

## Stoic Epistemology

The aim of the following questions is twofold: to guide the reading of the passages, and to get you thinking about the passages. The questions with an asterisk are more difficult. For credit, you write down your answers to a selection of them. Keep your answers as succinct as possible. (However, it is possible to choose only one or two questions and expand the answer a little further.)

- 39A 1 How would you characterise an impression (*φαντασία*)?  
 39B 2 What is the difference between impressions, imagination and figments?  
 39F 3\* Explain what Chrysippus thinks is the problem with the signet ring analogy.  
 4 How should we understand the idea that an impression ‘reveals itself and its cause’?  
 39E 5 What is the point about the ‘sheet of paper ready for writing upon (*ὡσπερ χάρτην εὐέργον εἰς ἀπογραφὴν*)’?  
 6\* What are ‘preconceptions’ (*prolēpsis, προλήψεις*)?  
 40B 7 How are ‘cognitive impressions’ characterised?  
 40C 8\* What is their function?  
 40E  
 40D 9 What is ‘the one controversial issue’ that lasted until Cicero’s times?  
 10\* How does the issue arise?  
 41A 11 Explain Zeno’s gesture.  
 41B 12 With a view to cognitive impressions, explain what it is for such impressions to leave out ‘nothing capable of confronting it’ (3).  
 41 13\* Can we know anything, according to the Stoics?  
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*Background Information.* (a) The analogy with printing is pervasive; the very term ‘impression’ indicates this. In 39F, a ‘conception’ is defined as a stored thought, and we can understand this literally: the Greek term for conception is *ennoia* (*ἐννοια*), which means ‘in-minded’ as it were. (b) A cognitive impression, or cataleptic impressions, *phantasiai kataplēptikai* (*φαντασία καταληπτικά*) could also be called ‘apprehensive appearance’, for it is a grasp of things just as they appear to us. Note too that an apprehension is a cognition that comes to us like an immediate insight; it is self-revealing, so to speak. This is what may be meant by the image of an impression that ‘seizes us by the hair’, and hence ‘pulls us to assent’ in 40K. (c) One of the key passages is 40E, where Sextus lays out the necessary conditions for the truth of an impression. (d) In 41G, the ‘wise man’, *ho sophos* (*ὁ σόφος*) or sage, is described as someone who never errs, and thus assents only to cognitive impressions. This suggests that only the wise knows. It is not clear whether such an ideal cogniser has ever existed or is only an ideal. But insofar as the Stoics stress that (moral) progress and education is possible (more of this later), it seems possible too that knowledge *could* be had by everyone.

