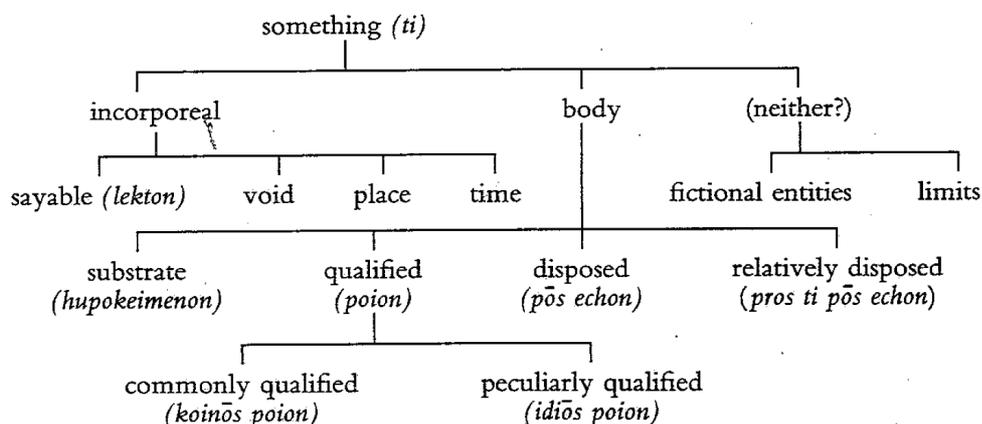


Stoic Ontology

1. What there is

Here is the useful overview from Long & Sedley.¹ Everything is something:



Something. This is the highest ontological genus: to be something (τί, *ti*) is to be some particular thing. Notably, this excludes Platonic Forms, or universals: they are not-somethings (οὐτίνα, *outina*), and thus ontological outcasts. The Stoics anticipate Locke's theory of 'abstract' ideas, which is a sort of conceptualism about universals. Through experience, 'preconceptions' (πρόληψεις, *prolēpseis*) arise that express general notions ('common notions'), on which knowledge depends.

Body. Only bodies (σώματα, *sōmata*) have being, or exist. Slogan: to exist is to have causal powers. Plato in the *Sophist* (247d–e): “Now, I say that what has some power to make something else into something, or to suffer the slightest, even once, this has real being. For I define being as nothing but power (οὐκ ἄλλο τι πλὴν δύναμις).” The Stoic conception of existence is thus dynamic. Matter as such is passive, but bodies are not, since they are also infused by *logos*, which is active.

Plato's 'Gigantomachia'.

“Visitor. It seems that there's something like the battle of gods and giants among them, because of their dispute with each other over being.

Theaetetus. How?

Visitor. One group drags everything down to earth from the heavenly region of the invisible, actually clutching rocks and trees with their hands. When they take hold of all these things they insist that only what offers tangible contact is, since they define being as the same as body. And if any of the others say that something without a body is, they absolutely despise him and won't listen to him any more.

Theaetetus. These are frightening men you're talking about. I've met quite a lot of them already.

Visitor. Therefore the people on the other side of the debate defend their position very cautiously, from somewhere up out of sight. They insist violently

¹ Long, A. A. & Sedley, D. N. (1987). *The Hellenistic Philosophers, Vol. 1* (p. 163). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

that true being is certainly non-bodily forms that can be thought about. They take the bodies of the other group, and also what they call the truth, and they break them up verbally into little bits and call them a process of coming-to-be instead of being. There's a never-ending battle going on constantly between them on this issue."²

Incorporeals. These do not exist, but subsist (*ὑφείσταναι*, *hyphestanai*); yet they are real (*ὑπάρχειν*, *hyparchein*). We can think of them as conditions 'without which the interaction of bodies in the world would neither be analysable nor intelligible'.³ (i) A *place* is a portion of space occupied by, and coextensive with, at least one body at a time. Place is a maximally occupied spatial region. If place were a body, motion would be impossible: for motion happens when a body empties a place and occupies another. Place is thus what remains, yet makes movement possible. (ii) *Void* is unoccupied, but occupiable, space. The Stoic world is a plenum surrounded by the infinite void ('all' = 'kosmos' + void). (iii) Like place and void, *time* has mind-independent reality as an objective dimension through which bodies pass: it is the 'interval of the world's motion' (Stobaeus, LS51D). (iv) More on *lekta* next week.

2. The Four Genera, or 'Stoic Categories'

The four genera are ways of thinking about *existent* objects, i.e. individual bodies. They loosely resemble Aristotle's categories (hence 'categories'), yet they are neither taxonomic nor exclusive, more like ontological aspects that each body combines. Hence Plutarch: the Stoics 'make each of us four' (LS28A6).

Object or substrate.

A dog as merely an object, something 'out there', a discrete portion of matter: a substance (*οὐσία*, *ousia*). As object, a dog is merely the potential bearer of qualities (a 'bare particular', perhaps).

Disposed.

A dog as a further differentiated qualified thing: as running, barking, brave (modes, perhaps).

Qualified.

A dog as an object with certain qualities: bad breath, soft fur, dotted; can be qualified commonly as 'dog' or 'furry', or peculiarly as 'Fido' (properties, perhaps).

Relatively disposed.

A dog as an object in relation to other objects: as owned by Jack, Rex' father, winner at Crufts (mind-dependent qualities, such as sweet, perhaps).

Qualities are *corporeal*. For if they were not, they could not cause any of the object's actions, and they could not *make* it a thing of a certain kind or the very thing that something is. Qualities are portions of *pneuma* (*πνεῦμα*) or breath. *Pneuma* endows all things with unity and cohesion, some also with vital properties, and some with a soul. More on this in the fifth meeting.

2 Plato, *Sophist* 246a–b. From J. M. Cooper (Ed.), *Plato, Complete Works* (1997). Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing (pp. 267–8).

3 Brunschwig, J. (2003). Stoic Metaphysics. In B. Inwood (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (pp. 206–32). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (p. 219).

