Moving the Foundations: Zeno of Citium and the Stoic Tradition

For any of the Hellenistic Philosophies, founders were crucial in the formation of doctrine and identity. The Stoics were no exception to this rule, and the distinctive features of their founder, Zeno's, biography and doxography reveal how the school conceived of itself, and situated itself within a particular historical, philosophical, and cultural context. Zeno's story is, of course, the story of Stoicism's origin, and the overlap between biography and philosophical history shows clearly in the way that his story was told and retold, by both the school and its opponents. At this point a methodological problem arises in that many of the sources for Zeno's life and teachings are ambiguous if not hostile toward the Stoics as a school. Diogenes Laërtius, the primary source for his biography, presents indeterminate philosophical biases of his own, making it difficult to discern which details he includes to present Stoicism in a favorable or unfavorable light, or whether he is editing at all when excerpting information from his sources. Other sources on Zeno and his teachings are more sympathetic toward the school on the whole, but these do not necessarily guarantee an accurate representation any more than potentially hostile witnesses.

What is more, modern scholarship on these works has tended to consider only the details on which doxographers and biographers focus, rather than the interpretive options for how to make sense of those details. This paper will consider the ways in which subsequent generations of Stoics adapted Zeno's teaching and added to them with their own innovations. As such this will also be a study in reception, since the different interpretations and representations of Zeno's life vary according to period and other influences of context. More broadly, this study will shed light upon a practice of "founder construction" amongst ancient philosophic schools generically. Over and over we see, especially in the Hellenistic schools, a pattern whereby founders are either

referenced with the highest forms of adoration (cf. Lucretius on Epicurus), or figures of early historical relevance are appropriated for a school if their thought seems at all amenable to the prevailing dogma (cf. the Cynics on Socrates; the Stoics on Heraclitus). There remains the open question of whether or not this concern with founders and historical pedigrees was actually a matter of interest for the schools in their original contexts, or an invention used for sorting through the broad variety of the ancient philosophical canon, since doxographers like Diogenes and Sextus Empiricus display a love of such organizational schemes, regardless of whether the schools they describe actually thought of themselves in such terms. In this way, founder construction is both an ideological and historiographical problem. An examination of the ways in which the Stoic school constructed its founders' image reveals the ways that each generation of Stoic connected themselves to the tradition of their school and distinguish themselves from previous Stoics by expanding their theories on physics, ethics, or logic.

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