (Long, 1986, p. 149)

"On the one hand Stoic cosmo-theology was itself much more than just a value free theory about the world. Chrysippus seems to have warned explicitly against regarding philosophy (including theology) as just an intellectual exercise or pastime. The moral and psychological commitment involved on the part of adherents of Stoicism came close to, and hence was likely to some extent to compete with, the kind of commitment required by religion." (Algra, 2009, p. 225)

"Cleanthes' religiosity, moreover, is not as exceptional in early Stoic thought as has often been suggested; perhaps our everyday notion of what constitutes "religion" is, anachronistically, more applicable in Cleanthes' case." (Mansfeld, p. 133)

"We may safely conclude that theology is an immensely important topic in the Early Stoa and that the attitude of the Early Stoics toward the supreme creator and ruler of the universe is not purely rational, but also emotional." (Mansfeld, p. 136)

"The deities of the philosophers differed fundamentally from those of ordinary citizens, but what of these philosophers' views of proper behavior in regard to traditional religious norms and customs? Little is known, but that little suggested these philosophers were not led by their theories or their personal inclinations to disparage or violate all contemporary standards of religious behavior. They recommended some traditional cultic acts, but they redefined the purpose and recipient of these honors. The Stoics seemingly defined piety in traditional terms and approved of traditional religious acts, although with a characteristic emphasis on Reason." (Mikalson, p. 125)

"The Stoics believed in the existence of God whom they identified with Reason and supported their conviction by the argument from design. In

their view an ordered universe presupposed the existence of a controlling intelligence just as in less perfectly regular human affairs, the existence of order and method in a house, gymnasium or forum necessarily implies some controlling intelligence has laid down rules. This Reason or God pervades the whole universe and can be understood as Ceres on land, Neptune on the sea and so on. This view that gods of polytheism are aspects of the Divine Reason reconciles philosophy with the religious practice of the ordinary man." (Halliday, pp. 156-7)

"The later philosophy of Stoicism was in its physical assumptions a materialistic pantheism, but in its religious language, the prayer of Kleanthes or the meditations of Marcus Aurelius, it approached sublimity. This language was being formed in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., and its importance should not be underrated. Language can stimulate thought. At the lowest it provides a framework within which the mind can develop, and without which its progress is seriously hampered, even if the highest concepts which were to follow lay far beyond the grasp of those who first expressed in these phrases their early groping after spiritual truths." (Guthrie, p. 144)

"Such being the works of the Stoics, let us see what was their faith. This is peculiarly interesting, because they were striving to rise above superstition mythology into a purely scientific religion." (Holland, p. 57)

"The Stoics were pantheists, but it was a pantheism that never was seized upon by either mysticism or egotism." (Holland, P. 70)

"Other utterances of the Stoic philanthropy will be found later (see chapter v); but we must next look at the proof that it was founded on faith in the goodness, not only of God, but of human nature." (Holland, pp. 72-3)

"To show fully the lofty character of [the Stoics'] religion, however, it is only necessary further to quote a few of the passages, which prove that it was as far from pessimism as from misanthropy and that it did not permit either discontent with the present, or anxiety about the future." (Holland, p. 76)

"In a monistic system such as that of the Stoics we would hardly expect to find any attitude of personal devotion towards the Divine Principle; but in point of fact such a tendency is indubitably visible. This tendency is particularly observable in the celebrated hymn to Zeus by Cleanthes... But this attitude of personal devotion towards the Supreme Principle on the part of some of the Stoics does not mean that they rejected the popular religion; on the contrary, they took it under their protection. Zeno did indeed declare the prayers and sacrifices are of

no avail, but polytheism was nevertheless justified by the Stoics on the ground that the one Principle of Zeus manifests itself in phenomena, e.g. the heavenly bodies, so that divine reverence is due to these manifestations..." (Copleston, pp. 393-4)

"Epictetus' religious sympathies and spirituality (a topic for Chapter 6) are broadly in line with traditional Stoicism, but they are also infused with a deep and ubiquitous affinity for the Socrates of Plato's dialogues." (Long, 2002, p. 16)

"In his ubiquitous references to God or Zeus, Epictetus has in mind the creator of the world and all its natural contents. To that divine being, just like adherents of the great monotheistic religions, he ascribes wondrous providence, supreme goodness, and omniscience. Epictetus' divinity is the maker of the best of all possible worlds. Conformity to God and imitation of God are expressions that he uses in characterizing human excellence; for God is the paradigm of the virtues human beings are equipped to achieve.'" (Long, 2002, pp. 144-5)

"Epictetus' theological language betokens a personal belief and experience as deep and wholehearted as that of any Jew or Christian or Muslim... One can scarcely avoid thinking about the great monotheistic religions when Epictetus refers to divine will, divine law, and obedience to God. Yet, however much his emotional involvement in these concepts may push us towards such assimilation, we need to step back and note a number of radical differences." (Long, 2002, p. 145)

"First, and most important, is the characteristically Stoic identification between God and rational perfection. There is no gap between an ideally wise Stoic and God because the human paragon, by virtue of being perfectly rational, is obedient to God and in conformity with the divine will and law. We have already noticed how Epictetus talks about 'the God within'. At times he seems to distinguish a human being's 'holy spirit' from God as such (p. 166), but we are never to think of the Stoic Zeus as transcendent in the Christian sense of the first person of the divine Trinity.

This is a second point of great difference from the other religions. For Epictetus, as for all Stoics, our minds are literally 'offshoots' of God, parts of God that God has assigned to be the mind or self of each person. As cosmic rationality, God also exists outside every individual's mind because he is the structuring principle of the entire universe; and Epictetus, like other Stoics again, will sometimes use language that could suggest a god who is distinct from his creation. But this is not to be taken literally. The Stoic God is nature, extending through everything, and, while Epictetus, unlike the early Stoics, gives no attention to explaining how God can be physically present everywhere, he does not differ from his predecessors over God's identity with the natural order of things." (Long, 2002, pp. 145-6)

"A common objection to the characterization of philosophy as an art of living is the claim that, insofar as it downplays the role of [logos], it makes a philosophical way of life indistinguishable from other, say, religious ways of life also common in antiquity. Yet what distinguishes a philosophical way of life from these religious ways of life is the fact that it is grounded upon, and expresses a desire for, rational understanding as opposed to, say, mystical insight or unquestioned faith in a system of beliefs. What makes the concept of an art of living specifically philosophical is the essential role that rational understanding, analysis, or argument [bios] plays within it. What distinguishes this conception of philosophy from that held by Aristotle, Hegel, or Williams is that this rational understanding is not constitutive but rather simply a necessary condition. It is the philosopher's distinctively rational way of life [logos] that is constitutive, his actions and behaviour, which are of course an expression of his rational understanding." (Sellars, pp. 6-7)

"Concerning the role of the philosopher, in particular, what is a striking difference between Epictetus and the early Stoics is his emphasis on the fact that the philosopher is not someone who merely understands God's message and conveys it to others; rather, he is someone who tries to explain God's will by himself actually following it in his everyday life, not only in theory (*logōi*) but also in practice (*ergōi*)..." (Ierodiakonou, p. 61)

"To conclude, there is no doubt that on Epictetus' view no divine revelation or religious faith in our sense is needed to save one's soul or to help other human beings save theirs. For Epictetus insists that, just by relying on our ordinary cognitive abilities, we can attain the kind of understanding of the world in the light of which we have the right attitude towards things. When Epictetus presents the philosopher as God's messenger, he certainly follows a tradition of philosophers from the first century BC onwards who are more interested in questions about God and the soul; but this does not mean that he diverges from the main dogmas of Stoic rationalism. For to follow God, according to Epictetus, means that we should pay attention to the God in us, i.e. to our reason, in order to determine what is the right thing for us, namely how we are to live in accordance with nature. But when salvation later becomes a matter of divine revelation and faith, the well-being of human beings is not entrusted to philosophers any more. Philosophers, therefore, lose their role as God's interpreters and messengers, and philosophy becomes primarily an intellectual exercise in the service of aims and ends not determined by philosophy itself, but for instance by religion." (Ierodiakonou, p. 69)

"Other Greek thinkers, such as the Stoics, dispensed with the creator and regarded the universe itself as divine. The Stoics supposed that the universe was animated by Pneuma (Spirit) or Logos (Reason), a fine fiery

substance that represented the active element in humanity as well as in nature. These Hellenistic concepts provided a way of reconceiving older near Eastern ideas." (Johnston, p. 64)

"The Stoics' belief in cosmic reason and intelligent design allows them to defend some aspects of traditional belief in the gods. The Stoic Cleanthes (331-232) wrote a 'Hymn to Zeus', combining the expressions of traditional piety with the doctrines of Stoic natural philosophy." (Irwin, p. 169)

"Stoicism was the most durably attractive philosophical system and the Classical world, both to philosophers and to the educated classes in general. Some of the reasons for the success of Stoicism were no doubt distinct from its philosophical merits. It could absorb much traditional morality and religion in an apparently rational framework. It could therefore offer comfort and reassurance to conservative and patriotic people who found it hard to take Greek and Roman morality and religion at face value, but still found it difficult and dangerous to reject them entirely." (Irwin, pp. 180-1)

"...Stoicism, or some modification of it, has tended to appeal to those who could neither except the claims of a dogmatic religion nor dismiss a religious attitude altogether. This attitude to Stoicism survived the Classical world, and was revived with the rediscovery of Stoicism in the sixteenth century. Since the Renaissance Stoic ethics in some aspects of the Stoic view of nature have attracted to those who have found it impossible either to accept Christianity or to lapse into complete atheism." (Irwin, p. 183)

"The structural resemblance between human and divine rationality to which these texts testify, and which is to be explained at a physical level by the fact that our inner *daimōn* is part (an *apospasma*) of the cosmic god, works both ways: not only does it allow a certain degree of personalistic theism in thinking and speaking about god, it also provides the basis for the claim that the virtuous and happy (*eudaimōn*) person leads a life in which what the Stoics call 'the god inside', our own *daimōn*, is in agreement with the 'will of the orderer of the universe'. Adjusting one's mind to divine rationality also means taking on the virtues of god—the Stoic version of the idea of *homoiōsis theōi* (becoming like god). We are here dealing, in other words, with the physical, or rather theological, basis of Stoic ethics." (Algra. K., 2010, p. 39)

"Just as Stoic theology rejected some elements of the traditional stories about the gods (anthropomorphism), Stoics also rejected some elements of traditional cult. Thus, Zeno's *Republic* advocated the abolition of temples and cult statues as being unworthy of the real god. And just as the Stoics could re-interpret certain elements of traditional myth (i.e., the cosmic gods in Hesiod), they could re-interpret the meaning of

certain elements of traditional cult (e.g. , divination, prayer). Although this means that strictly speaking they could only accept a philosophically 'enlightened' version of traditional Greco -Roman religion, they did not in practice adopt a radical attitude toward the religious tradition. Plutarch reproaches them for sacrificing at altars and temples which they professedly believe should not exist at all (*St. rep.* 1034 C). Indeed, Epictetus admits that a Stoic should in practice respect the religious conventions of his country (*Ench.* 31, 5). The Stoics were by no means alone in advocating this basically conservative approach. It is ascribed to Socrates by Xenophon (*Mem.* I, 3, 1 and IV, 3, 16), it can be found in the Platonic (or pseudo-Platonic) *Epinomis* (985c-d), and it is presented as something enjoined by Apollo in a Theophrastean fragment (fr. 584D FHS& G). Interestingly enough, it is also a view to which both Academic (Cicero *ND* III, 5- 6; 44- 45) and Pyrrhonian (Sextus *M* IX 49) sceptics subscribed. However, whereas the sceptics severed the link between the tradition, which they thought should be kept for practical reasons, and the truth, which they thought could not be established with any certainty, the Stoics took a different view. As we have seen, they believed the truth about gods and religion was in principle accessible and that traditional forms of cult and belief could at least be seen as approximations - however primitive and partial - of that truth. That being so, they presumably believed that one should not too easily dispose of traditional religion, where the majority of mankind will probably never be able work itself up to accepting the right philosophical attitude (compare the claim, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, that 'it is quite a struggle to hear the right things about the gods and to get hold of them'), whereas a religious tradition that encompasses at least some elements of the right preconception of the gods could be thought to be better than nothing." (Algra, 2003, pp. 177-8)

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