

PAUL AND THE STOA: A COMPARISON

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B. Metzger writes concerning the relationship of Paul and the Stoic thought of his day:

Like other educated men of his day, the apostle Paul was acquainted with a certain amount of Stoic teaching. . . . Paul's letters contain occasional phrases that have a Stoic ring. . . . At the same time, however, the parallelism is more in the realm of words than basic ideas, for the theological presuppositions and the springs of Paul's actions were very different from those of a Stoic philosopher.

Such a statement belongs to a larger stream of scholarship that seeks to distance Paul's thought from Stoic influence. G. Fee, for example, discussing Stoic parallels to 1 Cor 3:23, claims that "Paul's own radically different meaning for the phrase ['all things are yours'] is another clear indication that finding the 'source' of his language is not always significant, since his 'in Christ' existence so thoroughly transforms everything . . . and gives it new meaning."¹ A. D. Nock dissociates the two even more strongly: "Il nous est permis de douter que le stoïcisme ait exercé une grande influence sur les écrits pauliniennes. . . . Si du reste Paul manifeste par endroits une certaine connaissance des idées stoïciennes, c'est pour combattre le système dont elles faisaient parties."² This tendency stands strangely in opposition to the author of Luke-Acts, who carefully presents Paul as one fluent in the popular philosophies of the day and able to turn his knowledge of them to missionary advantage as a point of contact with the audience.³ Alongside the statements of Fee and Nock, Metzger's appears as rather balanced, allowing for the influence of Stoicism at least on the level of words and phrases that Paul might have easily acquired from the culture and slight acquaintance with Stoic adherents.

The evaluation of the correctness of Metzger's statement with regard both to the positive and negative elements of the relationship between Paul and Stoicism must proceed from a survey of those identifiable parallels between Paul and Stoic authors. This study will proceed by examining simple verbal parallels, more extended verbal parallels, conceptual parallels, shared use of *topoi* and images, shared use of formal elements such as the diatribe, lists of virtues and vices, and *Persistenzenkataloge*, and finally the

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¹ G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 154 n. 17.

² A. D. Nock, *Christianisme et Hellénisme* (Paris: Cerf, 1973) 126–127.

³ See M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Scribner's, 1956) 26–77.

parallels of natural theology and natural law. Only after the similarities and dissimilarities of meaning and function within a larger whole have been examined can one return to the question of whether Metzger has correctly stated the nature and limits of the relationship.

I. SIMPLE VERBAL PARALLELS

In analyzing the use of common words in Paul and Stoic authors it will be important to distinguish any differences in the meaning conveyed by the term in its context, to inquire whether the meaning of the term is affected by the larger philosophical or religious framework in which it appears, and then to examine the nature of the relationship between Paul's use and Stoic use.

The word *autarkeia* has been identified as an important term in Stoicism (and in Cynicism), close indeed to the heart of the ethical aspect of their philosophy. Epictetus says that "this is the position and character of the philosopher: He looks for all his help or harm from himself."⁴ The Stoic is free from all externals and looks for his or her happiness only to the things "under his control."⁵ The Stoic therefore depends only on the self and on no external things not under his or her control for happiness. This concept of self-sufficiency, however, does not carry over into Paul's use of the word in 2 Cor 9:8: "And God is able to multiply every grace to you, in order that, having *autarkeia* in everything always, you may abound in every good work." Here Paul is speaking merely of some sufficient amount, supplied by God (not the self or a proper attitude toward externals) for the purpose of sharing with those in need (not for inner contentment). When Paul uses the related adjective in Phil 4:11b it appears to be more closely related to the Stoic sense. The following verse enumerates varying external conditions that do not affect the apostle's *autarkeia*. But Paul is working within a different frame from the Stoics, as 4:13 makes clear: "I can do all things through the One who makes me capable." Paul's *autarkeia* comes not from a right view of externals (although he, like the Stoics, regards externals as insignificant) but rather through the power of the Lord (4:10), which is his help.⁶

F. H. Sandbach speaks of the Stoic use of the term *prokopē* and its related verb in Stoic writings, meaning progress or advancement in the discipline of the philosophy.⁷ Paul uses this term in Gal 1:14 to refer to his former "progress in Judaism" and in Phil 1:25 to speak of the Philippian Christians' "progress" in the gospel, with no discernible difference in meaning. While the term itself is rather neutral, it does suggest that Stoicism saw itself as Paul saw Judaism and Christianity—as paths along which one might make progress and that therefore required work and discipline

⁴ Epictetus *Encheiridion* 48.

⁵ *Ibid.* 1.

⁶ Contrast *ibid.* 48.

⁷ F. H. Sandbach, *The Stoics* (New York: Norton, 1975) 45, 48.

(cf. the discussion of athletic metaphors below)—a fact that separates them from other religious participations such as the imperial cult, in which there was only participation but no progress. Related to this concept is the common use of the verb *nikaō* in Paul (Rom 8:37) and Epictetus.⁸ Here, however, a difference manifests itself immediately. For Paul, “conquering” takes place “through the One who loved us” rather than through one’s own victory over false judgments with regard to external things.⁹

Dunn notes several verbal parallels between Stoic authors and Romans. He speaks of the use of the Stoic antithesis *apthartos/phthartos* in Rom 1:23, *ta mē kathēkonta* in 1:28, the familiar substantives *to kakon . . . to agathon* in 2:10, and the phrase *katho dei* in 8:26, all of which have a Stoic ring and appear to be used in a sense amenable to their Stoic background.¹⁰ The first two are especially significant as particularly Stoic terms (the latter two having a broader use in popular philosophy). More significant is his discussion of the use of the Stoic term *epithymia* in Rom 1:24; 7:7. The negative, Stoic sense of the word as a drive that is “sinful because of its impulsive and non-rational character”¹¹ is preserved in 1:24, carried to Paul via Hellenistic Judaism.¹² This is not true for Paul’s use of the term in 7:7, where it is no longer “desire’s” opposition to reason that makes it sinful but rather its opposition to the just demands of God’s law. Here, then, there is a concern with how to deal with *epithymiai* but differences with regard to the nature of the problem and its solution (see below).

Both Paul (1 Cor 7:32) and the Stoics used the terms *amerimnos* and *aperispastōs* without apparent differences in meaning within the context of discussions concerning the benefits and disadvantages of marriage.¹³ Here one might strongly suspect that, although Paul’s motivation for recommending abstaining from marriage is eschatological and not philosophical (how to live a trouble-free life), Paul may well have made use of Stoic arguments for his purposes. Finally, it should be noted that terms of central importance to Stoic philosophy, such as *logos* and *pneuma*, are used entirely differently in Paul with no discernible connections with Stoic usage.

II. MORE EXTENDED VERBAL PARALLELS

Parallels between Paul and the Stoics extend beyond one-word occurrences. Shorter phrases and even longer phrases among the Stoics have parallel expressions in Paul’s letters. A striking example appears in Rom 1:26, where Paul speaks of the Gentiles exchanging *tēn physikēn chrēsin eis tēn para physin*. Paul’s denunciation rests on the Stoic concept of “living

⁸ Cf. Epictetus *Dissertations* 1.18.22.

⁹ J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (WBC 38a; Dallas: Word, 1988) 506.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* *ad loc.*

¹¹ *Ibid.* 379.

¹² Cf. Wis 4:12; Sir 5:2; 18:30–31; 23:5; 4 Macc 1:3, 31–32; 2:1–6; 3:2, 11–12, 16; Philo *Leg. All.* 3.15. Hellenistic Judaism, as the ensuing discussions will make clearer, was an important mediator of Stoic thought and terminology.

¹³ E.g. Epictetus *Dissertations* 1.29.59.

according to nature” as “living well or nobly.” The opposition between living *kata physin* and *para physin* is Stoic in origin, passing to Paul again via Hellenistic Judaism.¹⁴ The relationship between Paul and the Stoics here appears to be positive.

Paul’s complaint in Rom 7:15 that “the thing I desire I do not do, but the thing I hate I do” finds a ready parallel in Epictetus: *ho thelei ou poiei kai ho mē thelei poiei*.¹⁵ As Dunn demonstrates, however, while Paul and Epictetus may make the same complaint, the two have a different solution that distinguishes them.¹⁶ For Epictetus, the rational soul should resolve the dilemma as soon as the contradiction becomes evident to it,¹⁷ whereas for Paul, the problem runs deeper and requires the intervention of God. Similarly both Paul (7:24) and Epictetus are able to describe the human creature with the same adjective: *talaipōros*.¹⁸ Both authors use this term to describe a human being caught between two alternatives within its own nature (Paul’s law of the mind and law of the members, Epictetus’ “body, which we have in common with the brutes, and . . . reason and intelligence, which we have in common with the gods”).¹⁹ There is thus a certain commonality in the anthropology of the two, an existence lived in tension between two alternatives. But the resolution of this tension is, again, effected differently. For Epictetus, the answer lies in inclining toward the reason and letting go of the flesh. For Paul, resolution comes from outside the self: “Who shall save me from this body of death?”

The ethical injunction in Rom 12:18, *meta pantōn anthrōpōn eirēneuontes*, has a strong parallel again in Epictetus: *eirēnēn ageis pros pantas anthrōpous*.²⁰ Here it appears that both Paul and the Stoic shared this ideal of a peaceful coexistence with one’s fellow citizens, indeed with anyone with whom life brought them into contact. Peace was of course a central value in Judaism and thus in Paul’s Jewish heritage, and one cannot say whether Paul was influenced by a Stoic or Jewish ideal here. Similarly Paul’s description of God in Rom 11:36, *hoti ex autou kai di’ autou kai eis auton ta panta*, bears striking similarity to Stoic authors. Marcus Aurelius, writing of nature, declares that *ek sou panta, en soi panta, eis se panta*.²¹ Pseudo-Aristotle writes *hoti ek theou panta kai dia theou synestēke*.²² Paul’s words thus resonate with the Stoic and broader Greco-Roman philosophic traditions concerning the ruling principle of the cosmos. And although the conceptions of God are different, these varying authors do appear to be expressing similar attributes of their respective deities. Again, it appears that

¹⁴ Cf. *T. Naph.* 3:4–5, cited in Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 64.

¹⁵ Epictetus *Dissertations* 2.26.4.

¹⁶ Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 389.

¹⁷ Epictetus *Dissertations* 2.26.7.

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.* 1.3.5.

¹⁹ Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 396.

²⁰ Epictetus *Dissertations* 4.5.24; cf. J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (WBC 38b; Dallas: Word, 1988) 748.

²¹ Marcus Aurelius *Meditations* 4.23.

²² Pseudo-Aristotle *De mundo* 6.

Hellenistic Judaism has mediated this manner of speaking about the Deity: “The language is appropriate to a variety of theistic beliefs, and had already been domesticated within Jewish monotheism, as the use of it by Philo demonstrates (*Spec. Leg.* 1.208; *Cher.* 125–126).”²³

The much-discussed argument in 1 Corinthians 11 concerning the veiling of women and the significance of different hair lengths and covering or uncovering the head has a curious parallel to Epictetus. Paul in 1 Cor 11:14 asks, “Does not nature itself teach you . . . ?” Epictetus appeals also to the instruction of nature with regard to hair on the chin as a sign of the distinction between sexes that is to be preserved and not confused.²⁴ Fee is correct to question the validity of Paul’s argument, seeing as the short hair of a man is not natural but effected by a haircut.²⁵ Nevertheless it is striking that an appeal to the instruction of “nature” can be found in both Paul and Epictetus with regard to a similar topic, “nature” being a decidedly Stoic authority and source of instruction.

Finally, we may note the common use of *tharreïn* and *pepoithēsis* (or its related verb) in 2 Cor 4:6 and Epictetus *Dissertations* 2.1.38–39. Both authors speak of “confidence” and “trust” as the proper way to face the hardships of life, within the context of understanding these hardships as something to which the apostle or philosopher is called by the deity—indeed, is deemed worthy to face by the deity. The difference of course is that Paul encounters these hardships on account of his work for the gospel, whereas Epictetus has in mind any hardships that might befall an ordinary citizen in the course of his or her life. The object of confidence is also different, as Paul makes it clear throughout 2 Corinthians that God is the source of his confidence (cf. 1:8b–9) whereas for Epictetus no such divine object is in view.

III. CONCEPTUAL PARALLELS

Beyond common occurrences of words or phrases, one may readily identify a number of concepts shared by Paul and the Stoics. Here, too, one may expect to find that the similarities are limited because of the difference in the larger conceptual frame in which the different representatives are working.

A cardinal concept of Stoicism was the way to acquire inner freedom from external circumstances. Epictetus begins his handbook with a discussion of the distinction between things “under our control” or “properly our own” and things “not under our control” or “not properly our own.” If one can grasp and accept this distinction and seek only the things pertaining to the first group, one can be free from all externals, a slave no longer to things not under one’s control. As H. Koester summarizes the concept, “inner freedom” is “detachment from all external experiences and . . . the surrender of any and all attempts to change one’s personal situation or the existing social

²³ Dunn, *Romans* 9–16 701.

²⁴ Epictetus *Dissertations* 1.16.9–14.

²⁵ Fee, *First Corinthians* 526–527.

conditions.”²⁶ Paul describes his state of mind in terms that suggest an inner freedom from external circumstances. Thus in 2 Cor 12:10 he writes: “Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ.” The basis for this contentment is not, however, correct judgment with regard to what is “one’s own” and what is an external thing “not one’s own,” as in Epictetus, but rather the apostle’s experience of the power of Christ manifesting itself strongly in his weakness. Similarly in Phil 4:11b–13 (discussed above) the apostle is *autarkēs* in the midst of varying external circumstances because of the presence and power of Christ in him.

Stoicism appears to have developed a concept of “humanity’s persistent evil.”²⁷ Sandbach, however, describes this more carefully as an orthodox Stoic recognition that “all human beings are, and inevitably remain, bad and unhappy. There was no intermediate state between goodness and badness.”²⁸ The term “goodness” was “applicable only to moral perfection.” Such a view calls to mind Paul’s argument in Rom 1:18–3:20, in which Paul demonstrates that all people are sinners before God. It appears that for Paul, like the Stoics, there was no middle ground between being a “sinner” and being “righteous.” Here, however, one encounters a striking similarity that is limited by the frameworks in which the different authors operate. For the Stoic, unhappiness and badness still relate to incorrect judgments with regard to external things. For Paul, “sin” has to do with transgressions against God. Similarly, as before, the solutions for the problem are different as well.

E. Ferguson notes another conceptual similarity to be the idea of kinship with the divine.²⁹ The citation from Aratus in Acts 17:28 (“for we are of his offspring”) documents the Stoic concept³⁰ as does, for example, Epictetus, who speaks of Zeus as the father of humankind (whom Odysseus even regarded as a personal father-like guardian).³¹ Paul’s similar statement in Gal 3:26 (“for you are all children of God”) distinguishes itself from the Stoic counterpart by the addition of “in Christ Jesus” and “through faith” as the qualifiers. For the Stoic, there were no qualifiers on kinship with the divine, a relationship all held to the deity by virtue of being the deity’s workmanship together with the rest of nature. Similarly the Stoics held that all parts of the universe formed a whole, and to describe this they employed the metaphor of a body and its component members.³² This understanding was also meant to lead one to altruistic action: “to hold no private interest; to deliberate of nothing as a separate individual, but rather like the hand or foot . . . with a reference to the whole.”³³ With this one may compare the

²⁶ H. Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1982) 1.354.

²⁷ E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 293.

²⁸ Sandbach, *Stoics* 44.

²⁹ Ferguson, *Backgrounds* 293.

³⁰ Aratus *Phaenomena* 5.

³¹ Epictetus *Dissertations* 3.24.

³² Cf. *ibid.* 2.10.4–5; Seneca *Ep.* 95.52: “All that you behold, that which comprises both god and man, is one—we are the parts of one great body,” cited by Fee, *First Corinthians* 602.

³³ Epictetus *Dissertations* 2.10.4–5.

similar statements in Paul, e.g. 1 Cor 12:12–13; Rom 12:4–5. Here the image is used to stress the indispensability of any of the members and to encourage the expression of the variety of gifts. The main difference between the Stoic and Pauline use of the image, however, is the limits Paul places on the body. It is not the corporate body of the universe but the body of Christ, which one must join through baptism and the Holy Spirit. The image does not therefore serve to unite humanity and the whole cosmos but to circumscribe a part of humanity as a separate but unified body within the cosmos. Here Paul's apocalyptic background may be determinative, as this is the body of the "saved," which one may oppose to the group of the "perishing" (cf. 2 Cor 2:15).

A third related idea is that of carrying the divine within one. Epictetus writes:

You are a distinct portion of the essence of God, and contain a certain part of him in yourself. Why then are you ignorant of your own kinship? Why do you not remember, when you are eating, who you are who eat, and whom you feed? When you are in the company of women, when you are conversing, when you are exercising, when you are disputing, do you not know that it is the Divine you feed, the Divine you exercise? You carry a God about within you . . . and you do not observe that you profane him by impure thoughts and unclean actions.³⁴

This bears a striking resemblance to 1 Cor 6:15–20: "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and join them to a prostitute? May it not be! . . . Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body." While the exact conception of God is different, of course, both authors conceive of the divine dwelling within a person and understand this as a strong impetus to moral behavior and a strong cause to avoid immoral behavior. Both conceive of the divine as profaned by immoral behavior. Of course the differences noted above still hold: Epictetus regards everyone as carrying about the divine, while Paul speaks only of Christians who have received the Holy Spirit in this way.

Another common conception is the equality of human beings. "For the Stoics, the differences among men are not of ultimate importance, since all men—whether rich or poor, slave or free, Greek or barbarian, male or female—participate in the cosmic order."³⁵ Paul's sweeping declaration in Gal 3:28, therefore, has important Stoic parallels, at least with regard to slavery and gender.³⁶ Interestingly enough, in both Stoicism and Christianity this was applied intellectually rather than socially (especially as neither group had the following or power to change the society's institutions). Once again, however, the basis for these claims was different for the two groups. For the Stoics, "nature" taught the equality of human beings. For Paul, the equality

³⁴ Ibid. 2.8.

³⁵ E. Lohse, *The New Testament Environment* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976) 249.

³⁶ Koester, *Introduction* 353–354; H. D. Betz, *Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 194, 196.

of human beings was a function of being in Christ and a part of the new creation, in which the distinctions that belonged to the old order dropped away.

Ferguson notes that Stoics denied the world's values, which is evident from Epictetus' *Encheiridion* and *Discourses*. In both he is concerned with reversing the usual goals: No longer is one to measure his or her "blessedness" by his or her attainment of external things that the world values, such as health, wealth, position, and the like. Paul clearly does the same, especially in 2 Corinthians, in which he constantly fights against the values that are placed on appearances in favor of the criteria for value in the sight of God. It is this reversal of standards that expresses itself in 4:16–18; 5:7 ("we walk by faith, not by sight"). It is thus clearly important to both groups to replace the larger society's set of values. This, however, is common to many religious and philosophical groups.

Paul (Gal 6:4) shares with the Stoics the value of the practice of self-examination.³⁷ Similarly he repudiates anyone among his readers "who thinks himself to be something" (v. 3) even as Epictetus does.³⁸ "You think you are somebody—fool among fools!" Paul is a little more restrained but may well be making use of popular-philosophical *sententiae*. W. S. Vorster notes a similar sort of conceptual parallel between Paul (Rom 14:22: "Happy is the person who does not feel guilty about what he approves") and Dio Chrysostom: "Whose [life] is freer from vexation than his who has no cause to blame himself."³⁹

A more significant conceptual parallel exists between Paul and the Stoics in their portrayal of the human being caught between a higher and baser principle. This has been touched upon above. The Stoics fought hard against the reign of "desire," the "excessive uncontrolled drive due to an overestimation of indifferent things,"⁴⁰ and understood that the human being could incline toward the higher nature or the lower.⁴¹ Similarly Paul describes the human condition as a battle between the Spirit and the flesh, each desiring what is contrary to the other (Gal 5:16–17). Just as inclining toward the higher nature makes one happy and inclining to the lower nature makes one unhappy according to Epictetus, so for Paul "if you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit" (6:8). Paul sets the reward, unlike Epictetus, in eschatological terms. Also, while it is somewhat unclear, one suspects that Paul refers to the Holy Spirit whom God gives to the believer and not to some innate higher power (such as one finds in Epictetus). Nevertheless the concept of the human being working out his path as part of a struggle between a higher and lower faculty is a striking common theme. Even though Paul understands freedom from the lower nature as coming through "crucifying the flesh with its desires and passions" and thus de-

³⁷ Cf. Epictetus *Dissertations* 4.7.40; 1.1.6; 1.20.7; 2.23.5–8.

³⁸ Ibid. 4.8.39; cf. Betz, *Galatians* 301–302.

³⁹ Dio Chrysostom *Oration* 1.35; cited in W. S. Vorster, "Stoics and Early Christianity on Blessedness," *Greeks, Romans, and Christians* (ed. D. L. Balch et al.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 50.

⁴⁰ Sandbach, *Stoics* 60.

⁴¹ Cf. Epictetus *Dissertations* 1.3.

pend on participation with Christ, still both Paul and Epictetus regard it as a matter of choice which way one will incline.

1 Corinthians 7:19–31, and particularly 7:29b–31, is often cited as a passage related to Stoic thought.⁴² Paul writes: “Let those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.” This appears to reflect the Stoic posture of distancing oneself from the world and from externals. Epictetus urges the reader to take care of the body “as of a thing not your own, as travellers treat their inn.”⁴³ He also offers an instructive parallel to Paul’s earlier statements about circumcision or slave status not being of any concern (7:19–24): “Remember that you are an actor in a play, the character of which is determined by the Playwright. . . . For this is your business, to play admirably the role assigned you; but the selection of that role is Another’s.”⁴⁴ This is reflected as well in the general Stoic attitude toward externals. Nevertheless here one must distinguish between Paul and Epictetus because of the motivation for this distancing: the belief in the imminence of the return of Jesus Christ. Paul’s “as though” only has meaning in the framework of apocalyptic expectation. It is not a general stance toward externals that he recommends because of the nature of externals, as in Epictetus.

Paul’s discussion of the importance of considering the conscience of others when eating food sacrificed to idols has a curious parallel in Epictetus. Paul writes: “We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care lest this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak” (1 Cor 8:8–9). Also, in 10:24 the eating is to be done subject to the following rule: “Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other.” Similarly Epictetus advises that one weigh the benefit to the body of indulging at a banquet with the need to do what is proper “for the maintenance of the proper kind of social feeling” and “to maintain your respect for your host.”⁴⁵ Of course Epictetus is formulating good manners that take into consideration the importance of the bond between host and guest and between oneself and fellow guests. Paul appears to employ this popular-philosophical principle to the problem of eating idol meats: One must consider one’s fellow guests (the fellow believers) and one’s host (be it Christ, who is the head of the Christian family in 8:12, or a human host [10:27–29]).

When Paul speaks of *tēn logikēn latreian hymōn* in Rom 12:1, he appears to echo a Stoic conception: “But as it is, I am a rational being [*logikos eimi*], therefore I must be singing hymns of praise to God.”⁴⁶ This has come to

⁴² See e.g. T. Schmeller, “Stoics/Stoicism,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 6.213.

⁴³ Epictetus *Encheiridion* 11.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 36.

⁴⁶ Epictetus *Dissertations* 1.16.20–21.

him, again, through Hellenistic Judaism.⁴⁷ Similarly Paul's distinction between the "outer person" and "inner person" in 2 Cor 4:16 appears to have its background in the Stoic distinction between one's self as the "rational principle" and the body as an external thing.⁴⁸ Paul and Seneca both speak of the body as a "weak vessel,"⁴⁹ and Paul and Epictetus both speak of existence in the body as a "groaning."⁵⁰ Here, however, there is a striking difference: Epictetus "promises that the person who learns how to deal with outward circumstances 'will not groan' any longer under 'this paltry body' whereas Paul "affirms the 'groaning' as the sighing of the Spirit and as a confirmation that believers belong already to the coming age."⁵¹ Paul's apocalyptic orientation again accounts for distinctions between his expressions and similar Stoic formulations.

Like Stoic authors, Paul likens the "wise" to those who are rich and to kings (although sarcastically)⁵² and employs the paradox of "having nothing, yet possessing all."⁵³ Even if Paul has a different "all" in mind, it appears likely (especially given the audience) that he once more employs popular-philosophical material to further his argument. A final conception ought to be examined: the goal of life. According to Sandbach the Stoic goal of life was (quoting Arius Didymus discussing Zeno) "to live consistently", that is, to live by one harmonious plan,⁵⁴ that plan being elsewhere expressed as "nature" or "reason." Living "consistently" with a divinely given plan is evident as a goal in Paul as well: "walking straightforwardly in the truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:14); "living up to what we have attained" (Phil 3:16); "living by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16). Paul's goals went beyond this goal for daily conduct, however. Unlike the Stoics, the ultimate goal of life for Paul was shaped by theo-/Christocentrism and apocalyptic eschatology. As he states in Phil 3:9–11, the goal is "to be found in Christ, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through the faith of Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

Already it may be seen that the relationship between Paul's writings and Stoic philosophy goes well beyond the realm of words. One may even make the claim that we have seen several basic ideas shared in common between the two worlds of thought. It is also becoming clear, however, that Metzger is essentially correct when he says that "the theological presuppositions and the springs of Paul's actions were very different from those of a Stoic phi-

⁴⁷ Cf. *T. Levi* 3:6: "The worship in heaven is a rational and bloodless offering"; Dunn, *Romans 9–16* 711.

⁴⁸ V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians* (AB 32A; New York: Doubleday, 1984) 261.

⁴⁹ 2 Cor 4:7; cf. Seneca *To Marcia* 11.3.

⁵⁰ 2 Cor 5:2–5; cf. Epictetus *Dissertations* 1.1.9–12.

⁵¹ Furnish, *II Corinthians* 296.

⁵² Cf. 1 Cor 4:8 with Plutarch *De tranq. anim.* 472a; Fee, *First Corinthians* 173 n. 43.

⁵³ Cf. 2 Cor 6:10 with Seneca *De beneficiis* 7.2.5; 7.3.2; 7.8.1; 7.10.6; Furnish, *II Corinthians* 348.

⁵⁴ Sandbach, *Stoics* 53.

losopher.” Apocalyptic eschatology and the assertion of dependence on God or Christ separate the two at the fundamental level. Nevertheless the relationship is closer than Metzger or Nock or Fee leads one to think. This will become even more clear as the analysis progresses through the consideration of common use of rhetorical devices, commonplaces and metaphors. Paul, it will be seen, frequently develops and ornaments his exposition of authentic Christianity through forms and figures familiar to Stoic authors.

IV. USE OF COMMON *TOPOI* AND FIGURES

As noted above, both Paul and the Stoics can speak of making “progress” along the paths of their respective philosophies. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that both could use athletic metaphors, whether of training, or competing in the games, or winning a prize.⁵⁵ Similarly both Paul and Epictetus make use of the opposition “mature/immature”⁵⁶ and of the image of being weaned and partaking solid food: “Are you not willing, at this late date, like children, to be weaned and to partake of more solid food?”⁵⁷

Paul and Seneca both make use of the image of being displayed in a triumphal procession to denote a humiliating experience.⁵⁸ They also both make use of what appears to be a common proverb—*cotidie morimur*—although Seneca refers to the natural death by degrees as one faces old age, whereas Paul has in mind a set of adverse conditions borne on account of Jesus.⁵⁹ Seneca speaks of the philosopher as a *spectaculum* (a cause of pride for him),⁶⁰ and Paul uses the Greek equivalent (*theatron*) to describe the apostles (although for him it is a humiliating display, 1 Cor 4:9).⁶¹ It was apparently common for a proponent of a way of life to contrast himself or his circle with *hoi polloi*. Paul’s self-contrast with “the many” in 2 Cor 2:17 thus bears a resemblance to Epictetus, who contrasts *hoi philosophoi* with *hoi polloi*.⁶²

Fee notes as well the common use of building imagery in Paul (1 Cor 3:10) and Epictetus.⁶³ Sleep as a negative image or figure for the “abnegation of the *nous*” appears in Rom 13:11, but also in Epictetus.⁶⁴ Dunn also notes that Paul has in common with Epictetus the denunciation of inconsistency between principle and practice.⁶⁵ Both also have extended passages in which they challenge their coreligionists/fellow Stoics.⁶⁶ Both even discuss

⁵⁵ Cf. 1 Cor 9:24–27; Phil 3:13–14; Epictetus *Dissertations* 2.18; 3.12; 1.24.2.

⁵⁶ Cf. Phil 3:15; 1 Cor 14:20; Epictetus *Encheiridion* 51.2.

⁵⁷ Epictetus *Dissertations* 2.16.30; cf. 1 Cor 3:1–2a; Fee, *First Corinthians* 124 n. 12.

⁵⁸ 2 Cor 2:14; cf. Seneca *Ben.* 2.9.1.

⁵⁹ 2 Cor 4:11; cf. Seneca *Epistulae* 24.19; Furnish, *II Corinthians* 284.

⁶⁰ Seneca *De providentia* 2.9, 11; *Ep.* 64.4–6.

⁶¹ Fee, *First Corinthians* 174 n. 50.

⁶² Epictetus *Dissertations* 2.1.22; Furnish, *II Corinthians* 178.

⁶³ Epictetus *Dissertations* 2.15.8; Fee, *First Corinthians* 137 n. 14.

⁶⁴ Epictetus *Dissertations* 2.20.15.

⁶⁵ Rom 2:1; cf. Epictetus *Dissertations* 2.21.11–12; 3.2.14–16; Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 79.

the nature of the “true” Jew⁶⁷ and speak of being between two religions as “play-acting.”⁶⁸

In all these parallels one finds Paul using the figures and techniques of Stoic authors/philosophers in the exposition of the gospel. These are more than verbal parallels, even in the cases where the connection appears only as one word, as Paul appears to be using the words as concepts that relate to a particular context or topic. That is, Paul and Seneca or Epictetus use a given word or image in comparable contexts.

One *topos* used frequently in both Paul and the Stoics is that of slavery and freedom. Epictetus, for example, makes this imagery a vehicle for the fundamentals of his philosophy: “Cease to be deluded by externals. Cease to make yourselves slaves, first of things, and then, upon their account, of the men who have the power either to bestow or take them away.” “Each man’s master is the person who has the authority over what the man wishes or does not wish, so as to secure it, or take it away.” “Freedom is not procured by a full enjoyment of what is desired, but by controlling the desire.”⁶⁹ Epictetus seeks thus to urge his hearers to attain freedom (become their own masters) by ceasing to equate satisfaction with any external thing.

Paul’s use of the imagery is quite different. In Paul’s thought, slavery is still the basic human condition, but it is slavery to sin (cf. Rom 6:6–7, 12, 16) or to law and the “elemental principles of the universe” (Gal 4:3). Slavery itself, however, is not an evil state. One can be a slave of obedience (Rom 6:16) or righteousness (6:18). But the Christian is basically called to a life of “freedom” (Gal 5:1, 13). This freedom is not libertinism but the freedom to live by the law of love (5:13). Thus while Paul and Epictetus use the language to express different conceptions of the human problem and its solution, it is significant that both use the same language—again an instance of Paul’s utilization of the language of popular philosophy as a means of giving expression to the gospel.

V. COMMON FORMS

It has been frequently noted that Paul used the form of argumentation known as the diatribe, a form common to Stoic authors.⁷⁰ Epictetus provides a good example of a Stoic diatribe: “God is beneficial. Good is also beneficial. It would seem, then, that where the essence of God is, there too is the essence of good. What then is the essence of God—flesh? By no means. An estate? Fame? By no means. Intelligence? Knowledge? Right reason? Certainly. Herein then, without more ado, seek the essence of good.”⁷¹ Romans 1:18–2:11; 3:1–8; 7:7–13; 8:31–39; 11:1–24; 1 Cor 4:6–15; 9:1–18;

⁶⁶ Rom 2:21–23; cf. Epictetus *Dissertations* 2.19.19–28; Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 113.

⁶⁷ Rom 2:28–29; cf. Epictetus *Dissertations* 2.9.20–21; Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 123.

⁶⁸ Gal 2:11–14; cf. Epictetus *Dissertations* 2.9.20–21; Betz, *Galatians* 110.

⁶⁹ Epictetus *Dissertations* 3.20.8.; *Encheiridion* 14; *Dissertations* 4.1.175.

⁷⁰ See e.g. Schmeller, “Stoics/Stoicism” 213.

⁷¹ Epictetus *Dissertations* 2.8.1–8.

15:29–49 all have characteristics of the diatribe style, proceeding from proposition or problem through a series of alternatives that are negated until the right answer is presented and affirmed, with corollary questions coming up as if from an interlocutor, and dealt with in turn. Paul clearly adopted this Stoic form as a helpful method of presentation.

Paul also makes use of the so-called catalogues of vices and virtues, a form popular in Stoic writings as well as Hellenistic Jewish works (which again become a mediator of things Stoic).⁷² In Paul one finds catalogues of vices in Rom 1:29–31; 13:13; 1 Cor 5:10–11; 6:9–10; 2 Cor 12:20; Gal 5:19–21. Catalogues of virtues are found in Gal 5:22–23; Phil 4:8. Not only the form but also the content of these lists corresponds to what one encounters in Stoic (and other non-Christian) authors, suggesting that Paul has incorporated them to reinforce Christianity's commitment to conventional morality. The lists themselves are therefore “not in any way specifically Christian” but represent the conventional morality of the time.⁷³

A third form common to Paul and the Stoic literature is the *Peristasenkatalog*, or “list of hardships.” V. Furnish cites the following:⁷⁴

The Stoic is not impeded when confined, and under no compulsion when flung down a precipice, and not in torture when on the rack, and not injured when mutilated, and is invincible when thrown in wrestling, and is not blockaded under siege, and is uncaptured while his enemies are selling him into slavery.⁷⁵

The Stoic is sick and yet happy, in danger and happy, dying and happy, condemned to exile and happy, in disrepute and happy.⁷⁶

Exile and imprisonment and bonds and death and disrepute are learned in the schools to be considered indifferent things.⁷⁷

Similar lists of hardships can be found in 2 Cor 4:8–9; 6:4–10; 11:23b–29; Rom 8:35–39; 1 Cor 4:9–13. One striking difference between Paul's use and the Stoic authors' use is that, with the exception of Rom 8:35–39, Paul appears to be describing his own experiences and not the theoretical imperviousness of the true philosopher to external circumstances. Furnish offers four additional and penetrating differences between the Pauline and Stoic use of such lists.⁷⁸ (1) The apostle “does not hesitate to acknowledge the real impact outward circumstances have had on him,” for example expressing the feeling of “desperation” in Asia Minor (2 Cor 1:8). The lists are not offered as proof of imperturbability. (2) “Paul does not speak of ‘happiness’ in the midst of adversity (Epictetus) . . . but rather of being comforted in his afflictions (1:4–7; 7:6–7, 13) and rescued from them (1:10).” (3) Against the

Stoic idea that “we afflict ourselves, we distress ourselves” by regarding

⁷² Cf. Wis 14:25–26; 4 Macc 1:26–27; 2:15; *T. Reub.* 3:3–6; Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 67.

⁷³ Betz, *Galatians* 282.

⁷⁴ Furnish, *II Corinthians* 281.

⁷⁵ Plutarch *The Stoics Talk More Paradoxically than the Poets* 1057E.

⁷⁶ Epictetus *Dissertations* 2.19.24.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 1.30.2.

⁷⁸ Furnish, *II Corinthians* 281–282.

afflictions as hurtful,⁷⁹ Paul “never doubts the external origin of the afflictions he catalogs.” (4) Against the view of Epictetus that “it is difficulties that show what men are,”⁸⁰ for Paul “difficulties must be met and borne with faith, and thereby disclose not ‘what men are’ but that the power which is beyond any comparison belongs to God and not to us” (2 Cor 4:7). Like the Stoics, Paul makes use of hardship lists and intends thereby to demonstrate something. But unlike the Stoics, what he seeks to demonstrate is not his imperturbability as a consummate Stoic but rather the sincerity of his commitment to the gospel and the manifestation of the power of God through human weakness.

VI. ROMANS 1 AND 2

Although Paul’s discourse in Rom 1:18–3:20 begins with a Jewish apocalyptic declaration of the impending revelation of the wrath of God, the argument itself takes as its starting point the Stoic conception of natural revelation. The section contains a densely packed collection of Stoic vocabulary, forms and conceptions, particularly the section dealing with Gentile depravity in 1:18–32. E. Lohse summarizes the Stoic doctrine thus: “The rule of the [divine] logos is discernible in the works of the cosmos. . . . Anyone who recognizes the ordered coherence of the cosmos will . . . join in praise to the deity.”⁸¹ Contemplation of the cosmos (as an orderly and created whole) is expected to lead to consciousness of the Creator of the cosmos: “Just as every work of art tells something about the artist, so the greatest work of art, the world, reflects an all-superior creative power.”⁸² When Paul writes therefore in Rom 1:19–20 that “what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them; ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made,” it is apparent that he reflects a knowledge of, and even approval of, this Stoic doctrine. Dunn points out the presence of Stoic terms in 1:20 significantly mediated through Wisdom of Solomon (Hellenistic Judaism).⁸³ Wisdom 13:1–5 provides a very close intermediate parallel between the Stoic doctrine and Paul:

For all people who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know the one who exists, nor did they recognize the artisan while paying heed to his works; but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water, or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world. If through delight in the beauty of these things people assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them. . . . For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.

⁷⁹ Epictetus *Dissertations* 1.25.28.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 1.24.1.

⁸¹ Lohse, *Environment* 245.

⁸² Schmeller, “Stoics/Stoicism” 211.

⁸³ Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 57–58.

Again it becomes apparent how important the literature and thought of Hellenistic Judaism is as a link between Stoicism and Paul. Both Paul and the author of *Wisdom of Solomon* use the doctrine within the context of a condemnation of idolatry and the immorality that results from idolatry, and thus they deny perhaps the effectiveness of natural revelation. But neither denies the doctrine or at least the possibility of natural revelation. Here is a basic idea of Stoicism at home in Pauline thought.

Related to this theme is the idea of a universal law derived from nature. The Stoics held that “because the divine power flows through the universe, man shares in it in that he reverently considers the order of nature, recognizes its laws, and follows them.”⁸⁴ It is against such a background that Paul’s statement in Rom 2:14–15 may be read: “When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness.” It seems more likely that Paul is weaving into his argument against Jewish privilege the Stoic concept of natural law than that he is referring to Jer 31:33.⁸⁵ The Jeremiah text, after all, speaks of a new covenant—which, for Paul, could only be applied to those “in Christ.” Again, this concept would most likely have come to Paul indirectly through Hellenistic Judaism: “Stoic ideas . . . found acceptance in Hellenistic Judaism, since people sought to identify the Creator and God of Israel as the deity that directs nature and to link as well the natural law that imposes ethical obligations upon all men with the Law of Moses.”⁸⁶

VII. CONCLUSION

Having reviewed at some length the parallels between Paul and Stoicism, we are in a better position to address the quotation that launched this investigation. We cannot be sure how Stoic texts or thought might have formed part of Paul’s education. Everyone read Homer and Aratus in Greek education. Did Paul have this benefit? He gives no indication that he did or that such things would have been of interest to him in his “progress in Judaism.” Nevertheless it is clear that he learned a great deal about the popular philosophy of his day (especially the Stoic aspects of it). His use of Stoic terminology, his echoing of Stoic phrases, his bringing to expression conceptions that would have been at home within Stoicism, his use of Stoic *topoi*, metaphors, figures and forms, his use of Stoic natural theology—all indicate that the apostle Paul was indeed “acquainted with a certain amount of Stoic teaching.” The parallelism goes beyond the realm of words, however.

Paul employed the rhetorical forms used in Stoic authors; he expressed his message in figures common among Stoics; he shows many agreements with

⁸⁴ Lohse, *Environment* 245.

⁸⁵ Nock (*Christianisme* 127) argues for this alternative to a Stoic background.

⁸⁶ Lohse, *Environment* 249.

Stoic authors in the conceptual world. Certain “basic ideas” were held in common, such as the position of the human being between two possible ruling principles. Metzger is correct, however, to qualify the relationship strongly by saying that “the theological presuppositions and the springs of Paul’s actions were very different from those of a Stoic philosopher.” It was the encounter with Christ, the experience of the Spirit, all within the framework of a fervent eschatological expectation that shaped Paul’s message, and, as seen throughout the discussion above, accounts for many of the differences between Paul and the Stoics at each level of parallelism explored.