

The Stoic Conception of Bodily Beauty as Symmetry

OTA GÁL

**Institute of Philosophy
Czech Academy of Sciences
Jilská 1
Prague 1
Czech Republic
ogal@volny.cz**

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an interpretation of the Stoic notion of bodily beauty as the symmetry of parts with respect to one another and to the whole. Symmetry is caused by the structuring activity of the rational spirit in multiplicity, making the beautiful thing an ordered whole. This is true for particular bodies in the world and, even more so, for the cosmos as a particular world order. I follow some traces in Stoic texts suggesting that this is also (and a fortiori) true for the cosmos, in the sense of God in conflagration, which somehow represents symmetry in its purest state.

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is generally accepted that the Stoic conception of beauty is linked with symmetry (e.g. Čelkytė 2020, Heath 2015, Bychkov and Sheppard 2010, Bett 2010, Horn 1989, and Tatarkiewicz 1970). We have relatively abundant testimony supporting such a claim, ranging from the old Stoa (e.g. Chrysippus in Galen) to the times of the Roman Empire (e.g. Cicero). However, it is less clear how we are to understand such symmetry. The very Greek word – *symmetria* – has at least two alternative translations: a “natural” one, i.e. symmetry in the ordinary sense, and an alternative one, which is also often used, i.e. proportion. However, there is a nuance here, since symmetry puts much less emphasis on the relation of the parts to the whole

than proportion does. Let me explain this a bit. Symmetry is nowadays often understood mathematically as “the quality of being made up of exactly similar parts facing each other or around an axis” (Oxford Dictionary of English 2021).¹ In a symmetrical face, for example, the eyes are of the same size and are positioned at the same distance from the middle axis of the face, as are both halves of the lips, and so on. It is of course true that parts *qua* parts (e.g. the eyes and the lips) are always related

1 Cf. also Čelkytė (2020, 144–145) and Hon and Goldstein (2008, 2–3). Hon and Goldstein also provide the historical background and development of this understanding of symmetry. They argue that such a concept is more recent and emerged only several centuries after the main historical representatives of the old Stoa were dead.

to some whole (in this case, the face), but the mathematical understanding of symmetry does not entail a judgement about the mutual commensurability of the parts that create the whole that is being evaluated, like of the eyes to the lips in the case of a face. A purely mathematical notion of symmetry would apply to a face with, for example, ridiculously small eyes and enormous lips, as long as they are positioned correctly and are all of the same size (i.e. one eye the same as the other, one half of the lips the same as the other half). However, *symmetria* as proportion rather refers to the rule of a common *metron*, which organises parts not only in relation to one another, but also in relation to the whole they constitute. The mathematically symmetrical face just described would not be beautiful insofar as beauty is proportion. Therefore, we should investigate which of the two meanings of *symmetria* – (mathematical) symmetry or proportion – the Stoics had in mind when talking about beauty. Interestingly, the extant Stoic sources could be read as supporting both views: the symmetry of parts alone can be found in Galen, Philo, and Cicero, whereas Stobaeus and Plotinus refer to the symmetry of both parts with respect to one another and with respect to the whole. This potential discrepancy – missed even by Čelkytė (2020), the most detailed and recent publication on this topic – needs to be examined and decided, since it either entails an important connection with, or disconnection from, another Greek aesthetic tradition, which claims that beauty is unity in multiplicity. It

will also help us understand in more detail what the Stoics thought *symmetria* to be.

In addressing these topics, I will begin by discussing the group of sources that connect beauty with the symmetry of parts alone (Galen, Philo, Cicero). I will also try to make sense of yet another concept mentioned within the definition of beauty: colour. A brief summary of the second group of texts follows (Stobaeus, Plotinus), with an exposition of the available solutions to the problem of the apparent contradiction between the claims of the two groups. In order to defend their positions as compatible, I will propose a simple line of argumentation: proportion is that which unifies all of the parts, while everything unified is a whole. In order to understand and test this hypothesis, a discussion of the Stoic conception of parts and wholes will be necessary, on the basis of which I will conclude that, for a Stoic, pointing out the relation of parts to the whole they constitute might have seemed superfluous in the case of unified bodies, i.e. those bodies to which the extant sources about symmetry refer. In Stoic thought, the model of symmetry is not a mathematical equilibrium – as it is for us – but an organic, living bodily structure with a functional organisation.

In the last two parts of my paper, I address the question of symmetry, parts, and wholes as it applies to the cosmos in both of its meanings: i.e. as a particular world order and as God, which is the beginning and end of this world order. I will try to show that there is a scale of descending beauty in the

Stoics, with God in conflagration at the top and bodies composed of distinct parts at the bottom. Ultimately, I will endorse the conclusion that the Stoic notion of beauty as proportion is merely a version of the Greek *unitas multiplex* theory,² at any rate in the case of the world order and lesser beauties.

- 2 According to the influential work of Władysław Tatarkiewicz (1970 and 1980), the Greeks' great theory of beauty declared "that beauty consisted in the proportion of the parts, more precisely in the proportions and arrangement of the parts, or still more precisely, in the size, quality, and number of the parts and their interrelations" (1980, 125). In the visual arts, Tatarkiewicz links this theory with symmetry (*ibid.* and 1970, 273) and supports his claim with references to Vitruvius. However, he incorrectly presents Vitruvius' doctrine as advocating the symmetry of parts alone (e.g. 1970, 273); however, in other places, Tatarkiewicz also mentions the relation to the whole (e.g. in *ibid.*, 49), and at other times he remains ambiguous (e.g. 1980, 126), whereas he explicitly related them to the whole as well (cf. *De architectura* I.2,4 and the commentary by Hon and Goldstein 2008, 99–106, esp. 101). Moreover, the theory of beauty as symmetry – understood solely as the proportion of parts – was, according to Tatarkiewicz, advocated by the Stoics, as can be seen from his summary of the difference between decorum and beauty: "Decorum embodied the concern for the adjustment of parts to the whole, while symmetria was concerned with the agreement of parts among themselves" (1970, 189). For Tatarkiewicz, the great theory was confronted with several rival concepts, among others the theory of beauty as *unitas multiplex*. According to Tatarkiewicz, the difference between the two theories ought to lie in the fact that "unity [...] does not necessarily imply any particular arrangement or proportions" (1980, 136). However, as I will try to show here, at least for the Stoics, the particular arrangement and proportions they had in mind when talking about beauty always implied unity. For the historical

My paper does not in any way cover the whole question of beauty in the Stoics. Bett (2010) and, more recently, Čelkytė (2020) published insightful texts on this topic, devoted to many facets of the theme which I will not discuss here, such as the link between beauty and love, beauty in souls (i.e. the ethical dimension of beauty), and the classification of beauty as an indifferent thing. Nevertheless, I find it to be of great importance to be able to explain what the symmetry of parts meant for the Stoics, since beauty is primarily linked with symmetry in the extant sources.

2. BEAUTY AS THE SYMMETRY OF PARTS

We may start with three passages from the fifth book of Galen's *De Placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*, in which he continues his discussion with the Stoics about the nature and the seat of the soul. These passages are highly relevant for reconstructing the Stoic concept of beauty, since Galen explicitly discusses Stoic doctrines, quoting Chrysippus – who, in turn, sometimes quotes Zeno – and summarising Posidonius' critique of Chrysippus. Galen's attempt to explain the Stoic (in this case Chrysippus') account of beauty and the health of the soul may be considered more or less sincere, because this part of the Stoic doctrine supports his own Platonic teachings of a tripartite soul. At the same time, we

background of the use of unity and proportion in aesthetics, see Heath 2015. For a broader critique of Tatarkiewicz with respect to the Stoic conception of beauty, see Čelkytė 2020, 1–4.

must be careful as well, since he makes little effort to be a charitable interpreter. His attitude towards the Stoics may be described as ironic or even disdainful (see Gill 2006, Chapter 4.4).

The context of the first passage (*De Hippoc. et Plat.* V.2.31.1-38.1 Kühn = partly SVF III.471) is a discussion of affections, which, Chrysippus claims, are unnatural (παρὰ φύσιν) and irrational (ἄλογον), and do not arise in the souls of the better sort of men (τῶν ἀστείων). Chrysippus says that affections are analogous to a body which is susceptible to fever, diarrhoea, or other such ailments, as the result of a minor, chance cause. This position is criticised by Posidonius, who attacks the appropriateness of the analogy by pointing out that wise men become immune to affections, while no body is immune to disease. Moreover, he objects that it is irrelevant whether the cause is minor or major. Nevertheless, he also utilises the analogy between a soul susceptible to affections and a healthy body prone to disease, clarifying that this proneness might already be considered a state of illness, such that the lower soul is rather analogous to the disease itself. However, as Galen points out, Posidonius thus blurs the line not only between the health of a body and its proneness to disease, but even between the health of the body and the disease itself. Hence, a soul which is receptive to affections should, in some sense, be analogous to such a body which is, in a sense, both healthy and diseased, a claim which makes no sense, according to Galen.

Be that as it may, Galen's main intention here is different. He wants to demonstrate that the Stoics use the analogy between the body and soul in order to point out that it implies the existence of parts of the soul, namely those parts identified by Plato. Therefore, he quotes further passages from Chrysippus showing that the latter wishes to preserve a certain analogy between the soul and body on the level of their affections, infirmities, diseases, health, robustness, strength, weakness, and, more broadly, everything that has the same name in both (V.2.26-31 Kühn). According to Chrysippus, a disease of the body is a lack of proportion (ἄσυμμετρία) between its components (τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ), i.e. between hot and cold, dry and wet (θερμοῦ καὶ ψυχροῦ, ξηροῦ καὶ ὕγρου). By contrast, health is a kind of good blending and proportion of the things mentioned (εὐκράσια τις καὶ σύμμετρία τῶν διετημένων). Similarly, proportion or lack of proportion in the tendons (ἢ ἐν νεύροις σύμμετρία ἢ ἄσυμμετρία) constitutes, respectively, strength or weakness (ἰσχύς ἢ ἀσθένεια), also termed firmness or softness (εὐτονία ἢ ἀτονία). Most importantly for our purposes, proportion or lack of proportion in the limbs (ἢ ἐν τοῖς μέλεσι σύμμετρία ἢ ἄσυμμετρία) constitutes beauty or ugliness (κάλλος ἢ αἰσχος). Galen now presses his attack on Chrysippus: the latter has not explained how a body, which has parts (i.e. on the one hand, the elements, on the other, parts such as tendons and limbs), and a soul, which has no parts, according to the Stoics, can be analogous. Without the soul having parts, the

analogy does not hold, and there is no health or disease – or, we might add, strength or weakness, or even beauty or ugliness – in the soul.

Galen concludes that Chrysippus falls victim to a double error. First, he contradicts himself in saying that a disease of the soul is the same “in name” as a disease of the body, and, simultaneously, he compares this disease of the soul to unstable and precarious health. Second, he is unable to demonstrate the very thing he promised to demonstrate, i.e. the mutual proportion and disproportion between the soul’s parts, with reference to which the soul is said to be healthy or diseased. Although he supposes that all of the soul’s affections and diseases arise in a single part, he is unable to explain what those parts are.

The second passage (*De Hippoc. et Plat.* V.2.46.1-50.1 Kühn) further expands on what has already been said, or at least implied. Galen stresses that the beauty or ugliness of a soul should analogously lie in the proportion (συμμετρία) or disproportion (termed ἀμετρία here) of the soul’s parts (τῆς ψυχῆς μερῶν), and he supports this claim with a direct quotation from Chrysippus: “by analogy the soul will also be called beautiful or ugly in terms of proportion or disproportion of certain parts of such and such kind” (διὸ καὶ καλὴ ἢ αἰσχρὰ ψυχὴ ἀνάλογον ῥηθήσεται κατὰ συμμετρίαν ἢ ἀμετρίαν τοιῶνδὲ τινῶν μερῶν. *De Hippoc. et Plat.* V.2.47.3-4; transl. de Lacy). As can be seen, Galen simply argues that the notion of symmetry or asymmetry is incompatible with the Stoics’ unitary conception of the soul, a point also made

by Plotinus in treatise I.6.1. Later in the text, he provides further justification for this claim by denying that the activities of the soul may be considered its parts. However, Galen does agree with Chrysippus insofar as the definition of health and disease or beauty and ugliness is concerned (cf. *De Hippoc. et Plat.* V.2.48.1-4 Kühn). Thus, our wariness towards his interpretation of Stoic teachings may be further diminished.

The issue of beautiful bodies reemerges in the third passage (*De Hippoc. et Plat.* V.3.14.1-18.1 Kühn), which still deals with the candidates for the parts of the soul in Chrysippus. According to Galen, Chrysippus accurately distinguishes between health and beauty in the case of bodies: health is the proportion of the elements (τῶν στοιχείων συμμετρία) and beauty the proportion of the members (τῶν μορίων). The definition of beauty shows that it is not connected with the elements themselves, as health is, but rather with the natural members. In the upper body, for example, these are the fingers, the palms, and the bases of the hand,³ the forearm, and the upper arm. Galen specifies the meaning of proportion here: beautiful fingers are symmetrical to each other (δακτύλου πρὸς δάκτυλον),⁴ and all

3 Cf. the explanation of the translation of μετακάρπιον καὶ καρπὸν as “the palm and the base of the hand” in the *Postscript* by Stewart (1978), who provides a further reference to Richardson (1977).

4 R. Tobin (1975) suggests that “δακτύλου πρὸς δάκτυλον” actually refers to the symmetry of the phalanx of a finger to a nearby one. However, this reading is not persuasive, as nicely shown by Stewart (1978).

of the fingers taken together are proportionate to the palm and the base of the hand (σὺμπάντων αὐτῶν πρὸς τε μετακάρπιον καὶ καρπὸν), while these, in turn, are proportionate to the forearm (τούτων πρὸς πῆχυν), just as the forearm is proportionate to the upper arm (πῆχεως πρὸς βραχίονα). Galen concludes this list with the proportion of everything to everything else (πάντων πρὸς πάντα), making a reference to Polycleitus' *Canon* (both the treatise and the statue).

There is much dispute about what precisely Polycleitus' *Canon* consisted of, an issue which is very relevant for the discussion here, since πάντων πρὸς πάντα may be interpreted as referring to the proportion of both "all parts to all other parts" and "all parts to the whole". Favouring one or the other of the interpretations on the basis of a conjecture about the nature of the *Canon* would amount to little more than wild speculation. Fortunately, Galen himself mentions Polycleitus in a different context in *De temperamentis* 1.566.3–15, where he claims that the *Doryphoros* received the name *Canon* "from its having a precise commensurability (συμμετρίαν) of all the parts to one another" (πάντων τῶν μορίων πρὸς ἄλληλα; transl. A. Stewart). One could argue that this is a sufficient reason for reading *De Hippoc. et Plat.* V.3.14.1–18.1 Kühn as referring only to the symmetry of parts to one another. However, the commensurability of different types of parts (e.g. not only of the fingers to each other, but also of the fingers to the palm and the base of the hand) already goes beyond the purely

mathematical understanding of symmetry sketched out at the beginning of this paper. From these references to Polycleitus, it seems rather that Galen understood the conception of symmetry as the commensurability of all the parts to one another, which establishes, in this sense, a link to the whole, to the rule of a common *metron*, and should therefore be rather translated as proportion. A closer reading of Galen's reports concerning the Stoic understanding of *symmetria* might thus be read as entailing a reference not only to the parts, but also to the composite whole, as is reported by the second group of sources (Stobaeus, Plotinus) discussed below in Section 3.

It is worth noting that in all three passages from Galen, a contrast is drawn between health and beauty. Even though both are linked with symmetry, it is a symmetry of different kinds of parts. In Galen's understanding, while health is said to be the proportion of the most elementary parts – that is, of the elements themselves (τῶν στοιχείων συμμετρία) – beauty is linked with parts that we may in some sense call natural, such as the above-mentioned fingers, forearms, etc. Similarly to how many other Stoic doctrines echo Aristotle's teachings,⁵ this too might be linked with

5 The influence of Aristotle's thought on Stoic philosophy is, of course, a matter of dispute, with positions ranging from the denial of any knowledge of Aristotle's work by the early Stoics (Sandbach 1985) to assigning it a significant role in the development of Stoicism (Hahn 1977). Personally, I tend to side with the second group of scholars, although I agree with Sedley, that "... we must avoid the

his understanding of beauty. Aristotle says in the *Poetics* (1450b.34–1451a.6) that the beauty of a thing lies in its magnitude (ἐν μεγέθει) and order (τάξει). In addition to order – which for Aristotle, at least, is self-evident – a beautiful thing must be of a certain size. It must be large enough to be recognisable by the senses. If it were too small, the observer would fail to perceive its distinctness (συγχεῖται γὰρ ἢ θεωρία ἐγγύς τοῦ ἀναισθήτου χρόνου γινομένη). On the other hand, it must not be too large, so that it remains cohesive, and the observer does not fail to perceive its unity and wholeness (οὐ γὰρ ἅμα ἢ θεωρία γίνεται ἀλλ’ οἷχεται τοῖς θεωροῦσι τὸ ἐν καὶ τὸ ὅλον ἐκ τῆς θεωρίας). Obviously, the Stoics only emphasise order, i.e. the symmetry of parts.⁶ One may thus wonder what happened to magnitude. First of all, the symmetry of elemental (i.e. very small) parts does not equate to beauty, but to health. Thus, the very use of the term “beauty” presupposes some magnitude, namely that of natural parts and not of the elements. As Plutarch (*De commun. Not.* 1079a-b = SVF II.483-4 = LS 50C) notes with reference to Chrysippus, what we mean by the whole or complete

parts (ὅλοσχερῇ μέρα)⁷ are things like the head (κεφαλῇ), the chest (θώραξ), and the legs (σκέλλω). These are the first (and, we might add, natural) candidates to be considered parts of the body, and they all have the right magnitude in the Aristotelian sense, which is required to call a body beautiful. From a different perspective, the symmetry of parts itself includes a reference to magnitude, because it is a *syn-metria*, proportion and, in a sense, the size of a given part pre-determines the sizes of all other parts, because they all have a share in the same *metron*.⁸ Thus, in the context of a human body, where the Stoics linked symmetry with natural parts, it is possible that they perceived Aristotle’s emphasis on magnitude to be superfluous and thus excluded it from their definition of beauty here.

A similar testimony to *De Hippoc. et Plat.* V.3.14.1–18.1 Kühn may be found in Philo’s *De Vita Mosis* 2.136–140, which is devoted to a discussion of Moses as a priest. A detailed description of the Tabernacle and its appurtenances can be found here, prompting Philo to make some additional comments about beauty. The Stoics are not explicitly mentioned, but the notion of symmetry Philo draws on corresponds to other testimonies.

unhistorical assumption that Aristotle’s unique importance was as obvious to his near-contemporaries as it is to us” (Sedley 2003, 12). For a more recent discussion of the topic, see Kupreeva (2009) and Tieleman (2016). For the relation of symmetry to Aristotle’s understanding of beauty, see Heath (2015, 388–389).

6 Although Aristotle probably differentiated between order and symmetry (*Met.* 1077b), the former seems to be a superordinate notion to the latter. Thus, the Stoics could easily have replaced τάξις with συμμετρία.

7 Cf. the translation by Paul Scade (2013), whose reflections point in the same direction as mine.

8 See Polycleitus’ *Doryphoros* and again the interpretations of Tobin (1975) and Stewart (1978). Regardless of how interpreters reconstruct the content of the treatise *Canon*, they agree on the fact that the statue of the same name was created in accordance with a particular proportion.

Moreover, Philo is known to make “acknowledgements to his anonymous predecessors, whose work he incorporates, sometimes (it appears) as almost unmodified blocks of matter, much as he also transcribes parts of Greek philosophical tracts” (Chadwick 1967; for more detail, cf. Runia 2010b). His attitude towards the Stoics is critical, since he is a Jewish scholar, but, at the same time, he does not refute their doctrines as such. Rather, he tries to merge them with his own.

According to this testimony, beauty of the body consists in a symmetry of parts (συμμετρία μερῶν), a good complexion (εὐχροία), and the good condition of the flesh (εὐσαρκία). Bodily beauty has merely a short period during which it is in full bloom (βραχὺν τῆς ἀκμῆς ἔχον καιρόν), as opposed to the beauty of the mind (διανοία), which does not fade away or become impaired with the passing of time (μὴ χρόνου μήκει μαραινόμενον), but constantly acquires fresh vigour and renewed youth (ἀλλ’ ἐφ’ ὅσον ἐγγχρονίζει καινούμενον καὶ νεάζον) as long as it endures. This beauty of the mind is, by analogy with bodily beauty, identified as the harmony of opinions (ἁρμονία δογμάτων) and the perfect accord of virtues (ἀρετῶν συμφωνία). Philo expands further on this claim, stating that it is adorned with the lustrous hue of truth (χρῶματι διαπρεπεῖ κεκοσμημένον ἀληθείας), as well as the agreement of its words with its actions (ὁμολογίας ἔργων πρὸς λόγους), of its actions with its words (καὶ πρὸς ἔργα λόγων), and of its thoughts and intentions with both (ἔτι βουλευμάτων πρὸς ἐκάτερα).

As can be seen, Philo is attempting to contrast bodily beauty with the beauty of the mind, in order to show the superiority of the latter over the former. However, the notion of symmetry he uses to define the two forms of beauty is not very suitable for making this point, because it does not show that bodily beauty is transitory (a point made by Plotinus in *Enn.* I.6.1.37–40 and VI.7.22.27–29), as opposed to the beauty of the mind. For this reason, perhaps, Philo adds the criteria of a good complexion (εὐχροία)⁹ and the good condition of the flesh (εὐσαρκία), both of which obviously fade away with age and/or illness. On the one hand, one might be inclined to exclude εὐχροία and εὐσαρκία from the Stoic definition of beauty, since they have an obvious purpose in Philo. On the other hand, we might consider the possibility that Philo’s text points out some lesser-known details of the Stoic doctrine, according to which an old and/or diseased body cannot be called beautiful, even if it has symmetrical parts. This line of thought would go in the direction of Plotinus’ objection mentioned above: the same face – i.e. a face with the same proportions – becomes ugly under certain circumstances (*Enn.* I.6.1.37–40), such as on a corpse (*Enn.* VI.7.22.27–29). Then again, if denying the beauty of a corpse was an integral part of the Stoic doctrine, it seems odd that Plotinus would mention it as an obvious flaw in the symmetry theory.

9 Note, however, that εὐχροία can also be translated as “well-coloured”. On this point, see my discussion of Cicero’s *Tusc. disp.* below.

However that may be, the Stoic doctrine was surely sophisticated enough to be able to explain the case of a corpse or of a diseased or aged body. According to the Stoics, death is “the separation of the soul from the body” (SVF II.604 = *De Stoic. Repug.* 39.1052c, cf. *Phd.* 67d) which is to be understood as a sort of loosening of the tension of the soul, similar to sleep but much more intense, if not absolute (cf. SVF II.766-7 = DL VII.158; *Plac.* V.24.4). Just as we see that a dead body stops breathing – i.e. loses its tonic movement – we also observe that it slowly starts to decay and loses its shape. Now shape is also an epiphenomenon of the tonic (i.e. pneumatic) movement (cf. SVF. II.451 and II.449). Thus, losing shape is probably to be understood as the gradual loosening of the tension of the soul. Thus, a corpse gradually becomes ugly, because it slowly loses its formerly beautiful proportions. Similarly, the process of ageing could perhaps be explained as the long-term loosening of the tension of the soul, and the phenomenal evidence for losing the shape of one’s body as one ages is quite evident. The case of a disease is an interesting one as well. As we have seen in Galen, the elements of a diseased body lose their symmetry. It is possible that Stoic thinking about this matter went in the direction of arguing that the disproportion of the elements ultimately – and, once again, perhaps gradually – leads to the disruption of the symmetry of the natural parts of the body.

The connection between the nature of health and beauty – along with the Stoic understanding of bodily beauty as

the symmetry of bodily parts – can, for that matter, also be found in Cicero’s *De off.* 1.95–98. As is well known, Cicero claimed allegiance to Academic scepticism. However, he often considers Stoic answers to various problems. On the whole, he sees Stoic views as extreme, but nevertheless admires them for their coherence and considers many of them to be well reasoned (cf. Graver 2002). However, this should not obscure the fact that he was a follower of a rival school and, in this sense, “a hostile witness”, as John Rist puts it (1969, 125).

The question at issue in *De off.* 1.95–98 is *decorum* (propriety),¹⁰ which he more broadly defines as “that which agrees with the excellence of man just where his nature differs from that of other creatures” (*quod consentaneum sit hominis excellentiae in eo, in qua natura eius a reliquis animantibus differat*; *De off.* 1.96, transl. Margaret Atkins) and, in a narrower sense, as “that which agrees with nature in such a way that moderation and restraint appear in it, along with the appearance of a gentleman” (*quod ita naturae consentaneum sit, ut in eo moderatio et temperantia appareat cum specie quadam liberali*; *De off.* 1.96, transl. Margaret Atkins). *Decorum* is substantially linked with virtue, but “in such a way that it is not seen by esoteric reasoning, but springs ready to view (*in promptu*)” (*De off.* 1.95, transl. Margaret Atkins). Thus, Cicero compares the relation of *decorum* to virtue with the relation of health to bodily beauty

10 For an account of *decorum*, see McMahon (2009). For the context of this passage, see Dyck (1996).

(*pulchritudo corporis*) or loveliness (*venustas*), in the sense that the two are separable only in one's mind and thoughts (*mente et cogitatione*), while in reality, they always accompany each other. Cicero further explains his concept of *decorum* by showing its meaning in the field of poetry, where characters need to speak in a way that is appropriate to their role. But the role of a real man is, by nature (*a natura*), that of achieving virtue and not being careless towards other people. Therefore, Cicero claims, *decorum* is crucial in both senses, broad and narrow (see above). *Decorum* will shine forth during one's life and arouse other men's approval, just as beauty arouses the eye (*movet oculos*) by the appropriate arrangement of the limbs (*apta compositione membrorum*) and delights it (*delectat hoc ipso*) with the pleasant combination of its parts (*lepore consentiunt*).

Cicero's *Tusculanae disputationes* IV.30–31, which deals with the emotions of a sage, further confirms the previous findings, but this time introducing a new element. In *Tusc. disp.* IV.30–31, Cicero starts with the already well-known analogy of the soul (*anima*) to the body (*corpus*) in both good and bad qualities (*ut in malis ... sic in bonis*), meaning that there are qualities such as beauty (*pulchritudo*), strength (*vires*), wellness (*valetudo*), toughness (*firmitas*), or quickness (*velocitas*) in both the body and soul. Like Galen, Cicero specifies that just as there is health of the body, which is a balanced condition (*temperatio*) of the elements, when they fit properly together (*congruunt inter se*),

there is also health of the soul, which, in an analogous way, is an agreement of judgements and beliefs (*iudicia opinionisque concordant*). In this context, the question of beauty resurfaces once again. Bodily beauty is said to refer to a configuration (*apta figura*) of limbs (*membrorum*) accompanied by a pleasant colour (*coloris quadam suavitate*). In the case of the beautiful soul, beauty refers to uniformity (*aequabilitas*) and consistency (*consistentia*) of opinions and judgements (*opinionum iudiciorumque*), together with a certain toughness and stability (*firmitate quadam et stabilitate*), which either follows upon virtue (*virtutem subsequens*) or is identical with it (*aut virtutis vim ipsam continens*).

The addition of colour to the definition seems suspicious, since Cicero does not mention it in *Off.* However, following the same procedure as we did in accounting for the addition of εὐχροία and εὐσαρκία in Philo, let us hypothesise that, if this doctrine is genuinely Stoic, colour was an integral part of the Stoic notion of bodily beauty. What would this mean? There are two extant Stoic definitions of colour. According to Aetius (I.15.6 = SVF I.91), colours are “the primary characteristics (πρώτους σχηματισμούς) of matter”¹¹ and according to Pseudo-Galen (*De hist. philos.* 27.5–6 = SVF I.91), “the surface colouration (ἐπίχρωσιν) of matter”. Some time ago, Katerina Ierodiakonou tried to make sense of these two fragments, and I agree with the conclusion she arrived at:

11 For a translation and interpretation, see Katerina Ierodiakonou (2015).

Colors, according to the Stoics, are intrinsic qualities or attributes of objects which may be either essential, as in the case of the four elements, or accidental, as in the case of the ordinary objects we perceive. An ordinary object has the color it has because of the mixture of elements which are its constituents; and as to the elements themselves, they have the colors they have in virtue of the breaths, or aeriform tensions, permeating them. (Ierodiakonou 2015, 244)

Now, it is difficult to make use of this account to shed light on the question of beauty unless we emphasise the fact that, according to the Stoics, the colour of a body is a direct display of the mixture of the body's elements. In this sense, the colour of a body could be taken to be something like an indicator of the state of the elements constituting the body, one that is visible at a glance. Note too that the term εὐχρoία discussed above actually means “well-coloured” and, in this sense, refers to a good complexion. Now we have seen that beauty often emerges – in Cicero and other texts – in the context of health, and we also know that the colour of the body or of its humours and other fluids was used by the ancient physicians in their diagnoses.¹² Thus, the addition of colour to the definition of beauty may once again point in the direction of the fundamental interconnectedness of beauty and

health, to the fact that a body cannot be truly beautiful if there is some sort of disproportion in it – i.e. of the elements – albeit a disproportion not yet visible in the natural parts. A possible first sign of such a disproportion could be a change in the colour of the human body, which is most obvious in the case of a corpse that becomes pale when livor mortis starts to develop, a change that occurs long before decay becomes obvious. Moreover, the colour of a human body changes throughout the process of becoming ill or ageing. Colour is, in this sense, an indicator of the state of the elements, although probably not the most obvious or striking one, certainly in the case of ageing but also in that of many diseases. Note too that in *De off.* 1.95–98, Cicero deals with *decorum* which “springs ready to view” (*De off.* 1.95), i.e. he is interested in immediately visible signs of phenomena. Colour could be one such sign, if we interpret it as an immediately visible sign of (dis)proportion between the elements, i.e. of health or disease, which can be separated from beauty only in thought.

3. BEAUTY AS THE SYMMETRY OF PARTS AND THE WHOLE

To conclude this overview of the sources dealing with bodily beauty, let us consider two other texts that complicate the situation even further. Both Plotinus (*Enn.* I.6.1) and the Stoic sources preserved by Johannes Stobaeus (*Anth.* II.7.5b4) claim that the Stoics considered beauty to be not only the symmetry of parts with respect to one another, but also their symmetry with respect to

¹² Cf. e.g. Hippocrates, *Prog.* 12; *Aph.* 3.21; Galen, *SMT* 11.459–461; *MM.* X65–6K; *Caus. Morb.* III.XII.1; *Symp.Diff.* IV.8.

the whole. In the previously mentioned passage from treatise I.6.1, Plotinus considers the notion of beauty as the good proportion of the parts to each other and to the whole (συμμετρία τῶν μερῶν πρὸς ἄλληλα καὶ πρὸς τὸ ὅλον), once again with the addition of a good complexion (τό τε τῆς εὐχροίας). A sensible thing – or, more generally, anything whatsoever – is beautiful, Plotinus reports, if it is well proportioned and measured (τὸ συμμετροῖς καὶ μεμετρημένοις). Now, the mention of good colour or a good complexion need not mean anything more than that Plotinus was familiar with Cicero's texts or his sources. But how are we to interpret the fact that proportion is here ascribed not only to parts with respect to each other, but also with respect to the whole?

One might speculate that this is simply a Platonic projection and justify this claim with testimony about Plotinus' extravagant style of writing (See *Vita Plot.* VIII.8-12 and 1-3.). The fact is, however, that in *Anth.* II.7.5b4, Stobaeus reports the same thing. He presents the already well-known analogy between a beautiful body and a beautiful soul as follows: "As beauty of the body is symmetry of the limbs with respect to one another and to the whole, so also is beauty of the soul symmetry of reason and its parts with respect to the whole of it and to one another" (*Anth.* II.7.5b4.12-16; Ὡς περ τε τὸ κάλλος τοῦ σώματος ἐστὶ συμμετρία τῶν μελῶν καθεστώτων αὐτῷ πρὸς ἄλληλά τε καὶ πρὸς τὸ ὅλον, οὕτω καὶ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς <κάλλος> ἐστὶ συμμετρία τοῦ λόγου καὶ τῶν μερῶν αὐτοῦ πρὸς <τὸ> ὅλον τε

αὐτῆς καὶ πρὸς ἄλληλα.; transl. Richard Bett, modified).

It is true that Stobaeus' *Anthologium* has survived only in a partially fragmented version. Nevertheless, it contains a vast amount of doxographical material in the area of physics. Even though Stobaeus gives no indication whatsoever as to what his sources were, there can be no doubt that he made use of the work of Arius Didymus (cf. Runia 2010a).

4. HARMONISING EXTANT SOURCES

Given that we must address this controversy with so few detailed sources at our disposal, it seems to me that we have only three options: 1) we can insist on the difference between the two conceptions, in which case we must either a) deny that Plotinus reports and Stobaeus quotes Stoic doctrines correctly or b) try to explain them as possibly Stoic, but not of third-century BC orthodoxy (i.e. interpret them as eclectic teachings of some sort, as we often do with those of Posidonius); 2) we can say that there is actually no difference in principle between the notion of the symmetry of parts with respect to one another and that of the symmetry of parts with respect both to one another and to the whole. Now let us consider all three options. Option 1a is a hermeneutically dull and arbitrary interpretation that ignores portions of the extant fragments. It represents a viable choice only in cases where some of the sources contradict vast amounts of thoroughly elaborated evidence to the contrary or where we find

an intrinsic contradiction within the disparate sources. However, this is not true in the present case, given that the sources are scarce and the conclusions drawn from them are but interpretative variations. Option 1b seems more plausible, but only if we are unable to find a better solution, since there is nothing to prove such a claim. We should thus focus on option 2, perhaps reasoning as follows: when talking about the symmetry of parts, we actually say that there is some common proportion between them, that there is a *syn-metria*, which is integral to the whole. Such proportion unifies all the parts and everything unified is a whole. Therefore, saying that parts are symmetrical always implicitly relates them to a whole.¹³ Moreover, this line of thought is precisely what we found in Galen, when we examined his text more closely, since he talked about symmetry between the parts and the whole with reference to Polycleitus' *Canon*. From a different perspective, Čelkytė (2020, 154–161) has convincingly shown that there is a functional component in beauty in virtue of its relation to τὸ καθῆκον, which the Stoics understood in an ethical context as an act in accordance with nature or, more broadly, as conformity with the natural order (*De commun. not.* 1069E = SVF 3.491 = LS 59A; *Anth.* II.85.13–86.4 = SVF

3.494 = LS 59B; DL VII.107 = SVF 3.493 = LS 59C). As she aptly formulates it: “the symmetria of parts with the whole’ concerns the role that an object has from the functional perspective as well as how the composition of its parts contributes to its playing of that role.” Using the aforementioned Polycleitian example, the function of the hand is grasping and the symmetry between the size of the fingers and that of the palm plus the base of the hand is required for the hand to perform its function properly. In order to refine this claim, however, we must investigate whether there are more types of wholes, with more than one type of relation to their parts. As we shall see, this is, in fact, the case according to the Stoics. A more detailed inquiry into this matter is thus required.

5. PARTS AND WHOLE IN STOIC TEACHINGS

In a passage from Sextus' *Adv. math.* (IX.78 = SVF II.1013), as well as in Seneca's *Epistles* (*Ep.* 102 = SVF III.160), we find a report that the Stoics distinguished between unified bodies (ἡνωμένα, *continua*) that are dominated by a power holding them together (τὰ ὑπὸ μιᾶς ἔξεως κρατούμενα), such as plants, animals, or people, and bodies composed (*composita*) either of connected (τὰ δὲ ἐκ συναπτομένων) or of distinct parts (τὰ δὲ ἐκ διεστώτων). Bodies composed of connected parts consist of juxtaposed elements (ἐκ παρακειμένων) that incline towards a common dominating unity (πρὸς ἓν τι κεφάλαιον νευόντων). The Stoics provide the following examples: a chain, a boat, a house, or a burial

13 Ultimately, Čelkytė (2020, 154–161) comes to a similar conclusion, albeit from a different perspective, namely that of the necessary connection of beauty as symmetry with each thing being able to perform its particular function. This function is determined by its relation to the whole.

vault. By contrast, bodies composed of distinct parts consist of elements that are disjoined (τὰ ἐκ διεξευγμένων, *ex distantibus*) and by nature (*natura*) separate (κεχωρισμένων, *diducti*) that are autonomous (καθ' αὐτὰ, *singuli*), such as an army, a flock, a choir, a nation, or a senate. They hold together on the basis of a law or duty (*iure aut officio*), at least in some cases. Both types of composite bodies are distinguished from unified ones by virtue of the sympathy that governs the latter. This may be seen in the cosmos, where celestial bodies influence the growth and wasting away of animals, high tide and low tide, and changes in the atmosphere. A somewhat different example of the difference between unified and composite bodies is that of a surviving soldier who is unaffected by the demise of the rest of the army, as opposed to the cutting off of a finger, which affects the entire body (τὸ ὅλον συνδιατίθεται σῶμα). Moreover, as Seneca reports, whatever is composed of parts is not good, since everything good is connected by a single leading breath (*uno spiritu*). This is the case of unified bodies that are held together either by holding (ἔξις), as in the case of stones or wood, by nature (φύσις), as in the case of plants, or by the soul (ψυχή), as in the case of animals. In other words, they are all modalities of *pneuma*, which holds everything together.

For the Stoics (cf. SVF II.471-473) *pneuma* was a mixture (μίξις) of active elements (fire and air). Bodies were also considered blendings (κρᾶσις), namely of *pneuma* and passive elements (water and earth), in which the former holds

the latter together. In every mixture or blending, it is possible to have a different proportion of constituents. *Pneuma* itself may be more or less hot or cold, i.e. more or less active or passive. Correspondingly, the Stoics distinguish four modalities of *pneuma*: reason (λόγος or νοῦς), soul (ψυχή), nature (φύσις), and holding (ἔξις). However, there may also be a different proportion of constituents in different blendings (κρᾶσις). In all cases of mixtures and blendings, the activity of holding together is accomplished by what is termed pneumatic motion (κίνησις πνευματική), i.e. a movement into itself (πρὸς or εἰς ἑαυτό) or back (οπίσω) and at the same time a movement out of itself (ἐξ αὐτοῦ) or forth (πρόσω). The first phase of the pneumatic motion holds the body together, producing cohesion (συνέχεια), unity (ένωσις) and being (οὐσία), while the second movement is the source of the bodies' dimensions (μεγέθη) and qualities (ποιότητες). The Stoics call the simultaneous nature of these contrary movements "tension" (τόνος) or "tensional movement" (τονική κίνησις). Consequently, different mixtures of active and passive elements have different tensions, i.e. different cohesion, unity, being, dimensions, and qualities.

All of this might be of use in answering the question of whether symmetry relates solely to parts or to the whole as well. As we have seen, Galen, Philo, and Cicero all comment on the bodily beauty of a living human body. Galen, who is interested in the analogy between the symmetry of the body and that of the soul, discusses beauty in the context of

health, strength, and other such predicates, connecting it with the natural parts of the human body. In one passage, he mentions a statue (Polycleitus' *Canon*), but it is, once again, a statue of a human body unified by the proportion given to it by its creator. Moreover, this particular statue was considered the paradigm of a piece of art governed by a single proportion. Philo contrasts the beauty of a body with that of the soul and criticises the former for its transitory nature, resulting from its connection with a good complexion and the condition of the flesh, i.e. with health and youth. Cicero also connects beauty with the symmetry of the limbs, i.e. of parts of the human body, and links it with health. In all these cases, the symmetry under consideration thus concerns unified bodies governed by the soul (*ψυχή*), nature (*φύσις*), and holding (*ἔξις*). In these cases, each part is necessarily related to the whole. Galen, Philo, and Cicero are thus able to focus exclusively on the symmetry of the parts to each other, since their symmetry with respect to the whole can be naturally presupposed. Thus, both Plotinus' and Stobaeus' testimony could be taken as being in accord with this position in the case of unified bodies.

That having been said, the situation would probably look different in the case of composite bodies, especially those composed of distinct parts. In the latter case, the relation of the parts to the whole is not a matter of course. If there is such a relation, it would need to be pointed out. Both Plotinus and Stobaeus may perhaps have had in mind this

broader notion of beauty, which is applicable to all types of bodies, when compiling their reports on Stoic doctrines – in Plotinus' case to criticise them, in that of Stobaeus to preserve them. By contrast, it is possible that Galen, Philo, and Cicero focused strictly on the question of the beauty of a unified living body and thus simplified the definition of beauty. While plausible, there is also no direct evidence for such a claim,¹⁴ which is motivated solely by the desire to understand the extant sources as compatible in a philosophically interesting fashion. Moreover, the objection could be raised that both Plotinus and Stobaeus also refer to the beauty of a human body and thus could have presented the Stoic doctrine in a similar way to Galen, Philo, and Cicero. Nevertheless, if one tries to avoid venturing out onto the shaky ground of mere speculation by rejecting options 1a and 1b, as laid out in Section 4, it is difficult to identify a plausible way of making sense of the extant sources.

There is, however, some indirect evidence for the claim that the Stoics genuinely believed that wholes consist of parts related not only to each other, but also to the whole they co-constitute, i.e. in some stronger sense than just conceptually (all parts qua parts are related to some whole). Two passages from Sextus directly address the relationship between parts and wholes

14 At least in the case of Philo and Cicero. Galen's reports, as I have tried to show, presuppose the relation of parts to the whole they constitute, which could be considered direct evidence.

(*Adv. math.* IX.336 and XI.24). According to these passages, a part is neither something other than the whole nor the same thing as the whole (οὔτε ἕτερον ... οὔτε τὸ αὐτό; οὔτε τὰ αὐτὰ ... οὔτε ἕτεροῖα). This is because it is included in the whole, just as a hand is included in a man (σὺν αὐτῇ [scil. ἡ χεὶρ] γὰρ ὁ ἄνθρωπος; σὺν γὰρ τῇ [ὅλῃ] χειρὶ ὅλος ὁ ἄνθρωπος), but it is also not coextensive with it, just as a hand is not coextensive with a man (οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν [ἡ χεὶρ] ἄνθρωπος; ἡ χεὶρ οὔτε ἡ αὐτὴ ἐστὶν τῷ ὅλῳ ἀνθρώπῳ). In wholes of this kind, i.e. in unified bodies, the parts are always related to the whole they compose. This claim may be interpreted as saying that the reciprocal relations between different parts always presuppose their relation to the whole, insofar as they are parts of the whole. But the relation between the parts and the whole they compose is not merely conceptual, in the above-specified sense. Nor is it mathematical in the sense of a whole, e.g. a group of ten units, which is composed of some random combination of parts, e.g. 5 + 5 or 4 + 6. Such a reading does not give its due to the substantially organic or biological nature of Stoic thought, i.e. to the fact that they primarily have organic structures in mind, such as a man and his hand (cf. Sambursky 1959, 9ff). The relation of a man to his hand is not just a formal relation of the concept of a part to the concept of a whole, but rather a man is a whole when he has his hand (see the expression σὺν γὰρ τῇ [ὅλῃ] χειρὶ ὅλος ὁ ἄνθρωπος above) and if a man cuts off his hand (or a part of it, such as a finger – see *Adv. math.*

IX.78 = SVF II.1013 above), the whole body is affected. A part of an organic structure serves some purpose, i.e. has its own function within the whole, and its size – among other things – must be appropriate to this function. In other words, there is always some communication (διάδοσις) between the parts and the whole in unified bodies, and there is an interlacing union (συμφυῆ ἔνωσιν) of the individual properties (SVF 2.391 = *In Arist. Cat.* 214.24ff = LS 28M).¹⁵ On these grounds, I propose a stronger reading of the passages from Sextus, according to which both the whole and its parts share in the same proportion. If so, it could support the claim that, in the case of unified bodies, it may have been unnecessary for a Stoic to point out the relation of the parts to the whole, since they were talking about living organisms. A Stoic philosopher would perhaps be similarly surprised if one were to comment on his definition of beauty as the symmetry of parts, saying that he surely means existing, corporeal parts. For him, this would go without saying. Thus, when the Stoics said that beauty is some sort of symmetry, it is possible that they had precisely an organic and living bodily structure in mind as a model. Moreover, in such organic structures, the parts are not linked to the whole merely on the conceptual level, but rather there is a much closer relationship between them, as the examples above show. Saying that a thing is beautiful because it is symmetrical should thus be read as implying that this thing is a structure

15 Cf. Sambursky (1959, 10ff).

within which the parts are related to each other and to the whole (an organic structure being the model in this theory). As Čelkytė (2020, 154–161) has once again shown, these relations are governed by the concept of function, i.e. each part serves its purpose and has a correspondingly apt arrangement and size to do this.

6. THE BEAUTY OF WORLD ORDER (ΔΙΑΚΟΣΜΗΣΙΣ)

The Stoics did not apply the conception of beauty as symmetry in the sense of an aptly arranged structure only to individual bodies that are parts of the cosmos, but also to the cosmos itself, since it is also a body.¹⁶ In their cosmology, they even relate parts, the whole, and beauty more explicitly than they do in the case of particular bodies within the cosmos. This situation was perhaps mainly due to the mechanistic teachings of Epicurus and his followers (cf. LS 13), which might have generated the need to spell out the obvious relationship between the parts and the whole (i.e. obvious for a Stoic, of course). According to Stobaeus' sources (SVF II.527 = *Anth.* I.21.5.2-22), the Stoics distinguished between, on the one hand, the cosmos (κόσμος) in the sense of a system of the heavens, the earth, and the natures within them (σύστημα

ἐξ οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς καὶ τῶν ἐν τούτοις φύσεων) or of the gods, the people, and that which came to be because of them (τὸ ἐκ θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων σύστημα καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἕνεκα τούτων γεγονότων) and, on the other hand, the cosmos in the sense of God (θεός), in accordance with whom the particular world order comes to be and comes to be complete (καθ' ὃν ἡ διακόσμησις γίνεται καὶ τελειοῦται).¹⁷ In other words, *diakosmēsis* was a term referring to the present state of organisation of the world, i.e. to the state in which the world is multiple (cf. SVF II.527-528, 558 and Hahm 1977, 242). According to the extant Stoic fragments (see the discussion below), the cosmos is beautiful in both senses, i.e. as a particular world order (διακόσμησις) and as God (θεός), who is the beginning and end of every world order.

Let us first consider the cosmos as a particular world order (διακόσμησις). According to the reports on Stoic doctrines compiled by Alexander of Aphrodisias (SVF II.441 = *De Mixt.* 223.25-36 = LS 47L; transl. R.B. Todd), *pneuma* acting as a sustaining cause (αἴτιον συνέχον, cf. 224.6-9) is that “through which things are bound together and have continuity with their related parts, and are connected with juxtaposed bodies” (ὅφ' οὗ συνδούμενα τήν τε συνέχειαν ἔχει τήν πρὸς τὰ οἰκεῖα μέρη καὶ συνῆπται τοῖς παρακειμένοις). In this fashion, each individual body is related to the whole of the cosmos, of which it is but a part (SVF II.550 = *De Stoic. repugn.* 1054e-f = LS 29D). As Scade (2013) rightly points

16 Of course, the cosmos is a unique body, as Plutarch reports (SVF II.550 = *De Stoic. repugn.* 1054e). As opposed to individual bodies, which are imperfect “since their existence is not independent but is their particular relation to the whole” (transl. Harold Cherniss), the cosmos is only disposed towards itself, thus being a proper whole.

17 For a discussion of the role of the God in the world order, see Bénatouil (2009).

out, it can be shown in Sextus (SVF II.524 = *Adv. math.* IX.332 = LS 44A) and Plutarch (*De commun. not.* 1074b–c) that the Stoic understanding of the notion of the Whole, which is the cosmos, is connected with the idea of structure. Sextus reports on the Stoic distinction between the Whole (τὸ ὅλον) – which is said to be limited (πεπερασμένον) and coextensive with the cosmos – and the All (τὸ πᾶν) – which is unlimited (ἄπειρον) and coincides with the void together with the cosmos. Plutarch confirms Sextus’ report and, moreover, connects the concept of the Whole with what is ordered (τεταγμένον), as opposed to the All, which is indeterminate (ἀόριστον) and lacking in order (ἄτακτον).

As Scade (2013) has observed, other sources (Chalcidius 295, DL 7.140, and Cleomedes in *Caelestia* 1.1.7–10 and 1.1.104–110) link several characteristics of the cosmos (ἕνα, *unum*, *totum*, *essentia*, *coherent*, etc.), including the notion of its structure and order (διακόσμησις), with the fact that it is limited (πεπερασμένος, *determinatum*). As was pointed out earlier, a unified body is what it is because of the pneumatic motion that first produces cohesion (συνέχεια), unity (ἔνωσις), and being (οὐσία), followed by dimensions (μεγέθη) and qualities (ποιότητες). Only that which becomes a unified existing whole, i.e. that which receives a limit, becomes an ordered structure with dimensions and qualities.

But the Stoics have more to say about how a structure becomes ordered. There are testimonies for the claim that the cosmos – as the most perfect body

(τέλεον μὲν ὁ κόσμος σῶμά; SVF II.550 = *De Stoic. repugn.* cp. 44 p. 1054 e.) – is the most beautiful thing (τὸ πᾶν κάλλιστον; SVF I.110 = *Adv. math.* IX.107). This claim is explained with reference to the fact that the cosmos is an ensouled living being (ζῶον ἔμψυχον) endowed with reason and intelligence (νοερόν τε καὶ λογικόν) and was naturally (κατὰ φύσιν) created in agreement with reason (ἀπειργασμένον ἔργον κατὰ τὸν εἰκότα λόγον). This agreement with reason, i.e. the fact that the cosmos itself is endowed with reason and intelligence, is the cause of its being legitimately called beautiful. This claim must, in turn, be connected with Sextus’ reports (SVF II.1016 = *Adv. math.* IX 111–114) concerning Stoic demonstrations of the existence of the gods from the motion of the Universe (ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου κινήσεως). Among other options, they reject here the possibility that the Universe is moved by a vortex (ὑπὸ δίνης) and of necessity (κατ’ ἀνάγκην). In arguing against the former option, they assume that a vortex is either disorderly or orderly (ἄτακτός ἐστιν ἢ διατεταγμένη). Now, if it were disorderly, it could not have moved anything in an orderly way (τεταγμένως τι κινεῖν). For the Stoics, however, the cosmos does, in fact, move in an orderly fashion, as can be seen especially clearly when we look at the movement of the stars in the heavens (cf. e.g. SVF I.528 = *De nat. deor.* II 13–16). Whatever moves something else in a way that is orderly and harmonious (μετὰ τάξεώς τι κινεῖ καὶ συμφωνίᾳ), must be intelligent, divine, and supernatural (νοερά; θεία τις ἔσται καὶ δαιμόνιος). This is not the case

with a vortex, which is disorderly and short-lived (ἄτακτον καὶ ὀλιγοχρόνιον), but it is the case with God. Moreover, we know from Chalcidius (SVF I.88 = Chalcidius 292), that the moving agent of the world (*spiritum porro motivum illum* [scil. *mundum*]), which is a rational soul (*animam et quidem rationabilem*) or God (*deum*), not only makes the world a living creature (*vivificans sensilem mundum*) but also adorns it with its present beauty (*exornaverit eum ad hanc, qua nunc inlustratur, venustatem*). In another formulation, preserved by Alexander (SVF 2.310 = *De Mixt.* 225,1-2 = LS 45H), God is mixed with matter (μεμῖχθαι τῇ ὕλῃ λέγειν τὸν θεόν), pervades all of it (διὰ πάσης αὐτῆς διήκοντα), and thus shapes it (καὶ σχηματίζοντα αὐτήν), structuring it (καὶ μορφοῦντα) and making it into the world (καὶ κοσμοποιοῦντα τούτῳ τῷ τρόπῳ).

There is clearly a line of thought running through all these testimonies, which may be summarised as follows: there is an intelligent, divine, and supernatural cause of movement in the world (i.e. God) which is mixed with matter and pervades it, thus structuring and shaping it and making it into a living, ordered cosmos that moves in an orderly and harmonious way. As such, the cosmos is in harmony with God's reason and intelligence, and it is thus beautiful or – since it is a perfect body – even the most beautiful thing. For the cosmos and for the individual bodies as its parts, this means that they become limited and structured, i.e. ordered, receiving cohesion, unity, being, dimensions, and qualities. The process of the formation

of such wholes is triggered by pneumatic motion. The structure and beauty of the world and of its particular bodies thus reflect the intelligent nature of God as its cause and, for this reason, may serve, at least in the Stoic mind, as “proof” of God's existence, intelligence, and other such attributes.

These interpretative suggestions may be further supported by the connection of beauty and providence, which is synonymous with the rational nature of God.¹⁸ In his summary of Stoic philosophy, Diogenes Laertius defines providence (or fate or destiny) as “an endless chain of causation, whereby things are, or as the reason or formula by which the world goes on” (αἰτία τῶν ὄντων εἰρομένη ἢ λόγος καθ' ὃν ὁ κόσμος διεξάγεται; SVF I.175 = DL VII.149; transl. Robert Drew Hicks), adding that *all things* happen by fate or destiny. Thanks to Cicero (SVF I.172 = *De nat. deor.* II 58), we know that Zeno compared the nature of the cosmos to the craftsman (*artifex*), whose foresight plans out the work to serve its use and purpose in every detail (*consultrix et provida utilitatum opportunitatumque omnium*). This nature of the world-mind (*mens mundi*), which may be called prudence or providence (*causam vel prudentia vel providentia appellari recte possit*), is chiefly directed at and concentrated upon three goals: 1) securing for the world the structure that is most suitable for survival (*ut*

18 For a discussion of the Stoic understanding of fate, see Meyer (2009). The basics of the Stoic doctrine of the rationality of the cosmos are well summed up in Powers (2012).

mundus quam aptissimus sit ad permanendum); 2) absolute completeness (*ut nulla re egeat*); and 3) consummating beauty and embellishment of every kind (*ut in eo eximia pulchritudo sit atque omnis ornatus*). In other words, it is once again the rational nature of God that causes the beauty of the cosmos and each of its individual parts, because it orders the world and each part in the best possible way (cf. SVF II.1150 = *De prov.* II.74). We have seen that for the Stoics, beauty can be deduced from God's reason and intelligence. However, this reasoning also works the other way around: the fact that there is beauty around us testifies to the existence of God or providence. Indeed, according to Cicero, the "proof" of the existence of providence might be derived from – among other things – the beauty of the world (cf. SVF II.1106 = *De nat. deor.* II 75). Since the cosmos is a living, ordered structure moving in an orderly and harmonious way in accordance with God's reason and intelligence, there must be providence.

On the basis of this preliminary understanding of the Stoic way of thinking about beauty, we are better placed to understand what Aetius reports about the beauty of the cosmos (SVF II.1009 = *Plac.* I.6). According to Aetius, the Stoics define the essence of God (τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ οὐσίαν) as an intellectual and fiery spirit (πνεῦμα νοερόν καὶ πυρῶδες) that continually changes into what it pleases (μεταβάλλον εἰς ἃ βούλεται) and assimilates itself to all things (συνεξομοιούμενον πᾶσιν), while it itself has no shape (οὐκ ἔχον μορφήν). Knowledge of this God was

first acquired from the beauty of things which appeared to our eyes (ἀπὸ τοῦ κάλλους τῶν ἐμφαινομένων προσλαμβάνοντες), since these things must have been created by the art of a great mind that produced the world (μετὰ τινος τέχνης δημιουργούσης). According to Aetius' testimony, the fact that the world is beautiful (καλὸς δ' ὁ κόσμος) may be clearly established from several of its characteristics: 1) its shape (ἐκ τοῦ σχήματος), which is spherical (σφαιροειδής), a shape which is exceptional for being round and whose parts are likewise round (περιφερῆς δ' ὧν ἔχει τὰ μέρη περιφερῆ); 2) its colour (καὶ τοῦ χρώματος), which shines so brightly (στίλβουσιν δ' ἔχει τὴν ποιότητα) that the heavens can be seen even at such a great distance. In other words, because of this great efficacy of the colour of the heavens (τῷ τῆς χροῖας συντόνῳ), it cuts through the large interval of air; 3) its magnitude (καὶ τοῦ μεγέθους), because that which is above (τὸ ὑπερέχον) everything else is beautiful, such as an animal or a tree; 4) the variety of stars which adorn it (τῆς περὶ τὸν κόσμον τῶν ἀστέρων ποικιλίας), which reflect the beauty of the world for us. Most importantly, this passage concludes with an explanation of the beauty of the world and its parts. That which is divine (τὸ θεῖον), i.e. the cosmos, is most excellent (κυριώτατον). Among its living parts, man is adorned with the greatest beauty (τῶν δὲ ζώων ἄνθρωπος κάλλιστον) and is also the best (τὸ κράτιστον), being distinguished by virtue above all others because of his intellect (<κε>κοσμημένον ἀρετῇ διαφόρως

κατὰ τὴν τοῦ νοῦ σύστασιν). In this fashion, man resembles that which is the best and most beautiful (τοῖς οὖν ἀριστεύουσι τὸ κράτιστον ὁμοίως καὶ <κάλλιστον ἐπιτιθέναι> καλῶς ἔχειν διενοήθησαν).

Once again, we see that beauty is explained by the activity of an intelligent, understanding, or rational spirit in the world, which gives the whole and each of its parts shape, colour, and magnitude, while at the same time preserving its variety. These are all just different ways of expressing the activity of an intelligent, divine, and supernatural cause structuring and shaping the world, resulting in the orderly and harmonious movement of the living and ordered cosmos. In this process, all the parts of the cosmos must take on a limit and structure in order to be distinguishable as parts. Moreover, these parts are said to be beautiful insofar as they resemble what is best and most beautiful. This resemblance is once again based on the activity of the rational spirit in each individual part. We have seen that *pneuma* is active in different ways in different natural parts of the world (i.e. in unified bodies). In some, it is active as pure *hexis*, in others as *physis* or even *psychē*. In those that are unified in the manner of *hexis*, the rational spirit is active as pneumatic movement, giving these bodies cohesion, unity, being, dimensions, and qualities. In bodies governed by *physis*, *pneuma* also provides the ability to nourish, change, and grow, while in ensouled bodies, it also provides the capacity for sense perception (cf. SVF II.458 = *Leg. Alleg.* II.22).

In any case, there seems to be a scale of beauty, with the cosmos as a whole at the summit, as the most perfect (see the discussion of SVF II.550 = *De Stoic. repugn.* cp. 44 p. 1054 e. above) and beautiful (see the discussion of SVF I.110 = *Adv. math.* IX.10 above) body, followed by unified partial bodies that are beautiful insofar as they resemble this best and most beautiful body. Such a resemblance is based on the activity of the rational spirit in them, which makes them an ordered structure. The more fire or *logos* there is, the more unified a structure is, and thus also more beautiful. In this sense, bodies governed by *psychē* are more beautiful than those ruled by *physis* and these more than those by *hexis* alone, because the rational spirit is present in these in a descending manner (cf. SVF II.634 = DL VII.138), so they lose their resemblance to the best and the most beautiful being.

Moreover, we can also take into account the fact that the structuring activity of the rational spirit in the world can be described in terms of unification. Testimony to this effect may be found in Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus* (SVF I.537 = *Ecl.* I.1.12), which describes the activity of God as making the world one. Among other things, Cleanthes praises Zeus for knowing how to make odd things (τὰ περισσά) even (ἄρτια), and how to bring forth order (κοσμεῖν) from chaos (τᾶκοσμα) or even how to make that which is unlovely (οὐ φίλα) lovely (φίλα) for himself. All this is possible because Zeus has joined all things (πάντα συνήρμοκας), the good and the bad (ἐσθλὰ κακοῖσιν), into one

(εἰς ἓν), so that the eternal Word of all things (πάντων λόγον αἰέν) came to be one (ἓν).¹⁹ On this basis, one might be tempted to speculate further about the scale of beauty depicted above. If the scale of beauties corresponds to the scale of unity, it seems to follow that next in line after *hexis* should be composite bodies, first those with connected parts, then those with distinct parts. However, there is no direct testimony for this, only for their decreasing unity.

7. THE BEAUTY OF THE RATIONAL CAUSE

We know from many sources that the Stoics taught that the world is periodically destroyed by a conflagration and that the same world order is repeatedly recreated out of the conflagration (cf. SVF I.107, 109, 510-12; II.585-620, 622-32, 1133).²⁰ In the state of conflagration, only fire remains (cf. SVF I.98; II.596, 618, 626), a craftsmanlike fire (πῦρ τεχνικόν; cf. SVF I.171) or God, that is, “the individual being whose quality is derived from the whole of substance; he is indestructible and ingenerable, being the artificer of this orderly arrangement, who at stated periods of time absorbs into himself the whole of substance and again creates it from himself” (θεὸν τὸν ἐκ τῆς ἀπάσης οὐσίας ἰδίως ποιόν, ὃς δὴ ἀφθαρτός ἐστι καὶ ἀγέννητος, δημιουργὸς ὢν τῆς διακοσμήσεως, κατὰ χρόνων ποίᾳς περιόδους ἀναλίσκων εἰς ἑαυτὸν τὴν ἅπασαν οὐσίαν καὶ πάλιν ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ γεννῶν; SVF II.526 = DL VII.137, transl.

Robert Drew Hicks). In other words, the world order is recreated from God himself, or, put somewhat differently, multiplicity arises from fire, which is purely one.

This last formulation – which connects the cycles of the creation and destruction of the world order with the generation of multiplicity from what is one – can be justified on the basis of the previously mentioned testimonies to the effect that nothing but fire remains in the state of conflagration (SVF I.98, II.596, 618, 626), or perhaps even more explicitly on that of Seneca’s discussion of the life of the solitary sage (SVF II.1065 = *Ep.* 9.16 = LS46O). In this text, Seneca likens it to the life of God or Zeus in the state of conflagration, when he reposes in himself, wholly given over to his thoughts (*sibi cogitationibus suis traditus*). More importantly, Seneca describes the very state of the conflagration, linking it with being purely one (fire) and saying that all this happens when the world is dissolved (*cum resoluta mundo*), when the gods are blended together into one (*et dis in unum confusis*), and when nature comes to a stop for a while (*paulisper cessante natura adquiescit*). The connection of the world order with multiplicity is obvious not only from the definition of διακόσμησις – i.e. as the present state of organisation of the heavens, earth, and natures; cf. the reference to SVF II.527–528, 558 above and Hahm (1977, 242) – but also from the fact that it is composed, and more specifically composed from four different elements (i.e. fire, air, water, and earth; cf. SVF I.102–103, II.413–415).

¹⁹ Cf. the interpretation of Asmis (2007).

²⁰ For a discussion of the Stoic understanding of conflagration, see Salles 2009.

If the cosmos as God or fire is not multiple but one, one would not expect it to be called beautiful, given that beauty was linked with symmetry. Nevertheless, there is some testimony that it was even called “the most beautiful”, while other testimonies link it with virtue. According to Dio Chrysostom (SVF II.1029 = *Or.* 36.55.1-5), when reason (νοῦς) becomes completely porous (μανότητος) and pours evenly in all directions (ἐπ’ ἰσης πανταχῇ κεχυμένος), so that it alone abides everywhere (λειφθεὶς γὰρ δὴ μόνος ὁ νοῦς καὶ τόπον ἀμήχανον ἐμπλήσας αὐτοῦ), i.e. in the state of conflagration of the world, reason becomes most beautiful (κάλλιστος γίγνεται), because it acquires the purest nature of unadulterated light (τὴν καθαρωτάτην λαβὼν αὐγῆς ἀκηράτου φύσιν). The utmost purity (καθαρώτατον) of God in the state of conflagration is also mentioned in Hippolytus (SVF II.1029 = *Philos.* 21; DDG 571.7), signifying a specific state of being one, in which fire is not mixed with anything else. From a different perspective, Plutarch (SVF 2.606 = *De commun. not.* 1067a = LS46N) reports that in the state of conflagration, no evil at all remains (κακὸν μὲν οὐδ’ ὅτιοῦν ἀπολείπεται) and the whole is then prudent and wise (τὸ δ’ ὅλον φρόνιμόν ἐστι τηνικαῦτα καὶ σοφόν).

It seems that even in the state of conflagration, in which all that there is becomes fire, it is possible to say that, as something unmixed, it is in the purest state (καθαρώτατον) and for this reason becomes most beautiful (κάλλιστος). Since the Stoic conception of beauty as symmetry, in the sense of a structured

whole, is closely related to, if not synonymous with, the traditional understanding of beauty as unitas multiplex (see footnote 2 above), it is tempting to go even further in a Neoplatonic direction, speculating about a God that coincides with the One and is super-beautiful or “beauty beyond beauty”, as Plotinus puts it when talking about the Good (cf. *Enn.* VI.7.32.29–30, VI.7.33.20). To do so would, however, be a mistake. Even though our sources on this topic are scarce, they seem to imply that the pre-eminent beauty of God does not result from his being beyond everything, let alone predication, but rather from the purity of the fire in this state, i.e. from the fact that it is not mixed at all. This is something one could only with difficulty say about the Good in Plotinus. In Plotinus, the Stoic God in the state of conflagration would rather resemble the beautiful Intellect, in which each part is all of the other parts, so that one cannot really say that there are separate parts composing a whole, but rather that everything is everything else, although in a distinct and determinate way. Similarly, in conflagration, the Stoic God reposes in himself given over to his thoughts, and his thoughts contain everything that will happen in the next world cycle since they are the source of the rationality of the world. But even this analogy is highly tenuous, given that the Intellect is multiple in Plotinus, while the Stoic God is unmixed and one in the state of conflagration. This difference also has implications for how their beauty is understood: In Plotinus, the Intellect is the most beautiful, as the

most unified multiplicity (Gál 2022), while the Stoic God is the most beautiful, as the result of being in the purest (i.e. unmixed) state. Thus, it seems so far that the beauty of the rational cause has nothing to do with symmetry.

However, the enigmatic passages about beauty from Diogenes Laertius (SVF III.83 = DL VII.100) might perhaps be read as stating the opposite. Although they are primarily reported in an ethical context, there is, as we have seen, an analogy between God in conflagration and the solitary sage (cf. SVF II.1065 = *Ep.* 9.16 = LS46O). Diogenes claims here that the reason why the Stoics characterise the perfect good (τὸ τέλειον ἀγαθόν) as beautiful (καλόν) is that it has in full all the numbers required by nature (παρὰ τὸ πάντα ἀπέχειν τοὺς ἐπιζητούμενους ἀριθμοὺς ὑπὸ τῆς φύσεως) or because of its perfect symmetry (ἢ τὸ τελέως σύμμετρον). If there is no evil in the conflagration and the whole is prudent and wise, we could speculate that the Stoics would agree to call this state the perfect good. If so, Diogenes would once again be reporting that this state of the world could be legitimately characterised as beautiful, on the grounds that: 1) all the numbers required by nature are present in this state and 2) it possesses perfect symmetry. The first reason perhaps signifies that God has a determined plan for the whole next cosmic cycle, so that everything that will become beautiful in the world order to be is, in this sense, already present in God's reason.²¹ The second part

of the argument is rather surprising, because it seems at first to imply that even in the state of conflagration, fire or God is an ordered and unified multiplicity, since it is symmetrical. But perhaps we should not overcomplicate things. The reference to symmetry here should be read instead as pointing to the even distribution of fire in all directions mentioned by Dio Chrysostom (SVF II.1029 = *Or.* 36.55.1-5; see above). God in the state of conflagration could be symmetrical in this fashion, with the perfection of this symmetry pointing to its purity. If so, even the beauty of the rational cause would be linked with symmetry, albeit its meaning changes here. It does not refer to the relationship of the parts to each other and to the whole any more, but rather to such an even distribution of fire.

If we wanted to follow the scale of beauty outlined above even further, the beauty of God in conflagration could be placed at the top of the whole scale. It is beautiful both as rationality itself in the purest form of symmetry and as its source in the world. The most complete reflection of this beauty is the particular world order as a whole, and then come unified partial bodies governed, in descending order, by *psychē*, *physis*, and, finally, *hexis* alone. Even less beautiful, then, would be bodies composed of connected parts, and the least beautiful of all those with distinct parts. I believe that, beyond this careful statement, we cannot really say much more about the beauty of God in conflagration, but

21 Cf. Scade's interesting interpretation of numbers as geometrical limits that give

particular things their distinctness. See Scade (2013, 86).

must confess our ignorance. Because of our lack of sources, it remains unclear whether the purest symmetry that exists in the state of conflagration can be understood as some sort of specific unity in multiplicity or not. If it was some sort of unity in multiplicity, its unity might be given by the fact that there is only fire everywhere, and supported by the fact that fire in this state cannot be lacking order and, in this sense, would constitute a whole (τὸ ὅλον) and not the All (τὸ πᾶν), in line with the distinction that Sextus and Plutarch use to distinguish them (see above, SVF II.524 = *Adv. math.* IX.332 = LS 44A and *Commun. not.* 1074b-c). Multiplicity could be interpreted here as referring either to God's own thoughts or to fire, insofar as it is everywhere, i.e. in different places. However, which of the two options (*unitas multiplex* or the absence of all multiplicity in conflagration) was, in fact, advocated by the Stoics remains a mystery.

8. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I aimed to provide an interpretation of the Stoic notion of symmetry, which is the cause of beauty. I tried to show that if we want to interpret the extant sources on this topic in a philosophically interesting fashion, we should connect symmetry with the relation both of parts to each other and of the parts to the whole they compose, i.e. to the structural nature of a beautiful

thing. I argued that, for a Stoic, pointing out the relation of the parts to the whole might have seemed superfluous in the case of unified bodies, which is exactly what all the extant sources about the Stoic conception of symmetry discuss. Furthermore, I explored Stoic statements about beautiful bodies, including the world order itself, in which symmetry is caused by the structuring activity of the rational spirit in multiplicity, making the beautiful thing a structured and ordered whole. I also observed that, in some sources, the cosmos is called beautiful even in the state of conflagration and I interpreted this with some caution as being linked with the notion of symmetry that exists in conflagration somehow being in its purest state. On this basis, I proposed a scale of beautiful bodies in Stoicism, at the top of which is God in conflagration, followed by the cosmos as a whole and by unified partial bodies (in descending order, those governed by *psychē*, *physis*, and *hexis*), then by bodies composed of connected parts, and last by those composed of distinct parts. This scale might, at the same time, be seen as a scale of decreasing unity and increasing multiplicity. If I am right in my interpretation, it follows that, at least for the world order and lesser beauties, beauty is essentially connected with unity in multiplicity even in the Stoics, who might seem, at first sight, to be opposing the theory of beauty as *unitas multiplex*.

ABBREVIATIONS

LS = Anthony A. Long and David N. Sedley,
The Hellenistic Philosophers. Cambridge/
New York.

SVF = Hans von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum
Fragmenta*.

ABBREVIATIONS (ANCIENT AUTHORS)

Aetius

Plac. = *Placita philosophorum*

Alexander of Aphrodisias

De Mixt. = *De mixtione*

Aristotle

Met. = *Metaphysica*

Cicero

Tusc. disp. = *Tusculanae disputationes*

De off. = *De officiis*

De nat. deor. = *De natura deorum*

Dio Chrysostom

Or. = *Orationes*

Diogenes Laertius

DL = *Diogenis Laertii Vitae philosophorum*

Galen

Caus. Morb. = *De causis morborum*

De Hippoc. et Plat. = *De Hippocratis et*

Platonis placitis

MM = *De Methodo Medendi*

SMT = *De Simplicium Medicamentorum*

[temperamentis ac] facultatibus

Symp. Diff. = *De Symptomatum Differentiis*

Hippocrates

Aph. = *Aphorismi*

Prog. = *Prognosticon*

Hippolytus

Philos. = *Philosophumena* (= *Adversus
haereses I*)

Johannes Stobaeus

Anth. = *Ioannis Stobaei Anthologium*

Philo

De prov. = *De providentia*

Leg. Alleg. = *Legum allegoriae*

Plato

Phd. = *Phaedo*

Plotinus

Enn. = *Enneades*

Plutarch

De commun. not. = *De communibus notitiis
contra Stoicos*

De Stoic. repugn. = *De Stoicorum
repugnantiiis*

Porphyry

Vita Plot. = *Vita Plotini*

Pseudo-Galen

De hist. philos. = *De historia philosophica*

Seneca

Ep. = *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales*

Sextus Empiricus

Adv. math. = *Adversus mathematicos*

Simplicius

In Arist. Cat. = *In Aristotelis Categorias
commentarium*

Stobaeus

Ecl. = *Eclogae physicae et ethicae*

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