

# Polemic Against the Stoic Theology

Post by “Matt” of March 25, 2019 at 1:01 PM

To prove I am not just critical of Epicurean theology, I figured I’ll take a stab at the Traditional Stoic theology today. ?

The Panpsychic concept of Providence is a hallmark of Traditional theistic Stoicism. Many modern Stoic adherents have shed the theistic accretions that were once entirely vital to the Stoic philosophical system. The “MoStos” carry on a philosophy in name only that was very different from the ancient version. I have a very low opinion of that modern movement, so I will not spend any time on it here.

That being said, the Traditional version as represented by the authors like Cleanthes does not get a pass either.

It’s clear that the materialist model of a pan-deistic or pan-theistic universe as posited by the deterministic philosophy is rather “safe” to put it gently. Meaning that it doesn’t take significant philosophical reasoning to identify a cosmic deity as the universe itself in the form of an all pervading universal panpsychism. One need only say that the divine mind is immanent in all things and then point to all the conscious “fragments” as evidence of this being true.

But really how *reliable* is that? And should this abstract concept be regarded as a deity?

I have previously discussed at length in other posts that virtue requires external standards for universal application. For virtues to be universal there needs to be some standard to judge by. Otherwise without that external judge you are cast into a swirling abyss of subjective relativism. What’s good and honorable for one person may be an abomination to another across a cultural divide.

The Stoic concept of Providence does not lend itself to be this judge. For an immanent deity that is merely an aggregate of a holistic cosmos is not a sovereign. Thus you end up with Providence being the *author of evil*. Because Providence is in all things, all actions are directed by nature both the “good” and the “bad.” You again arrive at a relativistic dilemma. This time with Providence fully immanent within the cosmos. Now Providence is responsible and internally present as the passive witness of all pain and suffering as it would be for all pleasure, completely undifferentiated.

This view of deity is hardly worthy adoration or hymns.

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Post by “Cassius” of March 25, 2019 at 3:29 PM

1 - I recall reading the anti-Stoic part of Cicero's "On Ends" and thinking that this was much more thorough a take-down even than he applied to Epicurus. So that's a good source for anti-Stoic argument too.

#### [Quote from Matthaeus](#)

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Yes that is definitely an implication of his issue. If there is no supernatural organizing force, then something else has to be found to take the place of it or "you are cast into a swirling abyss of subjective relativism." And so Epicurus turned to the natural faculty of pleasure and pain, which certainly does not mean the same thing to each person, but by and large presents something firm to which an individual can refer, and to which groups who have similar impressions of pain and pleasure can also refer.

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### **Post by "Matt" of March 25, 2019 at 3:42 PM**

I have never taken the Modern Stoic position of "virtue for the sake of virtue" seriously.

It's clear that Chrysippus and Cleanthes applied a certain benevolent personality trait to their vision of Providence. However, once it is deconstructed down to undifferentiated bare pantheism that it really is, you end up with the same dilemma as the MoStos.

Basically they call the universe "god" yet that word is an unnecessary and inappropriate name to give the universe if it does not have its own agency and autonomy. It's just "nature" or the "universe."

I believe Richard Dawkins once called pantheism a "sexed-up" version of atheism. I fundamentally agree. There is no special function the the universe performs other than what it normally does. Just ascribing the title of deity to it does not make it a god.