

PRESENTATION AND ASSENT: A PHYSICAL AND COGNITIVE PROBLEM IN EARLY STOICISM*

The Stoic theory of knowledge was founded by Zeno on a perceptual and crudely materialistic base, but subsequently developed into an elaborate theory involving *λεκτά* which has proved difficult to reconstruct. The evolution of the school, influenced not only by internal differences but also by interaction with the Platonic Academy, certainly contributed to this development. Hence any adequate reconstruction of the Stoic theory of knowledge must take account of the differences among the positions of the different representatives of the school with respect to the criticism put forward by the Academics. I propose here to clarify Zeno's position, showing how Arcesilaus' criticism helped to expose certain lacunae and thus to bring about changes in doctrine on the part both of Zeno himself and of his immediate successors.

I

In the first part I shall deal with Zeno's theory of knowledge, emphasising its close connection with physics and its total opposition to Platonic idealism. In this connection I shall examine Arcesilaus' arguments against the Zenonian concept of *κατάληψις*, comparing them with certain theories elaborated by Plato in the *Theaetetus* against the view of Protagoras.

Zeno set out from common sense, and from the conviction that the senses, if they are whole and intact, lead to absolutely certain knowledge of the outside world. Presentation (*φαντασία*) is the means which enables us to recognize external objects. Zeno conceived a presentation as an impression in the soul.¹ A cognitive presentation is free from error because it is 'stamped and reproduced and impressed from something which is, exactly as that thing is' ('ex eo quod esset sicut esset impressum et signatum et effectum').² It is infallible because it is an imprint of the external object in the soul, which is itself like a wax tablet. If the soul is like a block of wax and objects make their imprint on it, there is no room for error.

Various passages show that this was Zeno's conception of the commanding-faculty, though not his definition. The anonymous *Theaetetus* commentator says of the Stoics: 'for they compare the commanding-faculty to mouldable wax of a nature such that it can take every impression.'³ (That the reference is to Zeno's doctrine is clear from the citation of Aristotle, which follows.) Indeed, the idea that the commanding-faculty has the properties of wax is implicit in Zeno's definition of presentation as *τύπωσις*.⁴ According to Cleanthes Zeno had followed Heraclitus in defining the soul

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¹ SE *M* vii 236, 230 (*SVF* I 58), in which the definition is explicitly attributed to Zeno; cf. also DL vii 46, 50; Cic. *Luc.* 18, 77; SE *M* vii 248, 400.

² Cic. *Luc.* 77 (*SVF* I 59).

³ Cf. Anon. in *Plat. Theat.*, xi 27–31 (ed. H. Diels, W. Schubart, p. 9). I follow the text kindly given to me by F. Decleva Caizzi and D. Sedley.

⁴ SE *M* vii 373 (*SVF* II 56), *εἰ γὰρ κηροῦ τρόπον ἡ ψυχὴ φανταστικῶς πάσχουσα*. DL vii 45 (*SVF* II 53), *τὴν δὲ φαντασία εἶναι τύπων ἐν ψυχῇ, τοῦ ὀνόματος οἰκείως μετενηγεγμένον ἀπὸ τῶν τύπων τῶν ἐν τῷ κηρῷ ὑπὸ τοῦ δακτυλίου γινομένων*.

as a αἰσθητικὴ ἀναθυμίασις:⁵ 'He calls it perceptive because of the fact that in its main part it is susceptible to being impressed by the outside world through the sensory organs and it receives the impressions.' A passage in Plutarch, although not mentioning Zeno, confirms that the soul, understood as a vaporous exhalation, is, according to the Stoics, capable of receiving impressions.⁶ Plutarch observes that if the soul is an exhalation it is difficult for it to receive the impressions because of its fineness, and impossible for it to retain them. The physical aspect of the presentation does not lie in the metaphor of the impression on the soul as one in a wax tablet, since the soul is not really a block of wax but an exhalation,⁷ but rather in the fact that Zeno ascribes to it certain of the physical properties of wax. In the same way the effect of the presentation on it is similar to that produced by the seal of a ring. Even Cleanthes, when he explains his master's doctrine, tends to stress the aspect of imprint in presentation, when he states that the impression is determined according to eminence and depression as signet-rings make an impression on wax. This leaves no room for doubt regarding the physical contact which establishes itself between the external object and the commanding-faculty through the mediation of the senses.⁸ Presentation for Zeno is, in fact, almost a blow from the outside.⁹

Although Chrysippus modifies the definition of presentation from τύπωσις to ἐτεροίωσις, he still maintains Zeno's idea that presentation is the result of a physical impact on the material soul. It is for this reason that he compared the commanding-faculty to air: 'For just as the air, when many people are speaking simultaneously, receives many and different blows and at once undergoes many alterations too, so the commanding-faculty by receiving a variety of images will experience something analogous to this.'¹⁰ The object then, through the mediation of the senses, physically produces a real impact on the sensory organs and via the pneuma impresses a mark on the soul.¹¹

We do not trust every presentation, but only those which have a characteristic aspect ('quae propriam habent declarationem earum rerum quae viderentur').¹²

⁵ Ar. Did. *ap.* Euseb. *PE* xv 20, 2 (*SVF* I 141): Ζήνων τὴν ψυχὴν λέγει αἰσθητικὴν ἀναθυμίασιν [Thus Wellman followed by Diels and Arnim: αἰσθησὶν ἢ ἀναθυμίασιν codd.], καθάπερ Ἡρακλείτος. βουλόμενος γὰρ ἐμφανίσαι ὅτι αἱ ψυχαὶ ἀναθυμιώμεναι νοεραὶ αἰεὶ γίνονται, εἰκασεν αὐτὰς τοῖς ποταμοῖς. The text does not allow us to be sure whether the quotation ἀναθυμιώμεναι – γίνονται should be attributed to Heraclitus or to Zeno. The opinions of scholars on this point differ; for possible corrections of the text, see M. Conche, *Héraclite. Fragments* (Paris, 1986), pp. 452–4, which, however, does not include the one proposed by N. Festa, *I frammenti degli Stoici antichi*, II (Bari, 1935), pp. 119–20. It seems to me, however, that a comparison with the Plutarch passage (see note 6) supports the attribution to Zeno. This opinion, albeit for other reasons, is shared by J. Barnes, 'Robinson's Heraclitus', *Apeiron* 13 (1988), 102–3. Indeed Plutarch objects that the exhalation should always be new, and, therefore, not able to retain the imprints, *καὶνὴν αἰεὶ ποιεῖ τὴν ἀναθυμίασιν*. This would confirm the reading *νοεραὶ* proposed by J. D. Meerwaldt, 'Cleanthes' I, *Mnemosyne* 4 (1951), 40–69, p. 54, instead of *νοεραὶ* in the Arius Didymus passage.

⁶ *Comm. not.* 1084f–1085a.

⁷ See also DL vii 157 (*SVF* I 135).

⁸ See SE M vii 228, 400 (*SVF* I 484).

⁹ Cf. Cic. *Varro* 40: 'de sensibus...quos iunctos esse censuit e quadam quasi impulsione oblata extrinsecus.'

¹⁰ SE M vii 231; cf. DL vii 50.

¹¹ Cf. Cic. *de fato* 43: 'sic visum obiectum imprimet illud quidem et quasi signabit in animo suam speciem.' This confirms that Chrysippus is defending Zeno's doctrine, as the argument in *de fato* 40 also suggests; on this subject, cf. my 'Le cause antecedenti in Cicerone *De fato* 40', in *Matter and Metaphysics*, ed. J. Barnes, M. Mignucci (Naples, 1989), 399–424.

¹² Cic. *Varro* 41 (*SVF* I 60). Cf. SE M vii 232–5, in which the Stoics clearly distinguish between an affection such as an itching hand, or a scratch in the hand, and a presentation.

Zeno uses the special term *φαντασίαι καταληπτικαί* for these presentations which have the power of revealing the external object. A cognitive presentation 'is that which arises from what is and is stamped and impressed exactly in accordance with what is'.¹³ A cognitive presentation which, coming from what is, has the power of revealing it because it faithfully carries all its characteristics, is therefore discerned just by itself because of its self-evidence and effectiveness.¹⁴ This presentation is *καταληπτόν*, capable of being grasped, *comprehendibile*, in Cicero's translation. It would seem then, that Zeno had not conceived presentation as active, but rather as passive. In fact, Cicero, who explicitly poses the problem of the translation of the Greek term *καταληπτόν*, gives it a passive sense.¹⁵ This, however, does not mean that we do not grasp the external object but only the presentation, because it is, as we have seen, in a physical sense literally an imprint of the external object in the soul. 'So too some impressors touch, as it were, and make contact with the commanding-faculty to make their printing in it.'¹⁶

It is possible then, to say that a presentation is, in a certain sense, passive, because its cause is the external object which, by impressing its mark on the soul, determines it. But in another sense it is active because it implies an operation of the mind, being a *νόησις*, a thought process.¹⁷

It is however necessary to clarify in what sense we can speak of passiveness of a presentation. If by 'passiveness' we mean the fact that when faced with an external object, it is inevitable for the subject to get an impression and be affected by it, then presentation is no doubt passive.¹⁸ If instead we mean that presentation depends entirely on what produces it, then this does not exactly reflect the Stoic position. The adjective *καταληπτικός* was in fact first introduced by Zeno, in order to distinguish that presentation which was capable of grasping and reproducing the characteristics of the external object with absolute accuracy.¹⁹ Thus presentation, if it is the result of mental activity, cannot be reduced to a mere affection. It is, however, passive in its relationship with assent.²⁰ For when Zeno distinguished the various cognitive phases in a temporal sequence – presentation, assent, cognition, science – in his comparison

¹³ DL vii 46 (*SVF* II 53); cf. Cic. *Luc.* 77 (*SVF* I 59): 'ex eo quod esset sicut esset impressum et signatum et effectum.'

¹⁴ Cic. *Varro* 41: 'id autem visum cum ipsum per se cerneretur.' The meaning of Zeno's statement is made clear by SE *M* vii 257: 'This presentation being self-evident and striking (*ἐναργής οὕσα καὶ πληκτική*), all but seizes us by the hair, they say, and pulls us to assent, needing nothing else to achieve this effect or to establish its difference from other presentations.' The passage refers to the younger Stoics, but since the definition of the cognitive presentation given at 247 is that of Zeno and at 253 it is said that older Stoics (*ἀρχαιοτέροι*) invoked it as criterion of truth, we could reasonably assume that all the Stoics shared, on this subject, Zeno's view.

¹⁵ A. Bonhoeffer, *Epictet und die Stoa* (Stuttgart, 1890), p. 163, believes that if *καταληπτόν* has to be given a passive sense 'unter visum aber nicht sowohl die Vorstellung, als vielmehr das Vorgestellte Object selbst zu verstehen.'

¹⁶ SE *M* vii 409 (*SVF* II 85).

¹⁷ DL vii 51: *ἐτι αἱ μὲν εἰσι λογικαί, αἱ δὲ ἄλογοι. λογικαὶ μὲν αἱ τῶν λογικῶν ζώων. ... αἱ μὲν οὖν λογικαὶ νοήσεις εἰσίν.*

¹⁸ Cf. SE *M* viii 397 (*SVF* II 91); see also Arcesilaus in Plut. *Col.* 1122b–d, which refers to Zeno's position.

¹⁹ Cf. Cic. *Luc.* 145; Numen, *ap.* Euseb. *PE* xiv 6, 13. Moreover the ambiguity of Zeno's conception of presentation is to be found even in the adjective *καταληπτικός*, which in Greek can be both active and passive in sense; on this subject, much discussed by critics, see E. Bréhier, *Chrysippe et l'ancien Stoïcisme*² (Paris, 1951), pp. 88ff; F. H. Sandbach, 'Phantasia Katalēptike', in *Problems in Stoicism*, ed. A. A. Long (London, 1971), 9–21, p. 10.

²⁰ Cf. M. Frede, 'Stoics and Skeptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions', in *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. M. Burnyeat (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1983), 65–93, p. 68.

of knowledge, with the progressive closing of the hand, he was emphasising the passiveness of presentation with respect to assent:²¹ the approval or non-approval of the presentation depends on assent, which is a voluntary movement of the soul.²²

The ambiguity of the Zenonian conception of presentation is in fact stressed by Zeno's opponents, who object that if presentation is an activity, it is no different from other modifications (ἐτεροιώσεις) of the commanding-faculty, such as impulse, cognition and assent.²³ It is precisely in order to distinguish it from other mental acts that Chrysippus and the younger Stoics will be forced to specify that presentation is a ἐτεροίωσις of the commanding-faculty κατὰ πείσιν.²⁴ When the soul recognizes a presentation as true by giving its assent to it, we have cognition or κατάληψις. All men are able to recognize the outside world 'for nature has given the sensory faculty and the presentation which arises thereby as our light, as it were, for the recognition of truth'.²⁵ It is for this reason that cognition, which is assent to a cognitive presentation, is common to all men and is a criterion of truth:²⁶ it is founded on the truthfulness of the cognitive presentation, which faithfully reproduces all the characteristics of the existing object.

Apart from cognition, science (ἐπιστήμη) also has its foundation in cognitive presentation. Science is a firm cognition which does not allow itself to be changed by any kind of reasoning: it is a property that only belongs to the wise man.²⁷ The difference between cognition and science does not lie in the fact that they have different objects, but rather in the stability with which science grasps the object. The comparison of the cognitive process with a hand, gradually closing itself into a fist which is then tightly and forcefully clasped by the other hand, indicates the greater firmness with which science possesses its object compared with cognition. Assent is strong in both cases but in science it represents a possession which cannot be lost.

The assent given to the cognitive presentation is firm as well, because it is founded on presentations of simple sensory objects, which are at the basis of all conceptions, notions and prenotions.²⁸ Indeed the origin of our knowledge, even our intellectual knowledge, lies in the senses.²⁹ All psychological states and processes are corporeal

²¹ Cf. Cic. *Luc.* 145 (*SVF* I 66).

²² Cic. *Varro* 40 (*SVF* I 60): 'sed ad haec quae visa sunt et quasi accepta sensibus, assensionem adiungit animorum, quam esse volt in nobis positam et voluntariam.'

²³ Cf. *SE M* VII 237. The Stoics' opponents use τύπωσις and ἐτεροιώσις indifferently to indicate the presentation, showing that there was no difference for them between Zeno's position and Chrysippus' interpretation (see 232). In fact, that this was in part legitimate, is confirmed by the definition of the cognitive presentation given by Zeno and never abandoned by the later Stoics, in which the characteristics of the presentation as an imprint are emphasized.

²⁴ Cf. *SE M* VII 239.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 259. Both Cic. *Varro* 42, and Aristo's polemic against the Academics in *DL* VII 163 (*SVF* I 346) might be adduced to confirm that this was Zeno's position. Moreover the Epicureans also accuse the Academics of *ablepsia*; on this subject, see my *Opinione e scienza. Il dibattito tra Stoici e Accademici nel terzo e nel secondo secolo a. C.* (Naples, 1986), pp. 187–9.

²⁶ Cf. *SE M* VII 152.

²⁷ Different interpretations and different translations have been given of the expression ἀμετάπτωτος ὑπὸ λόγου in the definition of knowledge, depending whether 'reason', 'argument', or 'reasoning' is used to represent λόγος. I prefer 'argument', because it allows us to distinguish the κατάληψις from the ἐπιστήμη. For while reason represents the qualifying element in both (even in cognition the assent must be a strong assent if it is to be criterion of truth), unchangeability by arguments is peculiar to that knowledge which only the wise man possesses; see my review of A. A. Long, D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers, Elenchos* 10 (1989), 231–46, pp. 239–41.

²⁸ Cf. *DL* VII 53 (*SVF* II 87); *Sen. ep.* 120, 4, 5, 8; *SE M* IX 393–5; XI 250–1; VIII 58–60; III 40–2.

²⁹ *Aet. plac.* IV 11 (*SVF* II 83).

according to the Stoics, including virtue and vice. Correspondingly all the characteristics of objects, all their properties including goodness, are corporeal and hence perceivable.

For this reason the cognitive presentation, which is a criterion of truth, will normally be *αἰσθητική* as well as *λογική*. 'Some sensory presentations arise from what is and are accompanied by yielding and assent ... It is by perception [...] that we get cognition of white and black, rough and smooth,³⁰ but it is by reason that we get cognition of conclusions reached through demonstration, such as the gods' existence and their providence.'³¹ Through reason then we get cognition of notions, but this does not mean that they can be acquired without experience. Indeed 'every *νόησις* occurs either owing to sensation or not apart from sensation [...] and in general it is impossible to find in conception anything which one does not possess as known by experience.'³² Therefore if it is true that cognition of notions occurs through reason, it is equally true that there are sensory presentations at the foundation of these notions.³³ There is a precise correspondence between our senses and external objects, because nature has provided us with them so that we may understand it. In this sense *κατάληψις*, which is founded on the senses, is able to grasp everything leaving out nothing capable of confronting it.³⁴ However, in man, sensory presentations are also rational and, as such, they are thoughts.³⁵ Therefore, the cognitive presentation, being a *νόησις*, involves an operation of the mind.

The self-evidence and effectiveness of the cognitive presentation prompt assent, a kind of approval or yielding. It is possible to say that assent is voluntary and at the same time inevitable. The soul yields to an evident and striking presentation just as a scale pan necessarily goes down when weights are laid on it.³⁶ Zeno, therefore, conceives assent as a necessary concomitant of cognitive presentation, because in a healthy commanding-faculty it is natural to yield to those presentations 'which have the peculiar power of revealing their objects'.³⁷ A presentation is not an interpretation of reality, but rather a faithful translation of it. The expressions *ἐναπομεμαγμένη καὶ ἐναπесφραγισμένη*, used by Zeno to distinguish the cognitive presentation, help to convey the mechanical process of which it consists. The definition of a presentation must be understood in the same way, almost as a blow from the outside. Nevertheless assent is a voluntary act, because for Zeno it was an axiom both of his theory of knowledge and of his ethics that assent is in man's power.³⁸ From a physical point of view assent to a *καταληπτική φαντασία* consists of an immediate response to the movement which the imprint brings about in the commanding-faculty. It is therefore possible to explain what assent is from a physical point of view, in as much as, like presentation, it is a corporeal psychological process. But it is much more difficult to explain the relation from a cognitive point of view. Both presentation and assent are

³⁰ DL vii 51 (*SVF* II 83).

³¹ Ib. 52 (*SVF* II 84).

³² Cf. SE *M* viii 56–8.

³³ Ib. xi 250.

³⁴ Cic. *Varro* 42: 'quia nihil quod cadere in eam posset relinqueret quodque natura quasi normam scientiae et principium sui dedisset.'

³⁵ DL vii 51: *λογικαὶ μὲν αἱ τῶν λογικῶν ζώων, ἄλογοι δὲ τῶν ἀλόγων.*

³⁶ The metaphor is present in Cic. *Luc.* 38, where Zeno is not explicitly quoted, but Arcesilaus' polemical argument in Plut. *Col.* 1122c, τὸ δ' ὀρμητικὸν – γεύσεων γινωμένην, attests the Zenonian origin of the comparison. In fact Zeno frequently made use of the scales and weights comparison, cf. Epict. i 17, 10 (*SVF* I 48); Stob. ii 22, 12 (*SVF* I 49).

³⁷ Cic. *Varro* 41.

³⁸ Cf. Cic. *Varro* 40 and *de fato* 39–43, where Chrysippus answers an objection put forward by opponents against the Stoic claim, probably Zeno's, that assent is in man's power.

corporeal psychological processes. And assent is the recognition of the truthfulness of the presentation. But is it possible to recognize the truthfulness of the presentation if it consists of a physical state of the soul?

The passage of Sextus Empiricus (*M* vii 151–7) which reports Arcesilaus' criticism of Zeno's theory of knowledge, brings out this particular problem. The second of his three arguments is as follows: cognition is non-existent even by the definition which Zeno himself gives of it, that is, 'assent to a cognitive presentation', because assent cannot be given to a presentation, but rather to a proposition. As I shall try to show, this argument is of Platonic origin. The reason for the borrowing does not lie in Arcesilaus' secretly upholding a Platonic epistemology – as was alleged against him by a hostile part of the ancient tradition³⁹ –, but rather in the fact that Zeno took up the view of perception as awareness of the external object against which Plato had argued in the *Theaetetus*. Since Zeno did not separate psychological processes from psychophysical ones, he did not distinguish between perceiving something with the senses and getting to know something with the mind. Plato had brilliantly refuted the claim of αἴσθησις to be knowledge in the *Theaetetus*, and this is the reason why his arguments there can usefully be applied against the Stoics.⁴⁰

Let us add that Zeno himself, in defining presentation as τύπωσις, was recalling one of the models of opinion illustrated in the *Theaetetus* (191c ff.) as the linking of a present image to the imprint of a past image on the soul, which is itself compared to a wax tablet. This model is rejected there (195d), on the ground that it cannot account for purely intellectual errors of judgement. However if it is referred to things which are perceived at the present moment, things which do not involve a memory process, it is adequate, as we shall see shortly. Plato had in fact argued that in this case error is impossible (192a–b). Zeno too, had concentrated his attention on the fact that a presentation, in order to be reliable, had to spring from a currently existing object, ἀπὸ τοῦ ὑπάρχοντος, and had to possess, as its own properties, all the characteristics of the object, κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπάρχον ἐναπεφραγισμένη καὶ ἐναπομεμαγμένη. And since he believed that the origin of all knowledge lay in sense perception, from which subsequently the conceptions (ἐννοιαί) of things were elaborated, he found the *Theaetetus*' wax tablet model suitable for making the cognitive presentation as sure and as certain as possible. If, as seems probable, Zeno knew the *Theaetetus*, he knew Plato's refutation of the model of knowledge as an imprint in the soul, but he could have thought he had overcome it because of his different conception of the soul.⁴¹ For whereas Plato had established a distinct dualism between soul and body, between senses and reason, creating a rigid separation between the faculties of the soul, for Zeno there is no dualism between αἴσθησις and λόγος, because all psychological processes are empirically derived physical modifications of the commanding-faculty. This does not mean, however, that Zeno conceived the activity of the mind in

³⁹ On this subject, cf. my *Opinione e scienza* (n. 25 above), pp. 34ff.

⁴⁰ Cf. Anon. in *Theaet.* II 52–III 15, which treats the first part of the *Theaetetus* as if it were a refutation of Stoic epistemology.

⁴¹ At *Theaet.* 209c6–7 Socrates expresses the view that whoever makes a judgement about Theaetetus has to possess an imprinted memory trace of Theaetetus' distinguishing marks. This could be taken as Plato's upholding of the wax tablet model of knowledge. But, firstly, Plato has already rejected that model of knowledge, because it cannot account for mathematical errors; and, secondly, at 208b12–e6 Plato is not suggesting that a true judgement concerning Theaetetus amounts to a knowledge, because, as J. McDowell, *Plato, Theaetetus* (Oxford, 1973), p. 256, points out, 'any judgement concerning a particular thing requires that its maker have a thought, and hence the ability to produce a form of words, which distinguish that thing from everything else'.

exclusively mechanical terms, because the mind, which is identified with the *διάνοια*, is the centre of all psychological processes and is responsible for every sensory and cognitive function.

What Zeno particularly wanted to obtain was that the presentation should reproduce faithfully all the characteristics of the external object. Although his comparison of presentations to impressions in wax, understood literally, later drew the objection from Chrysippus that, like wax, the soul could then not hold many different, successive impressions, Zeno could be thought to forestall this objection by adding to the wax image the identification of the soul with an exhalation. Moreover, we must not forget that Plato, in the *Theaetetus* (191c-e) had stated that memory consists of the imprints left in the wax tablet by past perceptions. It is therefore possible that Zeno, taking up again from the *Theaetetus* the view of presentation as an imprint, had not seriously considered the objection that many successive imprints end up cancelling the previous ones, thus eliminating memory, since this had not been a problem for Plato either.⁴² In any case the Platonic wax image lends itself to Zeno's physical conception according to which sense perceptions were conceived in terms of touch. Of course Zeno did not believe that every presentation was reliable, but only those having a characteristic aspect which enabled them to reveal their own object. In this way Zeno adopted from the *Theaetetus* the arguments which ensured the certainty and infallibility of sensation, and which prevented any possibility of error in perception. It is true that in the *Theaetetus* they are imprints left in the soul by past images into which present perceptions need to fit, in order that it be possible to say that we know. But Plato, in setting out examples in which false belief is impossible, had shown that it was sufficient for an accurate existing imprint to be coupled with the corresponding present perception to avoid any error. It is impossible 'to think that something one knows and perceives, having the memory-trace in correct order, is something [*sc. else*] one knows'.⁴³ In this case it is impossible that anyone should judge something false. Adapting this Platonic example, Zeno could have thought that it is impossible to doubt the truthfulness of the perception if it faithfully reproduces the characteristics of the object impressing them directly onto the soul at the present moment. Indeed if objects are as they are perceived, error is possible only in exceptional cases in which the conditions for truth cannot be guaranteed. This, however, does not throw doubt on the general reliability of perception.

Arcesilaus shows the effectiveness of the Platonic arguments by using them against Zeno's claim, which is founded on sense perception but does not take into sufficient account the objections raised by Plato against this theory.

In fact in the *Theaetetus* Plato had not fought against the claim that perception is infallible. Although perception is continually changing and is applied to objects which are continually moving, it does not stop being perfectly adequate to grasp its object at any instant. From this point of view it is not deceitful, even if it can be nothing more than a silent meeting between the subject and the external object (182a-b). Its limit lies in the fact that it is not able to reach awareness of its object, because it remains below the cognitive threshold.⁴⁴

Theaetetus 184-7 is particularly significant on this point. Perception cannot identify

⁴² Chrysippus will not maintain the definition of presentation as an imprint, because it does not allow either memory or the *τέχναι* to take place; cf. *SE M* vii 373, and J. Mansfeld, 'Intuitionism and Formalism: Zeno's Definition of Geometry in a Fragment of L. Calvenus Taurus', *Phronesis* 28 (1983), 59-74, pp. 67ff.

⁴³ 192b6-7 (trans. McDowell).

⁴⁴ Cf. G. Fine, 'Plato on Perception: A Reply to Professor Turnbull', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Suppl. Vol. 1988, pp. 15-28.

its object because no sense is able to reach being. This means that no sense has the possibility of expressing judgements on its object. Sense perception is not adequate to distinguish that this particular object is red, because in order to be aware of the colour of this object the activity of the mind, thinking by itself, is necessary. To perceive red simply means being affected by the colour red.⁴⁵ If perceiving an object means also passing a judgement on it, it must be possible to identify it as this or that thing. But perception is not capable of expressing itself with propositional content. It does not satisfy the necessary, though not sufficient, condition for knowledge that it identify its own object as being something.⁴⁶ In short, perception and judgement belong to two different psychological stages, one which is characteristic of the senses, and the other of the mind. Even if we admit that perception is infallible, it is still incapable of conceptualizing its object and it thus remains below the most elementary cognitive level. Perception cannot use the verb 'to be', even in its broadest sense, neither specifically existential nor specifically predicative.⁴⁷ Since perception cannot reach being, it cannot reach truth either, and it therefore cannot be knowledge.

Arcesilaus' criticism follows much the same line as Plato's. Zeno defined cognition as assent to a cognitive presentation. But assent – Arcesilaus objects – does not occur in relation to a presentation, but in relation to an *ἄξιωμα*. Arcesilaus' criticism would seem to make sense if Zeno, to whom the criticism is addressed, had claimed that the proper object of assent is not the *ἄξιωμα* but the presentation itself. Now, as we have seen, for Zeno a cognitive presentation is a *τύπωσις* of the object in the soul. Assent is the recognition of the truth of the presentation, and hence of the truth of the impression. Arcesilaus points out that if the cognitive presentation is intended in a physical sense as an impression in the soul, assent, in as much as it is recognition of the truth, cannot recognize the truth of a *τύπωσις*, that is, of a mere affection of the soul. Only a proposition can be recognized as true, and only to it can the attributes of true and false belong. In short, if assent is reason which recognizes the presentation as true, the content of the presentation must, first of all, be expressed in an articulate form, that is as a proposition: *τῶν γὰρ ἀξιωματῶν εἰσὶν αἱ συγκαταθέσεις*.

Arcesilaus' criticism is very acute. It expresses his reservations about the recognition of the external truth which, since it requires a propositional content, cannot be obtained through a bare Zenonian *φαντασία*. It also shakes the foundations of the Stoic theory of knowledge. If we admit that a presentation must have at least some minimal propositional content, what remains unexplained is the causal aspect of perception, given the emphasis placed on body by the Stoics as the only thing able to act and to be acted upon. Either presentation is an affection of the soul, a *τύπωσις*, and assent in as much as it is a judgement of reason cannot recognize it as true, or it is a proposition, in which case, being a *λεκτόν*, it has no power to prompt assent. It would seem then, according to Arcesilaus' criticism, that Zeno had conceived

⁴⁵ M. Burnyeat, 'Plato on the Grammar of Perceiving', *CQ* 26 (1976), 29–51, p. 36, observes: 'take away judgement and all that is left to perception is to be an unarticulated encounter with sensible things.'

⁴⁶ Cf. G. Fine, art. cit. (n. 44).

⁴⁷ That the Greeks found it difficult to distinguish these two senses of the verb 'to be' has been pointed out by many critics, including C. Kahn, 'Why Existence does not Emerge as a Distinct Concept in Greek Philosophy', *AGP* 58 (1976), 323–34; J. Cooper, 'Plato on Sense Perception and Knowledge (*Theaet.* 184–6)', *Phronesis* 15 (1970), 123–46, pp. 123–4, Burnyeat, art. cit. (n. 45), p. 45, excludes that *οὐσία* could ever have the meaning of existence in this section, because 'no defence is offered of the idea that knowledge, let alone truth, presupposes a grasp of being in the specific sense of existence, reality or essence.' Nevertheless I believe that Plato ascribes to 'being' the existential meaning as well, when he prevents sense perception from formulating any type of judgement and from expressing itself in an articulate content.

presentation without stressing its propositional content, that is without worrying about its semantic structure.⁴⁸

II

In this second part I shall discuss the relationship between presentation and assent in the Stoic doctrine. As Arcesilaus' criticism has illustrated, the Stoics need to reply to the problem of the duality of assent, understood on the one hand as a dynamic movement towards another body, the presentation, and on the other as the recognition of the truth of a proposition, that is of an *ἀσώματον*. I shall then examine the evidence which may suggest that assent has the *ἀξίωμα* as its proper object, emphasising some of the difficulties involved.

I shall start by analysing the Stoic position as it emerges from Arcesilaus' criticism that assent can only be to a proposition and not to a presentation, which cannot bear the attributes of true and false. This objection seems justified, since Zeno, called the cognitive presentation 'true' when he defined it as *ἡ ἀληθὴς καὶ τοιαύτη οἷα οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο ψευδὴς* (ibid. 152). The problem is whether by 'true' presentations Zeno intends those 'of which it is possible to make a true assertion', following the position Sextus Empiricus (vii 244) ascribes generally to the Stoics; or whether he used the term 'true' as belonging to the cognitive presentation in virtue of its coming from and representing an existing object. It would seem that Arcesilaus' criticism could only make sense if Zeno had meant the latter. 'True' therefore, would be 'pictorially truthful', as in 'a true likeness'.

Other passages of Zenonian origin confirm that the attribute 'true' is ascribed not to propositions, but either to external objects or to corporeal psychological processes such as presentation and cognition. According to Zeno cognition effected by the senses is true.⁴⁹ In the dispute between Zeno and Arcesilaus which Cicero reports in the *Lucullus* 'true' and 'false' are applied both to external objects and to presentations: 'post requisitum etiamne, si eiusdem modi esset visum verum, quale vel falsum [...] neque enim falsum percipi posse neque verum, si esset tale quale vel falsum. incubuit autem in eas disputationes ... nullum tale esse visum a vero ut non eiusdem modi etiam a falso possit esse.'⁵⁰ Moreover it is Arcesilaus who calls presentations true and false, emphasizing Zeno's use, when he asks Zeno, who has just supplied his definition of cognitive presentation, 'whether this was still valid if a true presentation was just like a false one'. Even though Antiochus, who presumably provided Cicero with the account, is considered by many scholars an unreliable source, the use of *ἀληθές* linked with a presentation and not with a proposition seems fully supported by documented evidence for Zeno. At all events, Arcesilaus is arguing precisely against Zeno's claim to call a presentation true or false, when he objects 'that assent occurs not in relation to a presentation, but in relation to λόγος (for assent belongs to propositions)'. It seems therefore that it is Arcesilaus who stresses the difficulty of calling a presentation true and false, since, according to Zeno's definition, it is a mere affection of the soul.

Besides, the ascription of truth to a presentation does not seem peculiar to the Stoics and to Zeno in particular. Sources ascribe it to Epicurus as well,⁵¹ quite apart

⁴⁸ Indeed neither Arnim, nor Hülser include SE *M* vii 154 among their Stoic testimonia, because they consider the position expressed there, as reflecting Arcesilaus' criticism not Zeno's position.

⁴⁹ Cic. *Varro* 42.

⁵⁰ *Luc.* 77–8; cf. also *de nat. deor.* i 70 (*SVF* i 63).

⁵¹ Cf. SE *M* viii 9; DL x 32; *contra* Long and Sedley, op. cit. (n. 27), i.85; G. Striker, 'Epicurus on the Truth of Sense Impressions', *AGP* 59 (1977), 125–42.

from the fact that in pre-Stoic Greek thought true and false, far from being limited to propositions, were the attributes of things as well.⁵² Zeno could then have applied the attribute 'true' to the cognitive presentation to indicate that it comes from an object existing in the outside world and that it reproduces exactly all its characteristics, and not to indicate the truth appropriate to propositions.⁵³ If this interpretation is accepted, Arcesilaus' criticism fits in perfectly with the evidence regarding Zeno's doctrine.

Nevertheless a presentation for Zeno is not irrational, it is not an affection of the soul without awareness of the external object, as Plato had conceived it in the *Theaetetus*.⁵⁴ Frede has already stressed that Plato in the *Theaetetus* limits the meaning of αἰσθάνεσθαι to one which is not found in earlier Greek thought, and is not even used by Plato himself in previous dialogues.⁵⁵ The proof of this is that αἴσθησις is linked to δόξα as opposed to ἐπιστήμη, both in the *Phaedo* and in the *Republic*, and δόξα is judgemental. The association of sense perception with opinion is quite common even after Plato during the Hellenistic age, and we come across it not only in Zeno, but also, for example, in Timon.⁵⁶ In the *Theaetetus*, however, Plato maintains that opinion is a dialogue of the soul with itself, and so denies that perception has the capacity to judge.⁵⁷ In other words he refuses to admit that opinion can arise without the specific activity of the mind thinking by itself.

For Zeno, on the contrary, the cognitive presentation, being a criterion of truth,⁵⁸ is capable of recognizing things through the sense organs which grasp their special objects. So when we perceive white and black, hard and soft, etc., we classify things simply in virtue of seeing them, touching them, etc. Even Plato in the *Theaetetus* had tried to prove that it is not the senses which are able to grasp the sense-properties directly, but the mind itself. Zeno, opposing Plato's view, claims that sense perception is the foundation of knowledge. Hence the καταληπτική φαντασία has the sense-objects as its objects. For the senses are perfectly adequate for grasping everything which is within their sphere: 'He regarded cognition effected by them (the senses) as both true and reliable, not because it grasped all of a thing's properties, but because it left out nothing capable of confronting it.'⁵⁹

⁵² Cf. M. Frede, *Die stoische Logik* (Göttingen, 1974), p. 41. Moreover this use shows the permanence of a linguistic practice which has its origin in the identity of language, thought and reality, held by earlier thinkers, as G. Calogero, *Storia della logica antica*, 1 (Bari, 1967), has well pointed out, and which can still be found in Platonic expressions such as ὄντως ὄντα and ἀληθῶς ὄντα.

⁵³ In my view it is not only Epicurus who used the attributes 'true' and 'false' in this sense, as Long and Sedley, op. cit. (n. 27), i.85 believe, but Zeno as well.

⁵⁴ That Plato uses αἴσθησις where the Stoics use φαντασία is not a significant difference. Besides, the Stoics ascribe to αἴσθησις several meanings, cf. DL vii 52 (*SVF* II 71).

⁵⁵ 'Observations on Perception in Plato's Later Dialogues', in *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Minneapolis, 1987), 3-8; cf. also Fine, art. cit. (n. 44), Burnyeat, art. cit. (n. 45), Cooper, art. cit. (n. 47), who agree in emphasising the different conception of sense perception expressed by Plato in the *Republic*.

⁵⁶ Cf. Aristocles ap. Euseb. *PE* (fr. 53 Caizzi).

⁵⁷ 189e-190a; cf. also *Soph.* 236eff.; *Phlb.* 38c.

⁵⁸ Zeno names κατάληψις as criterion of truth in *SE M* vii 152-3, and not the cognitive presentation, but we can assume that he considered the latter the foundation of the criterion because of its absolute truthfulness and reliability, as in fact *SE M* vii 253 reports for the older Stoics in general.

⁵⁹ Cic. *Varro* 41. Scholars have discussed this passage a great deal, without coming to a satisfactory explanation. My point of view is closest to that of M. Frede, art. cit. (n. 20), p. 76, but I disagree with him about the propositional aspect of the presentation; see also Long and Sedley, op. cit. (n. 27), ii.255.

'Notions' of things involve a more elaborate mental process, though they depend on the cognitive presentation. Indeed, according to Zeno 'nature has given the cognitive presentation as the standard of scientific knowledge and as the natural foundation for the subsequent impression of conceptions of things upon the mind, which gave rise not just to the starting points, but to certain broader routes for discovering reason'.⁶⁰ Now, a human's sensory presentation is *λογική* also, and hence it is a *νόησις*. This implies that it consists of a conceptualization of the object, because it is the thought of a rational being. But this conceptualization occurs at a minimal level, not such as to be necessarily expressed in a proposition. Even the comparison of the presentation with light suggests rather the immediacy with which the presentation grasps the external object, being almost an illumination of it.⁶¹ This also explains Zeno's claim that cognition has been given to us as the foundation for the subsequent impression of conceptions.

We find a confirmation of this at *Lucullus* 21, where the elaboration of presentations into conceptions is outlined: 'Those characteristics which belong to the things we describe as being cognized by the senses are equally characteristic of that further set of things said to be cognized not by the senses directly, but by them in a certain respect, e.g. "This is white", "This is sweet", "That is melodious", "This is fragrant", "This is bitter". Our cognition of these things is secured by the mind, not the senses'.⁶² It seems here that the capacity to express itself in articulate language is characteristic of the mind and not of the presentation as such.

This is consonant with a controversial passage, DL vii 49: *προηγείται γὰρ ἡ φαντασία, εἴθ' ἢ διάνοια ἐκλαλητική ὑπάρχουσα, ὃ πάσχει ὑπὸ τῆς φαντασίας, τοῦτο ἐκφέρει λόγῳ*. Some scholars, starting from the fact that all presentations are rational in man, have concluded from this passage that for the Stoics all presentations have a propositional content and we assent to presentations by assenting to their corresponding *λεκτά*, namely propositions, which are the proper objects of assent.⁶³ I prefer to see in the passage a sharp contrast between presentations and 'the mind which has the power of utterance'. No doubt what is intended here by *φαντασία*, is the 'rational' type of presentation (which is mentioned shortly after, ib. 51, as a

⁶⁰ Cic. *Varro* 42. If the cognitive presentation is the foundation of cognition, it has to be *αἰσθητική* (cf. Zeno, *ibid.*, 'comprehensio facta sensibus'). Besides, the distinction between *αἰσθητικαί* and *οὐκ αἰσθητικαί* presentations in DL vii 52 presupposes that the latter have their origin in sensory presentations as well. In fact only the presentations of the incorporeals and the other things acquired by reason are examples of *οὐκ αἰσθητικαί* presentations: the presentations of the incorporeals presuppose a mimetic activity of the subject in representing them, which cannot do without previous sensory presentations, as is suggested by the example of the trainer standing at a distance and moving to a certain drill, to provide a model for the boy (see SE *M* viii 409 = *SVF* ii 85). Therefore they are conceived by a process of abstraction from bodily entities; cf. Long, Sedley, *op. cit.* (n. 27), i.163, who refer to DL vii 53. Moreover the definition of the cognitive presentation emphasizes the fact that its origin lies in an existing object, *ἀπὸ τοῦ ὑπάρχοντος*, but we cannot say of the incorporeals that they exist. As far as concerns 'the other things acquired by reason', we learn from DL vii 52 that they are 'the conclusions reached through demonstration'. Therefore they represent a point of arrival following a more elaborate mental process, which starts from sensory presentations as well. Moreover, if the *διάνοια* could do without *αἴσθησις*, the Stoics would not be able to state that all our knowledge comes from sense perception (SE *M* viii 56), or that the criterion of truth is the *φαντασία*, which decides *ἡ ἀλήθεια τῶν πραγμάτων* (DL vii 49; cf. also 46).

⁶¹ Cf. Aetius iv, 12, 1–5 (*SVF* ii 54).

⁶² As Long and Sedley, *op. cit.* (n. 27), ii.240, point out, 'since the Stoics regarded all perception as taking place in the *ἡγεμονικόν*, the distinction between 'sensibus' and 'animo' is potentially misleading.'

⁶³ Ib. i.240.

characteristic of all rational beings), but there is no indication that the actual presentation has the capacity to express itself in language, which is, rather, proper to *διάνοια*. We cannot appeal to the fact that presentation occurs in the commanding-faculty and therefore involves an activity of the mind.⁶⁴ By claiming that presentation arrives first, the Stoics simply mean that its presence is necessary for the cognitive process to take place. For 'assent cannot occur, unless it is prompted by a presentation', just as 'a sensation which is unmoved unaffected and unaltered is not sensation at all and is incapable of registering anything'.⁶⁵

Going back to Arcesilaus' criticism and the relation between presentation and assent, if the view that the proper object of assent is a proposition is ascribed to Zeno, we are faced with a series of problems. Stoic evidence shows that presentation is defined in physical terms as an impression on the soul. No definition relates it to propositions:⁶⁶ not only are Zeno's definition and Cleanthes' specification rather elementary and crudely materialistic, but even Chrysippus' definition in terms of *ἐτεροίωσις* also emphasizes the physical aspect of presentation, not taking into account the propositional aspect. Moreover it is unlikely that Zeno, who considered all psychological processes corporeal, could have looked on an *ἀξίωμα* as the proper object of assent, without providing an adequate justification for this view. Such a justification is missing not only for Zeno, but also for Cleanthes and for Chrysippus himself. Even though an argument *e silentio* does not always have probative value, in this case it is supported by the evidence which emphasizes the physical description of presentation. Finally, that assent must be given to a proposition appears to be a position which arose from the dispute, rather than being Zeno's own. For Zeno considers assent a constituent part of cognition defined as assent to a cognitive presentation,⁶⁷ and cognitive presentation is a *τύπωσις* in the soul. If we reflect that it is Plato who believes that opinion is a dialogue of the soul with itself, and certainly not Zeno, we can see that we are not authorised to ascribe to Zeno the idea that only those things which we say to ourselves are thoughts. In other words, for Zeno, the thought process does not necessarily involve its expression in words. It may instead be Arcesilaus who makes use of this Platonic theory in a polemical argument against the Zenonian claim of infallible and certain knowledge. For Zeno it is possible to have the concept of red without it being necessary to say to oneself 'This is red', and without the involvement of a reasoning or deliberative activity of the mind.

Only two passages attach assent to propositions. One is Sextus' report of Arcesilaus' criticism, discussed above. The other, a passage by Arius Didymus, is doxographic, and controversial because of the incomplete state of the text.⁶⁸ It is possible that it contains a modified theory put forward by one of Zeno's successors in response to the inadequacies revealed by Arcesilaus. But it contains so many difficulties that it would be unwise to make it the basis for any general interpretation of the Stoic position:

πάσας δὲ τὰς ὁρμὰς συγκαταθέσεις εἶναι, τὰς δὲ πρακτικὰς καὶ τὸ κινητικὸν περιέχειν. ἥδη δὲ ἄλλω [ἄλλω Wachsmuth: ἄλλων codd. et Arnim] μὲν εἶναι συγκαταθέσεις, ἐπ' ἄλλο δὲ

⁶⁴ Cf. Aetius IV 23, 1 (*SVF* II 854).

⁶⁵ Cic. *de fato* 43 (*SVF* II 974); *SE M* VII 160.

⁶⁶ The only passage that could suggest a relationship between assent and proposition is *SE M* VIII 70. But see below, p. 446 with note 73.

⁶⁷ This definition is repeated twice in *SE M* VII 153–4.

⁶⁸ Stob. II 88, 1 (*SVF* III 171); Wachsmuth's correction, accepted by Long and Sedley, does not seem necessary to me, since *συγκατάθεσις* is constructed both with the genitive and with the dative. This wavering cannot be attributed to the fact that it depends on different contexts, because we find it within the same context, as Sextus *M* VII 154–7 shows; cf. the remarks by B. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 101, 287 n. 271.

ὁρμάς. καὶ συγκαταθέσεις μὲν ἀξιώμασί τισιν, ὁρμάς δὲ ἐπὶ κατήγορηματα τὰ περιεχόμενά πως ἐν τοῖς ἀξιώμασιν.⁶⁹

The passage is not without problems, partly because of the mention of a *ὁρμή* *πρακτική*. This would imply the existence of a *ὁρμή* not *πρακτική*, which seems hardly possible for the Stoics. The *ὁρμή* *λογική* is no different from the *πρακτική*, because in rational beings these two forms of impulse are the same. The *ὁρμή* *λογική* is by definition 'a movement of *διάνοια* towards something in the sphere of action (*ἐν τῷ πράττειν*)'.⁷⁰ Hence it can be nothing but *πρακτική*, as is confirmed by Chrysippus when he defines impulse as the reason of man 'prescribing action to him'.⁷¹ Impulse then, occurs only in relation to acting and is said to be 'rational' in order to distinguish human impulse from that of non-rational animals, since *ὁρμή* belongs to the latter as well.⁷² Whereas assent is a cognitive act directed to the recognition of the truth of a presentation, impulse occurs when it is necessary to translate into action that which has been approved.

Moreover, the Arius Didymus passage is barely intelligible if the relationship between that which is corporeal, assent and impulse, and that which is not corporeal, proposition and predicate, is not made clear, given the absolute denial that the incorporeal can act or be acted upon.

What appears to be clearer is a passage of Seneca (*ep.* 117, 3) in which he openly declares that he is not giving his own position on the problem but rather that of the earlier Stoics:

There are bodily substances, e.g. this is a man, this is a horse: They are accompanied by movements of the soul which can make enunciations about bodies. These movements have a property which is peculiar to them, and which is separate from bodies, as, for instance, I see Cato walking: sense perception has revealed it to me and my mind has believed it. What I see is a body and it is to a body that I have directed both my eyes and my mind. Then I say, Cato is walking. What I now utter (he says) is not a body, but a certain enunciation about a body, which some call a proposition, others a thing enunciated, and others a *λεκτόν* (*dictum*).

There is no doubt that Seneca with the words 'corpus est quod video cui et oculos intendi et animum' wants to stress the fact that not only do the eyes, and hence the senses, turn towards that which is body, but so too, in assenting, does the mind. For the mind, by assenting, believes what sense perception presents it with. The cognitive process seems complete as soon as the mind has believed the visual presentation of Cato walking which involves the bodies alone. The movements of the soul which can make enunciations about bodies seem to perform an additional role, limited to the linguistic sphere. Seneca distinguishes the two stages, the cognitive one and the linguistic one, by saying: 'corpus est quod video... dico deinde'. It is just to this 'dicere' that the movements which are capable of making enunciations about bodies limit themselves.

Assent then, is aimed, in its proper sense, at that which is body. What emerges from Seneca's words is that the Stoics consider assent principally a dynamic movement

⁶⁹ Cf. M. Giusta, *I dossografi di etica* (Torino, 1967), ii.226, who believes that the lacuna is broader than Wachsmuth supposed.

⁷⁰ Stob. II 86, 17 (*SVF* III 169).

⁷¹ Plut. *de stoic. rep.* 1037f (*SVF* III 175).

⁷² Stob. II 86, 17, ταύτης δ' ἐν εἶδει θεωρεῖσθαι τήν τε ἐν τοῖς λογικοῖς γιγνομένην ὁρμήν καὶ τήν ἐν τοῖς λογικοῖς γιγνομένην ὁρμήν καὶ τήν ἐν τοῖς ἀλόγοις ζώοις. οὐ κατωνομασμένα δ' εἶσιν.

towards an external body, the presentation of which can be expressed in language. But the exhibition in language is an independent stage of a psychological process which is characteristic of man as rational being.

This interpretation may be confirmed by a passage of Sextus⁷³ which defines a rational presentation as 'one in which the content of the presentation can be exhibited in language (καθ' ἣν τὸ φαντασθέν ἔστι λόγῳ παραστήσαι). Now τὸ φαντασθέν is not a regular term in Stoic epistemology. It cannot be identified with the object of the presentation, which is standardly called τὸ φανταστόν,⁷⁴ nor can it be identified (as some scholars have proposed),⁷⁵ with the λεκτόν, which is what can express the content of the presentation, but which is not identical to it. For if τὸ φαντασθέν were the λεκτόν, we would face the problem that a rational presentation would not have a content if it were not verbalized – something not allowed by its definition. The fact that τὸ φαντασθέν 'can be' expressed in language does not imply that it necessarily has to be.

Thus the passages of both Cicero (*Luc.* 21) and Seneca (*ep.* 117), which we have discussed, lead us to the conclusion that verbalization represents a distinct stage from that of presentation. But if the rational presentation exists independently of the possibility of verbalisation, the requirement that it be translated into language does not constitute its definition. In this sense the λεκτόν is strongly connected to rational presentation, *qua* capable of being expressed, but it cannot constitute the proper object of assent. It would seem then that thinking and expressing the content of the thought in language are two different operations of the mind.

We can find evidence of this also in another passage of Sextus.⁷⁶ In illustrating the disagreement among philosophers concerning what is true, he informs us that the Stoics distinguished the signification (σημαινόμενον), the signifier (σημαῖνον) and the name-bearer (τὸ τυγχάνον):⁷⁷

The signifier is an utterance, for instance 'Dion'; the signification is the actual state of affairs (τὸ πράγμα) revealed by an utterance, and which we apprehend as it subsists in accordance with our thought, whereas it is not understood by barbarians although they hear the utterance; the name-bearer is the external object, for instance, Dion himself.

⁷³ SE *M* VIII 70 (*SVF* II 187). This passage has been interpreted in different ways, according to whether the word λόγος is translated 'reason' or 'language'. In my opinion the translation 'reason' is problematic. For if it were reason which makes a presentation rational, it would not be said that 'a rational presentation is one in which it is possible to establish by reason the presented object' (see Bury's translation). This means that reason may or may not establish the content of presentation. But in the latter case it would be difficult to call a presentation rational. However the translation 'reason' has been widely upheld by scholars since Zeller. It supports the thesis that a λεκτόν is the content of a thought independent of language. For a conciliation of this view with the one according to which λεκτά are the meanings of words, see M. Mignucci, *Il significato della logica stoica* (Bologna, 1967), pp. 88–96. It could be objected against the interpretation which maintains that a λεκτόν is that which is said, that the effects of causes are also λεκτά. But the Stoics conceived of the effects as predicates which are true of the body affected. Hence what a cause produces is not something existent, but rather a semantic item signifying a process undergone by the body. Thus the Stoic theory of cause and effect not only does not help to clarify the position of λεκτά, but complicates the problem considerably.

⁷⁴ Cf. G. Striker, *Κριτήριον τῆς ἀληθείας* (Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Phil. hist. Kl., 1974, pp. 47–110), p. 94 n. 1.

⁷⁵ Contra B. Mates, *Stoic Logic* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1953), p. 22, according to whom the λεκτόν 'is what might be called "the objective content", τὸ φαντασθέν, of the presentation.'

⁷⁶ *M* VIII 11–12 (*SVF* II 166).

⁷⁷ For the translation of τὸ τυγχάνον by 'the name-bearer', cf. Long, Sedley, op. cit. (n. 27), ii.197, i.201.

What Sextus calls τὸ σημαίνον is what is signified *when something is said*; it is the λεκτόν. If the meaning were not referred to the verbalization, and hence to the Greek language, it would not be possible to say that the barbarians, though they hear the utterance, do not understand it. Nothing is said about a signification connected with non-verbalized thought. In fact the regular definition of λεκτόν is 'what subsists in accordance with a rational presentation'.⁷⁸ When faced with an existing object, both the Greek and the non-Greek receive a presentation which is rational, in as much as it belongs to rational beings: it is therefore a thought with a presentational content in accordance with which a λεκτόν subsists. Its presentational content may or may not be expressed in words. If the meaning were referred to the thought process, Sextus would not be likely to say that the Greeks grasp it and the barbarians do not, since they are all rational beings. But if we view it as a dialogical situation in which one speaks and the other listens, we see that the Greeks differ from the barbarians because of their capacity to speak the Greek language. This confirms that the Stoics distinguished between the thought process and its linguistic expression.

A passage of Chrysippus cited in Galen's *De placitis* will help to clarify the relationship between thinking and speaking:⁷⁹ 'For – he says – speaking must be from the mind, and also speaking within oneself, and thinking, and going through an utterance in oneself, and sending out.' This is followed by Galen's criticism, according to which Chrysippus has put forward the clearly erroneous theory that speaking and speaking within oneself are acts performed by the same part, the heart. It seems to me that this passage, rather than favouring an identity between thought and language, testifies to their diversity. We would otherwise have to conclude that Chrysippus' doctrine claims the identity of all the functions of the commanding-faculty, presentation, impulse, assent, reason, because they all come from the δianoia. If this identification is not possible, we should not expect one between thinking and speaking either.

The fact that men are rational beings implies that they have thoughts which they then may translate into language. The definition of rational presentations as νοήσεις fits in with this line of thought. But thoughts, which are bodies, are not identical with incorporeal ἀξιώματα. Nor must we forget that the δianoia, or νοῦς, is corporeal.⁸⁰ Thus if we want to respect the foundations of Stoic physics, our understanding of presentation must take into account the bodily nature of psychic processes, and cannot, for the sake of brevity, consider the ἀξίωμα as the proper object of assent.

A further difficulty, if we want to consider the proper object of assent to be a proposition, is the relationship between true and cognitive presentation. In the Stoic classification of presentations, as Sextus reports it (*M* vii 242–8), cognitive presentations are a subdivision of true presentations, which in their turn, are a subdivision of convincing ones. Therefore whereas cognitive presentations must be true, not all true presentations are cognitive. The truthfulness of the cognitive presentation is due to the fact that from a causal point of view it is the external object which strikes the sense organs, impressing its characteristics on the soul through their mediation. If a perfect correspondence between the object and the presentation must be guaranteed, the time at which the presentation occurs must be the present. Now a true presentation is that 'of which it is possible to make a true assertion', as for example, at present 'it is day', or 'it is light' (*SE M* vii 244). It expresses, therefore, in a tensed form, the presented object – an object which exists at the present moment.

⁷⁸ *SE M* viii 70 (*SVF* ii 187); *DL* vii 63.

⁷⁹ iii 7, 313, p. 220, 42, 17ff *De Lacy*.

⁸⁰ *Cf. Stob.* ii 64, 18.

It is possible, however, that the true presentation, which can be expressed by a true proposition, does not prompt assent (*M* vii 247). Moreover it can happen, albeit exceptionally, that a cognitive presentation is unconvincing (*ἀπιστος*) because of external circumstances.⁸¹

Presentations which are true and cognitive, yet unconvincing, pose the problem of assent and of the assent–proposition–presentation relationship. For if assent is directed to propositions, a true presentation, being such because it is possible to make a true assertion of it, that is a true proposition, should also imply assent. Moreover, if assent is given to propositions, a true presentation and a cognitive presentation should not differ since both of them are expressed by true propositions. Let us add that a cognitive presentation is susceptible to being expressed not only by one proposition, but by many.

At this point a legitimate question arises: if assent has propositions as its object, what is the difference between the way in which cognitive presentations move it and the way it is moved by merely true presentations? For if the possibility of distinguishing them does not lie in their different truth-value, since they are both expressed by a true proposition, they must be distinguishable by some other characteristic. It would seem that the answer to this question is again to be found in Stoic physics. We have seen that for Chrysippus presentation is a *ἐτεροίωσις*, an alteration in the soul, and alteration is a movement according to quality.⁸² The Stoics define convincing presentations as those ‘which produce an even movement (*λείον κίνημα*) in the soul, e.g., at this moment, that it is day and that I am talking, and everything which maintains a similar obviousness’ (*SE M* vii 242). It is possible, therefore, that the Stoics considered the movement produced by the cognitive presentation a particularly strong movement of this kind, and considered the assent which it prompts equally strong. It must not be forgotten, in fact, that the younger Stoics believed that the cognitive presentation ‘being self-evident and striking, all but seizes us by the hair [...] and pulls us to assent, needing nothing else to achieve this effect or to establish its difference from other presentations’ (*M* vii 253). The same position can be attributed to Zeno when he speaks of presentations which have ‘a peculiar power of revealing their objects’ and of the cognitive presentation as such as to ‘be discerned just by itself’.⁸³ If the self-evidence with which the cognitive presentation imposes itself consists of a causal feature, because it induces a particular modification in the commanding-faculty, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that if true presentations, and in exceptional circumstances cognitive ones, are not able to prompt assent, it is because the movement which they produce in the soul is too slight, whereas assent requires a strong one.

Coming back to Arcesilaus’ objection, it has certainly contributed to the clarification of the relationship between presentation and assent in the Stoic doctrine and to the development of the theory of the *λεκτόν*. It is in fact Arcesilaus who first speaks of assent to presentation, understood as assent to an *ἀξίωμα*, and an *ἀξίωμα* in Stoic doctrine is a *λεκτόν*. However the theory of the *λεκτόν* is problematic both in its complexity and in the difficulty of establishing its origin and development. As Hülser⁸⁴ has already pointed out, our sources do not express the theory of the *λεκτόν* clearly, probably because they describe it as it appears at the end of its development,

⁸¹ Cf. the examples of Admetus and Menelaus in *SE M* vii 254–5.

⁸² Cf. *SVF* II 429, 494.

⁸³ Cic. *Varro* 41. Self-evidence provokes in the soul the same effect as the one of weights placed in the balance; cf. Plut. *Col.* 1122c.

⁸⁴ *Die Fragmente zur Dialektik der Stoiker* (Stuttgart, 1987), Band 2, p. 832.

glossing over the difficulties in a simplistic and superficial way. Moreover, it would seem that in Cleanthes the use of the *λεκτόν* is restricted to defining the *κατηγορήμα*⁸⁵ and that its significance was broadened only later. From all this it seems difficult to conclude that the proper objects of assent were for Zeno *ἀξιώματα*.

But if the proper object of assent is presentation and not a proposition, can bodily assent which is directed to an equally bodily movement, legitimately be considered the recognition of the truth of the presentation? The problem of the presentation–assent relationship must then be considered from a psychodynamic point of view, which, however, does not exclude a rational explanation for this relationship. Zeno in fact describes presentation as a physical process not because he wants to illustrate a psychological phenomenon, the explanation of which lies in psychological causes which are distinct from physical ones with a physical mechanism, but because he is referring to a thought process, which is in reality mechanical and physical. A rational presentation is true when it originates from a truly existing external object which physically impresses all its properties in the soul as characteristics of the presentation. Later the Stoics, according to Sextus,⁸⁶

... call a true proposition 'that which is (*ὃ ὑπάρχει*), and is contradictory to something' ..., but when they are asked what is 'that which is', they say it is that which activates a cognitive presentation. And then when questioned concerning the cognitive presentation, they again retreat to that which is, ... saying that a cognitive presentation has its source in that which is, in conformity with the very thing it is.

It is interesting to observe that they use the same verb *ὑπάρχειν* to define both the truth of a proposition and the existence of a presentation and of the real object, thus stressing the correspondence between truth and existence. The cognitive presentation, therefore, exists for Zeno because it comes from that which is, and is true because it represents that which is as it is, in thought.

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⁸⁵ Cf. Clem. Alex (*SVF* II 488), and M. Frede, op. cit. (n. 52), p. 15 n. 15.

⁸⁶ SE *M* VIII 85–6: *φασὶ γὰρ ἀληθὲς μὲν εἶναι ἀξίωμα ὃ ὑπάρχει τε καὶ ἀντίκειται τινι, ... ἐρωτώμενοι δέ, τί ἐστὶ τὸ ὑπάρχον, λέγουσι τὸ καταληπτικὴν κινεῖν φαντασίαν.*