

Composition, Constitution, and the Continuum: a defense of Stoic corporealism

This is an essay in Stoic mereology; it argues that the Stoics are committed to both the relations of composition (a many-to-one relation of parts to the whole they compose) and constitution (a one-to-one relation between part and whole), but not, as recently suggested, to gunk (infinite divisibility into an actuality of parts that are always decomposable into further parts). The resulting theory is a complete and consistent corporealism ready to meet the explanatory demands of their predecessors and critics.

First, the Stoics build their cosmos (the whole, *to hōlon*) out of two independent bodies (*sōmata*), the active principle, reason (*logos*), and the passive principle, matter (*hylē*). These two bodies are the simple, fundamental ingredients of the cosmos, out of which the complex and unified whole is composed. By freeing the Stoic conception of body – defined as three-dimensional extension with resistance – from the hylomorphic and atomistic assumptions of their critics, the first stage of the paper rehabilitates the controversial Stoic commitment to through and through blending (*krasis di' holou*) as the complete coextension of two (or more) individual bodies, to show that Stoic cosmogony proceeds entirely by composition: from the blending of the two principles at the beginning of each world cycle, through the development of the traditional elements (earth, air, fire, water) and their combination into active breath and passive matter, to the ordinary composition of individual bodies from their parts. For the Stoics, cosmogony is composition.

In contrast, the Stoic categories, as they are called, serve an entirely different explanatory purpose. When invoking the categories – substrate (*hupokeimenon*), qualified individual (*poion*), individual disposed (*pōs echon*), and individual relatively disposed (*pros ti pōs echon*) – the Stoics take as given the individual bodies composed during the cosmogony and seek, now, to give a thoroughgoing corporealist account of their identity conditions, kinds, and qualities. The second stage of the paper argues that the Stoic categories are not concerned with *building* individual bodies but, rather, with individuating what makes them F, e.g. what makes this thing Socrates, or a human, or virtuous. Each so-called category is related to the next as part to whole, but in a one-to-one ontological dependence relation this time, as, for example, a statue (qualified individual) depends for its existence on the clay (substrate) that constitutes it, or Socrates' wisdom (an individual disposed) depends for its existence on Socrates' unique soul (a qualified individual, itself constituted by *pneuma* in the role of substrate) being habituated a certain way. The constitution of the categories is thus no longer cosmogony, cosmology, or even physics for that matter, but self-conscious mereology that underwrites an innovative new corporealism, daring to say that the soul and even its virtues, are bodies.

Finally, the third stage of the paper makes the negative point that the Stoic commitment to infinite divisibility is not a mereological thesis at all, but the elementary commitment of their physical theory to the continuous nature of body, space, and time: the denial of atomism. To deny that the Stoics' continuum physics is a mereological thesis is to deny that infinite divisibility involves decomposition into prior components of the whole, i.e. to deny that infinite divisibility is about *parts* at all. In fact, in the context of infinite divisibility, the Stoics speak of partitions (*moría*) rather than parts (*merei*), and evince a strong resistance to treating such partitions as actual in advance of the division. If the three stages of the argument are successful, we can see that composition and constitution – building and individuation – are complementary, rather than competing, analyses of body, and that Stoic corporealism is complete without a theory of gunk in addition.