

## STOIC ALLEGORESIS: THE PROBLEM OF DEFINITION AND INFLUENCE

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OVER SEVENTY YEARS AGO, Phillip De Lacy wrote his seminal paper on Stoic poetics, where he famously stated that among “certain well known Stoic views about poems” there is the one that “Homer’s myths are allegorical expressions of the truths of physical and ethical philosophy.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, many a scholar has ascribed to the Stoics this view. While it would be impossible to cite all the relevant works here, one should definitely mention the classic and influential monographs by Félix Buffière<sup>2</sup> and Jean Pépin.<sup>3</sup> Yet, some researchers have impugned the accuracy of this view. Thus, for example, Peter Steinmetz found in the early Stoa “keine allegorische Deutung von Dichtung als Dichtung,”<sup>4</sup> whereas Anthony A. Long even more forcefully argued that one should altogether refrain from attributing allegorical interpretation to the Stoics.<sup>5</sup> Such criticisms have triggered a heated debate about the extent to which Stoic approach can be labeled as “allegorical” at all. Some scholars have (with various qualifications) embraced Long’s (and Steinmetz’s) conclusions,<sup>6</sup> others have rejected them (with varying degrees of vehemence),<sup>7</sup> and there is still no consensus regarding the issue.<sup>8</sup> In light of this plethora of conflicting positions, the purpose of the present article will be twofold.

This work was supported by the National Science Centre, Poland [grant number 2017/25/B/HS1/00559]. I would like to thank *CP*’s anonymous reviewers for their useful comments and helpful suggestions.

1. De Lacy 1948, 241.

2. Buffière 1956, 137–54 (chapter “Sous le Portique”).

3. Pépin 1976, 125–31 (chapter “L’allégorisme stoïcien”), who is followed by, e.g., Brisson 1996, 61–69.

4. Steinmetz 1986, 29. For a criticism of Steinmetz’s position, see, e.g., Hillgruber 1989, 18–20 and esp. Most 1989, 2023–26.

5. Long 1992; 1997.

6. See, e.g., Dawson 1992, 258 n. 1; Tieleman 1996, 221 with n. 9; Algra 2001, 577; Pichler 2006, 38–39 n. 81; Algra 2007, 26 n. 67; van Sijl 2010, 141 n. 142; 159 n. 43.

7. See, e.g., Boys-Stones 2001, 54; Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004, 458–59; Struck 2004, 113, 119 n. 18; Goulet 2005, 112–13, 116–17; Gourinat 2005, 11–12, 25–26; Ramelli 2011, 339 with n. 9.

8. Suffice it to compare two recent works on the subject: van Sijl (2010) argues that the early Stoic interpretations should generally not be categorized as allegorical, whereas Ramelli (2011) takes the diametrically opposite view. It may not be superfluous to note that the latest works which ascribe allegoresis to the Stoics differ significantly as to what constitutes allegorical interpretation (see, e.g., Radice 2015; Most 2016). The ensuing discussion occasionally uses, but also significantly departs from my previous considerations of the Stoics’ hermeneutical efforts (e.g., Domaradzki 2012; 2014).

*Classical Philology*, volume 117, number 1, January 2022.

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First, this study will show that much of this disagreement among scholars results from their disparate understandings of what qualifies as allegorical interpretation. Conflicting interpretations are often due to lack of consensus on key terms. Also, confusion is likely to arise when different fields intersect. After all, philosophers, historians, philologists, and literary scholars have often quite distinct interests about the Stoics. Thus, this paper will demonstrate that the answer to the question whether the Stoics practiced allegorical interpretation depends very much on how one defines this practice and, further, that our modern categories frequently fail to do justice to the specificity of Stoic hermeneutical efforts. By introducing several important conceptual distinctions this study will aim to bring some clarity to the minefield of conflicting positions, which—hopefully—will help to diminish the scope of disagreement.

Secondly, this paper will argue in favor of a middle ground between the two aforementioned extremes. On the one hand, it will be suggested that if the concept of allegorical interpretation is inflated to such proportions that it includes, for example, various instances of rationalization of mythology, then the concept loses its critical edge and the preponderance of Greek thinkers transmogrify into allegorical interpreters. On the other hand, it will be postulated that if the allegorical dimension of Stoic hermeneutical efforts is denied altogether, then it is difficult to account for the Stoics' profound influence on later allegoresis. Thus, it will be contended that the Stoic diversified approach to myths was conducive to the flowering of two distinct traditions: a rationalist one and an allegorist one. Let us begin, however, with several important caveats.

First of all, we need to acknowledge the meager and fragmentary nature of the evidence available to us. With the exception of Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*, no work of the early Stoics has survived, which is why we frequently have to rely on decontextualized quotations or sloppy paraphrases that come from authors whose attitude toward Stoicism is often witheringly critical, dismissive, or even downright hostile.<sup>9</sup> Naturally, in all such cases allowances must continually be made for possible distortions of Stoic thought. On the other hand, we possess various works of the later Stoics, which we obviously may consult on the assumption that this later tradition faithfully preserves the original views of the school, but this assumption can always be doubted in light of the various well-known disagreements among the Stoics.<sup>10</sup> While these disagreements within the school make some scholars sharply differentiate between the early and the later Stoics,<sup>11</sup> the ensuing discussion can take into account neither all

9. One of the most important interpretations by Chrysippus has been preserved for us by Galen in his *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* (PHP 3.8.1–19 = SVF 2.908–9), which is a vigorous polemic against Stoic psychology (on which see below in the main text).

10. In the context of our considerations, we may, for example, mention the fact that Seneca repudiates not only the specific interpretation of the Graces put forward by Chrysippus (*Benef.* 1.3.6–10, 1.4.4–6), but also the view that there is Stoic or any philosophy preserved in Homer (*Epist.* 88.5).

11. For example, Boys-Stones (2003, 189–216) opposes two types of Stoic allegorical tradition: the earlier Stoics considered the material they interpreted never to have been intended allegorically, whereas the later Stoics regarded major parts of traditional theology as deliberate allegories; thus, the former approach to myth continues the tradition of Aristotle, whilst the latter anticipates that of the Neoplatonists (see already Boys-Stones 2001, 52–54). In a somewhat similar vein, Gourinat (2005, 32) distinguishes two approaches to myth in Stoicism: one assumes that the first men personified various realities “de bonne foi” and the other that the ancients encrypted their profound truths “volontairement” (see also p. 29).

the problems in the source material nor all the issues connected with the evolution of Stoicism.

Secondly, it must be noted that the present paper will not be an exhaustive study of the Stoics' hermeneutical efforts: given the vast number and diversity of Stoic interpretations as well as given the enduring lack of scholarly consensus on how to categorize and assess them, this article will focus on selected illustrative examples. This should make it possible to identify the most problematic issues, which hopefully will provide a useful point of departure for further research. While all, or nearly all, Stoic interpretations have been discussed in several important monographs, these discussions build on either very broad<sup>12</sup> or, conversely, very narrow<sup>13</sup> definitions of allegorical interpretation (which is why they end up classifying either every or no Stoic interpretation as "allegorical"). Thus, to steer clear between a diffuse and a reductionist concept of allegorical interpretation, this study will concentrate on the most representative and controversial cases.

Finally, by way of introduction, it is worth noting briefly that the allegorical tradition, obviously, did not originate with the Stoics. As is well known, the early epic poets claimed to be divinely inspired (e.g., *Hom. Il.* 1.1, 2.484–92; *Hes. Theog.* 1–115) and, thus, to have access to divine truths about the universe. These pretensions were seriously challenged when the Presocratic "physicists" presented their explanations of the cosmos. Diogenes Laertius, for example, relates that Pythagoras (8.21), Heraclitus (9.1), and Xenophanes (9.18) explicitly repudiated the authority of Homer and Hesiod. Although the early philosophers did reject the poets, they also accommodated some of their images and concepts. Unsurprisingly, then, later allegorical interpreters were fond of demonstrating Homer to be the source of various ideas ostensibly authored by these detractors of the poet. Pseudo-Plutarch, for example, finds (122, 125) Pythagoras' doctrine of the soul in Homer.<sup>14</sup> Heraclitus the Allegorist emphasizes (24.1–5) the stylistic similarities between the poet and Heraclitus of Ephesus.<sup>15</sup> Finally, both Pseudo-Plutarch (93) and Heraclitus the Allegorist (22.8–9) derive Xenophanes' first principles of all things from Homer.<sup>16</sup> Naturally, these exaggerated and often unfounded claims (coming from much later authors) must be approached with extreme caution, but they nicely illustrate the complex interactions between poetry and philosophy that stimulated the development of allegoresis. While the practice of allegorical interpretation was motivated by the desires to defend the venerated poetry (*apologetic* allegoresis) or to utilize its authority (*appropriative* allegoresis), the origins of allegoresis can be traced to the sixth century BCE.<sup>17</sup>

12. E.g., Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004.

13. E.g., van Sijl 2010.

14. The text is that of Keaney and Lamberton 1996. For a recent discussion, see Domaradzki 2020b, with further references.

15. The text is that of Russell and Konstan 2005. See also n. 82 below.

16. Although Heraclitus confuses Anaxagoras and Xenophanes, on which see Buffière 1956, 93 n. 35; 1962, 101 n. 2.

17. For a recent discussion, see Domaradzki 2017 (in what follows, I use some of the findings presented there). Interestingly, however, a case can be made that in one form or another allegoresis can be found already in Homer, on which see Most 1993 and now Kotwick 2020.

## ALLEGORY VS. ALLEGORESIS

To begin with, we should note that the term ἀλληγορία is relatively late. Plutarch (ca. 45–120 CE) informs us (*De aud. poet.* 19E–F) that it is only “now” (νῦν) that ἀλληγορία has supplanted what “long ago” (πάλαι) used to be called ὑπόνοια.<sup>18</sup> In the Classical period, the latter term does occur sporadically in the relevant sense (e.g., Xen. *Symp.* 3.6; Pl. *Resp.* 2.378D6–7), but it has been well documented in research on allegorical interpretation that the term most often used by the early allegorical interpreters was neither ὑπόνοια (which is rare) nor ἀλληγορία (which is late), but rather αἴνιγμα.<sup>19</sup> As will be discussed below, the Stoics make an important contribution here by adding σύμβολον to the allegorical interpreters’ nomenclature.

Secondly, it is worth emphasizing that at least some part of the controversy over Stoic allegoresis arises from an indiscriminate and ambiguous use of the term “allegory.” While the roots of the confusion go back to antiquity,<sup>20</sup> the confusion has persisted to modern times.<sup>21</sup> Regrettably, the tendency to employ the term “allegory” with reference to both the mode of *composing* a work and the mode of its *interpreting* is particularly entrenched in English and French literature on the subject. This has been justly deplored by Jean Pépin, who has diagnosed that allegorical *expression* and allegorical *interpretation* are, thus, “malheureusement confondus sous le même vocable d’«allégorie».”<sup>22</sup> Obviously, the decision to use the term “allegory” in both (clearly related) meanings may very well be a conscious one.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the contrast between allegorical composing and allegorical interpreting becomes sometimes very elusive.<sup>24</sup> Notwithstanding all this, this paper sides with those scholars who seek to avoid the terminological confusion by clearly demarcating between the technique of allegorical *composing*, that is, *allegory*, and the technique of allegorical *interpreting*, that is, *allegoresis*.<sup>25</sup> When distinguishing between the two, the present paper will follow their definitions offered by Pépin, according to whom the former “consiste à cacher un message sous le revêtement d’une figure” and the latter—“à décrypter la figure pour retrouver le

18. Where no English reference is provided, the translation is my own. For exhaustive discussions of the relation between the earlier term ὑπόνοια and its later equivalent ἀλληγορία, see, e.g., Buffière 1956, 45–48; Pépin 1976, 85–92; Whitman 1987, 263–68; Blönnigen 1992, 11–19.

19. See esp. Struck 2004, 39–50, 171–79. See also Buffière 1956, 48–49; Ford 2002, 72–76, 85–87; Naddaf 2009, 112; Obbink 2010, 16; Most 2016, 54–55.

20. The verb ἀλληγορεῖν meant both “to speak allegorically” (e.g., Strabo 1.2.7: “Ὀμηρος . . . μυθολογεῖται . . . πρὸς ἐπιστήμην ἀλληγορῶν) and “to interpret allegorically” (e.g., Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 363D: “Ἐλλήνας Κρόνον ἀλληγοροῦσι τὸν χρόνον).

21. Lamberton (1986, 20) has rightly bemoaned the fact that the ancients failed “to make a clear distinction between allegorical expression and allegorical interpretation.”

22. Pépin 1976, 487.

23. E.g., Whitman (1987, 10) differentiates between “interpretive” and “compositional” allegory, upon which he observes that the two can “converge in a systematic form.” Similarly, Dawson (1992, 4) notes that the distinction between the two “is often blurred.”

24. For discussions of such cases, see Domaradzki 2015 and 2017, with further references.

25. While there has been a growing tendency to do that (see, e.g., Quilligan 1979, 25–26; Most 1989; Ford 2002, 67–89; Ramelli 2003; Gourinat 2005; Naddaf 2009; Most 2016), this distinction has been very well established in German literature, where *Allegorie* is customarily used with reference to *Dichtung* and *Allegorese* with reference to its *Deutung* (see, e.g., Friedl 1936; Joosen and Waszink 1950; Steinmetz 1986; Hillgruber 1989; Bernard 1990; Blönnigen 1992; Most 1993; Bernard 1997; Horn and Walter 1997; Pichler 2006).

message.”<sup>26</sup> To illustrate the difference between the strategy of allegorical encoding and the strategy of allegorical decoding, let us provide some examples.

Prodicus’ tale of Heracles at his existential crossroads (DK 84 B 2) is a fairly clear-cut example of an allegory.<sup>27</sup> Young Heracles encounters two women who allegorically personify two different paths of life between which he has to choose: Virtue (Ἀρετή) demands numerous sacrifices (i.e., “the long road”), but eventually leads to genuine happiness, whereas Vice (Κακία) offers a life of ease (i.e., “the short road”), but in fact only seduces into an insatiable pursuit of pleasures. The Derveni papyrus, on the other hand, contains an elaborate allegoresis.<sup>28</sup> The Derveni author brings to light the latent (i.e., allegorical) meaning of Orpheus’ poem so that a complex narrative is excavated from underneath this Orphic theogony. Thus, for example, Kronos (Κρόνος) is deciphered as the “Mind” (Νοῦς) that is “striking” (κρούων) individual things against one another (14.7, 15.6–8), upon which his castration of Ouranos turns out to be an allegory of the transition from the fire phase to the stage in which the Mind brings about the collisions between the individual things (14.2–10). Uncontroversially, then, Prodicus’ tale illustrates the technique of *composition* (“allegory”), whereas the Derveni papyrus—the technique of *interpretation* (“allegoresis”). Providing examples of Stoic allegory and allegoresis is, however, more challenging.

When it comes to the mode of allegorical expression, one should firstly stress that allegory does not appear to have been that popular with the Stoics. We find it easily in later authors who clearly espouse numerous Stoic views, but whose commitment to Stoic philosophy can be debated. For example, the famous *Libyan Myth* of Dio Chrysostom is a rather straightforward example of an allegory. In his fifth oration, Dio tells the story (5–15) of dangerous monsters, half-women half-snakes, who lure and devour men. Having presented his μῦθος, Dio explains (16) that it “can show adequately” (ικανῶς ἐπιδειῖξαι δύναντο) the true nature of desires (i.e., how they seduce and destroy people). With regard to the early Stoics, we could point to Cleanthes’ portrayal of Pleasure. Cicero relates (*Fin.* 2.69 = *SVF* 1.553) that Cleanthes would instruct his pupils to picture Pleasure as clad in beautiful attires with royal ornaments, seated on a throne and surrounded by little serving maids (i.e., Virtues), whose sole task consisted in waiting on Pleasure.<sup>29</sup> Both these examples fall clearly into the category of allegorical composition.

Let us now turn to the mode of allegorical interpretation. Providing an example of Stoic allegoresis is very difficult, for—as noted above—certain scholars have gone so far as to question its existence altogether. We may, however, look at

26. Pépin 1976, 488.

27. Whitman (1987, 22) hails Prodicus’ narrative as the “first true personification allegory in the West.” It is worth noting here that Prodicus’ story is an allegorical adaptation of Hesiod’s two paths in *Op.* 287–92, on which see Wolfsdorf 2008, 6–8, with further references.

28. The text along with translation is that of Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou 2006. There is a general scholarly consensus that the Derveni papyrus provides us with an example of allegoresis, although there is less agreement concerning the intentions of its author. For an overview, see Betegh 2004, 349–80; Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou 2006, 45–58. It may not be superfluous to note that Brisson (2006, 10–11) has even argued for the presence of “a Stoicising influence” in the text of the papyrus. This hypothesis, however, has been convincingly disproved by Betegh 2007 (for further skepticism, see also Algra 2007, 9 n. 13; Most 2016, 70 n. 51).

29. Ramelli and Lucchetta (2004, 95–96) rightly stress the similarity of Cleanthes’ “quadro allegorico” to Prodicus’ Heracles at the crossroads (on which see n. 27 above).

two interpretations put forward by Chrysippus, who is often hailed not only as the most significant Stoic thinker on a number of philosophical issues, but also as antiquity's most notorious interpreter.<sup>30</sup> Let us briefly touch upon two of his extravagant accounts: that of Athena's birth from the head of Zeus and that of the sexual union of Zeus and Hera. As will be shown, these interpretations illustrate two major divisions among scholars: whether allegoresis should be defined in terms of its continuity and whether it should be defined in terms of its intentionality.<sup>31</sup>

One might think that even a cursory glance at Chrysippus' sophisticated interpretation of Hesiod's narrative about Athena's birth from the head of Zeus<sup>32</sup> would reveal its allegorical nature.<sup>33</sup> This interpretation has been preserved to us by Galen in his *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* (*PHP* 3.8.1–19 = *SVF* 2.908–9).<sup>34</sup> According to Galen's testimony, Chrysippus sought to prove that the myth should not be hastily interpreted as a "symbol" (σύμβολον) that "the governing part of the soul" (τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν τῆς ψυχῆς μέρος) is in the head (*PHP* 3.8.3–4). Rather, he argued, the story accords with the view that the seat of rationality is in the chest. Importantly, Chrysippus himself put it in no uncertain terms that he was after the hidden sense of the myth. Galen reports him to have asserted that the things told of Athena "imply a different symbolic meaning" (ἄλλου τινὸς συμβόλου ποιοῦντ' ἔμφασιν, *PHP* 3.8.15). Let us briefly look at the gist of Chrysippus' argument.

Chrysippus equates Metis with "a kind of wisdom and art in practical matters" (τις φρόνησις καὶ περὶ τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον τέχνη, *PHP* 3.8.16). This identification makes it possible for him to suggestively and rather straightforwardly account for the swallowing of Metis: as the goddess personifies wisdom and art, she needs to be swallowed, for, says Chrysippus, "the arts must be swallowed and stored up within us" (τὰς τέχνας δεῖ καταπίνεσθαι καὶ ἐναποτίθεσθαι, *PHP* 3.8.16). We see that in his interpretation Chrysippus exploits the fact that the verb καταπίνειν means both "to swallow" and "to absorb."<sup>35</sup> That is why he points out that whilst it is natural for us to say that "the things said" (τὰ λεγόμενα) are "swallowed" (καταπίνειν), the very idea of "swallowing" (κατάποσις) signifies that these things "are stored in

30. For antiquity, one may quote, for example, Cicero (*Nat. D.* 1.39 = *SVF* 2.1077), who has the Epicurean Velleius label Chrysippus as *Stoicorum somniorum vaferrimus interpres*. For modernity, one may cite, for instance, Wehrli (1928, 64), who frowns upon Chrysippus' "gewaltsame Interpretationen" or Buffière (1956, 140), who passes the harsh judgment that Chrysippus "devait horriblement tirer par les cheveux dieux et déesses de la fable."

31. While Dio famously associates (*Or.* 53.4–5 = *SVF* 1.274) Zeno's approach to Homer with that of Antisthenes, the controversies surrounding Stoic allegoresis are similar to those surrounding Antisthenian allegoresis. For a discussion of the latter, see Domaradzki 2020a (in what follows, I use some of the findings presented there).

32. Chrysippus quotes Hesiod's authentic *Theogony* 886–90, 900, 924–26, and a text that Merkelbach and West (1967) classified as *fragmentum dubium* 343.

33. But see Long (1992, 58–59), who refers to the Athena interpretation as "exegesis" and insists that "interpretation is a much better term than allegorization for what Chrysippus is doing." For scholars who characterize this interpretation as allegorical, see, e.g., Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004, 130 with n. 132; Struck 2004, 119; Goulet 2005, 116; Gourinat 2005, 12, 18. Importantly, even scholars who otherwise agree with Long see the Athena interpretation as allegorical (see, e.g., Tieleman 1996, 221–24; van Sijl 2010, 130, 133, 142, 250).

34. The text along with translation (sometimes modified) is that of De Lacy (1978). In particular, I deviate from De Lacy in rendering the original σύμβολον as "symbol." In the relevant passage (8.1–19), Chrysippus employs the term four times: at 8.4 (De Lacy has "signifies"), at 8.15 (De Lacy has "allegorical meaning"), at 8.18 and 8.19 (De Lacy has "allegory" in both cases). I agree with those scholars (e.g., Tieleman 1996, 222 n. 13) who stress that σύμβολον becomes a technical term with the Stoics, which is why I think it should be rendered consistently as "symbol."

35. LSJ: καταπιῶ. See also Buffière 1956, 276.

the belly” (εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν ἀποτίθεσθαι) (*PHP* 3.8.16). Having established the analogy between “swallowing” and “absorbing,” Chrysippus drives home the point that “such a swallowed art can reasonably be said to give birth similarly to a mother giving birth” (τὴν καταποθείσαν τοιαύτην τέχνην τίκτειν εὐλογον . . . παραπλησίαν τῆς τικτούσης μητρός, *PHP* 3.8.17). Consequently, Chrysippus offers the following explanation of Metis’ giving birth inside Zeus’ belly: all wisdom and art (“Metis”) need to be absorbed (“swallowed”) inside the stomach, which is a poetic equivalent to the Stoics’ heart (viz. the locus of reason).

What also needs to be clarified is why the locus of Athena’s birth is either Zeus’ “head” (κεφαλή, *Theog.* 924) or its very “crown” (κορυφή, F 343 Merkelbach and West). To answer this question, Chrysippus proceeds to demonstrate that the poet employs the word “head” in a very broad and general sense. To substantiate his argument, Chrysippus juxtaposes the word “head” with such expressions as “a sheep’s head” (προβάτου κεφαλή) and “they remove the heads of some [people]” (τὰς κεφαλὰς ἀφαιροῦσιν τινῶν) (*PHP* 3.8.18). Thus, Chrysippus takes recourse to common parlance so as to obfuscate the concept of head: he makes references to an act of decapitation and an animal with no distinct neck to show that Hesiod’s description actually pertains to—as Peter Struck aptly puts it—“everything above the neck.”<sup>36</sup> When accounting for the fuzzy nature of the concept of head, Chrysippus points to the fact that “numerous such changes of meaning occur according to a symbol” (τῶν τοιούτων παραλλαγῶν κατὰ σύμβολον γινομένων πλειόνων, *PHP* 3.8.18). Chrysippus makes a case for his interpretation by pointing to the phenomenon of semantic shifts: words change their meanings, upon which their senses can overlap and their denotation can be obscure. Having sufficiently blurred the concept of head, Chrysippus can now argue that the head is not the actual seat of rationality but merely its outlet: although Hesiod has Athena spring from the (crown of the) head of Zeus, the true meaning of the myth is that she issues from Kronion’s mouth.

Let us briefly recapitulate. Chrysippus puts forward an ingenious interpretation that turns the myth of Athena’s birth into a complex “symbol” that needs to be understood properly (i.e., allegorically). Thus, σύμβολον becomes in Chrysippus an interpretation tool that makes it possible for him to distinguish between two ways of reading Hesiod’s narrative: a literal and superficial one, on the one hand, and an allegorical and more profound one, on the other. Crucially, Chrysippus explicitly signals (*PHP* 3.8.15) that he proceeds to unveil the symbolic meaning of the myth (see above), upon which he hails (*PHP* 3.8.19) the σύμβολον he unearths as a much “better” (μᾶλλον) account than the encephalocentric view. Consequently, his interpretation meets the criteria of allegoresis.

The same applies to Chrysippus’ interpretation of the sexual union of Zeus and Hera. While this infamous piece of allegoresis is mentioned by Diogenes Laertius (7.187–88 = *SVF* 2.1071), Pseudo-Clement (*Hom.* 5.18 = *SVF* 2.1072), and Theophilus (*Ad Autol.* 3.8 = *SVF* 2.1073), the most important testimony comes from Origen (*C. Cels.* 4.48 = *SVF* 2.1074), who reports that Chrysippus identified Hera with “matter” (ὕλη) and Zeus with “god” (θεός), allegorizing the hierogamy in the following manner: “having received the seminal principles of the

36. Struck 2004, 121. See also Tieleman 1996, 223–24.

god, matter retains them within herself for [the purpose of] ordering the universe” (τοὺς σπερματικούς λόγους τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ ὕλη παραδεξαμένη ἔχει ἐν ἑαυτῇ εἰς κατακόσμησιν τῶν ὄλων). Thus, the Samos (or Argos) mural is interpreted in such a way that the sexual act turns out to stand for an interaction of two principles: god (Zeus) and matter (Hera). Hera is the passive matter which absorbs and is, thereby, fertilized by the creative semen of Zeus, which generates the cosmos. While Diogenes Laertius (7.188 = *SVF* 2.1071) characterizes Chrysippus’ interpretation “as being a contribution to physics” (ὡς φυσικὴν),<sup>37</sup> one can easily show how Stoic physics underlies Chrysippus’ interpretation,<sup>38</sup> which most scholars categorize as allegorical.<sup>39</sup>

What is noteworthy about the aforementioned interpretations by Chrysippus is that they nicely illustrate—as has been noted above—two major divisions among scholars: whether allegoresis should be defined in terms of its complexity and extensiveness (i.e., an interpretation qualifies as allegoresis when it is a running commentary), and whether allegoresis should be defined in terms of its intentionality and purposefulness (i.e., an interpretation qualifies as allegoresis when it presupposes a deliberate composition on part of the author). Let us now turn to these issues.

#### ALLEGORESIS VS. ETYMOLOGY

A great deal of confusion regarding Stoic allegoresis has been generated by attempts to sharply oppose allegoresis and etymology. In what follows, it will be argued that this opposition does not help us to understand the specificity of the Stoics’ hermeneutical efforts.

Allegorical interpretation is often characterized as “systematic,” and/or “coherent,” and/or “continuous,” and/or “extensive.” Thus, for example, Roberto Radice defines allegoresis as “una interpretazione sistematica,”<sup>40</sup> Richard Goulet similarly says that “l’allégorie implique une cohérence et une continuité,”<sup>41</sup> and David Konstan describes allegory as “the systematic application of transferred or hidden

37. Trans. Inwood and Gerson (1997, 109).

38. See, e.g., Hahn 1977, 57–90; Gilbert 1985, 81–106; Lapidge 1978, 161–85; Todd 1978, 137–60; Domaradzki 2014, 9–12, with further references.

39. See, e.g., Hahn 1977, 62, 82, 84 n. 15; Gilbert 1985, 90–97; Lamberton 1986, 210–11 n. 191; Whitman 1987, 32. Even Long (1992, 58) speaks here of a “cosmological allegory,” although he expresses doubts as to whether Chrysippus was earnest in his interpretation of the mural. However, questioning the seriousness of Chrysippus’ interpretation is hazardous in light of Plutarch’s famous observation (*De aud. poet.* 31E = *SVF* 2.101) that while Chrysippus may be “in many places implausible” (πολλοῦ γλίσχρος), he “does not jest” (οὐ παίζων). Struck (2004, 280 n. 6) brilliantly observes that Plutarch’s testimony is very difficult to reconcile with Long’s suggestion. For other scholars who reject (or ignore) Long’s argument and classify the Samos/Argos interpretation as allegorical, see, e.g., Blönnigen 1992, 30; Struck 2004, 280; Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004, 112 with n. 94; Goulet 2005, 114–15; Gourinat 2005, 10–11, 19–20; Most 2010, 30; Domaradzki 2014, 7–12. Recently, van Sijl (2010, 132–33) has argued that the Samos/Argos interpretation should be characterized as sym-bolical rather allegorical (for a criticism of this view, see below in the main text).

40. Radice 2004, 7. Curiously enough, the scholar differentiates between allegoresis and allegory, but he characterizes the latter also as an interpretation: “un’interpretazione casuale e rapsodica” (see also Radice 2015, 11–12). This seems rather unfortunate and confusing, for treating allegory as an interpretation technique entails obfuscating the difference between the poet and the interpreter. Furthermore, defining both *allegory* and *allegoresis* as kinds of *interpretation* makes it very difficult to do justice to the various forms of hermeneutical activity of the Presocratic thinkers (see further Domaradzki 2015; 2017; 2019).

41. Goulet 2005, 102. See also Gourinat 2005, 18–19.



senses of terms in an extended passage or argument.”<sup>42</sup> Though in themselves useful, such characterizations are frequently used for strongly opposing allegoresis and etymology. For example, David Dawson suggests that etymology should be differentiated from allegory on the grounds that the former “lacks a narrative dimension.”<sup>43</sup> In a similar vein, Anthony A. Long specifies that etymology explains “atomic units of language,” whereas allegory requires “a whole story, a narrative.”<sup>44</sup> Most recently, Claartje van Sijl, drawing on some of the above proposals, specifies that etymology is “atomic” and allegory is “molecular.”<sup>45</sup> While it is surely laudable to differentiate between allegoresis and etymology, the ensuing discussion will show that it is misguided to use this distinction for completely denying the allegorical dimension of Stoic interpretations.

First of all, to draw a radical opposition between etymology and allegoresis is to disregard the specificity of ancient *ἐτυμολογία*. Let us note here that the adjective *ἔτυμος* means “true” and the related technical term *τὸ ἔτυμον* stands for “the true sense of a word according to its origin.”<sup>46</sup> Bearing this in mind, we may point to a crucial difference between ancient *ἐτυμολογία* and modern etymology: both study the origin of words or names, but the former also enquires into their “true” meanings. Consequently, more often than not, this *ἐτυμολογία* does have a narrative dimension as it transforms into a certain type of allegoresis.<sup>47</sup> Consider the following example. Cleanthes is reported (*SVF* 1.526 = Apollonius Soph. *Lex. Homer.* 114) to have identified the obscure herb *μῶλυ* at *Od.* 10.305 with “reason” (*λόγος*), upon which he could argue that “the impulses and passions” (*αἱ ὀρμαὶ καὶ τὰ πάθη*) which Circe cunningly exploits “are relaxed” (*μωλύονται*) by reason to Odysseus’ rescue. Can we really claim that such etymologies are devoid of narrative dimensions? After all, Cleanthes not only derives *μῶλυ* from *μωλύεσθαι* but also constructs a narrative around this etymology.

This is even more clear in the case of Lucius Annaeus Cornutus (first century CE), whose etymologies frequently yield allegorical interpretations. Let us very briefly look at his account of *Κρόνος*. The god, whom tradition reports “to swallow” (*καταπίνειν*) his children with Rhea, is equated (6.20–7.5) with “time” (*χρόνος*) on the grounds that what comes into being in time “is consumed” (*δαπανᾶται*) by it.<sup>48</sup> While according to the traditional account (e.g., Hes. *Theog.* 485–91) Rhea prevented Kronos from devouring Zeus by feeding him with a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes, Cornutus suggests that “the swallowing be taken differently” (*ἄλλως εἰληπται ἢ κατὰ ποσιν*), for the myth is actually “about the generation of the world” (*περὶ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου γενέσεως*) (7.10–12). Subsequently, Cornutus

42. Konstan 2005, xvi.

43. Dawson 1992, 6–7. See also Most 2016, 59.

44. Long 1992, 54.

45. Van Sijl 2010 (e.g., 109, 115, 141, 250).

46. LSJ: *ἔτυμος* and *ἔτυμον*, τό. On the relation between *ἔτυμος* and *ἀληθής*, see Krischer 1965, 161–74.

47. Plato’s *Cratylus* is a perfect example thereof. In his excellent commentary to the dialogue, Sedley (2003, 37) aptly emphasizes that ancient etymology should be treated “as more closely analogous to modern literary criticism than to modern etymology” (see also n. 53 below).

48. The text is that of Lang 1881. In my translations I have consulted Hays 1983 and Boys-Stones 2018. For a parallel account of Kronos/Saturn, see Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.64. Plutarch reports the equation of *Κρόνος* with Time to have been very common (see n. 20 above). It may have originated with Pherecydes (DK 7 A 9), on which see Kirk, Raven, and Schofield 1983, 57 n. 1; West 1971, 10; Schibli 1990, 17 n. 9, 27–33; Granger 2007, 144–45; Domaradzki 2017, 318 with n. 75.

identifies Zeus with the world's "governing nature" (διοικοῦσα φύσις), the stone—with the "earth" (γῆ) and the stone's swallowing—with its "being fixed firmly" (ἐγκατεστηρίχθη) as a "foundation" (θεμέλιος) for all things that come into being (7.12–17). Consequently, Cornutus can argue that through this story the ancient mythmakers "hint enigmatically" (αἰνίττονται) at "the ordering of the world's becoming" (ἡ τῆς τῶν ὅλων γενέσεως τάξις) (7.21–22).

It is incorrect to deny the allegorical dimension of such etymologizing. Cornutus not only derives (7.22–8.3) the name Κρόνος from his "accomplishing" (κράειν), that is, sending "the great flow of what until then surrounded the earth" (τὴν γινομένην τέως πολλὴν ῥύσιν τοῦ περιέχοντος ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν), but he also equates the god with the force that "makes the exhalations finer" (λεπτοτέρας ποιήσασα τὰς ἀναθυμιάσεις) so as to show that the dethroning of Kronos signifies that chaos has been replaced with order. In the same manner, the Derveni author not only derives (14.7, 15.6–8) the name Κρόνος from his "striking" (κρούων) individual things against one another, but he also deciphers the god as the "Mind" (Νοῦς) so as to demonstrate (14.2–10) that the castration of Ouranos signifies the transition from the fire phase to the stage in which the Mind brings about the collisions between the individual things (see above). While in both cases Κρόνος is allegorically identified with the earlier order of the universe, neither of these etymologies can be characterized as lacking a narrative dimension.

Another problem is that determining the "systematicity," "coherence," "continuity," and "extensiveness" of an interpretation is extremely difficult because it ultimately boils down to a matter of individual judgment. In other words, it is very risky to employ the above definitions for questioning the allegorical dimension of Stoic interpretations, since they contain inherently subjective and, therefore, questionable terms.<sup>49</sup> Unsurprisingly, then, scholars are poles apart in their interpretations of such comments as the one made by Cleanthes.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, they cannot agree about the nature of Cornutus' method<sup>51</sup> or—for that matter—about the nature of Stoic allegoresis as such.<sup>52</sup> Given everything that has been said so far, it

49. That is precisely why Gourinat (2005, 19–20), for example, argues that the Samos/Argos interpretation should be characterized as allegorical rather than symbolical, whereas van Sijl (2010, 132–33) takes the opposite view and insists that the Samos/Argos interpretation should be characterized as symbolical rather than allegorical (see below in the main text).

50. For scholars who characterize this as etymology, see, e.g., Long 1992, 63–64; van Sijl 2010, 136 n. 128. For scholars who find allegorical interpretation here, see, e.g., Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004, 94; Gourinat 2005, 31 n. 1.

51. Dawson (1992, 27) claims that Cornutus connects the etymologies of Kronos and Zeus "not to establish narrative continuity at the level of myth but to point to the cause-and-effect relationships in nature according to Stoic physics." Struck (2004, 147–48), on the other hand, regards Cornutus' treatment of Kronos as allegorical (see also Pépin 1976, 156–58; Blönnigen 1992, 38). For scholars who generally consider Cornutus to be an allegorical interpreter, see esp. Tate 1929a, 41–45 or, more recently, Boys-Stones 2001, 49–59; 2003, 196–209; 2018; Ramelli 2003; Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004, 292–306; Ramelli 2011, 338–39. It is noteworthy that even scholars who find Cornutus' explanations to be etymological rather than allegorical are forced to acknowledge the presence of narrative elements in some of his accounts (see, e.g., van Sijl 2010, 169–72).

52. Suffice it to mention here the interesting proposal by Bernard (1990; 1997), who differentiates between *die substitutive* and *die dihairetische Allegorese*: the former is characteristic of the Stoics, who focus on individual characters ("Personen" or "Figuren einer Geschichte") that they simply reduce to corresponding abstract concepts, whereas the latter is typical of the Platonists, who concentrate on larger episodes ("Reihen von Vorstellungen" or "Geschichten") that they take as signifying complex intelligibles or symbols (see, e.g., 1990, 6–8, 17–21, 59–94, 276–82; 1997, 63–83). Importantly, Bernard not only ascribes to the Stoics substitutive allegoresis but also regards Heraclitus the Allegorist as its chief representative (see, e.g., 1990, 15–21, 93–94). Thus, Bernard characterizes Heraclitus' allegoresis in a way that is diametrically opposed to how Long

seems more constructive to acknowledge that ancient ἐτυμολογία frequently coalesces with allegoresis<sup>53</sup> and to resist the temptation to strongly oppose the two.

The foregoing discussion suggests, then, that the scope of disagreement surrounding the issue of Stoic allegoresis could be diminished if we distinguish etymology that is intertwined with allegoresis from the one that is not. An example of the latter could be the following. Strabo upbraids Zeno for unnecessarily emending the mysterious Erembians at *Od.* 4.84 to Arabians and commends Posidonius for “deriving the etymology of names from the nations’ kinship and community” (ἀπὸ τῆς τῶν ἔθνῶν συγγενείας καὶ κοινότητος ἐτυμολογῶν, 1.2.34). While Posidonius’ explanation points to the cultural similarity, racial affinity, and geographical proximity of the peoples in question, his etymology does not reveal any ὑπόνοια.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, Posidonius’ etymology should be distinguished from that of Cleanthes: the latter metamorphoses into a kind of allegoresis, whereas the former does not. That is why instead of stampeding into the sweeping generalization that etymology has no narrative dimension, it seems more productive to recognize that sometimes it does and sometimes it does not. When it does, this etymology can only arbitrarily be labeled as non-allegorical.

Finally, it is worth noting that the aforementioned Zeno’s textual emendation fits neither the category of allegoresis nor that of etymology. This also deserves a brief comment.

#### ALLEGORESIS VS. EXEGESIS

Similarly to Posidonius’ etymology, Zeno’s correction of Erembians to Arabians does not unveil any ὑπόνοια.<sup>55</sup> It seems that this textual emendation invites the label of exegesis. However, some scholars employ the term “exegesis” with reference to the Stoic approach as such.<sup>56</sup> This is unfortunate, for it makes the term comprise interpretations that do bring to light some hidden meaning

(1992, e.g., 64) or van Sijl (2010, e.g., 110 n. 35) characterizes it. In connection with Bernard’s proposal, Ramelli and Lucchetta (2004, 398–99 n. 154) as well as Konstan (2005, xxiii) aptly point out, however, that the ancient allegorists cannot always be divided so neatly into distinct camps.

53. This has been brilliantly recognized by Ford (2002, 88), who observes that when the ancients interpreted poetry “there was little difference between allegorizing a divine figure in the tradition of Theagenes or etymologizing an apparently opaque word in the tradition of the sophists and grammarians” (see also n. 47 above). Thus, I side with scholars who stress the affinity of ancient etymology and allegoresis (e.g., Ramelli 2003; Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004; del Bello 2007) rather than with those who emphasize the differences between the two (e.g., Long 1997; Most 2016). Interestingly, however, even scholars who distinguish between allegoresis and etymology are forced to admit their inseparability in the Stoics. For example, Most (2016, 70), who generally opposes allegoresis and etymology, is nevertheless forced to acquiesce that the two procedures are “correlated systematically with one another . . . in the Derveni papyrus and among the Stoics.” Although Most (2016, 70) finds “the Stoic correlation of allegoresis and etymology” to be “a peculiarity of that school,” this concession is sufficient for our present purposes. For other scholars who highlight the close association of etymology and allegoresis in Stoicism, see, e.g., Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004 (e.g., 79–81, 98–99, 464–69).

54. As pointed out by van Sijl (2010, 205).

55. Steinmetz (1986, 21) is right that Zeno understands here the text “im Wortsinn.” In a similar vein, Long (1992, 48 with n. 15) observes that Zeno’s emendation (*SVF* 1.275) shows him to have “discussed standard philological cruxes” and that similar textual emendations and grammatical explanations are also to be found in Chrysippus (*SVF* 3.769–77). Finally, Goulet (2005, 104) also notes that such explanations “ne font jamais appel à l’allégorie.”

56. Most notably van Sijl 2010, but see also n. 33 above.

(e.g., the μῶλυ explanation) and those that do not (e.g., the Erembians explanation). Thus, this paper suggests that it is best to reserve the term “exegesis” for various textual comments that produce no ὑπόνοια. This allows us to differentiate allegoresis from exegesis: both are techniques of explaining a text, but the former brings to light the hidden (i.e., allegorical) meaning of a text, whereas the latter is content with its literal sense.<sup>57</sup>

However, the fact that the Stoics made various textual comments should not be adduced as evidence against Stoic allegoresis,<sup>58</sup> for the boundaries between allegoresis and exegesis can, again, be very blurry.<sup>59</sup> This will become clear from the following example. Cleanthes is reported (*SVF* 1.549 = *Schol. in Hom. Od.* 1.52 and Eustath. *In Hom.* 1389.55) to have emended Atlas’ epithet at *Od.* 1.52 from ὀλοόφρων (“baleful,” “malevolent”) to ὀλοόφρων (“omniscient,” “heedful of everything”) so that Atlas could be equated with the “indefatigable and untiring providence” (ἀκάματος καὶ ἀκοπίατος πρόνοια). This comment shows perfectly the fuzzy lines between exegesis and allegoresis. On the one hand, Cleanthes simply corrects the text by replacing the original spiritus lenis with spiritus asper. On the other hand, his emendation yields an allegorical identification (Atlas is deciphered as providence). Unsurprisingly, then, scholars are, again, widely divided over how to classify Cleanthes’ interpretative maneuver.<sup>60</sup> Granted that the Atlas explanation is somewhat difficult to categorize it appears that we will do more justice to the specificity of Stoic hermeneutical efforts if we differentiate between comments that do unravel a hidden sense (e.g., the μῶλυ explanation) and comments that do not (e.g., the Erembians explanation).

#### ALLEGORESIS VS. RATIONALIZATION

Probably, the greatest controversy, however, concerns whether (and, if so, to what extent) allegoresis should be accounted for in terms of intentions. Given the meager and fragmentary testimonies on the Stoics’ hermeneutical efforts, it is obviously very difficult to provide a conclusive answer to the question about the purpose of Stoic allegoresis. Consequently, scholars have put forward various competing theories: on the one hand, it has been argued that the primary motivation for Stoic allegoresis was an *apology* (the Stoics’ major concern would be to rescue the venerated poetry) and, on the other hand, it has been suggested that the main purpose of Stoic allegoresis was an *appropriation* (the Stoics would seek to make use of ancient myths to lend credence to their theories).<sup>61</sup> It seems, however, that these two

57. In a somewhat similar vein, Dawson (1992, 5) distinguishes between “interpretation” and “reading.”

58. Pace Steinmetz 1986 and Long 1992.

59. Over ninety years ago, Wehrli (1928, 1) cautioned that it can be challenging to always neatly distinguish between “grammatikalische Erklärung” and “allegorische Deutung.”

60. Long (1992, 63–64) characterizes this as etymology. So does van Sijl (2010, 109 with n. 34), who takes Cleanthes’ interpretation of Atlas to illustrate that Stoic etymological analyses are “elementary or atomic in character” (see also p. 117 with n. 64). I side with scholars who do find an allegorical dimension in Cleanthes’ interpretative maneuver (see, e.g., Blönnigen 1992, 29; Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004, 93–94; Struck 2004, 143 n. 2).

61. For a classic proponent of the apology view, see Zeller 1909, 345; for a classic advocate of the appropriation view, see Tate 1930, 2–4 (both critically discussed by Most 1989, 2019). For more articulations of the appropriation view, see Wehrli 1928, 94–95; Tate 1929b, 144–45; 1934, 110–14; Buffière 1956, 138–41; Blönnigen 1992, 23, 41; Goulet 2005, 117, 119.

aims do not have to be mutually exclusive: the desire to save the revered tradition and the desire to exploit its authority for buttressing a theory might work hand in hand.<sup>62</sup>

Importantly, the dispute gathered new momentum when Long vigorously argued that we should be very cautious about ascribing to the Stoics the view that Homer *deliberately* composed his poems as allegorical prefigurations of Stoicism.<sup>63</sup> While the question whether (Stoic) allegoresis needs to be intentional cannot be answered definitely, it seems useful to take Long's point into account and differentiate between those modes of explaining that presuppose an intention on the part of the author and those that do not. Let us illustrate this with some examples.

The Derveni author frequently and explicitly attributes to Orpheus the intention of an allegorical composition. Thus, in column 7, he asserts (6–7) that Orpheus “did not intend to say contentious riddles but rather great things in riddles” ([ἔ]ριστ' αἰν[ίγμα]τα οὐκ ἤθελε λέγειν, [ἐν αἰν]ίγματος[τι]ν δὲ [μεγ]άλα).<sup>64</sup> This shows clearly that the Derveni author regards Orpheus' poem as a deliberate allegory. As far as the Stoics are concerned, we may cite the following testimony:

βουλόμενοι γὰρ οἱ ἀρχαιότεροι τῶν ἱερογραμματέων τὸν περὶ θεῶν φυσικὸν λόγον κρύπτειν, δι' ἀλληγορικῶν [καί] συμβόλων τοιούτων καὶ γραμμάτων τοῖς ἰδίους τέκνοις παρεδίδουν αὐτά, ὡς ὁ ἱερογραμματεὺς Χαϊρήμων φησὶν.

For since the more ancient of the sacred scribes wanted to conceal the theory about the nature of the gods, they handed these things down to their own children by way of such allegorical symbols and characters, as the sacred scribe Chaeremon says.<sup>65</sup>

Chaeremon (ca. 10–80 CE), a later Stoic philosopher and Egyptian priest, is an obscure figure.<sup>66</sup> The fact that he ascribed self-conscious allegory to ancient Egyptians can hardly be taken as evidence that the early Stoics attributed a similar position to the authors they interpreted. His approach, however, seems concordant with that of his contemporary Cornutus, who also believed (76.3–5) that the ancients were “inclined” or “prone” (εὐεπίφοροι) to philosophize about the nature of the world “through symbols and enigmas” (διὰ συμβόλων καὶ αἰνιγμάτων).<sup>67</sup> What is noteworthy about the above testimonies is that they quite explicitly credit

62. See, e.g., Coulter 1976, 26; Whitman 1987, 20; Struck 2004, 14; Pichler 2006, 35; Naddaf 2009, 114; Domaradzki 2017, 307. For the Stoics, see, e.g., Friedl 1936, 18 or, more recently, Ramelli 2003, 36–40; Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004, 470–76; van Sijl 2010, 138–39, 143.

63. Long 1992, 41–66. Long followed Steinmetz (1986, 18–19), who also took it that allegoresis requires authorial intention: “Unter allegorischer Deutung oder Allegorese wird dabei der Versuch verstanden, unter der Annahme, hinter dem wörtlichen Sinn einer Dichtung habe der Dichter bewußt einen tieferen Sinn verborgen, eben diesen verborgenen Sinn als das vom Dichter in Wahrheit Gemeinte zu erkennen.” See also Goulet 2005, 101–2: “L’allégorie est indissociablement liée à une intention de dissimulation ou de dévoilement sélectif du sens.”

64. The original ἤθελε is translated as “intend” also by Laks and Most (both 1997, 12 and 2016, 389) as well as by Betegh (2004, 17). Janko renders it as “wish” (2001, 21; 2008, 39) and “want” (2002, 15). Whichever rendition is chosen, it can hardly be denied that the Derveni author ascribes to Orpheus the intention of an allegorical composition.

65. Chaeremon F 12. The text along with translation is that of van der Horst (1984).

66. For Chaeremon in general, see the excellent study by Frede (1989, 2067–103); for his allegoresis in particular, see, e.g., Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004, 352–57.

67. See also n. 80 below.

the authors in question with the intention of an allegorical composition (ἤθελε, βουλόμενοι, εὐεπίφοροι).

This approach can be contrasted with thinkers who rationalize myths rather than look for their deliberately encoded meanings. Democritus, for example, reduced Zeus to air, as he opposed (DK 68 B 30) the old notion of Zeus to “what we Greeks now call air” (ὄν νῦν ἡέρα καλέομεν οἱ Ἕλληνες). Prodicus likewise reduced (DK 84 B 5) the gods to “useful things” (τὰ ὠφελούντα), as he asserted that in the days of old bread was simply deified as Demeter, wine as Dionysus, water as Poseidon, fire as Hephaestus, and so on. This type of rationalization may resemble allegoresis,<sup>68</sup> but the two should not be rashly identified.<sup>69</sup> When trying to make sense of this rationalizing approach to myth, it is tantalizing to assume that Democritus and Prodicus were after the ancient world-picture that the poets inadvertently transmitted in their poems rather than after some allegorical message that they intentionally camouflaged there. That is precisely what has been argued for the Stoics.<sup>70</sup>

Clearly, there are testimonies that support this argument. Thus, Aëtius (*Plac.* 1.6 = *SVF* 2.1009) famously relates that when explaining the origin of men’s “conception of the gods” (ἐννοια θεῶν), the Stoics pointed to seven major sources: astronomical phenomena (e.g., Ouranos), harmful things (e.g., Ares), useful things (e.g., Demeter), activities (e.g., Hope), passions (e.g., Eros), the poets’ fabrications (e.g., Iapetos) and divinized humans (e.g., Heracles). In a similar vein, Cicero has the Stoic Balbus (*Nat. D.* 2.60–64) enumerate: useful things (e.g., Ceres), virtues (e.g., Faith), deified men (e.g., Hercules) and natural phenomena (e.g., Caelus). Such testimonies suggest that (at least sometimes) the Stoics interpreted myths so as to bring out their underlying *Weltanschauung* rather than some allegorical lesson purposefully concealed by the poets. This can be inferred from the disparaging phrase “the poets’ fabrications” (τὸ ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν πεπλασμένον) that Aëtius (*Plac.* 1.6 = *SVF* 2.1009) gives as the sixth topic.<sup>71</sup>

If we agree that the Stoics were prepared to regard traditional mythology as a treasure trove of valuable insights that had been accidentally preserved underneath various naive formulations, then such testimonies as that of Aëtius should not be hastily classified as instances of allegoresis.<sup>72</sup> For if the concept of allegoresis is expanded to include all types of rationalization of mythology, then the concept loses its heuristic value and the majority of Greek thinkers transfigure into allegorical interpreters. Clearly, it would be a stretch to categorize, for

68. See Domaradzki 2015; 2019; 2020a, with further references.

69. As Steinmetz (1986, 19) rightly cautions: “Wollte man auch die rationalistische Mythendeutung zur Allegorese zählen, wären zum Beispiel Thukydides oder Euhemeros Allegoriker.” This important point has also been made by Konstan (2005, xvii): “Not all rationalizing interpretations of myth involve allegory.”

70. Most notably by Long (1992; 1997), who has been followed by, e.g., Algra (2007) and van Sijl (2010).

71. One might also mention here the *impias fabulas* that appear in Cicero (*Nat. D.* 2.64 = *SVF* 2.1067) and Cornutus’ famous diagnosis (31.16–17) that πλείστα τῆς παλαιᾶς θεολογίας διεφθάρη. I have to disagree with Goulet (2005, 116), who observes, “la distinction que cherche à établir Long entre un intérêt pour les mythes primitifs et une condamnation des inventions des poètes me semble fort mal attestée dans les textes.”

72. Or at least they should somehow be distinguished from those in which the Stoics argue for a specific meaning intended by the author. Thus, for example, in the aforementioned Athena interpretation Chrysippus not only explicitly unveils the symbolic sense (*PHP* 3.8.15) but also harshly criticizes (*PHP* 3.8.19) those interpreters who “distort or alter the story” (διαστρέφοντες ἢ παραλλάττοντες τὸν λόγον).

example, Xenophanes' (DK 21 B 32) reduction of Iris to a "cloud" (νέφος) as a case of allegoresis. When Xenophanes explains the rainbow as a cloud, he unveils no ὑπόνοια but simply debunks the popular conception of Iris. As no assumption is made here about the intentionality of the myth, such rationalist explanations should be distinguished from these interpretations that take their *interpretanda* to be deliberate compositions.<sup>73</sup>

At the same time, however, it has to be kept in mind that determining intentions is never easy. This means that the boundaries between deliberate and non-deliberate allegories can be in fact very difficult to delineate,<sup>74</sup> since the task would ultimately require access to the allegorist's state of mind.<sup>75</sup> That is precisely why scholars have come up with diverse and frequently contradictory explanations as to what motivated a given allegorical interpreter.<sup>76</sup> Still, while the present paper suggests that such testimonies as that of Aëtius should not be rashly characterized as allegoresis, it also argues against negating the allegorical dimension of the Stoics' hermeneutical efforts. In fact, in what follows, it will be contended that if the existence of Stoic allegoresis is denied altogether, then it becomes virtually impossible to explain their long-lasting and well-attested influence on later allegorical interpreters.

#### THE IMPACT OF STOIC ALLEGORESIS

The foregoing discussion has shown that the Stoics' hermeneutical efforts have been understood and classified very differently by scholars. Now, it is worth stressing that our *modern* understanding of Stoic interpretations does not necessarily tally with their *ancient* reception. Thus, it should be noted that antiquity did regard the Stoics' hermeneutical efforts as a form of allegoresis. For example, Galen unequivocally categorizes Chrysippus' interpretations as allegorical, when he urges that Chrysippus should have relinquished myths and should "not have wasted his time explaining their hidden meanings" (μὴ κατατρίβειν τὸν χρόνον ἐξηγούμενον αὐτῶν τὰς ὑπονοίας, *PHP* 3.8.34). When attributing allegoresis to Chrysippus, Galen uses the term which Plutarch reports (*De aud. poet.* 19E–F) to have been the very synonym of ἀλληγορία (see above). Also, we may mention here authors who explicitly, even if anachronistically, ascribe allegoresis to the Stoics. Thus, Eustathius puts it in no uncertain terms (*In Hom.* 1389.55 = *SVF* 1.549) that the Stoics "allegorize" (ἀλληγοροῦσιν) Atlas as providence, whereas Apollonius Sophistes similarly insists (*Lex. Homer.* 114 = *SVF* 1.526) that Cleanthes says "allegorically" (ἀλληγορικῶς) that μῶλυ is λόγος (see above). Obviously, in light of Plutarch's testimony, we should acknowledge the terms ἀλληγοροῦσιν and ἀλληγορικῶς as coming from Eustathius and Apollonius, respectively, rather than from any of the Stoics, but the fact that their interpretations are characterized as allegorical is very telling, for—to reiterate—even if from our modern perspective some instances of Stoic approach to myth do not immediately

73. As I have argued in Domaradzki 2019 and 2020a.

74. As noted by Naddaf (2009, 119).

75. As stressed by Struck (2004, 14).

76. For the Derveni author, see n. 28 above; for the Stoics, see n. 61 above.

invite the label of allegoresis, it should be borne in mind that they were often taken as such by the Stoics' contemporaries and followers.

Given the importance of the Stoics for the development of later philosophy, the fact that they were commonly considered to be allegorical interpreters should not be belittled. This means that one should refrain from unqualified generalizations about the non-allegorical nature of Stoic hermeneutical efforts lest one find oneself unable to account for their profound impact on subsequent allegorical interpreters. The Stoics' enduring influence on Jewish and Christian allegoresis has been well documented and abundantly discussed in literature.<sup>77</sup> Suffice it to mention here the famous testimony of Porphyry (*ap.* Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 6.19.8), who accuses Origen of having transposed the Stoic "allegorical method" (μεταληπτικός τρόπος) to the Bible and explicitly cites Chaeremon and Cornutus as his sources.<sup>78</sup> While the practice of allegoresis goes right to the Enlightenment period, we may briefly touch upon the dissemination of Stoic understanding of symbol.

As noted above, in his Athena allegoresis Chrysippus employed σύμβολον as an interpretation tool that made it possible for him to differentiate between the surface and the hidden sense of Hesiod's narrative. The testimonies that we have do not allow the strong conclusion that he was the first to do so.<sup>79</sup> However, even if the term had already been in use to indicate figurative meaning, the fact that with Chrysippus σύμβολον enters the standard vocabulary of ancient allegorical interpreters is surely worth emphasizing. Given the salience of Stoicism for the development of later thought, we may surmise that such interpretations as the Athena allegoresis were conducive to further similar uses of symbol. Indeed, if we recall that Chrysippus assumed (*PHP* 3.8.18) symbol to be characterized by "numerous changes of meaning" (see above), then this assumption can be encountered in many later allegorical interpreters who also take it that symbol, like enigma or allegory, denotes different things. While it would be of course impossible to cite all the relevant authors, it should suffice to give here two representative examples: the first comes from a Stoic writer and the second from a Stoicizing one.

Cornutus frequently refers to some of the aforementioned Stoic interpretations (e.g., 35.9–36.1: Athena's birth from the head of Zeus; 48.9–17: all-considering and providential Atlas, etc.). Most importantly, however, he regularly employs the term σύμβολον in the relevant sense. Some of his interpretations are rather trivial: Zeus' scepter is a symbol of his "power" (δυναστείας, 10.10–11), Athena's virginity is a symbol of her "purity and immaculacy" (καθαροῦ καὶ ἀμιάντου, 36.8–9), and so on. Others, however, are less obvious: the serpents on Hermes' wand are a symbol that "even the savage are beguiled and bewitched by him (καὶ τοὺς θηριώδεις ὑπ' αὐτοῦ κηλείσθαι καὶ καταθέλγεσθαι, 22.20–21), whereas the practice of heaping up stones beside Herms is a symbol that "the *prophorikos logos* consists of small parts" (ἐκ μικρῶν μερῶν συνεστάναι τὸν προφορικὸν λόγον,

77. See, e.g., Blönnigen 1992; Dawson 1992; more recently, Ramelli 2011.

78. In connection with this testimony, Boys-Stones (2001, 50) astutely points out that Porphyry places the two Stoics at the head of his list of great Platonist and Pythagorean allegorical interpreters (see also Boys-Stones 2001, 58, 73 n. 26, 112; 2003, 204 n. 23).

79. In his classic study on the history of the term σύμβολον, Müri (1976, 27 n. 25) aptly notes that while Chrysippus might not have been the first to actually have used the word in this particular sense, he is nevertheless our "erste Zeuge." See also Gadamer 1989, 63 and esp. Struck 2004, 112, 119, 142.



25.1–2). This shows that Cornutus is willing to employ σύμβολον as a tool for unravelling the symbolic meaning of anything ranging from the attributes of the gods to ritual customs (the latter case is particularly telling, as it reveals readiness to look for Stoic ideas not only in poetry). When doing so, Cornutus treats the terms σύμβολα and αἰνίγματα synonymously.<sup>80</sup> Thus, beginning with Cornutus, the word σύμβολον enters the allegorical interpreters' technical vocabulary for good.

Cornutus' contemporary, Heraclitus the Allegorist, though not a Stoic,<sup>81</sup> espouses many Stoic views and also often refers to some of the aforementioned Stoic interpretations (e.g., 19.7–9: Athena's birth from the head of Zeus; 73.10–13: μῶλο is φρόνησις that helps Odysseus to overcome Circe's drugs, etc.). Most importantly, however, he interchangeably uses the terms σύμβολον, αἰνίγμα, and ἀλληγορία. In one passage, for example, Heraclitus first (24.1–2) explains that Homer "allegorizes" (ἀλληγορεῖ) when he calls aether and air by such "symbolic names" (συμβολικοῖς ὀνόμασι) as Zeus and Hades, upon which (24.3–5) he stresses that in the same manner Heraclitus of Ephesus "theologizes . . . through symbols" (διὰ συμβόλων . . . θεολογεῖ) and "allegorizes enigmatically" (αἰνιγματῶδες ἀλληγορεῖ).<sup>82</sup> This passage shows, again, that σύμβολον has become a technical term in the allegorical interpreters' nomenclature.

Hence, we may conclude that such testimonies as those of Cornutus and Heraclitus prove beyond any doubt that toward the end of the first century CE σύμβολον became an interpretation tool that (along with αἰνίγμα and ἀλληγορία) was regularly used for distinguishing between the esoteric and exoteric meaning of a work. Of course, it would be unwise to attribute this to the Stoics alone, but it seems equally misguided to deny their influence here altogether. While this use of the term σύμβολον becomes very widespread in Neoplatonism,<sup>83</sup> we shall conclude with a brief discussion of its occurrence in the *Olympian Oration*. This highly Stoicizing speech is particularly interesting because it illustrates how the term σύμβολον can be applied to interpreting a statue.

In the *Olympian Oration*, Dio has Pheidias defend his anthropomorphic representation of Zeus. While the whole argument cannot be fully discussed here,<sup>84</sup> it is worth noting that in the course of his explanation Pheidias first points to various difficulties in conveying and understanding the idea of divine intelligence and rationality, upon which he hails symbol as the best means of achieving this:

νοῦν γὰρ καὶ φρόνησιν αὐτὴν μὲν καθ' αὐτὴν οὔτε τις πλάστης οὔτε τις γραφεὺς εἰκάσαι δυνατόν ἐσται· ἀθέατοι γὰρ τῶν τοιούτων καὶ ἀνιστόρητοι παντελῶς πάντες. τὸ δὲ ἐν ᾧ τοῦτο γινόμενον ἐστὶν οὐχ ὑπονοοῦντες, ἀλλ' εἰδότες, ἐπ' αὐτὸ καταφεύγομεν, ἀνθρώπινον σῶμα ὡς ἀγγεῖον φρονησεως καὶ λόγου θεῶν προσάπτοντες, ἐνδεία καὶ ἀπορία παραδείγματος τῷ φανερῷ τε καὶ εἰκαστῷ τὸ ἀνείκαστον καὶ ἀφανὲς ἐνδείκυσθαι ζητοῦντες, συμβόλου δυνάμει χρώμενοι, κρεῖττον ἢ φασὶ τῶν βαρβάρων τινὰς ζῆοις τὸ θεῖον ἀφομοιοῦν . . .

80. See, for example, the above-cited assertion (n. 67) that the ancients understood the nature of the cosmos and philosophized about it διὰ συμβόλων καὶ αἰνιγμάτων (76.3–5).

81. See Buffière 1956, 70; 1962, xxxviii–xxxix. This view is generally accepted (see, e.g., Dawson 1992, 263 n. 43; Long 1992, 47; 1997, 202; Ramelli 2003, 49; Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004, 337; Struck 2004, 142, 151), albeit Bernard (1990, e.g., 15–21, 93–94) takes Heraclitus to be the main representative of the Stoics' substitutive allegoresis (see also Gourinat 2005, 10 n. 1).

82. See n. 15 above.

83. See, e.g., the seminal article by Dillon (1976).

84. For illuminating discussions, see Algra 2007, 39–41 and esp. van Sijl 2010, 214–46, with further references.

For mind and intelligence in and of themselves no statuary or painter will ever be able to represent; for all men are utterly incapable of observing such attributes with their eyes or of learning of them by inquiry. But as for that in which this intelligence manifests itself, men, having no mere inkling thereof but actual knowledge, fly to it for refuge, attributing to god a human body as a vessel to contain intelligence and rationality, in their lack of a better illustration, and in their perplexity seeking to indicate that which is invisible and unportrayable by means of something portrayable and visible, using the function of a symbol and doing so better than certain barbarians, who are said to represent the divine by animals . . .<sup>85</sup>

The argument has it, then, that the best way for men to capture and comprehend the divine is through the human. This means that Pheidias' Zeus is just a σύμβολον of the—*sit venia verbo*—"real" deity. The form of a human body is more suitable for representing the god than that of an animal (the barbarians are here in complete error), but it still should not be misconstrued as literal. To portray such attributes of the divinity as its intelligence and rationality, the sculptor (or any artist for that matter) must resort to the "vessel" (ἄγγειον) of a human body, but this anthropomorphic image is only a symbol.

Two points deserve to be emphasized here. First, similarly to Chrysippus' interpretation of the Samos/Argos mural, the *Olympian Oration* shows that the practice of allegoresis could be applied not just to poetry but to any visual art. Second, this highly Stoicizing speech echoes Chrysippus' use of σύμβολον. Crucially, this understanding of σύμβολον resurfaces one more time in the *Olympian Oration*, where we read that "the mere similarity in shape is intended to show the kinship between gods and men in the form of a symbol" (βούλεται δηλοῦν . . . τὴν δὲ ἀνθρώπων καὶ θεῶν ζυγγένειαν αὐτό που τὸ τῆς μορφῆς ὅμοιον ἐν εἶδει συμβόλου).<sup>86</sup> While this testimony quite explicitly ascribes to Pheidias the intention of an allegorical composition (βούλεται), some scholars refuse to classify this as an instance of allegoresis.

For example, Claartje van Sijl, in her otherwise excellent and thought-provoking study, argues that the above interpretation should be categorized as a symbolical rather than an allegorical one:

I would be very reluctant, however, to call this practice allegoresis, since not every symbolical interpretation is *eo ipso* an allegorical interpretation. The latter requires that at least two elements of the *interpretandum* and their relation are taken into account in the interpretation, but this requirement does not apply to symbolical interpretations, which may well be of a single element.<sup>87</sup>

This distinction between a symbolical interpretation and an allegorical one shows nicely that when modern categories are applied to analyzing ancient thinkers the latter may easily end up crammed into the self-imposed confines of the former. Thus, in what follows, it will be suggested that it is unhelpful to oppose a symbolical interpretation and an allegorical one when trying to make sense of Stoic hermeneutical efforts.

85. Dio Chrys. *Or.* 12.59. Trans. Cohoon (1939).

86. Dio Chrys. *Or.* 12.77. Trans. Cohoon (1939), modified.

87. Van Sijl 2010, 236. When differentiating between a symbolical interpretation and an allegorical one, van Sijl draws on the definition of allegory suggested by Konstan (2005, xvi–xvii) (see also n. 42 above).

First of all, we should stress that at least since the Stoics, symbol and allegory were used synonymously in various interpretive contexts (see, for example, the above-cited testimony of Heraclitus the Allegorist). This may at first strike us as odd, since from our contemporary perspective it seems rather natural to differentiate between the two. Yet, the radical opposition between allegory and symbol, on which so much ink has been spilt over the last two hundred years, was completely alien to the Greeks.<sup>88</sup> This aesthetic distinction was only created and propagated by such Romantic authors as Goethe, Schiller, the Schlegel brothers, Schelling, Hegel, Herder, Humboldt, Novalis, Solger, Ast, Tieck, and Coleridge. While we obviously cannot discuss here the criticisms that the Romantics leveled against allegory, suffice it to say that they disparaged it as “artificial,” “schematic,” “mechanistic,” and “arbitrary.”<sup>89</sup> Later authors sought to rehabilitate allegory,<sup>90</sup> but they also distinguished sharply between allegory and symbol.<sup>91</sup> Yet, no Stoic (or ancient for that matter) interpreter ever attempted to systematically differentiate between symbol and allegory (let alone to oppose them). Hence, when we accept the Romantic contrast between allegory and symbol and anachronistically interpret ancient texts through the lens of this modern opposition, we risk doing violence to the thought we seek to reconstruct. Obviously, no one can impugn the advantages of reading ancient authors in such a way that some light is shed not only on their works but also on various contemporary issues. At the same time, however, we should be extremely cautious about explaining ancient cultures in modern terms, for imposing modern concepts onto ancient views frequently results in molding the object of interpretation in accord with some preconceived picture of it.

This brings us to the second problem with opposing a symbolical interpretation and an allegorical one when categorizing various ancient hermeneutical efforts. Determining the difference between a symbolical interpretation and an allegorical one on the basis of such criteria as “systematicity” or “extensiveness” is very tricky, because—as has been already noted—it actually boils down to a matter of subjective judgment.<sup>92</sup> This can be clearly seen in van Sijl’s discussion of the Samos/Argos interpretation. On the one hand, van Sijl finds here “the minimal requirements for allegorical interpretation proper,” since “we have two entities engaged in an act that is itself understood symbolically.”<sup>93</sup> On the other hand, however, she observes that “if we take the union as such as the *interpretandum*, as a kind of tableau,” then “we are dealing with the interpretation of a single symbol rather than with a compound allegorical interpretation in which

88. Pépin (1976, 78) rightly stresses the fact that “l’Antiquité . . . emploie à peu près indifféremment . . . les termes de «mythe», «allégorie», «métaphore», «figure», «symbole», «signe», etc.”

89. For overviews, see, e.g., Sørensen 1963; Gadamer 1989, 61–70; Pépin 1976, 58–61; Todorov 1982, 147–221; Struck 2004, 272–76; Halmi 2007; and the numerous references cited in these works.

90. The Romantic preference for symbol over allegory has been challenged by de Man (1979).

91. For all their differences, both the Romantics and the post-structuralists perceived the relation between form and meaning in allegory as arbitrary (see, e.g., Crisp 2005, 324).

92. Thus, Whitman (1987, 267) aptly observes that the distinction between allegory and symbol is not only a development of the Romantic period, but it also “varies from theorist to theorist and remains problematic in both practical and conceptual terms.”

93. Van Sijl 2010, 132.

the elements are connected in a certain form of narrative.”<sup>94</sup> This shows that in practice it is simply a matter of arbitrary decision as to when a given interaction is to be taken “as such” so that we obtain a symbol rather than an allegory. Unsurprisingly, then, Jean-Baptiste Gourinat, who similarly distinguishes between “une véritable allégorie” and “un symbole isolé,”<sup>95</sup> reaches the opposite conclusion regarding the Samos/Argos interpretation: “Il est clair que la scène décrite est une allégorie physique.”<sup>96</sup> Thus, one might also ask why not treat, for example, the birth of Athena from the head of Zeus in this manner given that Chrysippus himself characterized the myth as a *σύμβολον*?<sup>97</sup> Once the contrast between symbol and allegory is established and such subjective categories as “allegorical interpretation proper” are introduced, then it is possible to dismiss virtually any instance of allegoresis and relegate it to the marginal status of “symbolical interpretation.” This, however, helps us to understand neither the Stoics’ hermeneutical efforts nor their impact on later allegorical interpreters.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Dispute has been rife over the extent to which Stoic interpretations can be categorized as “allegorical.” This paper has argued that a great deal of this controversy arises from incommensurate definitions of allegoresis and that the Stoics’ hermeneutical efforts frequently do not adhere to various modern concepts. The foregoing discussions have sought to demonstrate the usefulness of distinguishing between allegoresis and allegory, allegoresis and exegesis, as well as allegoresis and rationalization, when classifying Stoic interpretations. It has been suggested that if the concept of allegoresis is stretched to include various instances of allegory or exegesis or rationalization, then the concept loses its explanatory power, as practically all Greek thinkers turn out to be allegorical interpreters.

While it is highly advisable to seek clear definitions for assessing practices as complex as ancient allegoresis, one should also be very careful lest one force on the Stoics a distinction so narrow that it will hopelessly distort their hermeneutical efforts. Accordingly, the present article has aimed to show that hiving etymologizing off from allegorizing is frequently arbitrary and wrong, which is why one should rather differentiate between etymology that coalesces with allegoresis from the one that does not. Likewise, the fact that the Stoics made numerous exegetical comments should not be cited as evidence against their allegoresis, for the boundaries between allegoresis and exegesis are not always clear-cut. Also, it has been noted that Stoic hermeneutical efforts should not be anachronistically viewed in terms of the Romantic opposition between allegory and symbol. It seems that the allegory-symbol distinction is as difficult to keep as the one between allegoresis and typology. Finally, it has been contended that

94. Van Sijl 2010, 133.

95. Gourinat 2005, e.g., 18–19.

96. Gourinat 2005, 20.

97. Bernard (1990, 76 with n. 160), for example, regards this interpretation as an instance of substitutive allegoresis.

if the allegorical dimension of the Stoics' hermeneutical efforts is negated *in toto* and Stoic interpretations are reduced to etymology, exegesis or symbolism, then it is very difficult to account for the Stoics' profound influence on later allegorical interpreters.

In conclusion, it needs to be stressed that the above framework has been purposefully selective, tentative, and meant primarily to indicate potential for further research. Undoubtedly, there will be many more debates among scholars whether (and, if so, to what extent) Stoic hermeneutical efforts can be labeled as "allegorical." The sheer breadth and complexity of the subject matter will inevitably continue causing confusion and obstructing communication between scholars. It is hoped, however, that this contribution will bring some clarity to the discussion and, thereby, provide a useful point of departure for future attempts to understand the idiosyncrasies of the Stoics' hermeneutical efforts.

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