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# THE STOIC PHILOSOPHER

## AN ALTERNATE VIEW OF THE COSMOS



### AN ALTERNATE VIEW OF THE COSMOS (NEW AND OLD)

BY NIGEL GLASSBOROW

There are many viewpoints from which to observe the nature of the Universe - from the micro-viewpoint of subatomic particles and quantum science where everything is seen as being that which is manifested out of the interaction of particles and forces; to the overview that cosmology offers us of the macro-physical structures and movements to be found throughout the Universe.

But, of course, Zeno had none of the technology available today for such detailed investigation. Instead, he used simple observation and reason to establish an understanding of our place in the Universe, an understanding that leads to an appreciation of our relationship to the whole and vice-versa.

As Professor Gilbert Murray, in his 1915 lecture 'The Stoic Philosophy' (available in the College's Rare Books section of its 'Resources') tells us of Zeno:

*"Two questions lay before him how to live and what to believe. His real interest was in the first, but it could not be answered without first facing the second. For if we do not in the least know what is true or untrue,*

*real or unreal, we cannot form any reliable rules about conduct or anything."*

This sets in place an exercise in simple observation of the nature of all around us in order that we may gain an understanding as to how to 'live in accord with Nature' - that is, to live life ethically.

So, two thousand three hundred years after Zeno, what does common-sense say about Existence and how it manifests as it does? What can one say about the nature of the Existence we experience as it exists in this present moment?

Some Observations

1. Existence is an active state and activity only happens in the here and now. Yesterday is unalterable and tomorrow never comes.
2. The here-and-now, here on Earth, is the same Experiential Moment that is being experienced everywhere in the Cosmos at one and the same time - the Experiential Moment that we experience is ubiquitous and synchronous throughout the Universe.

Being active, Existence exists everywhere but not 'everywhen', for it only exists in the Cosmos-wide present moment.

3. We exist and live out our lives within the 'flow of change' that is the Experiential Moment. All that we experience is only that which we experience as occurring within the

moment that we are experiencing as 'the Now'. All that we remember as having experienced is only that which exists as a memory in the present moment - a memory of past states of what was the present moment as it was previously.

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4. The active state that is Existence is a 'flow of change' that manifests as it does as a result of the combined nature of Space (volume), Movement (activity) and Consciousness (the 'information' which organises Movement within Space).

*[In like manner, Plato reported that Socrates said, 'The Universe has plenty of Limit, an equal amount of Unlimit, and also a potent Cause which brings order and arrangement.' Space provides the 'limit', Movement provides the 'Unlimit', and Consciousness provides the 'potent Cause'.*

*With similar intent, Stoicism of old offers volume as an 'extension' that equates to Space and Socrates' 'Unlimit'; 'the passive principle' which may be seen as substance without Cause, which equates to Movement and Socrates' 'Limit'; and 'the active principle' which is Consciousness or Socrates' 'potent Cause' – also seen in Stoicism as the deity, the Logos, Phusis, Providence, Fate, etcetera.]*

Here, for this assessment of what is known by simple reasoned observation, 'Consciousness' refers to everything from the Laws of Nature to the state of awareness that we humans experience, whereby there is activity that may be covered in full or in part by the definition 'the state of being aware of and responsive to one's surroundings.' Albeit, that for the whole Cosmos it is 'the state of being aware of and responsive to that it contains.'

5. Space provides the means to experience the 'Limit' of 'anything' as well as the means to experience the spacial relationship of any individualised aspect of the Universe to all else around or within it.

Every part of the ultimate volume that is Space is filled with Movement. Space provides the stable volume within which the vibrancy that is Existence exists. Space, in its ultimate state, is not malleable, just as the volume that contains a lake is stable, while the water

that is the lake is fluid.

6. Movement provides the 'Unlimit' in that the many layers of movement (from that which manifests as subatomic particles up to the movement of galactic bodies etcetera) enables us to experience and identify the many and various aspects that go to make up all within the Universe.

No identifiable individualisation within Existence is internally or externally stationary. Absolute stillness does not exist anywhere in the Universe.

Movement occupies every point within the ultimate (probably even infinite) state that is stationary Space.

7. And then there is the Consciousness, that is the 'potent Cause', that ensures that all of the Movement within Space combines in such a manner that the Universe and all within it is manifested as it is, while also ensuring that the Universe continues to be the rational knowable state that is experienced through the 'flow of change' that manifests as Existence. As science would probably put it, Consciousness imparts the 'information' needed to organise Movement within Space in such a manner that it manifests the Cosmos as a whole and as its individualised parts.

8. The nature of this Consciousness is ubiquitous – being a quality that is to be found throughout the Cosmos, just as Space and Movement are to be found everywhere. (This accords with aspects of quantum science etcetera.) However, it may also be seen as acting in a number of ways – namely governing, enabling and participatory, in that it is to be seen that the whole of the physical Universe (Space and Movement or matter, energy and forces) is, in some manner, imbued with Consciousness. This view may be seen as a form of cosmopsychism 1.

9. The governing aspect of Consciousness relates to such areas as the ubiquitous Laws of Nature that science is discovering - laws that ensure

that the 'flow of change' that is Existence flows in a rational manner. For instance, Consciousness ensures that the various layers of Movement required to manifest a hydrogen atom manifest in such a way that each and every hydrogen atom in the Universe is identifiable as an individual hydrogen atom. Such Consciousness needs to be ubiquitous so as to ensure that the Laws of Nature are implemented, as necessary and as appropriate, everywhere and anywhere in the Universe within the Experiential Moment so as to ensure the 'flow of change' that is Existence flows in a consistent yet flexible manner.

10. The enabling aspect of Consciousness is knowable by the fact that not everything is subject to the late nineteenth century clock-like mechanical view of the Universe where it was believed that there was no place for living creatures (or anything else) to have the ability to choose between possible courses of action. The erroneous 'clockwork-universe theory' was wrong in its claims that all action, both now and in the future, has been pre-ordained.

Instead, in the twentieth century, science has shown that the Universe does not operate under the iron will of some supposed all powerful god or law of 'cause-and-effect' that has already chosen how everything is to happen before it even happens. The subatomic sciences have shown that matters are affected by 'probability' and the involvement of something akin to 'self-observation'. As such the Laws of Nature set the mechanics of the game of life while also being flexible enough to enable various aspects of Existence to interact in an independent manner, whereby the ongoing 'flow of change' is not totally preordained. In this respect, Consciousness is enabling - just as the master program in a computer game will adapt and adjust the game to accommodate the choices of the gamers.

*[It is to be noted that the Stoic take is that God, the Logos, etcetera is seen as being the Cause that causes everything to be as it is, where everything is caused to manifest in the experiential moment, albeit that the*

*Cause, while acting in the experiential moment, takes into account what must/ought to rationally happen as a result of the impetus of the 'flow of change'.]*

11. The participatory aspect of Consciousness relates to the question of free-will and the like, whereby individual aspects of the Universe have the ability to influence what happens in the 'flow of change' and so are able to be a 'participatory cause' when it comes to the area of Existence over which they have some influence. Their individual state of Consciousness, that acts in unison with or as part of the pan-Universe Consciousness, will interact with other aspects of the Universe as their choices, circumstance and the Laws of Nature will allow.

We are well aware of a human's ability to move independently and to make choices and to have an effect on what they interact with, just as other animals and plants are able to. To what extent other aspects of the Universe are able to participate in directing the 'flow of change' is an open question.

12. Regards the nature of 'the past' (from the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám as translated by Edward FitzGerald) we have the ever-popular words:

*'The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,  
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.'*

This expresses very clearly the nature of what we call 'the past'. It is unchangeable. It is no longer 'active' – 'the Finger' no longer writes. The present moment, the Experiential Moment, is where "The Moving Finger writes".

Our only knowledge of what is 'past' are the fossils, artifacts, records and memories that exist now, in the present moment. And as is suggested, nothing can alter anything that happened in 'the

past' – and so nothing can 'travel back in time'. Not a time machine. Not a single subatomic particle. Absolutely nothing.

The 'flow of change' that is Existence is, in a sense, 'directional'. Nothing can flow against it. Once the whole Universe has changed to become what it is in this present moment, no part of it may reverse the change - not one iota.

So it is that 'the past' does not 'physically exist' other than as a memory of the stages of the 'flow of change' that have brought us to where we are today.

In like manner, 'the future' does not exist. 'The future' is only a concept for speculating and trying to predict where the 'flow of change' that is Existence may take us. As has been said, 'tomorrow never comes'. In like manner 'the future' is always out of reach. Existence cannot exist in 'the future' in that there is no activity or Movement happening in 'the future'.

Rationality tells us that activity and Movement only occur in the present moment, the Experiential Moment.

These are the basic principles about "Life, the Universe, and Everything" that knowledge and beliefs about Existence, the Cosmos and the Universe have to fit in with. I believe that science does not contradict any of these principles and that cosmology, astronomy, the subatomic sciences and quantum theory etcetera are all demonstrating the need for some form of 'ubiquitous field of consciousness' (UFC)[1] in order to make sense of many a scientific area of study. The nature of this UFC is open to debate, but, in Stoicism ancient and modern, such is the mind of God.

### **Not just one viewpoint**

While classic Stoicism follows a similar line of thought to that above, on a simpler level, another Stoic rationale for a belief in the 'active principle' and God is that both are seen to be 'the universal governor and organiser of all things'

(Diogenes Laertius LIII) AND that we know that there is a 'universal governor and organiser of all things' just by looking at Nature and how:

'All things are mutually intertwined, and the tie is sacred, and scarcely anything is alien the one to the other. For all things have been ranged side by side, and together help to order one ordered Universe. For there is both one Universe, made up of all things, and one God immanent in all things,... and one Law, one Reason common to all intelligent creatures, and one Truth.' [Marcus Aurelius VII.9]

We are also told that just by looking at the organisation that goes into the production of a single flower we can see the works of 'the universal governor and organiser of all things'.

Hence, we have Seneca telling us:

*'God is near you, he is with you, he is within you... A holy spirit indwells within us. One who marks our good deeds and our bad deeds, and is our guardian. Indeed, no man can be good without the help of God. ... He it is that gives noble and upright counsel.'*  
*Seneca XLI. On the God Within Us*

1. Keppler, J. and Itay, S. (2020). Cosmopsychism and Consciousness Research: A Fresh View on the Causal Mechanisms Underlying Phenomenal States. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5 March 2020.

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