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# The Stoic Appeal to Expertise: Platonic Echoes in the Reply to Indistinguishability

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**Abstract:** One Stoic response to the skeptical indistinguishability argument is that it fails to account for expertise: the Stoics allow that while two similar objects create indistinguishable appearances in the amateur, this is not true of the expert, whose appearances succeed in discriminating the pair. This paper re-examines the motivations for this Stoic response, and argues that it reveals the Stoic claim that, in generating a kataleptic appearance, the perceiver's mind is active, insofar as it applies concepts matching the perceptual stimulus. I argue that this claim is reflected in the Stoic definition of the kataleptic appearance, and that it respects their more general account of mental representation. I further suggest that, in attributing some activity to the mind in creating each kataleptic appearance, and in claiming that the expert's mind allows her to form more kataleptic appearances than the amateur, the Stoics draw inspiration from the wax tablet model in Plato's *Theaetetus* (190e–196d), where Socrates distinguishes the wise from the ignorant on the basis of how well they match sensory input with its appropriate mental 'seal' (σφραγίς).

**Keywords:** Stoic, cognitive impression, *Theaetetus*, wax tablet, ancient skepticism

## Introduction

According to the ancient Stoics, the human mind has access to a reliable means of obtaining information about our surroundings and learning what the world is like. Because of their direct link with reality, some appearances we form are kataleptic (καταληπτική).<sup>1</sup> This label reflects the Stoic claim that in giving our assent to such appearances and endorsing their content, we achieve the accurate mental grasp

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<sup>1</sup> In transliterating, rather than translating, καταληπτική I follow Hankinson (2003, n. 1), Striker (1996, 51), and Brittain (2014).

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that is κατάληψις.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the kataleptic appearance says about the world is guaranteed to match the way it is, and for this reason these appearances are held to function as criteria of truth (DL vii 54).

From its initial formulation by the Stoic founder Zeno, the doctrine of the kataleptic appearance provoked a centuries-long debate with first Academic and then Pyrrhonian skeptics. To their minds, the Stoic attempt to develop and defend this position is futile, ‘more a prayer than the truth’ (SE M vii 402). Contrary to what the Stoics claim, the skeptics argue that no appearance is guaranteed to put the perceiver in touch with the way the world is, because for any appearance that is putatively kataleptic, there is a false appearance indistinguishable from it.

This ‘indistinguishability’ (ἀπαρλλαξία) argument forms part of a larger skeptical strategy to dislodge the kataleptic appearance as a criterion of truth. In this paper, I focus on one application of the indistinguishability argument, to the case where a perceiver encounters a pair of highly similar objects such as twins, eggs, or snakes (SE M vii 408–410; Cicero *Acad.* ii 54–57, 84–87). The skeptical claim here is that any appearance the subject forms of one egg, for instance, could have been created from an encounter with another egg that is highly similar to it but numerically distinct. Thus neither of these appearances will be kataleptic, since each could have come from what is not the case – namely the state of affairs containing the *other* member of the pair.

The Stoics respond to this challenge with what we can call the *appeal to expertise*. It is only the amateur perceiver, they claim – someone who lacks expertise concerning the objects in question – who forms appearances which fail to distinguish one member of the highly similar pair from the other. But when the expert turns her gaze to these same objects, the appearances she forms will succeed in discriminating the minute differences between them. There are some farmers on Delos, we are told, who really can perceptually distinguish one egg from another (Cicero, *Acad.* ii 57–58). These farmers’ expert appearances, unlike those created by the amateur, are then held to be kataleptic, because they could

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<sup>2</sup> Translating κατάληψις as ‘cognition’ is potentially misleading, since it is possible to have cases of false cognition but not false κατάληψις. ‘Apprehension’ – another popular translation – carries unhelpful emotional connotations. Some commentators have compared Stoic κατάληψις, the outcome of assenting to a kataleptic appearance (SE M vii 151; Alex. Aphr. DA 71.10–13) with our contemporary notion of knowledge: see Perin (2005, n. 1), Annas (1990, 187), and Long and Sedley (1987, 157); cf. also Nawar (2014, n. 1) and Menn (1995, 9–10). This intriguing proposal is developed and defended in Schwab (ms). Note that the Stoics posit a superior epistemological state – ἐπιστήμη – that is more secure than κατάληψις by being ‘unshakable by argument’ (Arius in Stob. *Ecl.* ii 73.18–20 and 112.13). However, present purposes do not require any further treatment of ἐπιστήμη and its relationship to κατάληψις.

not have arisen from a false state of affairs. According to the Stoics, then, the skeptics exaggerate the extent to which highly similar objects produce indistinguishable appearances: the challenge fails to attend to the presence of expertise in the perceiver.

This paper takes a new look at the presuppositions behind this exchange, whose significance for our understanding of Stoic epistemology has yet to be appreciated. According to my reconstruction, the appeal to expertise brings to light the Stoic claim that to generate a kataleptic appearance always involves the activity of the perceiver's mind – an exercise of reason which organizes and articulates the deliverances of the sense-organs on the basis of the concepts the perceiver possesses. I will then suggest that the activity of the mind in forming each kataleptic appearance is registered in the Stoics' canonical definition of the kataleptic appearance, which requires, in its second clause, that such appearances are 'sealed... on the basis of what indeed is the case' (καὶ κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπάρχον... ἐναπασφραγισμένη: SE M vii 248). My proposal is to cash out this part of the second clause with the claim that, if an appearance is kataleptic, then it has been generated under the influence of the concepts appropriate for the object, those which distinguish it from others in the context. One upshot will be an improved understanding of why the Stoics make the appeal to expertise: because the expert's mind is more advanced and her conceptual repertoire more expansive than the amateur's, there will be some circumstances in which a kataleptic appearance is available only to her.

Now, although it is recognized by scholars in other contexts, the Stoic commitment to the mind's activation of concepts is totally absent from recent treatments of the kataleptic appearance, even from those which take notice of the appeal to expertise. I suspect that one reason for this omission is that the language of 'sealing', which features prominently in the canonical definition, is thought to entail that, in forming a perceptual kataleptic appearance, the mind is entirely passive, serving only as a surface onto which features of the object are accurately stamped or imprinted.<sup>3</sup> However, once we recall the original context of this imagery in Plato's *Theaetetus* (190e–196d) – a text the early Stoics studied carefully – we will see that comparing the perceiver's mind to a wax tablet does not rule out its activity, specifically that of categorizing the perceptual stimulus by engaging a representation stored in memory. Indeed, Socrates distinguishes the wise from the ignorant in this passage on the basis of how well each matches sensory input with its correct mental 'seal' (σφραγίς: 192a6, 194c8–d7). In a

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<sup>3</sup> See Long (2002, 228): the second clause of the canonical definition 'requires a qualifying impression to have the imprint or stamp of its source object'.

departure from recent scholarly treatments, I argue that the Stoics appropriate this Platonic insight to expound their own claim that the mind, in generating a kataleptic appearance, applies the concepts appropriate for the object, and, moreover, that the expert will do this better than the amateur.<sup>4</sup> As we will see, the later Stoic Epictetus repeatedly characterizes correct concept application as a component of epistemological success, and there is ample evidence to think he is echoing early Stoic thinking on this point. Tracing this Stoic account back to the *Theaetetus* promises to shed much needed light on the appeal to expertise, and also to improve our understanding of how the central innovation of Stoic epistemology – the doctrine of the kataleptic appearance (cf. Eusebius, *Pr. Ev.* 14.6.12–13; Cicero, *Acad.* i 40–41) – takes shape in response to this Platonic text.<sup>5</sup>

Before considering these points, however, I begin with the Stoic account of the ‘appearance’ (φαντασία) – the more general psychological activity of which the kataleptic appearance (φαντασία καταληπτική) is one type (DL vii 49; SE M viii 398) – with a view to clarifying the role of the mind in generating each appearance (§2). With this background material in place, I turn to the canonical definition of the kataleptic appearance and present its standard interpretation (§3). Next I will propose my new reading of the definition and argue that it respects the Stoics’ more general theoretical commitments and makes better sense of the appeal to expertise (§4–6). I will conclude by showing that, on my reconstruction of their epistemological theory, the Stoics remain faithful to the original presentation of the wax tablet in the *Theaetetus* and so owe a deeper debt to this dialogue than has hitherto been recognized (§7).

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4 Here I mean to challenge the assessment in Long (2002, 228): ‘Unlike the Wax Tablet, Zeno’s KP [*katalēptikē phantasia*] does not rest on presumptions about the correspondence between a present percept and a pre-existing, cognitively accurate memory stamp of the same empirical object’. Both Ioppolo (1990, 438–439) and Togni (2013, 168–171), share Long’s assessment.

5 Long (2002) successfully discerns the outlines of the Stoic doctrine of the kataleptic appearance in the *Theaetetus*, both in the wax tablet model of false judgment (δόξα) (190e–196d) and also in the later discussion of the distinguishing mark that must be added to a true judgment to upgrade it to ἐπιστήμη (208c–209c). However, as the notes above make clear, Long’s interpretation does not give proper due to the role of the perceiver’s mind in creating a kataleptic appearance, specifically in activating the concepts appropriate for the sense-object, and Long explicitly denies that the ancestor of this Stoic commitment can be found in Socrates’s discussion of the wax tablet (2002, 228). My goal is to substantiate a deeper pattern of Platonic influence upon Stoic epistemology than Long’s earlier study acknowledges. (It is likely that Socrates’s discussion of the Aviary [196d–200d] also floats proposals of interest to the Stoics, but I do not examine the parallels here.)

## Appearances and the Rational Mind

Let's begin, then, with a basic sketch of the appearance (φαντασία) and its role within Stoic theory.<sup>6</sup> Here and for the rest of the paper, I will focus exclusively on *perceptual* appearances created by *rational* (i. e. adult human) agents (cf. DL vii 51). After all, it is these appearances which take center-stage in the skeptical challenge from highly-similar objects, and whose kataleptic status the Stoics endeavor to defend.<sup>7</sup>

The Stoics propound their account of the appearance in the context of a psychological model on which external objects interact with the soul and produce changes in it (Chrysippus in Aëtius, SVF ii 54). As corporealists, the Stoics identify the soul as a kind of breath (πνεῦμα), a mixture of fire and air suffusing the entirety of the subject's body (Calcidius, *Tim.* 220; Iamblichus in Stob. *Ecl.* i 368.12–20). The 'ruling' part of the soul (ἡγεμονικόν) – also called the 'mind' or 'intellect' (διανοία) – is found in the subject's chest (Chrysippus, in Galen, PHP iii 1.10–15; cf. DL vii 55, 110, 159), whereas the perceptual soul-parts animate the sense-organs. Connected to the mind like the 'tentacles of an octopus' (Aëtius, SVF ii 836), these perceptual soul-parts transmit the changes taken on as a result of the perceiver encountering an external object (DL vii 52).

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<sup>6</sup> Though the basic sketch is widely accepted (see notes below), it is rejected by Reed (2002, 161–167) and more recently by Caston (forthcoming, 18–26). Caston's novel account raises a number of important issues but unfortunately falters in mistaking sayables that are true of a psychological subject with content generated by, and available to, that subject.

<sup>7</sup> See Nawar (2014, 5–10) for a helpful survey of recent debate over the possibility of appearances that are both kataleptic and non-perceptual. The Stoics seem to assume there are such appearances e. g. in Chrysippus's discussion of the Sorites, where the non-perceptual appearance that <<Fifty is few>> is described as kataleptic (SE M vii 416–421; PH ii 253; Cicero, *Acad.* ii 92–94). But whatever we think of this case, my focus in this paper is on the challenge raised for adult human agents by the alleged *perceptual* indistinguishability of two highly similar objects (cf. Perin 2005, 383; Hankinson 2003, 71; Striker 1996, 52). I cannot pursue here the interesting question of whether the Sage has a single unified strategy for limiting his assent to kataleptic appearances of all kinds, whether perceptual or not (cf. DL vii 45–47; Cicero, *Acad.* ii 53): but see Shogry (2018, 368–380) and Perin (2005, 396–399). The status in Stoic epistemology of kataleptic appearances that are *non-rational*, i. e. kataleptic appearances created by non-rational minds (those of non-human animals and children before becoming rational adults) is much less clear: see Frede (1999, 315) for preliminary remarks on the topic. Cf. also Hierocles, *Eth. St.* col. vii–viii. In any case, I fully endorse the observation in Klein (2016, 174) that non-rational kataleptic appearances 'do not satisfy the formal set of conditions associated with kataleptic impressions', and so will not be covered by the canonical definition discussed below. I thus set aside all further treatment of them here and focus exclusively on the kataleptic status of appearances that are both rational and perceptual.

It is important to note, however, that to form a perceptual appearance involves more than just a change in the sense-organs. On the Stoic view, a perceptual appearance is always created in the subject's mind, which actively responds to what is conveyed to it by the sense-organs and perceptual soul-parts (SE M vii 232–233). Why might the Stoics insist on a distinction between changes to the sense-organs and changes to the mind, explicitly classifying the perceptual appearance as a case of the latter?

One plausible answer scholars have offered lies in the Stoic account of representation.<sup>8</sup> According to the Stoics, the appearance 'shows itself and also what made it' (Chrysippus in Aëtius, SVF ii 54). Minimally, this remark indicates that, upon encountering an object in one's surroundings, e. g. a white table, the perceptual appearance is the psychological state that brings the white table into one's awareness. In other words, the perceptual appearance serves to *represent* the white table, in the sense that it conveys to the perceiver that this object is in her environment. The Stoics seem to think that, in order to play this representational role, the perceptual appearance requires more cognitive sophistication than the sense-organs can provide on their own.<sup>9</sup>

We can appreciate the justification for this claim by consulting Stoic discussions of the appearances of interest to the present study, those created in the minds of perceivers who possess reason. For the Stoics, this will mean all normally-developed adult humans (Aëtius, SVF ii 83; cf. Iamblichus, SVF i 149). These 'rational' perceptual appearances, as the Stoics call them (λογικαί: DL vii 51), represent the world using the resources of reason. More specifically, the Stoics hold that they are formed under the influence of the perceiver's concepts (ἐννοιαι).<sup>10</sup> In creating a rational perceptual appearance, the mind engages the

<sup>8</sup> See, e. g. Long and Sedley (1987, 239–240) and Frede (1983, 153–155).

<sup>9</sup> Throughout the paper I translate φαντασία as 'appearance' rather than 'impression' to emphasize that φαντασία is distinct from the changes in the sense-organs which precede it. My translation also facilitates easier discussion of the metaphors of 'imprinting' and 'sealing' which feature in the canonical definition of the kataleptic appearance (§3–4 below).

<sup>10</sup> On this point I am in agreement with many recent commentators (Frede 1983, 153–155; Long and Sedley 1987, 240; Frede 1994, 57; Brittain 2002, 256–259, 2006, n. 25; Togni 2013, 173; Brittain 2014, n. 8; Coope 2016, n. 27; and De Harven 2018, 221–8). Indeed, for Chrysippus, to possess reason just is to possess 'a collection of certain concepts and primary notions' (Galen, PHP v 3.1). Here Chrysippus refers to the concepts that are created in the course of our natural development ('primary notions', προλήψεις) as well as those created through special training (Aëtius, SVF ii 83). Given this identification, and also the choice to label the appearances of adult humans as 'rational', it seems plausible to interpret the rational appearance as somehow involving these reason-constituting concepts.

concepts it has built up over time to categorize and articulate the external object that has altered the relevant sense-organ(s) (Galen, PHP ii 5.12–13; cf. Plutarch, *Soll.* 961c).<sup>11</sup> Suppose again the perceiver encounters a white table. This object creates a change in the perceiver's eyes, a change which is then transmitted to the mind, which activates the TABLE and WHITE concepts stored in memory: the result is the perceptual appearance that <<Here is a white table>>, the modification to the mind that brings the white table into the perceiver's awareness.<sup>12</sup> So according to the Stoics, to form a perceptual appearance counts as an exercise of reason because it requires the activation of the subject's stored concepts.

In offering this account, the Stoics assume that concepts convey information of a generic or universal character. For instance, Cicero reports that the sayable <<if it is human, then it is a mortal animal participating in reason>> gives the content of the concept HUMAN (*Acad.* ii 21).<sup>13</sup> This remark suggests that the content of a concept specifies the features that objects answering to that concept typically display (e. g. of humans, mortality and rationality). And so in possessing this concept, the perceiver has the information needed to detect human beings when she encounters them in her surroundings.<sup>14</sup> Upon receiving perceptual input from the sense-organs, the rational mind generates an appearance by ascertaining that these inputs instantiate the characteristics laid out in the content of one or more of its stored concepts. But there is no reason to think that this determination by the mind is necessarily a conscious process which the subject performs deliberately: rather, what the Stoics insist on is that it is

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**11** See further discussion of these texts in Brittain (2005, 170–171). Note that the Stoics characterize each rational appearance, including those which are perceptual, as a 'thought' (νόησις; DL vii 51). Some evidence for the Stoic assumption that thought requires the possession and use of concepts can be gleaned from SE PH ii 1–12 and its sister passage M viii 337–336a. Here, in responding to the charge that the Pyrrhonist cannot consistently undertake investigation, Sextus concedes to his dogmatic critics that both investigating and thinking about *x* requires consulting the concept of *x* (M viii 331a–332a). Given the Stoic jargon in the immediate context (M viii 334a) and also in the parallel passage (PH ii 1–12), it is likely that such dogmatic critics include the Stoics. For further discussion of these texts and their relevance for Stoic accounts of thought, see Vogt (2012, 147–156) and Brunschwig (1994, 224–228).

**12** I use SMALL CAPITALS to denote concepts. The phrase inside of guillemets (<<here is a white table>>) picks out the sayable (λεκτόν) – in this case an assertible (ἀξιωμα) – that specifies the linguistically-structured form of the content of the appearance (SE M viii 70; DL vii 63, 66–68). The truth-evaluability of a rational appearance derives from that of its corresponding assertible: a rational appearance is true if and only if its content-assertible is true; false if and only if its content-assertible is false: see Inwood (1985, 56–57); Shields (1993, 336); and Vogt (2012, 171–175).

**13** *Si homo est, animal est mortale rationis particeps.* Here I follow Brittain (2005, 174 n. 40). Cf. SE M xi 8–9.

**14** See also Crivelli (2010, 378–379).

automatic, occurring whenever we form a perceptual appearance in virtue of our status as rational creatures.

We can therefore discern both a passive and active aspect in the generation of each perceptual appearance. On the one hand, to create a perceptual appearance requires the sense-organs to be altered by the perceiver's interaction with a sense-object, an alteration that is transmitted to the mind, where it makes an impact. But to articulate the cognitive significance of this impact – to bring the object into the perceiver's awareness, and to represent what it is like – some psychological activity is required. The mind must respond to the affections of the sense-organs by activating certain concepts and predicating them of the sense-object encountered.<sup>15</sup> Only when both the passive and active elements are in place will the Stoics say that a perceptual appearance has been created.<sup>16</sup> So even in receiving the simplest sensory representations of our surroundings, the perceiver's mind is active.

## The Kataleptic Appearance

Given the mind's active role in creating our perceptual appearances, how should we understand the Stoic claim that some of these appearances will be kataleptic as well? What implications does the rationality of our appearances have on the Stoic account of which appearances are guaranteed to be true? And how, if at all, is this commitment reflected in the canonical definition of the kataleptic appearance? So far as I can tell, no commentator has explicitly raised these

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<sup>15</sup> It is tempting to think that the Stoics would explain the truth-evaluability of a rational appearance on the grounds that truth-evaluability requires predication, and that to form a rational appearance involves predicating concepts to objects.

<sup>16</sup> This crucial point is missed by Stojanović (2019, 164–6). Note that at least for the Stoics following Chrysippus (cf. DL vii 50; SE M vii 228–229, 372–373), the appearance is never described as an *entirely* passive change in the mind: the Stoics' language seems to be deliberately hedged on this point. As Sextus reports the general Stoic position, the appearance is an alteration created 'on the basis of an effect' (κατὰ πείσιν), or 'a quasi-effect... i. e. a disposition' (πείσις τις... καὶ διάθεσις) (SE M vii 237–240). Here the Stoics concede that the appearance is *more* passive than the mind's creation of impulses and acts of assent. But this reflects the idea that the generation of the perceptual appearance involves an encounter with a sense-object, whereas this is never the case for impulse and assent: these two psychological activities transpire entirely within the subject's soul (cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 113.23; Aulus Gellius, *Att. Noct.* 19.1). I agree with Ioppolo (1990, 435), that the appearance 'is active because it implies an operation of the mind' and 'cannot be reduced to a mere affection' but is still 'passive in its relationship with assent'. See also Bobzien (1998, 240) and Brittain (2014, 334).



questions, but, unless an answer is forthcoming, a full understanding of Stoic epistemology and of the structure of the Stoic-skeptic debate will elude us.

Let's consider the canonical definition. To distinguish which appearances are kataleptic and which are not, the Stoics eventually settled on a three-pronged account, on which the kataleptic appearance:

- (i) ἀπὸ ὑπάρχοντος ('comes from what is the case')
- (ii) καὶ κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπάρχον ἐναπομεμαγμένη καὶ ἐναπεςφραγισμένη ('and has been imprinted and sealed on the basis of what indeed is the case')
- (iii) ὅποια οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο ἀπὸ μὴ ὑπάρχοντος ('of such a sort that it could not have come from what is not the case'.) (SE M vii 248)<sup>17</sup>

According to one scholarly interpretation, standard but not entirely uncontroversial, clause (i) secures the kataleptic appearance's truth. What the kataleptic appearance says about the world matches the way it really is, and thus 'comes from what is the case'.<sup>18</sup>

Clause (ii) on the standard interpretation indicates that not every true appearance is kataleptic: in addition, it must be 'imprinted and sealed on the basis of what indeed is the case'. The wording here – which we will consider in more detail below – is commonly taken to refer to the representational character

<sup>17</sup> See also SE M vii 402; PH ii 4; and DL vii 50. At DL vii 46 and SE M xi 183 we find a shorter definition, with versions only of the first two clauses. Cicero *Acad.* ii 77 and SE M vii 252 suggest that the third clause was added after Arcesilaus's initial criticism of the doctrine. I discuss why the Stoics might have seen the need for this addition below.

<sup>18</sup> Thus Frede (1983, 164–165); Annas (1990, 190–191); Frede (1999, 302–304); Brennan (2005, 67); Brittain (2006, xx); Løkke (2015, 68). Sedley (2002, 146–147) agrees that clause (i) requires truth, but on the basis of a controversial reading of ἀπὸ: see discussion in Nawar (2014, 4–5), and Stojanović (2019, 156–159). 'What is the case' is my translation of τὸ ὑπάρχον, to reflect that the Stoics are here picking out a true sayable – the content of the kataleptic appearance – which we know from other sources ὑπάρχει rather than ὑφίσταται: see Stobaeus, *Ecl.* i 106 and SE M viii 10. A weaker existential reading, on which τὸ ὑπάρχον refers not to a true state of affairs but rather to any existing object, would overlook this attested technical Stoic usage. It is also notable that at *Acad.* ii 57 and 112, and *Fin.* v 76, Cicero translates instances of ὑπάρχον in the canonical definition veridically not existentially (as does Augustine, *Contra Academicos* iii 18.26–28). A pair of recent studies, Stojanović (2019, 160–169) and Caston (forthcoming, 12–18), rejects these considerations and argues instead that τὸ ὑπάρχον should be rendered as 'what is present'. I cannot discuss in detail here the interesting arguments that Caston and Stojanović adduce in support of their construal. But *prima facie* their proposal has the implausible consequence that there can be no kataleptic appearance of the validity of a proof or of the endpoints of a sorites (cf. Cicero, *Acad.* ii 92–94 and n. 7 above), since these facts cannot be present in the relevant sense.

and causal history of the kataleptic appearance.<sup>19</sup> In being ‘imprinted and sealed’, the mind has been affected by the object of a perceptual kataleptic appearance in a particularly direct manner, with the result that it forms a maximally detailed depiction of that object. Because of the non-defective conditions under which it is perceived, the object of a kataleptic appearance leaves behind in the mind an accurate outline of itself. By contrast, in a non-kataleptic appearance, the circumstances are such that the object fails to make a fully determinate trace upon the mind, resulting in an appearance that is hazy or blurry (cf. SE M vii 258). The kataleptic appearance is thus held to be ‘of such a sort that it could not have come from what is not the case’ (clause (iii)) because nothing other than what the kataleptic appearance represents (‘what is the case’) could have made the same kind of unmediated and direct effect on the mind. So interpreted, the three clauses entail that no false appearance could display the kind of clarity found in a kataleptic appearance. But at no point is the mechanism of concept application invoked.

The standard interpretation admittedly has many virtues, most of all that it carves out a subset of appearances – those which are true and created in such a way as to represent their objects clearly and distinctly, unlike any false appearance – that could plausibly ground *κατάληψις*. If there really are appearances of this kind, they would be the ones to nominate as criteria of truth. Furthermore, the standard interpretation can explain why the early Stoics came to expand the definition to include clause (iii), as a way of clarifying that the features picked out in clauses (i) and (ii) will not hold of any false appearance (SE M vii 252; Cicero *Acad.* ii 77).<sup>20</sup>

I will argue, however, that the standard interpretation provides an incomplete account of the canonical definition and fails to render important nuances in the Stoic position. First of all, it ignores a point I have emphasized in the preceding section, that the Stoics attribute some *activity* to the mind in the generation of our appearances and in the way they represent their objects. Since the Stoics hold that concepts are activated in the generation of every rational appearance, we would also expect them to play a role in the formation

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<sup>19</sup> Frede (1999, 306), Brennan (2005, 67–68), Brittain (2006, xx–xxi), Nawar (2014, 5), and Caston (forthcoming, 12–13). Sedley (2002, 147–148), and Stojanović (2019, 171) hold that clause (ii) refers to the high-quality representational character of the kataleptic appearance but not its causal history.

<sup>20</sup> Thus I agree with Frede (1983, 163–166) and Frede (1999, 308) that the final clause does not introduce a new feature beyond those referred to in clauses (i) and (ii). Sedley (2002, 148–149) and Annas (1990, 195) offer an alternative view.

of our *kataleptic* appearances, given that these too are a kind of rational appearance (DL vii 46; SE M viii 398).

Second, in neglecting this aspect of Stoic theory, the standard interpretation likewise obscures an argumentative strategy that the Stoics use to defend the possibility of *κατάληψις* against skeptical attack: the appeal to expertise. Of certain objects and their features, only the mind of the expert is apt to form a *kataleptic* appearance, and in these circumstances the Stoics will recommend that any non-expert suspend assent (Cicero, *Acad.* ii 57). The appeal to expertise allows the Stoics to respond to a recurring brand of skeptical counter-argument, yet, as I will show in more detail below, the standard interpretation struggles to explain this anti-skeptical strategy and the broader dialectical context in which it emerges.<sup>21</sup>

Ultimately, I believe that these two shortcomings in the standard interpretation originate in a misunderstanding of the language of sealing and imprinting in clause (ii), wrongly construing them as indicating only a *passive* effect made on the mind by the object of the *kataleptic* appearance. As mentioned above, the participles ‘sealed’ (*ἐναπεςφραγισμένη*) and ‘imprinted’ (*ἐναπομεμαγμένη*) are commonly held to indicate that the object of the *kataleptic* appearance has affected the mind directly, with the result that the object is depicted clearly and distinctly.<sup>22</sup> On this construal, the *kataleptic* appearance is ‘sealed’ and ‘imprinted’ insofar as the mind where it is generated is passively affected by an object so as to capture its relevant features. But this interpretation sits uncomfortably with the Stoic claim that the mind is active in the generation of every rational appearance, and commentators have largely failed to apply the Stoics’ more general account of representation to the specific case of the *kataleptic* appearance. To substantiate this line of criticism, and fill in the gaps in the standard interpretation, it is now time to re-assess the second clause and clarify the significance of the wax tablet imagery it deploys.<sup>23</sup>

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**21** Cf. Annas (1990, 199): the invocation of expertise at Cicero, *Acad.* ii 57–58 ‘is a strange claim for the Stoics to make. Why ever would they appeal to an alleged actual poultry farmer on Delos who could tell eggs apart?’

**22** See Long (2002, 228) quoted above. Cf. also Nawar (2014, 5–6): ‘the talk of “stamping” and “impressing” [in clause (ii)] also suggests that the appearance has to be caused in the right way. This is because something leaving an impression or imprint seems to be an instance of causation *par excellence*. What causes a footprint? A foot.’ One exception is Frede (1999, 306–307), who acknowledges the activity of the mind in generating a *kataleptic* appearance but does not offer a reconstruction of clause (ii) that invokes concept application, as I do below. In any event, I take my contribution here to be a deepening or enriching of the standard interpretation, not a full-scale rejection.

**23** There is no indication in our sources that Chrysippus’s disagreement with Cleanthes over the meaning of wax tablet metaphors (e.g. at DL vii 50) extends to their use in the canonical definition. Indeed, Chrysippus seems to have accepted the canonical definition without

## A New Interpretation of Clause (ii)

Consider again the canonical definition in full. The kataleptic appearance:

- (i) ἀπὸ ὑπάρχοντος ('comes from what is the case')
- (ii) καὶ κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπάρχον ἐναπομεμαγμένη καὶ ἐναπασφραγισμένη ('and has been imprinted and sealed on the basis of what indeed is the case')
- (iii) ὅποια οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο ἀπὸ μὴ ὑπάρχοντος ('of such a sort that it could not have come from what is not the case').

I agree with the standard interpretation that clause (i) secures truth. I also agree with the standard interpretation that clause (ii) requires the kataleptic appearance to arise in such a way that it represents its object clearly and distinctly. Finally, I agree that, when (i) and (ii) are satisfied, the kataleptic appearance is thought to have a direct and unmediated connection with its object – a link or bond with the world that is missing in any false appearance (clause (iii)).

Noting these points of agreement, I aim to enhance the standard interpretation by arguing for a new understanding of the two participles in clause (ii): 'imprinted' (ἐναπομεμαγμένη) and 'sealed' (ἐναπασφραγισμένη). My strategy will be to propose a distinct meaning for each, in contrast with the nearly-universal approach of lumping them together as a single unit.<sup>24</sup> And, with a view to remedying the shortcomings of the standard interpretation, my proposal will deploy the Stoics' more general theory of representation to explain why clause (ii) ensures the high-quality depiction of the object of a perceptual kataleptic appearance.

I suggest, then, that in being 'imprinted... on the basis of what indeed is the case', the Stoics indicate that the object of the kataleptic appearance has made the appropriate kind of impact on the mind – in the case of perceptual kataleptic appearances, an impact on the mind transmitted there by the sense-organs.<sup>25</sup> The

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qualification and to have exerted himself in defending it against skeptical attack (cf. Cicero, *Acad.* ii 87; Lucian, *Vit. Auct.* 21). Thus the use of wax tablet imagery, insofar as it appears in the canonical definition, is uncontroversial within the Stoa. On this point, I agree with Caston (forthcoming, 10).

<sup>24</sup> Brennan (2005, 67–68) and Løkke (2015, 69–70) also recognize a distinction in sense between the two participles, but do not claim, as I do below, that 'sealing' refers to correct concept application.

<sup>25</sup> Is there any analogous 'impact' on the mind in the case of non-perceptual kataleptic appearances? I don't see why not, given Chrysippus's generous understanding of the kind of alteration of the soul that is the appearance: see SE M vii 227–231, viii 409–410, and insightful discussion in Brennan (2005, 78–79). Thus even in forming a kataleptic appearance like <<This geometrical proof is valid>>, there would be a physical change or 'impact' in the mind.

kataleptic appearance is ‘imprinted’, on my reading, in that the mind where it is formed has received an impact from its object and no other: thus the mind has been affected ‘on the basis of what indeed is the case’ (κατ’ αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπάρχον).

On my view, then, the standard interpretation as stated above does not misdescribe the significance of the ‘imprinting’ discussed in clause (ii). Here the Stoics really do mean to pick out the passive aspect of the kataleptic appearance, the effect on the mind caused by its object. But the standard interpretation is inadequate as an account of the entire clause, which contains in addition a second participle: the kataleptic appearance must also be ‘sealed (ἐναπνεσφραγισμένη) on the basis of what indeed is the case (κατ’ αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπάρχον)’.

I contend that, with this phrase, the Stoics mean to express that, in generating a kataleptic appearance, the mind must activate the concepts that correctly articulate the impact made upon it. The second participle thus has on my preferred construal the sense of ‘certified with a seal’ or ‘affixed with a mark’: it serves to pick out the mind’s activity of affixing concepts, the active aspect of the generation of an appearance. Every rational appearance will be ‘sealed’ in this sense, since, according to Stoic theory, to generate such an appearance always involves the activation of concepts stored in the perceiver’s memory.<sup>26</sup> What distinguishes the kataleptic appearance, then, is that it is ‘sealed on the basis of what indeed is the case’ (κατ’ αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπάρχον): in a kataleptic appearance the mind applies the ‘seals’ (concepts) that correctly match its object.<sup>27</sup> The concepts activated in a kataleptic appearance appropriately characterize the true state of affairs it represents.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Cf. SE M viii 334a, where Sextus distinguishes consulting the stored concept of *x* from achieving κατάληψις of *x*, and endeavors to show that the Pyrrhonist does the former but not the latter. Whether or not his argument is successful, the distinction Sextus draws is consistent with Stoic epistemology: see further discussion in Vogt (2012, 147–152).

<sup>27</sup> DL vii 50 reports a version of clause (ii) that includes a *third* participle (‘molded’, ἐναποτετυπωμένη) occurring in between the two discussed here (‘imprinted’ and ‘sealed’). Cf. *Scholia in Lucianum* 27.21 (= FDS 332A) and Cicero, *Acad.* ii 77, the latter of which also translates clause (ii) of the canonical definition with three participles: *ex eo quod esset sic ut esset impressum* [cf. ἐναπνεσφραγισμένη] *et signatum* [cf. ἐναποτετυπωμένη] *et effictum* [cf. ἐναπομεμαγμένη]. The third participle ἐναποτετυπωμένη – unusual in Stoic epistemological contexts and in Greek usage more generally – I would read in line with my proposal for ἐναπνεσφραγισμένη, as indicating the active aspect in the generation of a kataleptic appearance. In support of this suggestion, see Galen PHP ii 5.12–13, discussed by Brittain (2005, 171), which describes human speech as ‘molded’ with concepts in the mind (ὑπὸ τῶν ἐνοιῶν ἐνσημασμένον τῶν ἐν τῇ δianoia καὶ οἷον ἐκτετυπωμένον ἐκπέμπεσθαι τὸν λόγον).

<sup>28</sup> The version of clause (ii) in DL vii 46 mentions sealing first and imprinting second (κατ’ αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπάρχον ἐναπνεσφραγισμένην καὶ ἐναπομεμαγμένην), but this variation is of no philological significance. The important point is that imprinting and sealing pick out the passive

For instance, consider a case where the subject forms a perceptual kataleptic appearance of a brown dog. On my interpretation, this entails that there really is a brown dog in the perceiver's surroundings, and thus that the appearance is true (clause (i)). Additionally (clause (ii)), the perceiver's mind must receive an imprint from the dog, via the sense-organs, and in so doing activate the appropriately-matching concepts – in this case, *DOG* and *BROWN* – resulting in the appearance that <<Here is a brown dog>>. Because of the normal conditions under which the dog is perceived, and because the subject's mind has activated the correct concepts in response to this encounter, the conditions are fully satisfied for bringing the brown dog into the subject's awareness and for sensorily representing it without any blemish.<sup>29</sup>

In making this proposal, I hope to explain better than the standard interpretation why clause (ii) refers to the kataleptic appearance's representational character and causal history. We have seen that, in general, which features an appearance depicts will depend on the concepts deployed in generating it – on the 'seals' that are affixed. So then, we would expect that in creating a *kataleptic* appearance the subject must call upon the *right* concepts, the ones that appropriately render the sense-object and its features. This expectation is corroborated by the Stoic insistence that, in order to form a perceptual kataleptic appearance, more is needed than the normal operation of the sense-organs in non-deviant perceptual conditions: the Stoics also require the perceiver's mind (*διάνοια*) to be in working order (SE M vii 424).<sup>30</sup> Since the Stoics characterize the mind as unified (Iamblichus, SVF ii 826), with its stored concepts as its parts (Chrysippus in Galen, PHP v 3.2, v 4.9), this insistence also implicates the correct use of concepts as one element necessary for a perceptual kataleptic appearance to arise. When the concepts the perceiver's mind has activated correctly render the object she has encountered, the appearance she forms enjoys the right kind of

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and active aspects of the kataleptic appearance, respectively. The chronology of psychological events need not be inferred from the order of the participles in any given formulation of clause (ii). For versions of clause (ii) with *three* participles, see note above.

**29** Cf. the 'hybrid' account of the canonical definition, combining elements of externalism and internalism, defended recently by Nawar (2014, 16–20). See also discussion in Shogry (2018, 364–5). However, as noted above (n. 22), my view differs from Nawar's in emphasizing the Stoic insistence on the role of the perceiver's mind in generating a kataleptic appearance, namely, in activating the concepts appropriate for the object. Unlike Nawar's reconstruction, mine includes the condition and activity of the perceiver's mind as an epistemologically significant element of the causal history of the kataleptic appearance.

**30** Perhaps this insistence also explains why some Stoics nominate 'right reason' (*ὁρθὸς λόγος*) as a criterion of truth (DL vii 54). Such commitments show that it is highly misleading to describe the Stoics as 'staunch empiricists' (Stojanović 2019, 158).

link between mind and world: its representational character and causal history stand apart from any false appearance (clause (iii)).

Of course, more should be said as to which concepts count as correct or appropriate on my interpretation. And we might also wonder whether the ordinary agent will in fact possess such concepts. To better understand the dimensions of the mind-dependence of the kataleptic appearance, and also to showcase the explanatory power of my interpretation, we should now turn to one Stoic response to the skeptical indistinguishability argument.

## Skeptical Indistinguishability and the Stoic Appeal to Expertise

Recall that, with the ‘indistinguishability’ (ἀπαράλλαξία) argument, the skeptics argue that, for any putatively kataleptic appearance, there is a false appearance that differs from it in no respect (Cicero *Acad.* ii 40, 83; SE M vii 402ff.). The skeptics often formulate this claim in terms of the Stoics’ own definition of the kataleptic appearance, conceding to them that while very many appearances meet the first two clauses, *none* meets all three (SE M vii 251, 402; Cicero, *Acad.* ii 77). Consequently, they deny that the Stoics have succeeded in sketching a path to attain the epistemic security promised in κατάληψις.<sup>31</sup>

One version of the indistinguishability argument adduces cases in which the subject perceives a pair of highly similar objects, such as eggs, twins, or snakes (SE M vii 408–411; Cicero *Acad.* ii 54–57, 84–87). The challenge proceeds as follows. Suppose there are two eggs, Egg A and Egg B, and that the first of these is presented to the subject who then forms an appearance of Egg A. Since this object is perceived under ordinary conditions, the subject’s appearance of Egg A should count as kataleptic. After all, according to the Stoics, it is the norm to generate perceptual kataleptic appearances (Cicero, *Acad.* i 42), and there is nothing obviously deficient in the circumstances attending her encounter with Egg A. Next we are to suppose that, while the subject’s back is turned, Egg A is replaced with Egg B. Surely, the skeptics will argue, the subject’s appearance of Egg A differs in no way from the one she now forms of Egg B, given that the objects are so similar. But then the subject’s putatively-kataleptic appearance of Egg A could have been caused from a state of affairs *other* than that in which Egg A is present, namely, that in which Egg B is present.

<sup>31</sup> For further discussion of this Academic argument, see Nawar (2017, 153–157), Brittain (2006, xix–xxii), Perin (2005, 396–399), and Striker (1996, 51–57).

The result then generalizes. The skeptics argue that any true appearance that is ‘imprinted and sealed on the basis of what indeed is the case’ could nevertheless have been created by an alternative, false state of affairs, and so could have come from ‘what is not the case’ (cf. clause (iii)).

Now, given the reconstruction of the canonical definition I have offered above, how would the Stoics hear this generalized skeptical claim? Although many appearances are true (clause (i)), and have been imprinted on the mind from a perceptual encounter with an object, sealed with the appropriate concepts (clause (ii)), all such appearances could have been created by some state of affairs *other* than that which they represent, and thus fail clause (iii). For this reason, appearances which meet (i) and (ii) still have the potential to mislead.

Indeed, some details in Sextus’s presentation suggest that the skeptics formulate the challenge from highly similar objects so as to target the Stoic commitment to the mind’s activity in generating a kataleptic appearance. Consider how the conclusion of the challenge is described at SE M vii 408. Since it is possible for a subject to form indistinguishable appearances of a pair of eggs in certain circumstances, Sextus claims that the skeptics successfully demonstrate that kataleptic and non-kataleptic appearances are indistinguishable ‘in their impress and outline’ (κατὰ χαρακτήρα καὶ... κατὰ τύπον).<sup>32</sup> Sextus’s imagery here is clearly of a piece with the two participles in clause (ii), since ‘impress’, ‘outline’, ‘imprint’, and ‘seal’ are all elements of wax inscription (cf. DL vii 50). Now, one might be tempted to take ‘impress’ and ‘outline’ at M vii 408 as both referring to a *passive* process – i. e. to the way in which the mind has been affected by a sense-object – and so analogously with ‘imprinted’ on my construal of clause (ii). But if this is right, then Sextus would be assuming that correct concept application forms no part of the Stoic view he intends to refute with the challenge from highly similar objects. However, on purely linguistic grounds, it is more plausible to understand the ‘impress’ (χαρακτήρ) mentioned at M vii 408 as a synonym for ‘sealed’, in that the impress, like a seal, is the item affixed or attached to an underlying receptive surface. On this reading, the ‘impress’ of a kataleptic appearance refers to its active aspect, i. e. to the concepts the mind calls upon to generate it.<sup>33</sup> So understood, the passage

<sup>32</sup> SE M vii 408: ἀλλὰ γὰρ αὕτη μὲν ἢ ἀπαρραλαξία τῶν τε καταληπτικῶν καὶ τῶν ἀκαταληπτικῶν φαντασιῶν κατὰ τὸ ἐναργὲς καὶ ἔντονον ἰδίωμα παρίσταται. οὐδὲν δὲ ἦττον δείκνυται τοῖς ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀκαδημίας καὶ ἡ κατὰ χαρακτήρα καὶ ἡ κατὰ τύπον.

<sup>33</sup> A χαρακτήρ can mean either the engraver himself (LSJ s.v. χαρακτήρ A.I) or the item engraved upon a surface (LSJ s.v. χαρακτήρ A.II). Both meanings are consistent with the χαρακτήρ of an appearance being used by the Stoics to refer to the concepts that have been activated in the course of its generation. Admittedly, there is some indeterminacy in Sextus’s use of these metaphors, e. g. at M vii 251, where a χαρακτήρ is what is left by the ‘the seals on



lends support to the reconstruction sketched above, on which the skeptical challenge is designed to show that a putatively kataleptic appearance is indistinguishable from one that is not, in part because the two appearances have activated the same concepts in response to highly similar objects.<sup>34</sup>

So how do the Stoics meet this challenge? As they see things, there is no reason to concede to the skeptics that amateur perceivers possess the appropriate concepts to distinguish one egg from another: the skeptical challenge thus fails to attend to the cognitive and perceptual transformation wrought by expertise. The Stoics will claim that, in encountering Egg A, the amateur mind activates concepts that do not differentiate this object from Egg B: for both members of the pair, the amateur's concepts are no more determinate than WHITE and EGG. But this means that the amateur appearance created from an encounter with Egg A is *not* sealed on the basis of Egg A itself (κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπάρχον... ἐναπεσφραγισμένη) and for this reason is not kataleptic, as it fails to meet clause (ii). Therefore, from the Stoic perspective, rather than offering a decisive refutation, at the general level, of the reliability of the kataleptic appearance, the skeptical challenge from highly similar objects only establishes the much narrower and philosophically innocuous claim that, for some specialized objects, in some scenarios, a kataleptic appearance will not be available for an amateur perceiver.

When it comes to the expert, by contrast, the Stoics will say that she *has* developed her mind to such an extent that she can generate appearances which succeed in distinguishing the minute differences between Egg A and Egg B.<sup>35</sup>

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rings' (αἱ διὰ τῶν δακτυλίων σφραγίδες). But even here the context allows us to interpret 'seals' (σφραγίδες) as the stored mental items applied by the subject of the kataleptic appearance, in order to articulate what is delivered to her mind by the sense-organs. This is because in the same passage the subject of the kataleptic appearance is compared to a carver who has 'set their hands to all parts of the works they are completing' (SE M vii 251). Across its various formulations, then, the skeptical challenge presupposes the claim that forming a kataleptic appearance is an activity that engages the perceiver's mind and concepts. But Sextus is less precise than we might wish in the metaphors he uses to refer to this activity.

**34** So construed, this skeptical challenge bears some resemblance to Socrates's criticism in the *Theaetetus* of one version of the proposal that ἐπιστήμη is true δόξα with an account (209a1–c10). Here Socrates highlights the difficulty in formulating an account that succeeds in distinguishing highly similar individuals (e. g. two human beings) on the basis of general features that they share (e. g. having a snubbed nose and prominent eyes).

**35** Earlier, at *Acad.* ii 20, Lucullus maintains that, on the basis of their training and expertise (*exercitatione et arte*), musicians and painters receive more detailed appearances of music and painting than do amateur perceivers. I take it that the same point is assumed here, in Lucullus's response to indistinguishability (*Acad.* ii 54–58; cf. ii 85–87). In fact, the Stoic distinction between expert and non-expert appearances is attested in several sources. DL vii 51 contrasts

This is because, unlike the amateur's appearances, those of the expert deploy the appropriate concepts and so meet clause (ii). The appropriateness of these concepts consists in their ability to distinguish the object from others in the perceptual scene: in the case of the expert, the seals affixed to Egg A differ from those affixed to Egg B. Or so I will now suggest.

Consider the passage in Cicero's *Academica* where the character Lucullus responds to this brand of skeptical challenge (ii 54–58).<sup>36</sup> He begins with a well-attested thesis of Stoic metaphysics, that no two numerically distinct objects are qualitatively identical (cf. Cicero *Acad.* ii 85; Plutarch *Com. Not.* 1077c–e).<sup>37</sup> Lucullus next proposes that, for those who have attained expertise in the relevant domain, it is possible to distinguish one discrete object in that domain from another, even when they are highly similar, in virtue of the appearances the expert forms of such objects. He then illustrates this proposal as follows:

You see how the similarity of eggs to each other is proverbial? Nevertheless, we have heard that there were quite a few people on Delos, when things were going well for them there, who used to rear a great number of hens for their living. Well, when these men had inspected an egg, they could usually tell which hen had laid it. Nor does this work against us, since it is all right for us not to be able to discriminate those eggs: that doesn't make it any more reasonable to assent that this egg is that one, as if there were absolutely no difference between them (Cicero *Acad.* ii 57–58, tr. Brittain).<sup>38</sup>

On the basis of their training, the expert can form perceptual appearances capturing the difference between two discrete – but highly similar – objects within their domain of expertise.

Why might the Stoics take this view? One relevant fact will be that the Delian farmer, insofar as he is an expert in the domain of eggs, has a richer

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τεχνική and ἄτεχνος φαντασία as follows: 'a picture is seen in one way by an expert and in any way by an amateur'. Note also the distinction drawn by the early Stoic Diogenes of Babylon between 'natural' and 'knowing' perception (αὐτοφυής and ἐπιστημονικὴ αἴσθησις) in Philodemus, *On Music* iv 34.1–8. And Epictetus, *Diss.* iii 6.8 remarks on the capacity of the musical expert to hear notes that the amateur cannot (§6).

**36** For a defense of the use of Cicero's character Lucullus as a source for Stoic epistemology, despite his professed affiliation with Antiochus of Aschalon (*Acad.* ii 10), see Striker (1997, 258) and Perin (2005, 387).

**37** For discussion of this metaphysical thesis and its broader philosophical motivations, see Sedley (2018, 28–34), Nawar (2017, 120–123), and Sedley (1982, 259–265).

**38** Cicero, *Acad.* ii 57–58: *videsne ut in proverbio sit ovorum inter se similitudo: tamen hoc accepimus, Deli fuisse complures salvis rebus illis, qui gallinas alere permultas quaestus causa solerent; ii cum ovum inspexerant quae id gallina peperisset dicere solebant. Neque id est contra nos; nam nobis satis esset ova illa non internoscere; nihil enim magis adsentiri hoc illud esse quam si inter illa omnino nihil interesset.*

conceptual apparatus which his mind can rely on to generate perceptual appearances of eggs. His training has furnished him with domain-specific concepts (e. g. FRECKLED) that succeed in making salient the genuine differences between Eggs A and B. Or he may re-arrange more basic concepts in a specialized pattern (e. g. applying OBLONG to Egg A but not B).

By contrast, the amateur's appearances do not reveal such distinctions, because the amateur lacks the expert's specialized conceptual resources. So although the expert and amateur are 'imprinted' by the same sense-objects – Egg A and Egg B – their minds respond to these objects differently, by activating different sets of 'seals' (concepts), and so form appearances differing in their degree of discriminatory power. Fully spelled out, then, the Stoic appeal to expertise consists in the claim that since there is a metaphysical difference between any two numerically distinct objects, it is possible to perceptually detect this difference, provided that one has the relevant expertise and the robust set of conceptual resources that comes with it.

It is crucial to consider exactly what kind of expertise the Stoics have in mind here. Recall that, in the cases used to illustrate the Stoic appeal to expertise, our sources give no indication that the expert perceiver has acquired the total state of wisdom characteristic of the Sage.<sup>39</sup> We can infer, then, that the kind of expertise the Stoics are calling attention to here – the cognitive accomplishment that enables the Delian farmer to perceptually discriminate two highly similar eggs – is a condition that is in principle available to the vast majority of rational creatures who fall short of the Stoics' extremely demanding requirements for virtue.<sup>40</sup> The amplification of one's conceptual resources is a perfect candidate for such an accomplishment. With the right kind of instruction and experience in a given domain, any rational perceiver can expand their conceptual repertoire,

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**39** Pace Brittain (2006, xii) and Annas (1990, 199). Note that the Stoic definition of τέχνη does not require the possession of ἐπιστήμη (Galen, SVF ii 93; SE M xi 182), and so will be open to vicious and virtuous agents alike. See also Simplicius *In Cat.* viii 237.25–238.2, where the Stoics are reported to deny that τέχνη is a διάθεσις like virtue or vice (cf. DL vii 89; Arius in Stob. *Ecl.* ii 70.21–71.14). For further discussion of the definition of τέχνη, see Menn (1995, 9–11).

**40** It is not plausible to suppose that either the Delian farmer or the mother identifying her twin sons has acquired the virtue of non-precipitancy, or the global 'knowledge of when to give assent and when not' that the Sage possesses (DL vii 46). This is a much more demanding accomplishment, which the Stoics also refer to as an expertise in living (Arius in Stob. *Ecl.* ii 66.19–67.2). See discussion in Vogt (2008, 118–130). The Stoics presume, then, that the Sage possesses a different, stronger form of expertise than the one featuring in their response to the challenge from highly similar objects.

with the result that their perceptual appearances track the minute differences between highly similar objects.<sup>41</sup>

Of course, to appreciate these points, it is necessary to acknowledge the role of correct concept application – and more generally the activity of the perceiver’s mind – in the formation of a kataleptic appearance. But this will require an augmentation to the standard interpretation, along the lines I proposed above.

Consider again the standard interpretation, which accords no activity to the subject’s mind in the course of generating a kataleptic appearance: clause (ii) on this view expresses only that the mind takes on a particularly accurate imprint from the object. Admittedly this view has the resources to distinguish the physical constitution of the expert and amateur minds, and on this basis their receptive potential (cf. Galen, PHP iv 6.1–12). The tension of the πνεῦμα constituting the expert mind could be more apt to receive a detailed imprint of the sense-object than that of the amateur mind. But unless the appearance is conceived of as a psychological activity sensitive to differences in judgment and other ‘rational’ achievements, the difference in the underlying πνεῦμα of the expert and amateur minds would be unmotivated: it would fail to track any functional difference in the minds of these two subjects as they form their appearances. Here we should recall the Stoic insistence that the appearance transpires in the subject’s *mind* rather than in her sense-organs (SE M vii 232–233), and also their well-attested claim that it is not merely the beliefs of the expert and amateur that differ, but the character of their appearances as well (Cicero, *Acad.* ii 20; DL vii 51).<sup>42</sup> Taking these points on board, my proposal to amplify the standard interpretation insists that imprinting alone cannot tell the whole story as to the differential ability of expert and amateur appearances to reach out and ‘grasp’ the world. What the expert has accomplished and the

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**41** At *Acad.* ii 57, Cicero’s Lucullus adduces the case of a mother drawing on habit or custom (*consuetudo*) to perceptually discriminate her twin sons. Does this remark undermine the interpretation I have been offering? No, because we can understand this habit or custom to involve some conceptual amplification on the mother’s part – e.g. applying IRASCIBLE or STUBBORN to one of her twins but not the other – which falls short of genuine wisdom.

**42** See Vogt (2016, 148), for insightful discussion of why the Epicureans locate sense-perception in the sense-organs rather than in the mind. In part, it is to uphold their claim that sense-perception is ἄλογος, which in turn supports their thesis that all sense-perception is true (DL x 31–32). The contrast with the Stoic account of λογική φαντασία couldn’t be sharper: here the Stoics deny that all our appearances are on a par with respect to truth and representational detail, because they hold that the mind is implicated in their generation. So then, without the claim that the appearance transpires in the subject’s mind, and so is formed on the basis of some mental activity, the Stoics could not defend their distinction between expert and non-expert appearances (DL vii 51) and their view would collapse to that of the Epicureans.

amateur has not is something active and intellectual, a discernment in judgment sharpening the appearances she creates.

## Does κατάληψις Require Expertise?

Reflection on the Stoic response to the indistinguishability argument has brought to light their claim that, in order to form a kataleptic appearance, the perceiver must have a mind stocked with concepts that distinguish the object from others in the perceptual scene. Having activated such concepts, the kataleptic appearance is ‘sealed... on the basis of what indeed is the case’ (clause (ii)): the concepts match the object and succeed in differentiating it from others in the relevant scenario. This reconstruction explains why the Stoics describe kataleptic appearances as those that ‘discern expertly (τεχνικῶς) the difference present in their objects’ (SE M vii 252).<sup>43</sup> And, more generally, it takes seriously the Stoic commitment to the mind’s role in the generation of every perceptual kataleptic appearance (SE M vii 424) – a commitment the Stoics have strong philosophical reasons to uphold, insofar as they (1) deny that perceptual representation transpires in the absence of the activation of subject’s concepts, and (2) characterize the subject’s concepts as the parts of her rational mind (Chrysippus in Galen, PHP v 3.2, v 4.9). So then, because the expert surpasses the amateur in the scale of her conceptual resources, she has effectively broadened the circumstances in which a kataleptic appearance is available to her.

But how far do the Stoics take this response? Do they hold that expertise of the relevant kind is necessary to form *any* perceptual kataleptic appearance, since only experts possess a mind furnished with the correct concepts? If so, then it

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<sup>43</sup> In an earlier passage discussing clause (ii) of the canonical definition (M vii 250), Sextus reports that the Stoics include the participles ‘imprinted’ and ‘sealed’ to indicate that, in a kataleptic appearance, ‘all the sense-objects’ characteristics are represented expertly’ (πάντα τεχνικῶς τὰ ιδιώματα τῶν φανταστῶν ἀναμάττηται). Here I read φανταστῶν with Mutschmann (1914). My translation assumes that ἀναμάττεσθαι functions differently than ἐναπομάττεσθαι (the root of the ‘imprinted’ participle in clause (ii)): to say that the features of sense-objects ἀναμάττηται in a kataleptic appearance is to refer to the fact that a kataleptic appearance depicts or represents sense-objects as possessing certain features. On this understanding, the passage evinces the Stoic commitment I have been emphasizing throughout, that the passive and active aspects of the kataleptic appearance *jointly* contribute to its high quality representational character. For discussion of the difficulties concerned with translating ιδιώματα in this passage, and with its claim that a kataleptic appearance must represent *all* such ιδιώματα, see Frede (1999, 307–308), and Nawar (2017, 130–132).

would be impossible for them to defend their claim that it is the norm to achieve perceptual *κατάληψις*, since the Stoics deny that it is the norm to possess expertise across many domains in the way that Delian farmers have of eggs.

Fortunately, the Stoics can avoid this problematic consequence. Suppose that Bill has never paid much attention to classical music, much less studied it formally, but has been persuaded by his friend Jill, an accomplished baroque harpsichordist, to attend a performance of Bach. They are seated in the front row and enjoy the concert in ideal auditory conditions. If the reconstruction given above is correct, then Jill will form *kataleptic* appearances that Bill does not, e. g. <<This melodic counterpoint ends in perfect consonance>>, since she possesses a refined repertoire of musical concepts obtained through years of training. But though Bill is not a musical expert like Jill, the Stoics can hold that it is still possible for him to form *some* *kataleptic* appearances in this scenario, e. g. <<Music is coming from the stage>> or <<The performers are playing as a group>>. This is because his stock of concepts, while impoverished compared to Jill's, is advanced enough to contain such notions as MUSIC and PERFORMER, which the Stoics would classify as members of Bill's set of 'primary notions' – the concepts he has acquired naturally in the course of his development into adulthood.<sup>44</sup> Consequently, Bill can draw on this basic 'system' (*κατάστασις*) of primary notions to accurately recognize features of the perceptual scene before him.<sup>45</sup> By activating MUSIC or PERFORMER, Bill could form an appearance which correctly distinguishes what is happening on the stage from other objects in the scenario (e. g. the chair he is sitting on or the audience surrounding him). In such a case, then, there are a variety of *kataleptic* appearances the amateur perceiver can generate. Bill's ignorance of one domain does not obviously rule out the possibility of *κατάληψις* of non-specialized features in his surroundings. Concerning these non-specialized features, the Stoics could maintain that, thanks to his set of primary notions, Bill is sufficiently expert.<sup>46</sup>

## Wax Tablet Imagery in Plato's *Theaetetus*

If the interpretation I have proposed is along the right lines, then the wax tablet imagery in the canonical definition of the *kataleptic* appearance brings out both

<sup>44</sup> See n. 10 above.

<sup>45</sup> For the claim that the set of primary notions constitutes a 'system' and is classified by the Stoics as a 'common intellect' (*κοινὸς νοῦς*), see Epictetus, *Diss.* iii 6.8 and discussion in Shogry (2019, 41–2).

<sup>46</sup> I owe this formulation to an anonymous referee.

the passive and active aspects in the creation of such appearances: passive ‘imprinting’, whereby an object affects the perceiver, and active ‘sealing’, whereby the appropriate concepts are activated and applied. But is there any precedent for using wax tablet language in this way, in a philosophical context that the Stoics would have recognized as authoritative, or at least worthy of serious consideration?

I think the answer is yes, in the wax tablet model of soul (henceforth, the WTM) found in Plato’s *Theaetetus* (191b10–195b8).<sup>47</sup> Here I will argue that Socrates offers an ancestor of the Stoic distinction between passive imprinting and active sealing and deploys it to explain the possibility of false judgment (δόξα). Though Socrates argues it ultimately fails in this task (195b9–196c8), the model clearly exerts a strong influence on the formulation of Stoic doctrine.<sup>48</sup> More specifically, the Stoics will have taken interest in the WTM’s commitment to the soul’s activation of an item stored in memory to articulate a change made by an external sense-object. The Stoics would have found no awkwardness, then, in the use of wax tablet imagery to refer to the activity of the mind in the creation of our cognitive and perceptual states. And they will have been attracted to Socrates’s proposal that error is impossible when a stored mental ‘seal’ (σφραγίς) is matched correctly with perceptual stimulus.

To flesh out these connections, we should start with Socrates’s account of ‘seals’ (σφραγιδες) and their origin in activities of perception and thought.<sup>49</sup> On

<sup>47</sup> Line numbers are those of Duke et al. (1995), not Burnet (1900).

<sup>48</sup> See DL vii 45, *Anonymous Commentary on Plato’s Theaetetus* XI, and the insightful remark in A.G. Long (2013, 5), discussing the Stoic reaction to the WTM: ‘if Plato rejected a credible theory, then (the Stoics would say) that is Plato’s loss, not theirs: Plato’s decision need not debar a revival of the theory’. As mentioned above, A.A. Long (2002) and Ioppolo (1990) are the pioneering studies on the influence of the *Theaetetus* on the development of the kataleptic appearance. However, Long explicitly disclaims the interpretation I believe is correct, since he denies that the WTM contains the seeds of the Stoic claim that, in generating a kataleptic appearance, the mind applies the concepts appropriate for the object (2002, 228). This claim also does not feature in the reconstructions of Ioppolo (1990, 438–439) and Togni (2013, 168–171). In what follows, I hope to supplement Long’s excellent observations (2002: 230–231) about the role of *Theaetetus* 208c–209d in shaping the Stoic claim that the kataleptic appearance distinguishes its object from others in the perceptual scene (SE M vii 252, discussed above).

<sup>49</sup> Besides ‘seal’ (σφραγίς, 192a6), Socrates uses a variety of terms that are interchangeable in the context of the WTM: ‘outline’ (τύπος, 192a4; 194b6), ‘sign’ (σημείον, 192b3, b4; 193c1, c3, c7; 194a2, a7, d1, d4), ‘image’ (εἶδωλον, 191d10), ‘imprint’ (ἐκμαγεῖον, 194d6, e6), and ‘memory-imprint’ (μνημεῖον, 192a2, b6). Despite the subtle differences in sense, these terms must all refer to the same psychological entity posited in the WTM: a representation of *x* stored in memory, created by an act of perception or thought, which enables future recognition of *x*. Here I follow Rowett (2012, 161), Woolf (2004, 588), and Crivelli (2003, 192).

the view Socrates presents, which focuses on the case of perception (cf. 195d1–2), the sense-object makes contact with the sense-organ, and then affects the soul in such a way as to leave a seal on it, just like a signet ring, when pressed upon wax, leaves behind an image of the signet (191c8–e1). Moreover, just as wax retains these images over time, the soul is said to store in memory, for later use, the seal left behind in this episode of perceptual contact.

Socrates's next task is to explain how we come to mistaken judgments about the objects for which we have such seals.<sup>50</sup> The key move here is to distinguish between *possessing* (ἔχειν: 193b10) a seal and *attaching* it to (προσαρμόσαι: 193c4, 194a8) an occurrent object of perception (193b9–d4).<sup>51</sup> According to the general view that emerges (194b2–6), false judgment is possible in the case where the perceiver has a seal of *x* but fails to affix it to the correct perceptual input, i. e. to the input created from an actual encounter with *x*: for instance, upon seeing Theaetetus, one attaches the 'Theodorus' seal to the perceptual stimulus, resulting in the false judgment that 'here is Theodorus'. Conversely, it will be impossible for a perceiver to generate a false judgment in the case where the seal and perceptual input are matched correctly.<sup>52</sup> According to the account of epistemological success presented in the WTM, then, the good case is one where the perceptual input is categorized according to the correct seal – where 'recognition' (ἀναγνώριστος) of the object is said to occur (193c5). Socrates prefers to express this view in modal terms: it is *impossible*, he claims, to create a false judgment when the perceiver correctly matches an object with its appropriate seal (192b3–5). We can thus summarize Socrates's proposal in the WTM as follows:

**(Attach-WTM):** judgment requires the soul to attach a seal to perceptual input.

**(Match-WTM):** false judgment is impossible in the case where the perceiver correctly matches seal and perceptual input.

Socrates is not entirely clear in the WTM as to what accounts for the bad cases, those in which **(Match-WTM)** is not satisfied. He does indicate that, when the

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<sup>50</sup> Socrates has already identified knowing *x* with possessing an image of *x* (191d9–e1). In attempting to show how error is possible regarding the objects which we know, Socrates responds to the earlier argument, from knowing and not-knowing, against the possibility of false judgment (187e5–188c8; cf. 191a8–b1). See Crivelli (2003, 175–176).

<sup>51</sup> Becker (2006, 306) correctly describes this attaching as an 'Aktivität der Seele'.

<sup>52</sup> Of course, there will be other circumstances besides correctly matching seal and sense-object in which no false perceptual judgment can be created. Indeed, Socrates takes some care in elaborating all such cases (192a–c6). However, examining them here would take us too far afield. See Crivelli (2003, 181–185), Burnyeat (1990, 97), and McDowell (1973, 210–211).



object is encountered under non-ideal perceptual circumstances, such as bad lighting or long distance in the case of vision, a correct application will be more difficult (193c1–2). However, in addition to these factors *external* to the perceiver, Socrates also explains how the *internal* character of the soul will be relevant, specifically whether its constituent wax is pure, clean, and of the proper consistency (194c5–7). The purest souls are found in the wise, who succeed in distributing their seals to the correct sense-objects and so avoid forming false judgments (194d5–7). This contrasts, of course, with souls that are dirty, runny, small or excessively hard – conditions that are said to impede correct matching (194e1–195a9).<sup>53</sup>

On my reconstruction, the Stoics are deeply indebted to this model, defending a modified version of it as follows:

**(Attach-Stoics):** appearance requires the mind to attach concepts to perceptual input.

**(Match-Stoics):** false appearance is impossible in the case where the mind correctly matches concepts with perceptual input, i. e. when it attaches the concepts appropriate for the perceptual input.

Hewing closely to the imagery of the WTM, the Stoics in several texts speak of concepts as inscriptions. For instance, in one passage, the Stoics compare the human soul to a blank sheet of paper on which ‘each one of our concepts is inscribed’.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, just after he considers the content of the concept HUMAN, Cicero’s Lucullus speaks of concepts, in general, as items which are ‘engraved’ (*inprimuntur*) in the soul and stored in memory (*Acad.* ii 21–22).<sup>55</sup> It is these

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<sup>53</sup> Socrates may be suggesting that it is the degraded character of the seals themselves that accounts for a mismatch: when stored in souls of improper consistency, seals suffer degradation over time and become ‘unclear’ (ἄσαφῆ) and ‘obscure’ (ἀμυδρά) (194e5–195a2), therefore hindering their proper application. However, there is no reason to think that this explanation will generalize to every case of mismatch. For instance, in his discussion of non-ideal external conditions, Socrates leaves open the possibility that, despite having an uncompromised seal, what reaches the soul through the sense-organs (194c7: τὰ ἴοντα διὰ τῶν αἰσθήσεων) does not enable the correct application of that imprint. Thanks to the distance of the object, these perceptual encounters are too indeterminate to allow the subject to form a true judgment, even if her soul possesses an unblemished seal of the relevant sense-object. Here my reconstruction follows that of Crivelli (2003, 193–194). See Woolf (2004, 589–590) for criticism of the claim that the degradation of a seal explains cases of mismatch.

<sup>54</sup> Aëtius iv 11.1–4 = SVF ii 83: ὅταν γεννηθῆ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἔχει τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν μέρος τῆς ψυχῆς ὡς περ χάρτην εὐέργων εἰς ἀπογραφὴν· εἰς τοῦτο μίαν ἐκάστην τῶν ἐννοιῶν ἐναπογράφεται. Cf. Ps.-Galen, *Medical Definitions* xix 381: ‘A concept is a stored thought, and a thought is a rational appearance’. See Crivelli (2010, 374–375).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Cicero, *Topica* xxvii: ‘of these things [sc. that are intangible, e.g. ownership and acquisition]... there is a certain pattern sealed and impressed in the intellect’ (*quaedam*

stored representational entities which, according to the Stoics, following Socrates in the WTM, the mind activates to articulate the incoming deliverances of the sense-organs, resulting in a ‘thought’ (νόησις), i. e. a rational appearance (cf. DL vii 51).

It should be conceded, of course, that for the Stoics these stored entities (concepts) are explicitly of a generic or universal character, while in the WTM, Socrates focuses instead on representations of particulars (e. g. the seals left by Theaetetus and Theodorus).<sup>56</sup> And Socrates nowhere in the WTM envisions the possibility of the soul attaching *multiple* seals to perceptual input, whereas each Stoic rational appearance seems to activate more than a single concept (e. g. BROWN and DOG in the appearance of the brown dog). However, in sketching a role for the mind to play in making significant the deliverances of the senses, by means of attaching a representational entity stored in memory, Socrates offers the Stoics a promising psychological model for the activity involved in generating each appearance.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, when these entities are matched correctly – when the appropriate concepts are activated to articulate the character of the perceptual stimulus – the Stoics agree that error is impossible: the appearances formed in such circumstances ‘are of such a sort that they could not have come from what is not the case’ (clause (iii)). There is some reason to think, then, that the modal

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*conformatio insignita et impressa intelligentia*), which I call ‘concept’ (*notionem voco*).’ While this report is not explicitly attributed to the Stoics, I agree with Crivelli (2010, 384–386) that it gives evidence of a Stoic view. Cf. also Seneca *De Clementia* i 3.1: ‘since there are vices which imitate the virtues, they cannot be discerned unless you impress them with seals by which they are distinguished’ (*nam cum sint vitia quaedam virtutes imitantia, non possunt secerni, nisi signa, quibus dinoscantur, impresseris*).

<sup>56</sup> But cf. the later reference to the WTM at *Theaetetus* 209c5–10 and discussion in Long (2002, 230–231). Here Socrates speaks of Theaetetus’s snubness as distinct from other kinds of snubness, and claims that “once impressed it is established” (ἐνσημηνωμένην κατάθεται, 209c8) in the soul. This seems to anticipate the Stoic claim that certain seals (concepts) can be more detailed or fine-grained than others. Cf. Galen, PHP ii 5.12–13, quoted above in n. 27.

<sup>57</sup> The WTM is committed, after all, to the view that to form a true or false thought involves more than a change in the sense-organs. Recall Socrates’s claim that until ‘what comes through the sense-organs’ (194c6: τὰ ἰόντα διὰ τῶν αἰσθήσεων) receives the application of some seal or another, no truth-evaluable δόξα is formed. Here Socrates is likely presupposing the characterization of perception from the final refutation of knowledge as perception, on which perception does not access being and so cannot get at truth (186c7–10). This further cognitive accomplishment requires a distinct activity of the soul on its own. Pace Ioppolo (1990, 439–441) and Caston (forthcoming, 22), I think that the Stoics take this point on board in their account of the rational appearance. Cf. SE M vii 344–5 and discussion in Shogry 2019, 59–60. For helpful observations concerning the connections in the *Theaetetus* between the WTM and the final refutation of knowledge as perception, see Sedley (2004, 136).

force of the WTM's account of epistemological success is reflected in the Stoic definition of the kataleptic appearance.<sup>58</sup> And we can find an early expression of the Stoic appeal to expertise in Socrates's claim that the souls of the wise enjoy more success than the ignorant in matching perceptual inputs with their correct seals (194d4–6). Like Socrates in the WTM, the Stoics maintain that experts and amateur minds differ in their corporeal make-up, and that this difference affects which seals (concepts) each applies.<sup>59</sup>

In fact, this WTM-inspired account is developed in some detail in the writings of the later Stoic Epictetus, who praises correct concept application as characteristic of virtue.<sup>60</sup> Consider one of Epictetus's protreptic conversations with his students (*Diss.* ii 11), where he observes that, despite the fact that every human possesses the concepts GOOD and BAD, BEAUTIFUL and UGLY, we still often fail to 'attach' (ἐφαρμόζειν) them to the particular objects falling under them.

The explanation for this [natural inclination to use GOOD, BAD, BEAUTIFUL, UGLY] is that humans already arrive in this place having been instructed, as it were, by nature, but while starting from here we have added on our own defective thinking. – Yes, by Zeus, he says, for do I not know the beautiful and the ugly? Do I not have a concept of this? – Yes, you do – Do I not attach them to particulars? – You do attach them. – Do I then not attach them well? – Here is the entire question and here is where our defective thinking comes in. For although

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**58** We might wonder why the Stoic account pertains to appearance (φαντασία) and not δόξα as in the WTM. I think that this shift stems from the Stoic conception of δόξα as an inherently defective cognitive state (Arius in Stob., SVF iii 548). See Vogt (2012, 158–166) and Meinwald (2005) for detailed discussion. In the Stoic context, then, it is φαντασία not δόξα that admits of the kind of epistemological improvement which the WTM seeks to explain: the Stoics regard appearance as the state which under certain circumstances *cannot* be false. We should also note that the inherently defective status of δόξα motivates Socrates's later rationale at 200d–201c for rejecting any proposal identifying ἐπιστήμη with true δόξα.

**59** However, the Stoics can be seen to depart from the WTM in their focus on forms of expertise available to the non-wise agent. As I argued above (§5–6), the Stoics think that attaining expertise in the manner of the Delian farmer is a less demanding accomplishment than becoming virtuous and wise. And so, given Stoic principles, the corporeal make-up of such an expert soul should differ not only from the non-expert's but also from that of the Sage: an expert like the Delian farmer has not brought about the change in the overall condition of his soul that is virtue (cf. DL vii 89). Socrates in the WTM, however, simply contrasts wise and non-wise souls and assumes that they differ in their overall physical condition (194c5–195a9). I thank an anonymous referee for drawing this point to my attention.

**60** Furthermore, we know that Chrysippus identifies the symmetry of concepts (the parts of reason) with psychological health, and thus with virtue (PHP v 2.49, v 3.1–2, v 4.9; cf. Cicero, *Tusc. Disc.* iv 78). Perhaps this symmetry consists in applying concepts to their proper objects. For discussion of successful and unsuccessful concept application in the context of the early Stoic theory of definition, see Crivelli (2010, 387–390).

humans begin from these agreed-upon concepts, they proceed to disagree with one another because of incongruous application of them. Because indeed if they acquired in addition to the concepts the applications as well, what would prevent them from being perfect? (Epictetus, *Discourses* ii 11.6–10, tr. Oldfather modified)<sup>61</sup>

In this revealing passage, Epictetus draws a distinction between possessing concepts (ἔχειν ἐννοίας) and attaching them to particular objects (ἐφαρμόζειν τοῖς ἐπὶ μέρους) to explain the origin of persistent disagreement about value and to sketch a vision of epistemological perfection. Note first his remark that we ‘already arrive in this place having been instructed, as it were, by nature’. This surely reflects the Stoic claim that we rational creatures have acquired these concepts (more specifically, the primary notions or προλήψεις of GOOD and BAD, BEAUTIFUL and UGLY) as a result of our natural development into adulthood (DL vii 53).

Note further that in this passage and elsewhere in the *Discourses* (e. g. i 22.1–9), Epictetus uses Socrates’s metaphor of ‘attaching’ (ἐφαρμόζειν) to describe the (mis-)predication of concepts to object. His claim is that while we all possess the concept GOOD, we often err by attaching this concept to items – such as wealth, political power, health, etc. – that are not good, on Stoic theory, but instead are merely preferred. We thus suffer from ‘defective thinking’ (οἷσις).<sup>62</sup> And disagreement arises because our patterns of mis-application differ: some of us mistake wealth for a good, others political power, etc. (*Diss.* iv 1.41–46). But for those who apply concepts correctly, and thus regularly form thoughts about the world that match objects with their appropriate mental classifications, ‘what could prevent them from being perfect’?

## Conclusion

If the interpretation I have offered here is along the right lines, then Epictetus’s vision of epistemological perfection is reflected in the Stoic account of the

<sup>61</sup> *Diss* ii 11.6–10, reading the text of Schenkl (1916): τούτου δ’ αἴτιον τὸ ἦκειν ἤδη τινὰ ὑπὸ τῆς φύσεως κατὰ τὸν τόπον ὡσπερ δεδιδραγμένους, ἀφ’ ὧν ὀρμώμενοι καὶ τὴν οἴησιν προσειλήφαμεν. — Διὰ γάρ, φησὶν, οὐκ οἶδα ἐγὼ τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὸ αἰσχρὸν; οὐκ ἔχω ἔννοιαν αὐτοῦ; — Ἐχεις. — Οὐκ ἐφαρμόζω τοῖς ἐπὶ μέρους; — Ἐφαρμόζεις. — Οὐ καλῶς οὖν ἐφαρμόζω; — Ἐνταῦθα ἐστὶ τὸ ζήτημα πᾶν καὶ οἷσις ἐνταῦθα προσγίνεται. ἀφ’ ὁμολογουμένων γὰρ ὀρμώμενοι τούτων ἐπὶ τὸ ἀμφισβητούμενον προάγουσιν ὑπὸ τῆς ἀκαταλλήλου ἐφαρμογῆς. ὡς εἴ γε καὶ τοῦτο ἐστὶ πρὸς ἐκεῖνοις ἐκέκμητο, τί ἐκόλυεν αὐτοὺς εἶναι τελείους;

<sup>62</sup> It is likely that here Epictetus is referring to defective rational appearances, which may or may not go on to receive the subject’s assent. DL vii 23 records a similarly pejorative use οἷσις in Stoic epistemology but the context does not make clear whether assent is involved.

kataleptic appearance. That is because in defining such as appearances as ‘sealed... on the basis of what indeed is the case’, the Stoics hold that they are generated on the basis of the concepts appropriate for the object, those which match that object and succeed in distinguishing it from others in the scenario. I propose that it is rumination on Plato’s *Theaetetus* – specifically, on Socrates’s description in the WTM of the soul’s activity of attaching seals to perceptual input – that leads the Stoics to adopt this claim and to develop it into a subtle and intriguing response to skeptical indistinguishability.<sup>63</sup>

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