

ETERNAL QUESTIONS

a Journal of Metaphysics written by

Brother Erikos, Abbot

The Stoic Monastery

<https://stoicmonastery.com>

DEC-JAN 2023-24: Issue #11

“From Every Thing to One Thing”

1. The Birth of God

Nothing. The birth of the universe. The birth of God. Do you remember when God was born? Well, if God was born at the birth of the universe, then it was 13.8 billion years ago and far, far away. But, if you believe the stories of religions, God was already there to create the universe—and now we fall into a trap, a logical fallacy, the Infinite Regress. So, from them we have nothing. Well, we have myths and stories, but nothing even remotely approaching factual.

What do contemporary physicists say? “In the beginning, there was a question mark. All else followed. The end.”¹ The universe doesn't necessarily begin with the Big Bang; all we know is the *history* of this explosion, one of several theories. Scientists don't know what was going on before the universe was born; or, even if there is a “before” before the universe was created. “Before the Big Bang we're a bit lost.... At small enough scales, we don't even know if the word 'before' even makes sense!”²

¹ Paul Sutter, visiting scholar at Ohio State University's Center for Cosmology and AstroParticle Physics, <https://www.space.com/31192-what-triggered-the-big-bang.html>

² *ibid*

So, regarding the birth of God, the universe, we don't get much help from either religion or science. What about the cosmology of the Stoics? Almost nothing. There is no birth. The closest we come to describing the birth of God is from Heraclitus who denies God was born. "This cosmos, which is the same for all, no one of gods or men has made; but it was ever, is now, and ever shall be an ever-living Fire, with measures kindling and measures going out (frag. 20, Burnet)."

2. Everything is God

So, do we know anything at all about how God came into existence? Yes. In 1928 the English mathematician Paul Dirac discovered an equation that resulted in the first realization existence begins with matter and anti-matter destroying each other as soon as they leap out of the vacuum of space. Today, according to CERN physicists, that equation created nearly a century ago still holds. "During the first fractions of a second of the Big Bang, the hot and dense universe was buzzing with particle-antiparticle pairs popping in and out of existence."³

Furthermore, we are told by CERN physicists that the only reason anything exists at all is because some "unknown entity" intervenes in the battle of matter and anti-matter destroying each other, and causes one particle of matter per billion to survive more often than the particles of antimatter.⁴ Without this intervening entity causing more particles of matter to survive than their opposite, we would not have a universe at all. Does anyone know who or what this intervening entity is? No, but we can call it God until we have a better answer. After all, it did create the universe.

And, of course, what we are saying here is what Heraclitus said 2500 years ago about the dynamic continuum, that all existence lies on a continuum of opposites, the dynamic continuum, one of the most important ideas in human history. From this, we can know another thing about God. "God is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, surfeit and hunger; but he takes various shapes, just as fire, when it is mingled with spices, is named according to the savour of each (frag. 36, Burnet)."

What we do *not* find in Heraclitus is an "intervening entity" that makes one side of the dynamic continua an infinitesimally tiny bit more prevalent than the other, one particle of matter per billion to survive more often than it's opposite. So, existence, physical material existence happens because of that one part of the positive that is not immediately destroyed by its opposite. Yes, as Heraclitus said, "War is the father of all and the king of all... (frag. 44, Burnet)," but one particle in this great battlefield of a billion manages to survive. And here we are.

³ <https://home.cern/science/physics/matter-antimatter-asymmetry-problem>

⁴ *ibid*

Yes, everything is God. "It is wise to listen not to me but to my logos and acknowledge that all things are one....The one is made up of all things, and all things issue from the one (Heraclitus frags 1 & 59, Burnet)." But is this God anything more than one particle per billion that survives a war to the death? What did these surviving particles become? According to a growing number of theoretical physicists, the particles that survived became a universe of billions of galaxies. And, it may be a neural network, a brain.⁵

Finally, is this brain conscious? Some great minds believe it is.

"I regard consciousness as fundamental. I regard matter as derivative from consciousness. We cannot get behind consciousness. Everything that we talk about, everything that we regard as existing, postulates consciousness."⁶

Max Plank

Marilyn Monk, Professor Emeritus of University College London, has exhaustively studied the nature of consciousness and says, "...matter is derivative from consciousness and displays a sense of belonging, meaning and purpose of everything throughout evolution...it is evident that all forms of life have consciousness but at different levels of sophistication, and with a very different range of consequences of their consciousness."⁷

If we accept a growing belief of scientists that the universe, God, is conscious, then all that remains to be believed about the Stoic god is Providence. We can summarize the providence of God in the remainder of this paragraph. Beauty, truth, love, and endorphins are a four common but also excellent reasons to believe in the providence of Nature. Regardless of how they came to us, regardless of their origins with or without evolution, life is only made bearable by a providential deity.

3. Knowing God by Other Means

And now we address the direct experience of the divine. It would be a mistake to confine our knowledge of God to the myths of religions or the theories of scientists or the speculations philosophers. We can know more by other means, and even the logical positivists of the 20th century made exceptions for the experiences of the individual. "... some of the most rigid materialists in the last century, such as Willard Van Orman Quine and Paul Churchland, allowed for the

⁵ *Researched and written by neuroscientist author Bobby Azarian and published by "Hard Science" June 12, 2023. <https://bigthink.com/hard-science/the-universe-may-be-a-giant-neural-network-here's-why/>*

⁶ Max Plank, January 25, 1931 issue of *The Observer*

⁷ Marilyn Monk, https://integral-review.org/issues/vol_16_no_2_monk

possibility of there being compelling empirical evidence of parapsychological powers and even ghosts.”⁸

When one paranormal experience agrees with another, those who explore the outer limits of our reality should pay attention. When an individual in deep meditation “sees” and feels the euphoria of the Empty Sky that is later confirmed by shamanic journeying to a teacher, then there is the beginnings of cosmological agreement. Exploring the furthest reaches of human consciousness can and does yield empirical data.

And when physicists agrees with Heraclitus, a mystic genius who lived 2500 years ago that we live on a dynamic continuum, and when this continuum is described by a spirit world teacher as the Heart of God, then we have taken yet another step into understanding. The heart of God is our heart when we feel the polar opposites of the continua that govern reality. “God is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, surfeit and hunger ... (H. frag. 36, Burnet).”

Profound experiences of euphoria and love can be known in the hard discipline of deep meditation. Journeying to the upper and lower spirit worlds to speak with wise teachers, is another way to know God by other means. There is so much more that we can learn when we use reason *and* metaphysical practices. We must learn to think for ourselves and rely on our own efforts to determine what we believe. But it takes courage and effort.

In 20 BCE, the Roman Poet Horace wrote in his *First Book of Letters*, *Sapere aude!* Dare to be wise. We hear this phrase again in 1784 when Immanuel Kant emphasized *Sapere aude!* in his essay on enlightenment. And, we do dare to be wise when we have the courage to investigate the God of everything who is made up of the same star flesh as the one thing. And this understanding of God is increased again when we focus on the soul, the next step on our path to enlightenment. *Sapere aude!*

4. The Soul

Now we look away from everything to see the one thing, the soul. The first problem with contemplating the soul is that there are so many definitions of it. We have dictionaries, psychologists, Stoics, atheists, Jews, Hindus, and many more groups, philosophies, -isms and schisms, each with a unique definition of soul which they hold onto firmly with religious fervor. We could ignore all but our own beliefs and believers, but we shouldn't. It is especially important for a journal of metaphysics to include other ideas of soul, even when we disagree with them.

⁸ Excerpt from Stanford University's entry on the afterlife:
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/afterlife/>

It's a Stoic tradition.⁹

My very big Random House Dictionary has 14 definitions of soul. The first one is: "The principle of life, feeling, thought, and actions in humans, regarded as a distinct entity separate from the body, and commonly held to be separable from the body; the spiritual part of humans as distinct from the physical part." I'm guessing that may be the definition you had in mind unless you remember your lessons from the Stoic Essential Studies course you took from the College of Stoic Philosophers.

What you learned in your Stoic studies probably looked something like this: "**soul** (*psuchē*) the level of tension of *pneuma* that generates the animal properties of perception, movement and reproduction."¹⁰ Before we dig any deeper into the Stoic definition it's important to point out that in the regular dictionary quoted above, none of the 14 definitions included even a *suggestion* that soul may have anything to do with anything other than being human. But here, in the Stoic idea of *psuchē* there is an expansion of who or what may have a soul. We now have all "animal properties of perception," et cetera.

But whereas my Random House dictionary doesn't include other animals in the subject and only defines the soul in the context of a humanity, the Stoic definition includes animals with humans reining as the apex animal but says nothing about the soul as separate or separable from the body. Although the Stoic soul isn't assumed to be separable from the body it is considered to be something divine. Let's take a look at What the Stoics believe is the structure of the Human Soul:

The *pneuma psychikon* is made up of eight parts or streams: the five senses, plus the faculties of reproduction, speech, and command, the director of all the other parts, the *hegemonikon*. Classical Stoics believe that the five senses, plus reproduction and speech, are extensions of the *hegemonikon*, the command center. Here's an excellent summation of the Stoic concept of Pneuma that can be found in Wikipedia:

"Originating among Greek medical writers who locate human vitality in the breath, pneuma for the Stoics is the active, generative principle that organizes both the individual and the cosmos. In its highest form, the pneuma constitutes the human soul (*psychê*), which is a fragment of the pneuma that is the soul of God. As a force that structures matter, it exists even in inanimate objects..." Which suggests that Stoics *could* believe that Marilyn Monk was right. "...matter is derivative from consciousness and displays a sense of belonging, meaning and purpose of everything throughout evolution..."

⁹ Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, and Seneca all examined other philosophies. Marcus even had other, competing schools endowed and built in Rome.

¹⁰ John Sellars' glossary of terms in his book, *Stoicism* (California, 2006)

Even if the Stoics are right and God *is* the *pneuma* in everyone and everything organic and inorganic, that doesn't make it more personal and warm. That doesn't assure us we can be heard when we cry out for justice or mercy—or vengeance. If God is everything, then trillions upon trillions of its parts could be crying out in the warfare of life at any given time. After all, everything that was born is now at some stage of dying. What a cacophony of discordant howling. And besides, how can God change the course of Fate just to make ME more comfortable?

The Christians have a Holy Spirit, the third part of a Trinity, that's remarkably like the god within each Stoic, and everybody else, of course. And their Holy Spirit god thing DOES know and DOES care about the pornography you watch on the Internet when your spouse is asleep. And, the Holy Spirit is writing it all down in a book that God checks when deciding whether to send you to heaven or hell. Yes, it's a VERY BIG book. And every breath you take is written in there somewhere. Does that personal god sound warm and nice to you?

Well, what about angels, I hear someone ask? Yes. That could work. God doesn't have time for all our foolishness, but if we just had an angel looking over our shoulder we could cry out to SOMETHING and it would hear us. Yes, it does seem like it could be a good thing, this angel business, but it could also be the same problem we talked about before. In the Christian world of angels the good ones are never alone. The bad ones are always nearby.

Yes, the so-called good angels compete with demons for our attention, and whereas the Holy Spirit begs you not to look at those naughty pictures, and your good angel covers its eyes in shame when you disobey that still small voice, there's this other fellow with a pointy tail and real horns on his head enthusiastically rooting for you to ENJOY YOURSELF. You work hard. Have a little fun. It's OK. REALLY, it's OK. Don't be such a wimp!

Hindus pray to Shiva or Krishna, but we still have the same problem again: we humans are just too little. Muslims pray to Allah. Same problem. Who do Buddhist pray to? They don't. Well, they may pray to their ancestors. Atheists aren't allowed to pray, of course. All of which brings me once again to my favorite group, the Stoics.

They don't pray either, or they're not supposed to, but Stoics understand that there is an inner god and an outer god (aka Fate). It's the same God, but that little bit of the One God that is inside of us is only one of 7 billion tiny flames on a planet revolving around a sun that is no larger than one grain of sand on all the beaches of all the oceans of the world. If we're proportionately smaller than all that, and we are, how could we be heard even if we did pray? Is there anything divine that we can talk to that will hear us? Yes, there is. But as much as I would

like to jump right in here and talk about making the divine more personal, we have to wait. We have other important subjects that must first be examined carefully and understood.

5. Souls and Spirits

I once had a philosophy book that examined the difference between spirit and soul. That was the entire subject of the book. Unfortunately, I found it incomprehensible, and one day the book just went away. I don't even remember when it left, but now I wish it hadn't. I tried to do an Internet search on the subject, but 90% of it was some Christian theologian working from the Holy Bible, and the other 10% was just ghastly. So I gave up and came back to my very big dictionary definition:

“**spirit 1.** the principle of conscious life; the vital principle in humans, animating the body or mediating between the body and soul. **2.** the incorporeal part of humans...**3.** The soul regarded as separating from the body at death.” And so on. Let me summarize these definitions this way:

1. The vital principle mediating between body and soul.
2. Incorporeal part of humans that
3. separates from the body at death.

What happens to the soul when the body dies was never settled as Stoic orthodoxy, and different Stoics had different ideas, which mostly appear to be pure speculation (aka guesses). But, we do have Chrysippus, the third head of the Stoic school, who said that when the body dies the soul and body separate. “But, nothing incorporeal can be separated from something corporeal, because it could never have been attached to it. Therefore, the soul is a body.”¹¹

Let me summarize Chrysippus this way:

1. the soul and body separate at death
2. But the incorporeal cannot separate from the corporeal, because the incorporeal cannot *attach* to the corporeal.
3. So, the soul is a body that separates from the rest of the body at death.

He doesn't say that because the soul is a body it dies with the rest of the body. Just the opposite. He says the soul body separates from the other parts of the body making up the individual. If we accept Chrysippus as our teacher of Stoic orthodoxy, then we must accept that Stoics don't believe in spirits at all. The spirit as defined in my very big dictionary separates from the body at death and is incorporeal. So, if I'm reading this correctly, the soul in the dictionary is always incorporeal and is the spirit that activates the body.

¹¹ Josiah B. Gould, *The Philosophy of Chrysippus* (SUNY, 1970, p.129)

When the dictionary spirit activates an individual body it is a soul. When it leaves the body it is a spirit again. But it was still a spirit when it was the soul in a living body, and even after it dies it is still the soul of the body that was once living. Therefore, after death, the soul and spirit are one and the same, just as it was when the body was still living. And now you can see why my book on the difference between soul and spirit went away.

BUT, it is especially important to note that Chrysippus does not say that because the soul body is corporeal it dies along with the corporeal body. What he believed is that some souls died with the body and some didn't. Souls other than those of the wise died with the body, and the wise would live on until the conflagration (*ekpyrosis*), the fiery end of the universe when everything burns away.¹² So far as we know, he provided neither reasons nor logical syllogisms to support this belief. Of course, as we know, of the hundreds of books he wrote none of them survived. We can only speculate that if he had found logical proofs for the survival of the wise soul it would have been important enough to have survived in the minds of others—as so much of his work did.

We do know what Heraclitus would have said about Chrysippus's idea that only the souls of the wise survive. According to Heraclitus, if *only* the soul of the wise survives, then no one survives. "Wisdom is one thing. It is to know the thought by which all things are steered through all things...The wise is one only. It is unwilling and willing to be called by the name of Zeus (frags. 19 & 65, Burnet)." Heraclitus had other things to say about spirits and the afterlife, but we have to wait for the next issue to find that out.

^^

6. The Rest of the Story

In issue #12, the next issue, we discover the various facets of belief in the afterlife. We also look at some of the leading investigations into existence beyond the grave. These matters are of keen interest to everyone alive, and that includes philosophers as astute as Socrates.

Then, in a later issue we examine the ancient conundrum of metempsychosis, better known as reincarnation. What do we know, and what does it matter?

Finally, we examine the Stoic belief in daimones. From Socrates to Posidonius there is a strong undercurrent of experience and exploration into their nature and place in cosmos.

^^^

¹² Ibid, p.132

QUOTE OF THE DAY

You will not find the boundaries of soul by traveling in any direction, so deep is the measure of it.

Heraclitus (fragment 71, Burnet)

^^^

For the Readers

The Eternal Questions Journal of Metaphysics is published online monthly by Brother Erikos, Abbot of The Stoic Monastery:

<https://stoicmonastery.com>

If you have a question or comment about the Eternal Questions publication, please for go to the Contact page of the EQ website at

<https://theEternalQuestions.org>

Please state your name, email address, the issue number, and the nature of your question or comment in 200 words or less.

Erik D. Wiegardt, GCDK
Copyright © 2023. All rights reserved.