

Jean-Baptiste Gourinat, *Le stoïcisme*. “Que sais-je?” no. 770.

Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007. Pp. 128. ISBN

978-2-13-056267-2.

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Bryn Mawr Classical Review 2008.08.48

This is the first “Que sais-je?” to be reviewed in *BMCR*, so a word on the series might be in order. In general outlook and intended readership, QSJs are similar to OUP’s Very Short Introductions. Paul Angoulvent launched the collection back in 1941, however, that is, more than half a century before the publication of the first *VSI*. As a title for the new series, he chose the phrase Michel de Montaigne, the great Renaissance essayist, had adopted as a motto. QSJs all have 128 pages (corresponding to 4 signatures of 32 pages), and their cover sports a compass as an emblem (very much like the new Blackwell *Compass* journals). Of the 3800 titles published so far, 1300 are still in print. Some of the more recent volumes are not bad at all—to pick two from the same field, for example, I very much enjoyed Alain de Libera’s *Philosophie médiévale* and Carlos Lévy’s *Scepticismes*.

Jean-Baptiste Gourinat is a researcher at CNRS and *directeur-adjoint* of the Centre Léon-Robin at Paris IV-Sorbonne. The author of numerous books and articles on Stoicism, Gourinat was the ideal candidate to write the new QSJ 770; its predecessor, due to Jean Brun and also titled “*Le stoïcisme*”, first appeared in 1958.

The organisation of Gourinat’s opusculum is straightforward. After a short Introduction come three chapters entitled “*Le stoïcisme hellénistique*” (78 pp.), “*Le stoïcisme à l’époque romaine*” (25 pp.), and “*Postérité et actualité du stoïcisme*” (11 pp.); these are followed by a Chronology and a Select Bibliography.

Let me state my conclusions at the outset—Chapters 2 and 3 are generally excellent and succeed in providing a wealth of information in a very limited amount of space; by contrast, the Introduction and Chapter

1, in my view, are slightly less satisfactory. I hope I shall be excused if I do not rehash the many positive points of this brief book, but focus instead on a few sections of the Introduction and the first chapter that I consider problematic.

In the Introduction, Gourinat inter alia distinguishes several “*stoïcismes*”—there is, first, ancient Stoicism, the philosophy, that is, of the ancient Stoics such as Zeno or Chrysippus; secondly, there are the various philosophical “*avatars*” of the original doctrine; and lastly, there is stoicism, a certain “*attitude existentielle*”. Now in Gourinat’s eyes, these three philosophies (if one may include them under this heading) have more in common than a name—they possess the same “*essence*” (p. 6; cf. p. 117). From which follows that anyone interested in stoicism will, or at least should, ipso facto also be interested in ancient Stoicism.

To take the last point first, I doubt whether Gourinat’s appeal to a common essence will convince anyone to take up the study of the ancient Stoics. Those few with a stoic outlook on life, at least, are unlikely to be impressed—surely it is preferable to exercise one’s mind in more sensible ways than to learn about the who-said-what-and-when? As for those who already have an interest in history, I fear that they, too, will remain unimpressed. Compare Gourinat’s claim to the opening sentence in David Hahn’s *Origins of Stoic Cosmology*: “For half a millenium Stoicism was very likely the most widely accepted world view in the Western world.” *That* is a start. To be sure, many if not most potential readers fall into a third class, those interested in neither ancient history nor “*stoïcisme ordinaire*”—the class into which, I presume, most philosophers would fall. Nothing is said to enthuse those.

In any event, for Gourinat’s claim to be effective, one must assume that there is such a thing as an essence of Stoicism. Although (according to the Blurb) “*en dégager l’essence*” was actually Gourinat’s aim in writing the book, until the very last pages he says surprisingly little about the specific make-up of this essence. Neither logic nor physics, he there argues, can be part of it, since some Stoics considered them dispensable—Aristo, for example, famously rejected logic altogether, and M. Aurelius claimed that it did not really matter which physics one subscribed to (p. 117). Yet what Gourinat attempts to describe, it seems to

me, is not so much the essence as the lowest common denominator of all ancient Stoicisms. For the essence of, say, Chrysippus' Stoicism is simply the set of propositions that Chrysippus considered essential to his philosophical system—regardless of whether some other person who at one time, perhaps, was a member of the same school did so too. And it was certainly never Chrysippus' view that logic, for instance, is not essential to Stoicism—logic is considered a virtue, and therefore the Stoic sage is always a logician (cf. pp. 15 and 22); besides, as is well known, logic constitutes a tightly integrated whole together with physics and ethics (cf. p. 16); not to mention that Chrysippus himself had dedicated a good part of his life and more than half of his total output of 700 books to the pursuit of logical matters (see D.L. 7.180; 7.189–202); etc. The essence of Stoicism, I should therefore conclude, is an ill-conceived notion that merits no place in the historiography of ancient philosophy.

Chapter 1 opens with a section entitled “*Histoire et évolution de l'école*”, wherein Gourinat presents the life and work of a number of Stoics, from Zeno to Panaetius. While impeccable in content, I believe Gourinat's presentation could have been improved in form. Not often he presupposes that the reader is already acquainted with the principal ideas of Stoicism. For instance, what is a neophyte to make of an isolated sentence such as “*Cléanthe semble avoir aussi joué un rôle en logique, puisqu'il inventa le terme d'«exprimable» et réinterpréta la définition de la représentation*” (p. 11)? For Gourinat explains what an “*exprimable*” is only in the next section (p. 26). The (much longer) *Première partie* of Jean Brun's volume provides an eloquent example of how this task can be done.

The second section of Chapter 1 is the book's core: on 70 pages—more than half the length of the slim book—Gourinat offers a reconstruction of Chrysippus' system. I shall here only consider the subsection dedicated to logic, which, in turn, is articulated into seven parts (pp. 16–37). In part (A), Gourinat presents the standard division of logic into dialectic and rhetoric, and tries to account for it by paraphrasing a passage from Diogenes Laertius: rhetoric is continuous speech, whereas dialectic proceeds by question and answer. A sentence or two explaining what this in his eyes means would have been welcome. After all, vir-

tually nothing in what Gourinat is going to say on dialectic seems to fit this description. Next Gourinat competently discusses (B) the notion of criterion, (C) the claims that dialectic is a virtue and a science, and (D) the concepts of definition and division. Part (E), on the Stoic theory of signification, is not quite satisfactory. To begin with, it is questionable whether it was a good idea to start from the difficult passage in Sextus' *M.* 8.11—in recent years, doubts have been raised as to its validity as a cornerstone of our reconstruction of Stoic dialectic.¹ In any case, four paragraphs later Gourinat is forced to admit that what Sextus says seems incompatible with the report from Diogenes Laertius (as well as with a host of other sources). Gourinat then tries to argue that, in fact, they all say the same: it is but a matter of context. Few will be persuaded by this manoeuvre. And when Gourinat claims that the rôle of Diogenes' definitions is "*de différencier entre elles les différentes formes de mots*" (p. 28), perhaps something more needs to be said: for on the face of it, definitions such as "A name signifies a peculiar quality" or "A verb signifies a predicate" appear to be semantic in nature—they relate a certain type of word to a certain type of worldly thing, whether corporeal (as in the case of qualities) or incorporeal (as in the case of predicates). Finally, Gourinat should also have mentioned that the definition of the article, as reported by Diogenes, is corrupt: what is defined and exemplified are the grammarians' articles $\acute{\omicron}$, $\acute{\eta}$, $\tau\acute{\omicron}$ —the Stoic class of articles comprehends words such as $\acute{\omicron}\tau\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$ [this one] or $\tau\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ [someone]. Part (F) discusses Stoic sayables and their parts; and part (G) gives a very brief overview (2.5 pages) of Stoic syllogistic—here one might have expected a bit more passion and less parsimony for what undoubtedly is one of the great achievements of antiquity.

But as I said at the beginning, these are mere quibbles about what in other respects is a quite decent introduction and certainly one of the best available in French. There can be no question that it succeeds in providing the urgently needed update to Jean Brun's *QSJ*. I should also mention that although inexpensive, the book has been carefully edited,

1 See e.g. M. Frede (1994) "The Stoic notion of a lekton", in S. Everson, ed., *Companions to ancient thought* 3. *Language*, Cambridge: CUP, pp. 109–128, especially p. 118.

and is well printed and bound.² Recommended for students as well as the general reader interested in the history of ancient thought.

2 I have noticed only a few minor errors—

p. 4: “*Et il ne veut pas non* [ADD: *plus?*] ‘être insensible comme les statues’.”

p. 5: “..., *Philodème* [ADD: ,] *Plutarque*, ...”

p. 5: “*Aëtius*” vs. p. 14: “*Aétius*”

p. 10: “*sur la manière de les* [?] *interpréter*”

p. 33: “*entre l’antécédent et* [ADD: *la*] *négation*”

p. 120: WRITE “*philosophischen*”

p. 125: Karlheinz Hülsler’s indispensable *Fragmente zur Dialektik der Stoiker* (Stuttgart, 1987–88) is missing from the Bibliography.

p. 125: WRITE “*Die Ethik des Stoikers Epictet*”