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Bodies and Their Effects: The Stoics on Causation and Incorporeals

Abstract: The Stoics offer us a very puzzling conception of causation and an equally puzzling ontology. The aim of the present paper is to show that these two elements of their system elucidate each other. The Stoic conception of causation, I contend, holds the key to understanding the ontological category of incorporeals and thus Stoic ontology as a whole, and it can in turn only be understood in the light of this connection to ontology. The thesis I defend is that the Stoic incorporeals are to be understood as effects, as effects of the causality of bodies. What is gained by this thesis? First, it explains how the seemingly heterogeneous item of ‘sayables’ (*lekta*) fits into the category of incorporeals. Second, it allows for a new interpretation of the two verbs with which the Stoics characterize the way of being of incorporeals, *huphistanai* and *huparchein*. And, third, it sheds light on the peculiar features of the Stoic conception of causation.

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The Stoics offer us a very puzzling ontology. They are corporealists, they hold that only bodies exist. At the same time, they assert that the facts and events we refer to when using language – what they call ‘sayables’ (*lekta*) – are something incorporeal. How do these two positions go together? If only bodies exist, then ‘incorporeal’ is tantamount to ‘non-existent’. But how can facts about the world be said to lack existence?

No less puzzling is the Stoic conception of causation. Causation is, for the Stoics, not a dyadic relation between a cause and an effect but is considered to involve *four* items. Two bodies, they say, are causes to each other and thereby produce as effects two incorporeal predicates. What is the reason for this intricate set-up? Why are causes and effects seen as different *kinds* of things, the former as bodies and the latter as incorporeal? And why are the two bodies said to be causes to *each other*, thus making causation a symmetrical relation?

What I want to show in this paper is that these two elements of the Stoic system, ontology and conception of causation, elucidate one another. The conception of causation reveals how we are to understand the ontological category of incorporeals and thus sheds light on Stoic ontology as a whole. And conversely,

the category of incorporeals allows us to explain the peculiar features of the conception of causation.

My paper is indebted to Émile Bréhier's study *La théorie des incorporels dans l'ancien stoïcisme* ("The Theory of Incorporeals in Early Stoicism"), which was first published in 1908 and then reedited several times thereafter, most recently in 1997, yet unfortunately never translated into English.¹ The thesis I want to defend, namely that the Stoic incorporeals are to be understood as effects of the causality of bodies, is Bréhier's.² Yet although I endorse Bréhier's thesis, I believe that his arguments for it need to be amended. I will call into question some of the considerations that he adduces in support of his interpretation and put forward others that he did not recognize.

The paper is organized into seven sections. The two opening sections are of an expository nature. The first lays out the Stoic conception of causation, and the second the ontological division of bodies and incorporeals. In the third section, I highlight the puzzle posed by this ontological division – more precisely, the puzzle arising from the inclusion of sayables in the category of incorporeals. The remaining sections propose an account of this category that solves the puzzle, an account informed by what the Stoics say about causation. In sections 4, 5, and 7, I discuss, in turn, the particular incorporeal items – sayables, time, place and void, respectively. Lastly, in the intercalated section 6, I put forward a new interpretation of the two verbs *huphistanai* and *huparchein*, which the Stoics use to characterize the way of being of incorporeals, an interpretation that constitutes an important piece of support for my account.

1 Causation

Let me begin with a compilation of short quotations that bring out the central aspects of the Stoic conception of causation. Sextus Empiricus reports that "the Stoics say that every cause is a body which becomes the cause to a body of something incorporeal".³ Stobaeus specifies what this "something incorporeal" is of which a body is the cause. Zeno of Citium, he reports, maintained that "the cause

1 Bréhier 1997. The translations of the passages I will cite are therefore my own.

2 It was Gilles Deleuze who made me aware of Bréhier's work. In the second chapter of his *Logique du sens* (1969), Deleuze cites and adopts Bréhier's interpretation of the category of incorporeals.

3 Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 9.211 (LS 55B).

is a body, while that of which it is a cause is a predicate”.⁴ We are given an example in the passage from Sextus Empiricus from which I have already cited: “For instance the scalpel, a body, becomes the cause to the flesh, a body, of the incorporeal predicate ‘being cut’.” We see in these quotations that the Stoics distinguished between being a cause *to* something and being a cause *of* something. This aspect is emphasized by Clement. He points out that “causes are not *of* each other, but there are causes *to* each other”.⁵ And a little later in the passage, using the same illustration as Sextus Empiricus, he explains that “the knife is the cause to the flesh of being cut, while the flesh is the cause to the knife of cutting”.

What we have here is a highly peculiar conception of causation. It differs from other ancient conceptions as well as from how causality came to be understood in modernity. I would like to highlight the four most striking features.

First, in the Stoic conception, cause and effect do not have the same ontological status. Causes are bodies, whereas effects are incorporeal. They thus belong to different ontological categories. In fact, they belong to *fundamentally* different categories. For the distinction between bodies and incorporeals represents the highest-order bifurcation in the ontological tree developed by the Stoics. The supreme genus and root of this first bifurcation is simply termed ‘something’ (*to ti*). Both bodies and incorporeals are ‘somethings’.⁶ We see here that causation plays a crucial role in the Stoic system: it links the two realms set apart by Stoic ontology, it relates bodies and incorporeals.

The second feature to be emphasized follows from the first. Due to the heterogeneity of cause and effect, the Stoic conception does not allow for causal chains in the usual sense, where the effect brought about by a cause is, in turn, the cause of another effect. Since cause and effect are radically different kinds of things, the latter cannot take the place of the former. The Stoics explicitly stress this point. Only bodies can have a causal impact on something else. Incorporeal predicates, the effects of bodily causes, are themselves causally inefficacious.⁷ In other words, the link that leads from cause to effect is a *cul-de-sac*.

4 Stobaeus 1.138 (LS 55A).

5 Clement, *Miscellanies* 8.9.30.1 (LS 55D).

6 See Alexander, *On Aristotle's Topics* 301,19–25 (LS 27B).

7 See Cicero, *Academica* 1.39 (LS 45A); Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 8.263 (LS 45B); Nemesius 78,7 (LS 45C); Aetius 1.11.5 (LS 55G). We find a conflicting passage in Simplicius' commentary on Aristotle's *Categories* (217,32–218,1; LS 28L). Simplicius reports that “the Stoics say that the qualities of bodies are corporeal, those of incorporeals incorporeal”, and he claims that this view “arises from the [Stoic] belief that causes are of the same essence as the things affected by them, plus their supposition of a common account of explanation for bodies and incorporeals alike”. He thus suggests that at least some incorporeals, namely incorporeal qualities, can

The third peculiarity is that, for the Stoics, causation is not a dyadic relation. It is not conceived as a simple link between two relata, a cause and an effect, but involves at least three terms: a body is cause *to* another body *of* a predicate.⁸

The fourth puzzling feature, finally, is that the Stoics hold the causal relation to be symmetrical. Bodies are causes to *each other*, Clement asserts. The knife is cause to the flesh and the flesh cause to the knife. The knife causes the predicate of the flesh (i.e., ‘being cut’), while the flesh causes the predicate of the knife (i.e.,

causally affect other incorporeals. I believe that this testimony cannot be taken at face value, given the overwhelming evidence that, for the Stoics, only bodies can be causes. In addition, it is unclear to what incorporeal qualities Simplicius is referring. As far as I can see, the claim that the Stoics posited such qualities is not corroborated by other sources. Long and Sedley (LS II 174) put forward that the truth or falsity of a sayable may be an example in point, an example of an incorporeal quality of incorporeals. That may be. Yet it would be very strange to say that truth as a quality causally affects sayables. It would be to suggest that it is the presence of such a quality that makes a sayable true, which is not how the Stoics think of these matters. (See section 6, where the Stoic conception of the truth of sayables will be presented and discussed.) Long and Sedley’s example hence does not entirely fit the picture Simplicius presents, and so his report remains a puzzle. It seems to me that Simplicius is erroneously extending the Stoic account of how bodies come to be qualified to incorporeals.

8 Susanne Bobzien (1998, 19–21; 1999, 236–242) presents a challenge to the general validity of this claim. She highlights that the Stoics distinguish between two kinds of causation: causation of change and causation of states. The interaction between the cutting knife and the cut flesh is an example of the former, whereas the existence and persistence of the knife or of the flesh as an individual object is an example of the latter. This is to say that, for the Stoics, the continued existence of a thing as a distinct entity requires a cause just as much as any change happening to it. So what is it that causes the persistence of a particular object? It is, the Stoics maintain, the portion of divine ‘breath’ (*pneuma*) that pervades the object and, thereby, through its tension, holds the object together. Now, Bobzien asserts that in such causation of states, unlike in causation of change, only one cause is involved, namely, the said portion of breath. I would like to propose an alternative description that does away with this apparent difference between the two kinds of causation. The portion of breath is not the only constituent of the object. There is also the underlying substance, the portion of matter that comes to be shaped by the divine breath. It is plausible to assume that the Stoics see the underlying matter as a causal factor in the constitution of the object, just as they describe the flesh as a causal factor in its being cut. Thus, the two kinds of causation would be brought together under one account, an account that posits the cooperation of two causes. One may object, though, that there is still no complete correspondence between the two kinds of causation. What about the third element, the incorporeal effect? Is there such an effect in the case of the constitution of an object? This is admittedly unclear. A possible candidate is the object’s surface, its spatial bounds. I will return to and elaborate on this suggestion in section 4, when dealing with the question of how surfaces and other geometrical limits fit into my account of the category of incorporeals.

‘cutting’). It thus turns out that Stoic causation is a *tetradic* relation.⁹ It involves two bodies and two predicates, two causes and two effects.¹⁰

This symmetry in the Stoic conception is most remarkable. It runs counter, it seems, to an essential element of the idea of causation, namely, directionality. When we, today, assert a causal connection between two things, we mean that the first brought about the second, and not vice versa. The causal relation is thus understood to be directional by definition. In fact, it seems to be the very paradigm of directionality. Why, then, do the Stoics conceive the causal connection between two bodies as symmetrical? This is one of the questions on which this paper sheds light. I will return to it in section 5.

Let me sum up this preliminary presentation of what the Stoics say about causes and effects and the relations between them.¹¹ If we combine the four aspects I have highlighted, we get what we may call the Stoic square of causation.

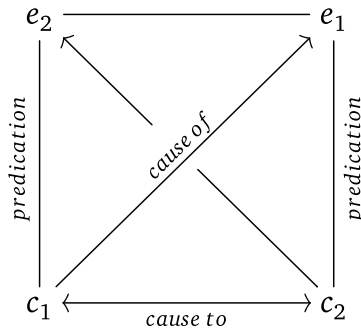


Figure 1: The Stoic square of causation

Figure 1 depicts an instance of causation as it is described by the Stoics. Two bodies, here called c_1 and c_2 , stand in the cause-to relation. That is, they are

⁹ This aspect has generally been overlooked. M. Frede (1987b, 137), S. Bobzien (1998, 19), and R. J. Hankinson (2000, 484) characterize Stoic causation as a *triadic* relation as it links two bodies and a predicate. They do not take note of the fact that the link between the two bodies is said to be symmetrical such that, in all, four relata are involved.

¹⁰ Clement notes (in the cited passage) that sometimes bodies are causes to each other of the *same* predicate, the *same* effect, for example when “the teacher and the pupil are causes to each other of the predicate ‘making progress’” or when “the merchant and the retailer are causes to each other of making a profit”. The two effects may thus appear to collapse into one.

¹¹ I do not go into the complex typology of causes developed by the Stoics – their distinction between sustaining, preliminary, antecedent, and auxiliary causes – as it is not relevant to my argument. (For a discussion of this aspect see LS 340–342, Bobzien 1999, and Hankinson 2000, 483–494.) The passages that I have cited speak about causes in general, without distinction.

causally linked to each other. Both are said to be causes. And what they are causes of – the effects – are the predicates that come to be true of the other body, respectively.

Let us apply the diagram to the example of the knife and the flesh.

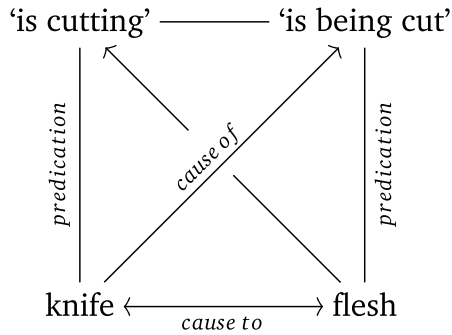


Figure 2: The Stoic square of causation, applied

What we see in figure 2 is an illustration of Clement’s words: “The knife is the cause to the flesh of being cut, while the flesh is the cause to the knife of cutting.”

2 Bodies and Incorporeals

Let me put the Stoic conception of causation aside for the moment and turn to Stoic ontology.¹² I have already mentioned that the dichotomy of bodies and incorporeals constitutes the highest-level division on the ontological map laid out by the Stoics. All things – all ‘somethings’ – fall into one or the other category.¹³

¹² I need to caution that the expression ‘Stoic ontology’ may be misleading. As Katja Vogt (2009, 143–145) has highlighted, the Stoics are not concerned with the abstract question ‘what is being?’ that had occupied Plato but saw themselves as studying nature. With reference to them, ‘ontology’ thus means the theory about the kinds of things there are, rather than an investigation of being as such.

¹³ It has been argued that some phenomena – concepts, geometrical limits (points, lines, surfaces), and fictional creatures like centaurs – are by the Stoics considered to be ‘not-somethings’, which would place them outside the said dichotomy. (See footnotes 18 and 20 for references.) The general problem with such interpretations, as Victor Caston (1999, 162–165) has pointed out, is that “if there are not-somethings, by definition they fall outside the genus *Something*. But then either there will be a superordinate genus, which includes both somethings and not-somethings, or there will not”. Neither option, Caston convincingly argues, is acceptable. Our sources

The two kinds of things are so heterogeneous that they differ in their way of being, their ontological status. Only bodies fully exist (*einai*), according to the Stoics. Incorporeals are of a lesser reality. They ‘obtain’ (*huparchein*) and/or ‘subsist’ (*huphistanai*). How these verbs are to be understood is a complicated and contentious issue that must be postponed. (It will be discussed in section 6.) For the moment, let us retain that the Stoics recognize only bodies as ‘existents’ or ‘beings’ (*onta*). Incorporeals are denied this standing. They are not existents, but merely ‘some-things’ (*tina*).

So which are these non-existing somethings? What falls under the category of incorporeals? One of them has already come up, namely predicates, the effects of the causal connections between bodies. Predicates are in fact only a sub-kind within the category of incorporeals. They are incomplete ‘sayables’ (*lekta*). The Stoic notion of sayables can, as a first approximation, be likened to the modern concept of propositions. Predicates are incomplete, then, in that they need to be joined to a subject in order to form a full-blown sayable. For instance, ‘is cutting’, when applied to the knife, yields the complete sayable ‘The knife is cutting’.

Sayables are one of the four principal kinds of incorporeals. The other three are place, time and void. These four items are sometimes called the ‘canonical’ incorporeals¹⁴ because their membership in this category is well attested and, hence, uncontroversial. They are listed as the four Stoic incorporeals by Sextus Empiricus and Plutarch¹⁵ and are one by one confirmed by other sources.¹⁶ Whether they are the *only* members of the category is a matter of dispute, however. Two other items have been proposed for the status of incorporeality, namely geometrical limits (points, lines, surfaces) and concepts like ‘man’ or ‘horse’. Victor Caston has made the case for concepts.¹⁷ He argues that they were considered non-existent somethings and, hence, incorporeals, contra Jacques Brunschwig and Long and Sedley, who classify them as ‘not-somethings’.¹⁸ And David Robert-

strongly suggest that the Stoics did posit a highest and fully comprehensive genus and that this supreme genus is *something*, not some other notion.

14 For example by Jacques Brunschwig (1994c and 2003).

15 Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 10.218 (LS 27D); Plutarch, *Against Colotes* 1116B–C (not included in LS).

16 For the incorporeality of time, see Proclus, *On Plato’s Timaeus* 271D (LS 51F). For place and void, see Stobaeus 1.161,8–26 (LS 49A), and Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 10.3–4 (LS 49B). For sayables, see Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 8.11–12 (LS 33B), and Seneca, *Letters* 117.13 (LS 33E).

17 Caston 1999, 150–171.

18 Brunschwig 1994c; LS 164; Sedley 2000, 410f. Brunschwig (2003, 224–227) has meanwhile responded to Caston. He acknowledges the cogency of Caston’s arguments but also raises a series of objections and, therefore, ultimately remains unconvinced.

son has made the case for geometrical limits.¹⁹ He argues that Chrysippus counted them as incorporeals, again contra Brunschwig, who groups them with concepts under the category of not-somethings,²⁰ and Long and Sedley, who suggest that they were considered somethings that are *neither* corporeal *nor* incorporeal.²¹

For the purposes of this paper, I will remain agnostic with respect to these disagreements and focus on the four incorporeals that are undisputed. I do so for two reasons. For one, I *want* to remain agnostic because there are strong arguments on both sides. Brunschwig emphasizes that neither concepts nor limits are on the list reported by Sextus and Plutarch,²² while Caston points out that the thesis that the Stoics introduced a category of not-somethings is problematic because it conflicts with the status of *something* as the supreme genus.²³ And Long and Sedley's suggestion that the Stoics admitted a third kind of something besides bodies and incorporeals is difficult to sustain as well because there is no direct evidence to support it.²⁴ I thus see an interpretive dilemma (or trilemma). And the second reason is that I *can* remain agnostic because the conception I want to propose is not seriously affected either way. To be sure, if Caston is right about the incorporeality of concepts and/or Robertson about the incorporeality of limits, then these items enter the purview of my subject. They do not require extensive discussion, though. As for limits, they can be accommodated in my account, as I will point out in section 4.²⁵ And as for concepts, Caston himself provides reason for disregarding them. He argues that only Zeno and Cleanthes recognized concepts as a distinct kind of entity. Chrysippus, by contrast, sought to understand concepts in terms of sayables, that is, he sought to reduce talk about generic objects like 'man' to talk about particular facts regarding particular men.²⁶ Thus, Caston maintains, "the appeal to concepts is *not* part of the 'canonical' form of Stoicism, which coalesced under Chrysippus and his followers".²⁷ I am thus licensed to leave them

¹⁹ Robertson 2004.

²⁰ Brunschwig 1994c, 96–103.

²¹ LS 165 and 301.

²² Brunschwig 2003, 225; 1994c, 96f.

²³ See footnote 13.

²⁴ Long and Sedley (LS 165) submit that the Stoics had a penchant for tripartite classifications of the form 'A, not-A, neither'. With respect to value, for instance, they classify things as good, bad, or neither good nor bad. We do not, however, have a report saying that they made such a three-fold distinction when it comes to corporeality. In fact, the passages from Sextus and Plutarch listing the four 'canonical' incorporeals suggest that the distinction between bodily and non-bodily somethings is meant to be exhaustive.

²⁵ See p. 133f.

²⁶ Caston 1999, 195–210.

²⁷ Caston 1999, 147 (emphasis original).

aside, given that the object of my investigation is Stoic philosophy in its fully developed form.²⁸

Let me return, then, to the four undisputed incorporeals – sayables, place, time and void. One of the major puzzles of Stoic philosophy is why these four items – not less and (arguably) not more – are conceived to be incorporeal. We can appreciate the puzzle if we consider that the Stoics were committed corporealists. We have already seen that they only counted bodies as beings. Corporeality is for them the criterion of existence. This stance made them very inventive in developing corporeal accounts for things that we generally take to be incorporeal, for instance, God and the soul, to cite the two most salient examples.²⁹ Why, then, did they make an exception for sayables, place, time and void?

The last-mentioned item seems to present the least difficulty. Void cannot be but incorporeal. Otherwise, it would hardly be void. Also, by admitting this one incorporeal, the Stoics do not really compromise their corporealist principles since, for them, void is not part of the cosmos proper. It is found solely outside the world. The Stoics posit a finite cosmos surrounded by infinite void. And the former is compactly made up of bodily stuff, devoid of void.³⁰ The question, then, is not why the Stoics considered void to be incorporeal, but why they admitted it at all. Why did they posit this “bleak and useless abyss” (Bréhier) beyond the world? The answer lies in their assumption of a cosmic cycle of all-consuming conflagration and subsequent reconstitution. During conflagrations, the cosmos was thought to expand. It was this periodic expansion that the external void was supposed to make possible.³¹

The incorporeality of place and time appears to be easily accommodated as well. We are accustomed to thinking of space and time as the ungraspable dimensions underlying all existence, and it stands to reason to assume that the Stoics had a similar conception in mind. The idea that bodies are located in a spatio-temporal coordinate system that is itself incorporeal does not, it seems, contradict the Stoics’ corporealist agenda. For on this conception, place and time are not taken as beings in their own right but as the *conditions* of being – the non-bodily conditions of bodily existence. Bodies are inherently extended, they exist

28 I may add that the fact that concepts do not fit easily into my account of the category of incorporeals may have been one of the reasons why Chrysippus sought to explain them away, besides the reasons pertaining to the principle of bivalence pointed out by Caston.

29 For the corporeality of God, see Eusebius, *Evangelical Preparation* 15.14.1 (LS 45G), and Diogenes Laertius 7.134 (LS 44B); for the soul, see Nemesius 78,7–79,2 (LS 45C) and 81,6–10 (LS 45D), and Stobaeus 1.367,17–22 (LS 28F).

30 See Stobaeus 1.161,8–26 (LS 49A), and Galen, *On the Differences in Pulses* 8.674,13–14 (LS 49D).

31 See Cleomedes 10,24–12,5 (LS 49G).

in space and time, they occupy a place and a period. If we assume the Stoics to have thought in such ‘dimensional’ terms, the incorporeality of place and time becomes a matter of course, since it is evident that the dimensions of bodily existence cannot themselves be conceived as bodies.

The problem with this interpretation is that it does not account for the incorporeality of the one remaining item on the list. Why are sayables, and *only* sayables, put on a par with the three ‘dimensional’ somethings? At first glance, the question may not seem particularly tricky. Again, we are dealing with a phenomenon that we are accustomed to regarding as intangible, namely language, the domain of meaning. That the Stoics considered sayables to be incorporeal may, therefore, not seem too surprising. We must not forget, however, that the Stoics were determined corporealists. Apart from the ‘dimensional’ items, they conceived *everything else* in bodily terms. And in this light, it is puzzling that they did not ‘incorporate’ sayables as well.³²

3 The Incorporeality of Sayables

Before we can try to resolve the puzzle, we need to get a clearer picture of the ‘something’ at issue. What exactly did the Stoics mean by ‘sayable’ (*lekton*)? The question is not that easy to answer because the term appears in four quite differ-

³² The puzzle has been highlighted by Long and Sedley (LS 199): “Given the Stoics’ insistence that only bodies exist, the incorporeal status of sayables and predicates has proved a difficult notion to accommodate. Why are they grouped together with place, void, and time whose incorporeality seems unproblematic?” In his discussion of the category of incorporeals in the *Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (2000, 395–402), Sedley proposes an answer to this question. He notes that time, place, and void are dimensional in character, whereas sayables are not. He still sees a commonality, however, namely that the four items “have some sort of mind-independent reality” and constitute the “objective parameters” onto which the motions of bodies and rational thoughts, respectively, are “mapped” (401). I do not think that this observation resolves the puzzle of the category of incorporeals. Why are these “objective parameters” taken to be something incorporeal, something over and above bodily reality? For void, place, and time, the answer is close at hand. The motions of bodies, Sedley argues, require a dimensional framework that is itself incorporeal. Yet what about sayables? Sedley characterizes them as “the formal structure onto which rational thoughts [...] must be mapped” (401). Why should this structure be incorporeal? Why should rational thoughts not be mapped onto the cosmos itself? Sedley reasons that a predicate that comes to be true of a body, for example ‘is cut’ in the case of the flesh, must be distinct from that body and hence incorporeal “since the flesh was there all along” (400). This argument seems questionable, however. Why should the predicate not be identified with the *now altered* body, the cut flesh?

ent contexts. For one, it occurs, as we have seen, in the Stoic conception of causation. Sayables are there presented as the effects of the causal connections between bodies. Second, it appears in the analysis of language. A sayable is said to be the signification or meaning (*semainomenon*) of an utterance. It is thereby distinguished from the utterance itself (*semainon*, the signifier) as well as from the body that the sayable is about (*tunchanon*, the name-bearer), both of which are corporeal.³³ Third, it features in a psychological context, as the content of a thought. The thought itself – or ‘rational impression’, as the Stoics term it – is again conceived to be something corporeal. It is literally an impression, an imprint in the mind, which for the Stoics is a body. Yet the propositional content of the thought is incorporeal, a sayable.³⁴ Finally, we find it in the analysis of action, as the object of an impulse.³⁵ This aspect is best explained with an example. When I strive to become a sage, the object of my striving, the Stoics hold, is not wisdom – which is a body, a particular disposition of the soul – but ‘being wise’, an incorporeal predicate.³⁶

So the question that arises is this: What connects these four uses of ‘sayable’? How is it that they refer to the same phenomenon? The second and the third uses can be brought together quite easily. A thought can be expressed by an utterance, and so the content of a thought coincides with the meaning of an utterance. As Sextus Empiricus reports, “[the Stoics say] that a rational impression is one in which the content of the impression can be exhibited in language”.³⁷ What, however, connects the sayable as the content of a thought or utterance with the sayable as the effect of causation and with the sayable as the goal of an action? What does the domain of meaning have to do with the causal interactions of bodies or with the objects of our strivings? The already cited passage from Sextus Empiricus on the sayable as the meaning of an utterance as well as a passage from Diogenes Laertius provide us with the answer. Sayables are there declared to be facts or events (*pragmata*).³⁸ This characterization allows us to see how the notion of say-

33 See Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 8.11–12 (LS 33B).

34 Cf. on this point Frede 1994, 111f.

35 See Stobaeus 2.88,2–6 (LS 33I) and 2.97,15–98,6 (LS 33J). Cf. also the distinction between *skopos* (a body) and *telos* (a predicate) at Stobaeus 2.77,16–27 (LS 63A).

36 Brunschwig has devoted an illuminating paper, “On a Stoic way of not being” (1994a), to this issue.

37 Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 8.70 (LS 33C).

38 Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 8.11–12 (LS 33B); Diogenes Laertius 7.57 (LS 33A). Long and Sedley translate *pragma* as ‘state of affairs’, which is, I believe, a potentially misleading translation since it suggests something corporeal, a configuration of bodies. I therefore follow Frede (1994) and Bréhier (1997) in using the terms ‘fact’ and ‘event’, alternatively.

ables bridges the four contexts mentioned. The effects of the causal connections between bodies are events – e.g., ‘The knife is cutting’ – and it is such an event that is signified by an utterance, reflected by a thought, or aimed at by an action.

Now that we have a clearer idea of what the Stoics mean by ‘sayable’, I can return to the question of why they conceive it as something incorporeal. No explicit answer from the Stoics has survived, so we rely on conjectures. One way to respond to the question is to argue that the Stoics were simply forced to give sayables this exceptional status in their ontology because there is no good way of conceiving the content of an utterance or thought in corporeal terms. How would such an argument go? There seem to be two ways in which the Stoics could have ‘corporealized’ the sayable, and so what needs to be shown is that these are in fact not viable options. First, the Stoics could, one may think, have conceived of sayables as bodily states of affairs, that is, as configurations of bodies in the world. It seems indeed more plausible to understand the facts produced by the causal interactions of bodies as something corporeal, as the constellation or disposition of these bodies brought about by their interactions – the cutting knife and the cut flesh, in our example. And if the Stoics wanted to see in these facts what is signified by utterances, they could still do so, it seems, regardless of their corporeality. There is, however, a decisive obstacle standing in the way of such an approach. Utterances can be false.³⁹ The meaning of an utterance can, therefore, not be equated with a worldly state of affairs, for it would then follow that false utterances are meaningless, which they obviously are not. Put differently, the content of an utterance may fail to correspond to the way things are, and so it is not possible to identify the former with the latter.⁴⁰ This way of understanding sayables in corporeal terms is thus effectively barred.

The second way is to equate the sayable with the rational impression whose content it is said to be. An utterance would thus be taken to signify a thought, a mental state, rather than a fact, a worldly state of affairs. This strategy would escape the above difficulty. Like utterances, impressions can be false. Yet this does not pose a problem to their corporeality, given that they are located in the mind. However, to identify the sayable with the corresponding thought encounters an obstacle of its own. It seems that such a conception cannot account for how we can communicate the content of our thoughts, given that, as Long and Sedley put

³⁹ I am speaking in informal terms here. For the Stoics, the bearer of truth-value is not the utterance but the sayable signified by the utterance. And it is similarly un-Stoic to speak of false impressions, as I do in the next paragraph. Again, the bearer of truth value is, for the Stoics, the associated sayable, not the impression. How the Stoics think of the truth of sayables will be explained in section 6.

⁴⁰ This point is highlighted by Long and Sedley (LS 199) and Frede (1994, 117f.).

it, “I cannot pass on to you the physical modification of my mind”.⁴¹ Thus, apparently, if the meaning of an utterance is to be something that can be shared, it must be separate from the mental state of the speaker.

I have to say that I am not convinced by this argument. When computers communicate information, they do so without the help of incorporeal meanings. The code they use is precisely a means to transfer a physical state – memory written in bits and bytes – from one machine to the other. All it takes for this to work is that the two machines are configured in such a way that they – that is, their physical states – will be affected in the right manner by the messages they are transmitting. And if we want to leave aside computers, since the Stoics did not know of such apparatuses, we may refer to non-human animals instead. Dogs, for example, communicate with one another, and they do not need incorporeal meanings either (or so we assume). They ‘understand’ each other because they are disposed, or ‘configured’, appropriately. Why should it have been impossible for the Stoics to conceive human communication along similar lines?⁴²

But let us assume, for the sake of argument, that there is an answer to this question, that it is indeed impossible to see what is meant by utterances, what is transmitted in communication, in the mental states of the speakers. The options for conceiving the sayable in corporeal terms would thus be exhausted. Neither ‘internal’ state of mind nor ‘external’ state of affairs, the sayable would *have* to be incorporeal. Would the puzzle about the Stoic category of incorporeals thus be solved? Not really. We would have an explanation for why the Stoics conceived

⁴¹ LS 201. This consideration is also put forward by Frede (1994, 112) and Brunschwig (2003, 218).

⁴² It must be noted that the idea that the Stoics were concerned with the problem of communication when devising the notion of sayables is not pure speculation. Sextus Empiricus, in the passage on the sayable as the meaning of an utterance, says, reporting Stoic doctrine, that “we apprehend [the sayable] as it subsists in accordance with our thought whereas it is not understood by those whose language is different although they hear the utterance”. This phrase has often been taken to indicate that the notion of sayables is supposed to explain how it is possible that of two speakers who hear the same utterance, one may grasp what it means and the other may not. However, as Brunschwig (2003, 217) has noted, this is not a solid rationale for the mind-independence and thus incorporeality of the sayable since “if the Greek and the barbarian, hearing the same sequence of vocal sounds, differ in that the former understands and the latter does not, there must be something different also in the psychophysical apparatus” of their minds. This objection is analogous to the one I made above. While I have suggested that the notion of sayables does not explain how communication can work, Brunschwig points out that it does not explain how communication can fail. For communication to work (or fail), there must be some concord (or discord) between the minds of the speakers. I take these considerations to be reason not to see in the passage from Sextus an answer to the question of why the Stoics devised the notion of sayables.

sayables to be incorporeal – they had no other choice in the matter. However, the category of incorporeals as a whole would still lack a proper account. It would still be a hodgepodge of very heterogeneous things – the dimensions underlying corporeal existence on the one hand and the domain of meaning on the other. It would appear to be a ‘wastebasket’ category, a collection of all those things that the Stoics were unable to conceptualize as bodies. I take it that such a solution would be unsatisfactory. It is possible, of course, that the category of incorporeals is (nothing but) a wastebasket. Yet this assumption should be accepted only as a last resort, for it would look like an admission of failure on the part of the Stoics, of the failure to carry through their corporealist agenda.⁴³ We should therefore not be satisfied too easily with explanations for every incorporeal taken by itself but strive for a single account for all of them, an account that justifies their being put together in an ontological category.

4 Surface Effects

What I want to suggest, following Bréhier, is that it is the Stoic conception of causation that provides the answer to our question. The thesis is that the Stoic incorporeals are to be understood as effects, as the effects of the causality of bodies.⁴⁴

⁴³ To be discussed in this connection is the account of the category of incorporeals that Brunschwig has proposed. Brunschwig seeks to avoid the ‘wastebasket’ hypothesis (as I call it) but in the end, I believe, corroborates it. In the paper in which he investigates the evolution of Stoic ontology (1994c), he declares early on that the purpose of the category of non-existent somethings – i.e., of incorporeals – “was *not* to forge an *ad hoc* status for items that proved difficult to classify”, for items, that is, which “could neither be granted a corporeal existence nor denied some kind of reality” (115, first emphasis mine). He argues that the category has rather been the result of a close reading of Plato’s *Sophist*. The arguments put forward in the battle between the Sons of the Earth and the Friends of the Forms led the Stoics to “distinguish two separate ontological criteria, a physical criterion of existence and a logical criterion of reality”. And this distinction “carves out an ontological niche for [non-existent somethings]” (131), for things that pass the criterion of reality (they are something) but fail the criterion of existence (they are not bodies). Now, Brunschwig’s derivation of the framework of Stoic ontology from Plato’s *Sophist* is very intriguing and plausible. A question remains, however: why did the four given items and not others come to occupy the category of non-existent somethings? The answer Brunschwig proposes is that they “were not recognized as incorporeal realities for exactly the same motives and at the same time” (2003, 213; cf. 1994c, 145). He thus suggests that the category of non-existent somethings is a category “for items that proved difficult to classify”. What he shows with his derivation is (only) that this category was not devised “*ad hoc*”.

⁴⁴ Cf. Bréhier 1997, 62.

I thus propose to make the sayable the paradigm of the category of incorporeals and understand the others on that model.

I need to clarify how the term ‘effect’ is here to be understood. It is not to be taken in the sense of a link in a causal chain, of something that is or could be the cause of something else. We have seen that there are no such effects in the Stoic conception. Rather, the term is to be taken in the way in which we use it when we speak of, say, the Doppler effect. The Stoic incorporeals are effects in the sense of being ‘mere’ effects – “surface effects”, as Deleuze, taking a cue from Bréhier, puts it.⁴⁵

Another clarification is in order, concerning the role of sayables in the conception of causation. In section 1, only predicates, which are *incomplete* sayables, were mentioned. If we look more closely, though, we do find whole sayables in the conception of causation. What completes a predicate is that it is joined to a subject. That a body is the cause of a predicate to another body thus means precisely that this body causes a complete sayable – the sayable of which the other body is the subject and the predicate the predicate.⁴⁶ This is illustrated by the square of causation: the left and the right sides of the square – a predicate belonging to a body – are complete sayables.

Sayables are thus effects of the activity of bodies. They are the facts or events produced by the interactions of the bodies that make up the world.⁴⁷ These facts or events are what is sayable, what can be said about the world. They constitute the domain of meaning. And this domain is for the Stoics something incorporeal, something over and above corporeal reality.

My thesis, I said, is that the other incorporeals are also to be understood in this way, as effects of the activity of bodies. To examine them one by one is the task of the remainder of this paper.

Before I discuss the other ‘canonical’ incorporeals, I would like to deal with the disputed candidate put on hold in section 2, geometrical limits. As already explained, I do not want to decide whether limits were counted as incorporeals by the Stoics. What I would like to point out is that they do fit into my account of this

⁴⁵ Deleuze 1969, 13–21. Cf. Bréhier 1997, 12f.

⁴⁶ I here follow Long (1971, 104–106), Long and Sedley (LS 200f.), and Brunschwig (1994b, 46) in assuming that, for the Stoics, the subject of a sayable – that is, the meaning of the subject of an utterance – is the body being spoken of and not, like the predicate, something incorporeal. For a contrary interpretation see Frede 1994, 118–128, and Barnes 2000, 207–209.

⁴⁷ This point has been confirmed by Frede (1994). He argues that the notion of sayables was originally developed in the analysis of causation and only in a second step came to be employed in the three other contexts (language, thought, action). What Bréhier and I seek to show is that the other incorporeals too are a matter of causation.

category, which, incidentally, may be taken as an argument for their incorporeality. In order to see that limits can be considered effects of causation, we need to put together two Stoic positions. The first one is the definition of limits, which is reported by Diogenes Laertius.⁴⁸ According to his report, a surface is defined by the Stoics as “the limit of a body, or that which has only length and breadth without depth”. And a line is defined as “the limit of a surface, or length without breadth”, hence, as the limit of the limit of a body – a limit to the second degree, so to speak. A point, lastly, is “the limit of a line”, hence the limit of the limit of the limit of a body. What these definitions show is that a limit is for the Stoics the limit of a particular body, of a particular object. And the existence of a particular object – this is the second position to be considered – is for them the result of the causal interaction between a portion of divine ‘breath’ (*pneuma*) and a portion of inert matter. The portion of breath, they imagine, pervades the portion of matter and holds it together, thereby producing a bounded object.⁴⁹ Limits can then be seen as effects of this kind of interaction, as effects of the constitution of particular objects and so as effects of causation.⁵⁰

So much for limits. Let me turn to the remaining undisputed incorporeals – time, place and void.

5 Time

Chrysippus defined time as “the interval of the world’s motion”.⁵¹ The term ‘interval’ suggests that time is something relative to *and thus an effect of* the world, just as a musical interval is an effect of two notes.

Things are unfortunately not that simple. The word that I – following Bréhier and Malcolm Schofield⁵² – have translated as ‘interval’, namely *diastema*, is rendered as ‘dimension’ by Long and Sedley. Both translations are possible. The fact that the Stoics use this term can therefore not be adduced to determine whether they conceived time as an underlying dimension or as a ‘superficial’ effect. Rather,

⁴⁸ Diogenes Laertius 7.135 (LS 50E).

⁴⁹ See Galen, *On Bodily Mass* 7.525,9–14 (LS 47F); Plutarch, *On Common Conceptions* 1085C–D (LS 47G); Alexander, *On Mixture* 224,14–26 (LS 47I). See also footnote 8 for a related discussion.

⁵⁰ Note that Bréhier and Deleuze appear to be sympathetic to this view since, even though they do not discuss the status of limits, they use the metaphor of surface to characterize incorporeals in general.

⁵¹ Simplicius, *On Aristotle’s Categories* 350,15–16 (LS 51A); Stobaeus 1.106,5–23 (LS 51B).

⁵² Bréhier 1997, 54; Schofield 1988, 355.

the other way around, our idea of the Stoic conception of time will determine how we understand *diastema* in this context.

What grounds do we have, then, to think that the Stoics conceived time as an effect? My argument will proceed in two steps. The first, carried out below, will be to establish that time is not a feature of the Stoic cosmos taken by itself. This fact suggests that time is a mere effect of that cosmos. To substantiate that the Stoics indeed thought of time in this way will then be the second step, to be performed in the next section.⁵³

The Stoic cosmos is at bottom timeless. This, I want to argue, follows from the doctrine of fate, from the idea of universal determinism. The Stoics maintain that every future occurrence is preordained, fated, even the most insignificant and minute of occurrences. In such an utterly determined cosmos, I contend, there is no time, understood as the trichotomy of past, present, and future. There is, to be sure, an ordered series of occurrences, but the three categories of time are not applicable to it.

The rationale for this claim is the following: if future occurrences are preordained, then they are, in a sense, *already there*. They are part of the cosmic series of occurrences that stretches from the formation of the world to its conflagration, a series that is and always has been *laid out from beginning to end*. If the whole series is thus already given, it does not lend itself to the notions of the past and the future as what has been and what is to come. Rather, it constitutes an all-embracing ‘cosmic present’ which, of course, is not really a present since it lacks a past and a future. Time as we experience it is thus not a feature of the Stoic cosmos proper.⁵⁴

So far, this line of reasoning is but speculation. What indication do we have that it reflects Stoic thinking? Did the Stoics indeed consider time not to be a feature of the cosmos itself? We do not have an explicit report to confirm it, but I can present three considerations that shall make it very plausible.

For one, my interpretation can explain – and is thus corroborated by – an otherwise puzzling aspect of the Stoic conception of time, namely, that although

⁵³ I here depart from Bréhier. On the question of time, he proceeds too quickly. He concludes from the apparently conflicting claims about the present attributed to Chrysippus – claims that in the meantime have been explained and reconciled by Schofield (1988) – that for the Stoics time is “unreal” (Bréhier 1997, 54–59). He does not make clear, though, what – if not “reality” – is its ontological status. That is, he fails to show how time fits into his account of the Stoic incorporeals as effects of the activity of bodies. In particular, he does not see the connection (expounded in section 6) that the verb *huparchein* establishes between effects and time, a connection that I consider to be crucial for making the case.

⁵⁴ To put it in the terminology that John McTaggart (1908) has introduced, there is no A or B series in the Stoic cosmos, only a C series.

time as such is considered incorporeal, particular *stretches* of time, like days or months or seasons, are said to be bodies.⁵⁵ This seems very odd. If time as a whole is incorporeal, how can *parts* of time be bodies? On my interpretation, however, the peculiarity becomes a matter of course. To understand it, we need to distinguish, as I propose, between time as the tripartition of past, present, and future, on the one hand, and the cosmic series of occurrences, on the other hand.⁵⁶ Days, months, and years are parts of this series and, hence, bodies. They are, strictly speaking, not stretches of *time* but stretches of *the cosmos*. This is why they have to be considered bodies. Time, by contrast, is the division of the series of occurrences into past, present, and future, and *that* is for the Stoics a mere effect, an incorporeal.

Second, my view is confirmed by one of the peculiar features of the Stoic conception of causation highlighted in section 1, namely, the symmetry of the causal relation between bodies.⁵⁷ This symmetry is puzzling, I noted, because we are accustomed to considering causation as inherently directional. On my interpretation, again, the peculiarity turns out to be a logical consequence. In a timeless cosmos, it does not make sense to say of two connected occurrences that the one brings about the other, given that they are both ‘present’ in the above sense and, hence, coeval. It is thus not possible to identify a direction in their relation. All that can be said is that they are connected to each other – as the Stoics indeed say.

The third consideration, finally, concerns the doctrine of eternal recurrence. The Stoics believe that the cosmic cycle from world formation to conflagration repeats itself again and again. Not only that, it is *exactly the same* world, “indiscernible down to the smallest details”, that is perpetually (re)born and destroyed.⁵⁸ And since the Stoics endorse the principle of the identity of indiscernibles, we must conclude that it is *one and the same* world that is eternally recurring. Now, on a dimensional conception of time, such a claim would be incoherent. If the successive worlds occupy different periods on a linear continuum of time, they

55 Stobaeus (1.219,24; not included in LS) reports that Chrysippus defined a month with reference to the moon, thus in corporeal terms. And Plutarch (*On Common Conceptions* 1084C–D, LS 51G) cites Chrysippus as making the argument that, if a particular stretch of time – a month, for instance – is a body, then other, longer or shorter stretches of time – a day, a week, a season, etc. – must be bodies too.

56 The A series and the C series, in McTaggart’s terms.

57 See p. 122.

58 Nemesius, 309,5–311,2 (LS 52C). I here follow Long and Sedley (LS 312f.) in assuming that this is the original Chrysippian doctrine. Alexander (*On Aristotle’s Prior Analytics* 181,25–31; LS 52F2) and Origen (*Against Celsus* 5.20; LS 52G2) report that some Stoics allowed slight differences from one world to the next. These divergent positions, Long and Sedley convincingly argue, are probably later heterodoxies.

are at least numerically distinct, even if they are exactly alike. Yet if time is conceived as a mere effect, the claim can be upheld. It is *one and the same timeless world* that is being repeated, like a film – *one and the same film* – that is replayed in a loop. The repetition is not a feature of the world itself, just as the looping is not a feature of the film. Put differently, the repetition does not take place *in* time, a linear time that underlies the world and its recurrence. Rather, the repetition is time, a circular time that is extraneous to the world.⁵⁹ This view can make sense of the claim that the world is indiscernible from one cycle to the next, and so the doctrine of external recurrence too suggests the timelessness of the Stoic cosmos.

6 *Huphistanai* and *Huparchein*

The timelessness of the Stoic cosmos does not by itself imply that time is to be understood as an effect. To show that the Stoics do think of time in this way must therefore be the second step of my argument. What I want to highlight is that the Stoics explicitly link time to the effects of causation by using the same verb for their ontological status or way of being. This is the moment to return to the issue postponed in section 2. I mentioned there that the Stoics employ two different verbs to characterize the way of being of incorporeals, namely *huphistanai* and *huparchein*. How these terms are to be understood is an integral part of the puzzle of the role of incorporeals in the Stoic system.

Huphistanai is generally translated as ‘to subsist’, in contradistinction to ‘to exist’ which renders *einai*, the verb used for bodies. It is often taken to designate the way of being of incorporeals *tout court*, without qualification.⁶⁰ This cannot be entirely correct, however. It is true, to be sure, that some of our sources suggest that ‘subsistence’ represents *the* ontological status of incorporeals. Galen, for one, reports that the Stoics “generically divide the existent and the subsistent”, by which, we may assume, he is referring to the division of bodies and incorporeals.⁶¹ And Proclus makes the connection between subsistence and incorporeality explicit, noting that the Stoics characterize the incorporeals as “inactive and non-existent and subsisting merely in thought”.⁶² But we know from other sources that for *some* incorporeals, the Stoics use a different verb, and so *huphistanai* cannot

⁵⁹ My argument here is inspired by Long and Sedley, who point out that the doctrine of eternal recurrence requires a circular conception of time (LS 312).

⁶⁰ For instance by Sedley (2000, 397) and Frede (1994, 116).

⁶¹ Galen, *On Medical Method* 10.155,1–8 (LS 27G).

⁶² Proclus, *On Plato's Timaeus* 271D (LS 51F).

be the *only* way of being of *all* incorporeals. What I am referring to is that the effects of causation are said to *huparchein*, which, following Schofield, I will render as ‘to obtain’.⁶³ Stobaeus reports that “[Zeno] says that it is impossible that the cause be present yet that of which it is the cause not obtain”.⁶⁴ *Huparchein* is thus used to designate the way of being of effects. And in another passage, now citing not Zeno but Chrysippus, Stobaeus explicitly highlights this fact with regard to predicates belonging to a body, which, as we know, *are* effects: “[P]redicates which are [actual] attributes are said to obtain, for instance, walking around obtains at me when I am walking around.”⁶⁵

I believe that these passages need to be read together with the Stoic definition of a true sayable as *ho huparchei*, “that which *huparchei*”, and the corresponding definition of a false sayable as “that which does not *huparchein*”.⁶⁶ If *huparchein* signifies the way of being of effects, this definition means that a true sayable is one that has been brought about by the causal interactions of bodies. In other words, a true sayable is linked to the world as it really is by having been caused by it.⁶⁷ To see the Stoics hold this view should not surprise us. We might expect the truth of a sayable to be defined in terms of its predicate actually being an attribute of its subject. The fact that the Stoics use the verb *huparchein* in both contexts indeed establishes this connection. And since the belonging of a predicate to a subject is due to causation, so will be the truth of a sayable. A false sayable, then, is characterized by not having the required causal history. It has not been effected by the world and, hence, does not *huparchein*.

63 Cf. Schofield 1988, 354. Unlike for *huphistanai*, no consensus exists as to the translation of *huparchein*. Long and Sedley mostly translate it as ‘to belong’, Brunschwig (2003, 216) as ‘to be the case’, Frede (1994, 117) as ‘to be present or be there’. I adopt Schofield’s proposal for the reason he puts forward, which is that ‘to obtain’ parallels ‘to subsist’ in grammatical form. I amend Long and Sedley’s translations of the sources cited in this section accordingly.

64 Stobaeus 1.138,14–139,4 (LS 55A).

65 Stobaeus, 1.106,5–23 (LS 51B). The clarifying insertion “[actual]” has been added by Long and Sedley.

66 Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 8.85–6 (LS 34D). Long and Sedley here translate *huparchein* as ‘to be’, rendering *ho huparchei* as “that which is”. They thereby conceal the connection I want to highlight, the connection between the definition of the truth of a sayable and the conception of causation.

67 Note that not all sayables have truth values. For a sayable to be either true or false, it must, first, be complete since a predicate by itself – i.e., not attributed to a subject – does not have a truth value. And, second, it must be capable of being expressed in an assertion, since questions, imperatives or oaths, though complete sayables, do not have truth values either. ‘The knife is cutting’, for example, meets these conditions. The Stoics call such complete and assertible sayables ‘*axiomata*’. See Diogenes Laertius 7.65 (LS 34A) and Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 8.74 (LS 34B), for the definition of the *axioma* and Bobzien 2003, 85–88, for instructive commentary.

Now, if *huparchein* means the way of being of effects, what about *huphistanai*? Since *huphistanai* is not the only verb used for incorporeals, it cannot be taken to designate their ontological status in general but must have a more specific meaning. What could this more specific meaning be? I would like to propose the following answer: *Huphistanai* signifies the way of being of *noematic* things, the ontological status of *objects of thought*. In other words, I contend that by ‘subsistence’ the Stoics mean ‘subsistence in thought’. There is, I must admit, no incontrovertible evidence for this view, but we do have a couple of pointers. Proclus uses the phrase “subsisting merely in thought”, by which he may want to indicate how the verb ‘to subsist’ is to be understood. Sextus Empiricus similarly speaks of subsistence as “subsistence for the mind”.⁶⁸ And when both Sextus and Diogenes Laertius report that the Stoics define sayables as “what subsists in accordance with a rational impression”, the definition concerns sayables *qua* objects of thought, and so the fact that ‘to subsist’ is used in this context lends support to my suggestion.⁶⁹

The preceding paragraphs can be summed up by the following thesis: the Stoics use the verbs *huphistanai* and *huparchein* to distinguish two ways of being of incorporeals. *True* sayables are effects of causation and therefore said to obtain. They can *also* come to subsist, namely when they become objects of thought. They *do not have to* subsist, however, since they do not necessarily become such objects. Sayables are effected by the causal connections between bodies, whether or not there is someone to think or talk about them.⁷⁰ *False* sayables, on the other hand, *only* subsist since they are to be found only in thought, as figments of the imagination. They are not effects of the corporeal cosmos, they have no being apart from being thought or talked about, and so they do not obtain. Subsistence is thus a status that *can* pertain to *all* incorporeals. (This, by the way, may be the reason why Galen and Proclus take it to be their ontological status *tout court*.) Only *certain kinds* of incorporeals, however, obtain.⁷¹

68 Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 1.17 (LS 27C).

69 Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 8.70 (LS 33C); Diogenes Laertius 7.63 (LS 33F).

70 This point is highlighted by Frede (1994, 110): “[T]he Stoics think that what gets said has some status independently of its actually being said, that it is somehow there to be said, whether or not it actually is said.” See also Brunschwig 2003, 218, and Sedley 2000, 401. Long (1971, 97f.) holds the opposite view, claiming that “there is no evidence to show that *lekta*, as distinct from the speaker and his reference, persist outside acts of thought and communication”. The passages cited at the beginning of section 1 clearly falsify this claim, I believe.

71 For this account I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer who raised valid objections to the view I held previously. Working through these objections led me to the account I here propose.

What I need to show is that this interpretation is borne out by the other relevant sources. The verb *huparchein* is not only applied to effects/sayables. We also find it in the Stoic analysis of time. The present is said to obtain, in contradistinction to the past and the future, which (merely) subsist. The most important source here is the passage from Stobaeus from which I have cited above, and which I now need to quote in full:

[Chrysippus] says that only the present obtains; the past and the future subsist, but obtain in no way, just as only predicates which are [actual] attributes are said to obtain, for instance, walking around obtains at me when I am walking around, but it does not obtain when I am lying down or sitting.⁷²

The first thing to highlight about this passage is that *huparchein* is explicitly contrasted with *huphistanai*. The former designates the ontological status of the present, whereas the latter characterizes the past and the future.⁷³ The general presupposition of my thesis is thus corroborated. It is made clear that the two verbs are not used indiscriminately. They convey an ontological distinction, they signify different ways of being.

The particular interpretation I propose is put on a stronger footing as well. My thesis makes sense of Chrysippus' assertion about the different ways of being of the three parts of time. The past and the future are said *not* to obtain because they subsist only in thought – in our recollection or anticipation, respectively. The present, by contrast, is mind-independent and therefore *does* obtain. Note that, according to my account, the present *may also* subsist, in addition to obtaining. The passage does not say as much, but it does not exclude it either.

My interpretation is substantiated by Stobaeus' report also in another respect. Based on my thesis as to the meaning of *huphistanai*, I claimed above that this term applies to false sayables, given that they are objects of thought. Stobaeus' testimony provides support for this claim and, hence, for my understanding of *huphistanai*. The present is said to obtain just as predicates that are actual attributes obtain. It is thereby suggested, albeit not made explicit, that predicates that are *not* actual attributes subsist just as the past and the future subsist. And the expression "predicates that are not actual attributes" is just another way of talking about false sayables: a sayable is false if its predicate is not in fact an attribute of its subject. Thus, Stobaeus' report gives us reason to believe that false sayables were considered to subsist.

⁷² Stobaeus, 1.106,5–23 (LS 51B).

⁷³ Stobaeus' testimony on this point is confirmed by Plutarch, *On Common Conceptions* 1081C–1082A (LS 51C).

I have noted at the beginning of the section that with my account I depart from the prevailing understanding of *huphistanai*. What I propose for *huparchein* is equally uncommon. This term has been the source of much contention. It has been interpreted in a striking variety of ways. Pierre Hadot put forward the thesis I have defended, namely, that *huparchein* means “the presence of an event or process, the actuality of an effect that results from a cause”, and thus a way of being peculiar to incorporeals.⁷⁴ Victor Goldschmidt, criticizing Hadot, argued that the term applied to both incorporeals and bodies and simply meant ‘to exist’.⁷⁵ Long, finally, maintained that it had a double meaning, that it indeed meant ‘to exist’ when applied to bodies but ‘to be the case’ when applied to an incorporeal sayable.⁷⁶

My agreement with Hadot does not go all the way. The thesis just cited leads him to the conclusion that *huparchein* represents *the* way of being of incorporeals.⁷⁷ He thus overlooks that some of them – false sayables, the past and the future – are explicitly said *not* to *huparchein*. As for Goldschmidt and Long, their views must appear rather strange, given what I have said thus far. How can they take *huparchein* to pertain to bodies if, in the contexts that I have listed, it is clearly only used for incorporeals (effects, sayables, time)?

What motivates Goldschmidt and Long is that *huparchein* occurs in one more context that I have not yet mentioned, a context in which the verb indeed seems to be applied to something corporeal and that thus might be adduced as a counterexample to my interpretation. I am referring to the Stoic conception of cognitive (*cataleptic*) impressions. By this term, the Stoics denote impressions that cannot possibly be false. That is, cognitive impressions are impressions that can be recognized to be true because of their intrinsic qualities – they are, as we would say today, self-evident. The claim that there are such impressions is central to Stoic epistemology. According to Sextus Empiricus, as translated by Long and Sedley, the Stoics define a cognitive impression as “one which arises from what is and

⁷⁴ Hadot 1969, 126.

⁷⁵ Goldschmidt 1972, esp. 335f.

⁷⁶ Long 1971, 89–94. Long’s interpretation is endorsed by Andreas Graeser (1971, 303). Long assumes *huparchein* to be ambiguous because it will otherwise introduce an additional ontological status besides existence and subsistence, which he seeks to avoid. He states that, when applied to a sayable, *huparchein* “indicates its truth-value, not its ontological status”. I would like to reply that for a sayable – a fact or event – its truth-value is its ontological status. The obtaining of a true sayable must be distinguished both from the material existence of a body and the merely mental subsistence of a false sayable. In addition, I think that Schofield (1988, 352) is right to criticize Long’s interpretation for making the Stoics seem “unscrupulous or confused”. It would be “just bad philosophy”, Schofield notes, to use a crucial term in two different senses.

⁷⁷ Hadot 1969, 126.

is stamped and impressed exactly in accordance with what is, of such a kind as could not arise from what is not”.⁷⁸ ‘What is’ here renders *to huparchon*, that is, ‘that which *huparchei*’. This phrase is generally taken to stand for a body or configuration of bodies (i.e., a worldly state of affairs), for how else could the impression be said to arise from it? This is why Long and Sedley translate it as ‘what is’.

I want to contend that this translation and the view on which it is based are mistaken. In the definition of cognitive impressions, I maintain, *huparchein* means the same as in the other contexts in which it appears, namely, the way of being of true sayables, of actual events. The expression *to huparchon*, ‘that which *huparchei*’, then stands for a true sayable, not for a corporeal state of affairs.⁷⁹ So, on this reading, a cognitive impression is defined by its provenance from and accordance with a true sayable. I here find an ally in Frede, who, in his paper on cognitive impressions as well as in his presentation of Stoic epistemology in the *Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, has defended this view.⁸⁰ Frede’s remarks can be summarized in the following four points: First, the thrust of the definition of cognitive impressions is to frame them as necessarily true, and for the Stoics truth pertains to sayables. It thus makes perfect sense that *to huparchon* should refer to a true sayable. Second, what Long and Sedley translate as ‘arises from’, *he apo*, literally means ‘is from’, which need not have the causal connotation suggested by their translation. Third, and in line with the second point, Frede highlights the fact that the definition does not say that cognitive impressions are impressed *by to huparchon* but *in accordance with it*. This too casts doubt on the view that what is asserted here is a causal connection. Finally, he cites passages in Cicero and Sextus Empiricus that imply that *to huparchon* indeed stands for a true sayable. (He admits, though, that in Sextus we also find contrary evidence.) Frede thus makes a convincing case to the effect that the definition of cognitive impressions does not constitute a counterexample to my interpretation of *huparchein*.

Having put forward and defended my understanding of *huphistanai* and *huparchein*, I may finally turn to the point that motivated this discussion. What is

⁷⁸ Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 7.247–252 (LS 40E).

⁷⁹ We have already encountered the phrase ‘that which *huparchei*’, namely – precisely – in the definition of a true sayable. There, however, the phrase translates *ho huparchei*, not *to huparchon*. (See p. 138.) It may thus seem that, by way of translation, I am creating a correspondence that does not exist in the sources. Note, though, that Long and Sedley too translate the two expressions in (almost) identical terms (‘that which is’ and ‘what is’, respectively). Long and Sedley thus suggest that the two expressions are to be taken as equivalent. I agree with them on this point, yet disagree about how *huparchein* is to be understood and translated.

⁸⁰ Frede 1987a, 164f.; 2000, 302–304.

striking about the passage from Stobaeus cited above is that time is linked to sayables. The present obtains *just as* actual predicates obtain. It is thus compared to the effects of causation. In fact, we must understand the words ‘just as’ in a stricter sense, namely, as indicating that the present *is* an effect. This is the thesis put forward by Schofield, to whose seminal paper on the Stoic conception of the present I here want to defer. Schofield shows that *huparchein* “as applied to a time is not merely analogous to its application to a predicate, but parasitic upon it. For some time to obtain or be the case is for there to be some predicate which obtains or is the case of a subject”.⁸¹ Time is thus for the Stoics an aspect of the effectuation of sayables – facts or events – by the corporeal cosmos. The present consists of the facts that obtain, whereas the past and the future consist of the facts that we remember to have obtained or anticipate to obtain and that thus subsist only in thought.

In sum, the picture I propose is the following: the corporeal cosmos effects sayables. These sayables are *present* events, *true* sayables. They can be perceived, reflected and communicated by the mind. Yet the mind also has the peculiar power to imagine events that are not present – to remember past events, to anticipate future events, as well as to make things up completely. That is, it is able to generate false sayables, sayables whose predicate is not actually – i.e., presently – an attribute of its subject. It is evident that true sayables and false ones, thus conceived as actual versus imaginary events, do not have the same kind of being. The former belong (primarily) to the world, whereas the latter reside only in the mind. With the two verbs *huparchein* and *huphistanai*, the Stoics recognized this distinction.

Before I can proceed to the discussion of place and void, I need to address an apparent inconsistency in my account. The general thesis I seek to defend in this paper is that the Stoic incorporeals are effects of causation. And in the present section, I have argued that *huparchein* means the way of being of such effects. Yet I have also acknowledged that not all incorporeals do *huparchein*. Some only subsist in thought. The general thesis is thus contradicted. I, therefore, need to qualify it somewhat. I want to suggest that there is an order of precedence between the incorporeals that obtain (true sayables, the present) and those that merely subsist (false sayables, the past and the future). The former inspire, so to speak, the mind to generate the latter. It is because there are true sayables that we can come up with false ones; it is because there is a present that we can imagine the past and the future. In other words, the domain of meaning effected by the bodily cosmos, the domain of incorporeal facts and events, has this peculiarity that it can be ex-

⁸¹ Schofield 1988, 358.

tended by the mind beyond its original bounds. Only true sayables and the present are then effects of causation directly. False sayables and the past and the future are so only indirectly.

7 Place and Void

I have shown how sayables and time are to be understood as effects of the activity of bodies. What remains to be discussed are place and void.

The incorporeality of place nicely fits into my account. Place is defined by the Stoics as “what is occupied by an existent” – i.e., by a body – whereas void is defined as “what can be occupied by an existent”.⁸² The idea conveyed by these definitions is that a body makes a place by occupying void. The body’s place is thus an effect of it.

Let me give a little illustration. In the middle of the ocean (which is to represent the void), there are no places (i.e., definite locations), only water in all directions, as far as the eye can see. No part of the water can be distinguished from any other. Yet once there is a body floating in the water, there is a place, a place that defines the location of that body and that can be used to define the locations of other bodies. It is in this sense that place is for the Stoics an effect of the activity of bodies.

That the incorporeality of place fits into my account so easily has a flipside, however. The quick success on this front comes at a high cost, namely, that it is the more difficult to accommodate the incorporeality of void. In fact, it is, I have to admit, not difficult but impossible. That a body produces its place by occupying void implies that the latter is prior to that body and hence cannot be an effect of it. We may also put this point in terms of the world at large: The infinite void surrounding the cosmos cannot be an effect of that cosmos. It thus appears that the Stoics indeed conceived void in a dimensional way, as the dimension – or, more precisely, set of dimensions – underlying bodily existence, as the ungraspable emptiness that comes to be filled by bodies.

How does Bréhier deal with this problem for his and my interpretation? He acknowledges that void represents an “entirely special” case among the Stoic incorporeals since it exists independently of the bodily cosmos. He then goes on to argue that the admission of this peculiar incorporeal has “fatal consequences” for the Stoic system:

⁸² Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 10.3–4 (LS 49B); Stobaeus 1.161,8–26 (LS 49A).

If one says that [the void] is necessary for the expansion of the divine fire [during conflagration] to be possible, one introduces into the world potentiality and indeterminacy. The void will be the condition for the world to actualize its potentials. [...] [T]he world will become relative to the void.⁸³

These implications, Bréhier points out, are incompatible with the world's proclaimed completeness and self-sufficiency. He perceives in the Stoics' "rather enigmatic" distinction between 'the whole' (*to holon*, i.e., the world) and 'the all' (*to pan*, i.e., the world plus the external void) an acknowledgment of the uneasy supplementary status of void, an indication that the latter is indeed to be seen as an exception.⁸⁴ And it is this inconsistency, he claims, that "led in the Middle Stoa to the abandonment (Panaetius) or at least restriction (Posidonius) of the theories of the void and of the conflagration, which, as we have seen, are linked".⁸⁵ The upshot of Bréhier's discussion of why the (early) Stoics posited an infinite void outside the world is thus that they shouldn't have.⁸⁶

I believe that Bréhier's analysis is plausible. To be sure, to blame an inconsistency in one's interpretation on the philosopher(s) whom one is interpreting is – again – a solution that can be accepted only as a last resort. Yet like Bréhier, I see no other option.

83 Bréhier 1997, 49.

84 Bréhier 1997, 50. Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 9.332 (LS 44A).

85 Bréhier 1997, 51. As far as I can see, the evidential basis for this claim is rather weak. Bréhier himself does not provide any references to support it. As for Panaetius, the only relevant source of which I am aware is a passage from Philo (*On the Indestructibility of the World* 76–7 (LS 46P)) reporting that "Boethus of Sidon and Panaetius [...] gave up the conflagrations and regenerations and deserted to the holier doctrine of the entire world's indestructibility". Philo does not say that Boethus and Panaetius also abandoned the doctrine of void surrounding the cosmos. Maybe Bréhier's remark that this doctrine is linked to the theory of periodic conflagrations is intended to suggest that we should *infer* that much from Philo's testimony. As for Posidonius, there is an uncorroborated and hence often dismissed passage from Aetius claiming that Posidonius dissented from the earlier Stoics by maintaining that the outer void is not infinite but just large enough to house the expanding cosmos during conflagrations. (Keimpe Algra (1993) has given this passage an extensive discussion, arguing for its trustworthiness.)

86 We know today that the Stoics would not even have had to give up the idea of conflagration. Albert Einstein has shown with his general theory of relativity that it is possible to conceive an expanding finite universe without assuming an infinite outside. The Stoics could not see this possibility because they were limited by the Euclidian conception of space as axiomatically flat.

8 Conclusion

I have myself not delivered what I called for at the end of section 3, to wit, an account that unifies the Stoic category of incorporeals, that reveals each of the four items to be incorporeal for the same reason and in the same sense. Have we made any progress, then, over the interpretation that I rejected in that section? There, the sayable was an outlier. Now void is an outlier. So why prefer my account over the other one?

As an answer to this question, I can only present the considerations that I have put forward in this paper. My account brings together the ontology of the Stoics and their conception of causation. By showing these two elements to be interconnected, it makes them both less enigmatic. Also, it provides a consistent interpretation of *huphistanai* and *huparchein*. Lastly, it offers an elegant solution to two other puzzles of Stoic philosophy, namely that stretches of time are considered bodies and that the world is said to be indistinguishable in its innumerable incarnations. In other words, my account consolidates the Stoic system. In addition, I believe that Bréhier is right that there is some indication that the Stoics indeed considered void to be an outlier, whereas there is no indication that they had a problem with the incorporeality of sayables. In short, I contend that my account offers a more compelling picture overall.⁸⁷

LS *The Hellenistic Philosophers*. Eds. A. A. Long/D. Sedley. Vol. 1: *Translations of the Principal Sources, with Philosophical Commentary*. Vol. 2: *Greek and Latin Texts with Notes and Bibliography*. Cambridge 1987. The sources are cited by section number and letter (e.g., “LS 55B”), while the commentary is cited by page number. If no volume number is given, references are to the first volume.

⁸⁷ I thank Tad Brennan, Richard Kraut, Kyla Ebels-Duggan, John Wynne, Ryan Cook and Katja Vogt, who was one of the reviewers for the *Archiv*, as well as the second reviewer, who remains anonymous, for their comments on previous versions of the paper. Without their critique and encouragement, this project would not have come to fruition. I am especially grateful to John Wynne for also serving as respondent when it came to questions about the translation of the original Greek sources. Lastly, I would like to thank the organizers of the 2010 Ancient Philosophy Graduate Student Conference at Princeton University for inviting me to present the project, and my audience on this occasion for their stimulating questions.

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