



Ephesians and Stoic Physics

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IS BODY A HIERARCHICAL CONCEPT? IN EPHESIANS, ONE TYPE OF ANALYSIS AFFIRMS that it is by pointing to the social function of the head/body motif in the letter. Then it assembles parallels from Greco-Roman philosophy and literature that speak either of spatial arrangements (head/up and body/down) or social organizations in which the head represents leadership and the body followers.¹ Often at this point, the analysis ends and interpreters make their peace with hierarchy. They say that it is softened by the love (ἀγάπη) the ruler has for the ruled, and that makes hierarchy all right.

The problem with this analysis is twofold. First, body in Ephesians is treated as if it were a metaphor. It is, in fact, other than that. The church in Ephesians is not like a body, it *is* body. This leads to the second problem: interpreters acknowledge hierarchy as a sociological fact only. There is little critique of the hierarchical relation between God and the church or world in Ephesians. To the extent that these interpreters do acknowledge the hierarchical relation, they seek to redeem it by extolling the virtue of patriarchal love.

In this essay I propose a different method of analysis of body in Ephesians. Ephesians should be understood in light of Stoic physical theory. For the Stoics, everything, including God, is body, and theology is located within the framework of physics. For the Stoics, hierarchy is “hard-wired” into matter itself. Love, if anything, expresses hierarchy; it certainly does not play an ameliorating role. If I can

¹See Iiro Kajonto, “The Body Politic: On the History of a Famous Simile,” *Arctos* 29 (1995) 49-80.

A primer in Stoic physics is required to understand Ephesians’ description of the body of Christ. The result is problematic.

show that there is more common ground between Ephesians and Stoic physical theory than has usually been thought, the high value of Ephesians in contemporary Christian reflection on the doctrine of the church and the doctrine of Christ must be questioned. It might be the case that Ephesians' Stoic body saddles us with a Stoic church and a Stoic Christ, neither of which can love make all right.

I. STOIC PHYSICS (AND EPHESIANS) VERSUS ATOMISM

A prominent historian of ancient science, David Furley, describes a crisis in physical theory in the centuries surrounding the turn of the era.² By "crisis" he does not mean one moment when the intellectual community had to decide for or against a particular theory. Rather, he points to a simmering controversy between two mutually exclusive ways of construing the universe. Atomists, followers of Democritus and, later, Epicurus, thought that the world consisted of atoms and void. For them, all of reality, from a bolt of lightning to the lover's gaze, was the chance interaction of atoms bumping into one another in the void. Aristotelians and, with particular zest, Stoics denied the existence of void in the cosmos (outside the cosmos is a more complex matter).³

Stoic physics is impossible to imagine without hierarchy. Yet, theirs was not the hierarchy of two separate ontological realms. The Stoics believed that *everything* is body and there is no void.⁴ The world is a single, living animal. Its processes are organic rather than mechanical, as the atomists thought.⁵ The Stoics did not leave the governance of the world to chance but posited two principles (ἀρχαί)—active and passive—in the body of the world and in every individual body.⁶ The active, male principle shapes matter and causes it to cohere and grow. The passive principle, matter itself, is female and simply receptive.⁷ The active principle is an intelligent force, and because it is corporeal, it *pervades* this very large body, the cosmos. The active principle was called fire, spirit, nature, or God. God fills all things.⁸ The world is the product of the active principle; God is the preeminent craftsman.⁹

If Furley is correct about the high visibility of the crisis in physical theory, then it makes sense to ask whether the controversy is present in Ephesians. It is worth noting, therefore, that the author alludes to the physical theory his readers had adhered to before converting to Christ. They were atomists, or at least this is

²David Furley, *Cosmic Problems: Essays on Greek and Roman Philosophy of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 223-235.

³*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* 2.428, 433, 507, 508, 545; Ps.-Plutarch, *De Placitis Philosophorum* 886D-E.

⁴Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 7.140.

⁵David E. Hahm, *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977) 63-82, 136-174.

⁶Michael Lapidge, "ἀρχαί and στοιχεῖα: A Problem in Stoic Cosmology," *Phronesis* 18 (1973) 240-278.

⁷Michael Lapidge, "Stoic Cosmology," in *The Stoics*, ed. John M. Rist (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) 166.

⁸Robert B. Todd, "Monism and Immanence," in Rist, *The Stoics*, 137-160.

⁹Friedrich Solmsen, *Kleine Schriften I* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968) 332-355.

the way the author constructs their past: “Remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (2:12). What is the evidence of atomism in this verse?

It comes in the concluding two phrases: “without God in the world (ἄθεοι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ)” and “not having hope (ἐλπίδα μὴ ἔχοντες).” To accuse someone of atheism (ἄθεότης) meant that you disliked his physical theory. To hold that the atom was the first principle (ἀρχή) of nature and that there is void between atoms—these are the marks of the one who is without the divine (ἄθεος).¹⁰ On the list of recognized atheists, Epicurus was at the top.¹¹ He was tops not because he denied the existence of gods (he did not explicitly), but because he asserted they played no role in a cosmos that worked well enough without them.¹² The charge of atheism also stemmed from the sloppiness of the universe, if Epicurus were right about atoms and void.¹³ Haphazard occurrences in the void offended the Stoics’ intuition of a craft-like intelligence in the cosmos. Atomists denied divine providence and were for that reason alone ἄθεοι.¹⁴

There is more evidence pointing to the Epicurean brand of atheism. In their former state the Ephesian readers were “without God in the world.” Banishing the divine from the world is precisely the charge Stoics and others made against Epicureans. Epicurus himself gave his enemies the idea by claiming that the gods lived apart from our world in the spaces between the multitudes of worlds (τὰ μετακόσμου). There they could remain in uninterrupted bliss. Opponents, however, trivialized his effort to correlate physics and theology. They invented what would become a cliché about his denial of divine providence (πρόνοια): Epicurus “evicts the divine from the world (τοῦ κόσμου τὸ θεῖον ἐξοικίσασθαι).”¹⁵

Let’s consider the other allusion to Epicurean atomism in Eph 2:12: “having no hope.” Again, Epicurus provided the language later polemicists would turn against his hedonism and atomism. Epicurus spoke about a “trustworthy expectation” (πιστὸν ἔλπισμα) based on the relatively stable condition of the flesh and the wise man’s anticipation of pleasure this stability promised.¹⁶ Plutarch pillories this fleshly hope in his treatise *That Epicurus Actually Makes a Pleasant Life Impossible*. He argues that atomism makes hope impossible because it removes the divine from the world and eliminates the providential care of the gods.

¹⁰Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 1.65.

¹¹Marek Winiarczyk, “Wer galt im Altertum als Atheist?” *Philologus* 128 (1984) 157-183.

¹²Posidonius in Lactantius, *De Ira Dei* 4.7; Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.20.21-24.

¹³Plutarch, *On Stoic Self-Contradictions* 1043B; 1051E.

¹⁴Plutarch, *Against the Stoics on Common Conceptions* 1075E; Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 1.1-4; 1.123-124; 2.76; 3.3.

¹⁵Atticus in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 15.5.8. Cf. 15.5.11: “he banished [the gods] to a foreign land and established them outside of the world somewhere” (εἰς ἄλλοδὴπὴν ἀπόκτισε καὶ ἔξω πού τοῦ κόσμου καθίδρυσεν). My translations.

¹⁶Plutarch, *That Epicurus Actually Makes a Pleasant Life Impossible* 1090A. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are from the Loeb Classical Library.

We have seen that two related stereotypes of Epicureanism allude to the audience's past association with atomistic physical theory. We now know atomism as the enemy that Ephesians sets out to defeat. With this understanding of the occasion of the letter, we can explore the author's claims about the Spirit, God, and Christ and how these figures fight atomism. Since the Stoics were the chief opponents of atomism in the first century, it should come as no surprise that Stoic physical theory appears in the pneumatology, theology, and christology of Ephesians.

Yet, the following analysis will show that the author of Ephesians does not simply reproduce Stoic physical theory. There is a problem buried within Stoic physics that Ephesians attempts to solve even as it deploys the Stoic system against atomism. This problem is the decline of physical entities. Bodies die. More accurately, bodies dissolve into their constitutive elements (στοιχεῖα). Yet, because there is no void, these dissolved bits don't just float away available for random recombination. Rather, three of the elements—water, earth, and air—are transformed/consumed by the fourth, fire. This process implies that given enough time God would consume the whole cosmos and transform it into his own fiery self.¹⁷ Fire is the beginning and guide of the cosmos; it is also its end and the reason that it comes to this end.¹⁸

We see, then, that Stoicism's theory of the physical world is rather moody. When it opposes atomism it is optimistic, promoting a spirit that pervades the cosmos as soul pervades the body, causing it to cohere, grow, and persist. Yet, when it reflects on the core of its own theory it knows that the same fiery spirit that unifies the cosmos also consumes it. Thomas Rosenmeyer has written perceptively about the "inevitable consequences of physicality" in the dramas of a leading Stoic of the first century, Seneca.¹⁹ Seneca recognized that Stoic physics entailed vulnerability, disorder, decline, and death just as much as it did cohesion, growth, and preservation. Rosenmeyer aptly notes that the same spirit that, according to Stoic physics, causes iron to cohere also makes it rust.²⁰

We discover in Ephesians that if the cosmos declines and dies, it does so in a Stoic, not an Epicurean way. That is, the problem that really engages the author of Ephesians is not the chance dissolution envisioned by Epicureans but the organized, rational transformation of the elements by fire into fire posited by Stoic theory. What are the indications Ephesians knows about this problem of vulnerability and decline built into fundamentals of Stoic physical theory? Eph 6:10-17 offers some important hints. I will show below that the phrase "in the strength of his

¹⁷Plutarch, *On Stoic Self-Contradictions* 1052C.

¹⁸There is deep ambivalence about fire in Stoic physical theory. See J. Mansfeld, "Providence and the Destruction of the Universe in Early Stoic Thought," in *Studies in Hellenistic Religions*, ed. M. J. Vermaseren (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979) 129-188.

¹⁹Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, *Senecan Drama and Stoic Cosmology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 106.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 103.

power” in verse 10 is borrowed from the Stoic doctrine about spirit’s capacity to hold all things together in the face of elements tearing apart in opposite directions. Similarly, the military motif of God as an armored warrior in verse 11 finds parallels in the Stoic reflection on the capacity of spirit to bring about cohesion in the cosmos, a capacity affirmed in 6:17 (“the sword of the Spirit”).²¹ Furthermore, the “cosmic powers of this darkness” of verse 12 should be connected with an earlier statement in the letter about air (2:2). Air, whose chief physical characteristic is darkness, is one of the chief culprits in the process of decline for those physical theorists who believed that “the hot, the cold, the dry and the wet” exist at an even more fundamental level than the elements (fire, water, earth, air).²² Eph 6:16 describes decline one last time. It has to do explicitly with fire, thus reminding us that the Stoic answer to atomism entailed a further problem of degeneration through the consuming force of fire: “take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”²³

If we shift our attention away from the elements to a related set of fundamental physical principles (hot, cold, wet, dry) embraced by a wide range of philosophers and medical writers, the problem of corporeal decline in Ephesians can be brought out even more clearly, although now the cause of degeneration comes from loss of heat rather than the consuming power of fire. The two sets of physical principles relate to one another. Corresponding to the Stoic belief in the creative and preserving function of fire was a high estimation of heat. “Hot” is associated with life, as to a lesser degree is “wet.” “Cold” and “dry” were characteristic of dying or dead matter.²⁴ Air quite frequently was related to “cold” and for this reason played a critical role in the physical theory of the aging and dying process. The cause of degeneration is not too much fire, as in the case of Eph 6, but loss of heat and moisture brought on by air.²⁵ From the background of this physical theory, it becomes easy to understand why “air” takes on such an ominous tone in Eph 2:2. We thus return to the basic problem of Ephesians: although the elements (fire, air, water, earth) or the qualities (hot, cold, wet, dry), guided and caused to cohere by spirit, defeated atomism, the ultimate decline of both individual bodies and the cosmic body cried out for a savior.

I offer one last piece of evidence pointing to the problem of physical decline inherent in Stoicism’s alternative to atomism. Wrinkles seem to be a pressing issue for the author of Ephesians. Christ’s work on the church is described in what modern commentators suppose is moral language: “so as to present the church to him-

²¹Seneca, *Epistulae morales* 58.27-31; Philo, *On the Cherubim* 27-30, 35; *On the Eternity of the World* 135-136; Dio Chrysostom, *Discourse* 36.50-53.

²²Hahm, *Origins*, 92. See also Plutarch, *On the Principle of Cold* 948D-E.

²³For fiery attacks, see Solmsen, *Kleine Schriften I*, 497-498; Rosenmeyer, *Senecan Drama*, 128-135.

²⁴G. E. R. Lloyd, “The Hot and the Cold, the Dry and the Wet in Greek Philosophy,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 84 (1964) 101.

²⁵Adolph Dyrhoff, *Der Peripatos über das Greisenalter* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1939) 28-34; W. H. S. Jones, *The Medical Writings of Anonymous Londinensis* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1968) 85-87.

self in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.”²⁶ Ancient interpreters recognized a clear reference to old age, even though they too succumbed to moralizing by asserting the body grown old is a trope for a soul past its prime, and rejuvenation comes through virtue bestowed by Christ.²⁷ There is another way of reading this text. Working within the explanatory framework of the hot, the cold, the wet, and the dry, medical writers agreed that wrinkles were a sign of old age. Old age came about as the body gradually lost its vital heat and dried out. Galen describes the body’s inescapable movement toward destruction:

[A]s all the organs become drier, not only are their functions performed less well but their vitality becomes more feeble and restricted. And drying more, the creature becomes not only thinner but also wrinkled, and the limbs weak and unsteady in their movements. This condition is called old age, and is analogous to the withering of plants; for that is likewise the old age of a plant, arising from excessive dryness. This, then, is one innate destiny of destruction for every mortal creature.²⁸

Ephesians conceptualized Christ’s work as removing wrinkles. That is, Christ preserves the body against the onslaught of the physical principles.

II. EPHESIANS’ INCORPORATION OF STOIC PHYSICS

We turn now to an exploration of the ways Ephesians appropriates Stoic physical theory. With respect to the Spirit and to God the influence goes one way. Spirit and God in Ephesians are for the most part carriers of Stoic anti-atomistic physical theory. When it comes to Christ, however, the author confronts the shortcoming in Stoic physical theory—the inevitable decline of corporeal reality. Christ is savior of the body.

We will first explore the incorporation of Stoic physics into God and Spirit. Eph 4:3-6 might well be regarded as a primer in Stoic physical theory, especially in the way it speaks of the active principle (spirit, nature, or God) causing cohesion of the cosmic body and of individual bodies:

...making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit (τηρεῖν τὴν ἐνότητα τοῦ πνεύματος) in the bond (ἐν τῷ συνδέσμῳ) of peace. There is one body (ἓν σῶμα) and one Spirit (ἓν πνεῦμα), just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all (εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν).

Spirit, itself corporeal, pervades all bodies and causes them to cohere. This is the bed-

²⁶Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Dallas: Word, 1990) 377.

²⁷Christian Gnllka, *Aetas Spiritualis* (Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1972) 245.

²⁸Galen, *De Sanitate Tuenda* 6.5-6. Translation is by Robert M. Green, *Galen’s Hygiene* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1951) 7. See also Ps.-Lucian, *Affairs of the Heart* 25.

rock of Stoic cosmology from Chrysippus onward.²⁹ In stones, spirit provides cohesion; in plants, cohesion and growth; in animals cohesion, growth, and perception; and in humans, all three plus mind.³⁰ Thus, at the individual level spirit brings about cohesion and, on a grand scale, the unity of the cosmos that the Stoics asserted in defiance of atomism.³¹ In language reminiscent of Eph 4:3, Plutarch reports on the Stoic conviction about spirit's ability to cause bodies to cohere or "cohibit" (συνέχειν):

[T]he Stoics, while calling the four bodies—earth and water and air and fire—primary elements, make some of them, I know not how, simple and pure and others composite and mixed, for they say that earth and water cohibit (συνέχειν) neither themselves nor other things but maintain their unity (τὴν ἐνότητά διαφυλάττειν) by virtue of participation in a pneumatic (πνευματικῆς) and fiery power, whereas air and fire because of their intensity are self-sustaining and to the former two, when blended with them, impart tension and permanence and substantiality.³²

As I have noted above, for the Stoics, spirit, nature, and God are interchangeable terms. This helps us understand why the God mentioned in 4:6 (εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν) sounds so much like Stoic spirit with respect to its ability to pervade the cosmos. The Stoics themselves often have God doing the same work as spirit, filling all things and causing the universe and individual bodies to cohere and maintain unity.³³

Ephesians borrows from the Stoics a metaphor pertaining to the unity and cohesion caused by the all-pervading spirit: bond (δεσμός or σύνδεσμος). The bond of the spirit is one of the most extensively researched topics in Stoic physics.³⁴ It occurs frequently in writers who, like the author of Ephesians, were not self-identified Stoics but were nevertheless influenced by Stoic physical theory.³⁵ These writers had in common a concern for social disintegration mirrored in cosmic dissolution.³⁶

Spirit is the bond that holds matter together because it creates tension between all bodily parts. Thus, the bond is closely associated with the famous Stoic

²⁹Hahm, *Origins*, 157-174; Robert B. Todd, *Alexander of Aphrodisias on Stoic Physics* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976) 34-49.

³⁰*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* 2.458-460.

³¹For corporeal unity as an anti-void doctrine, see *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* 2.543-544.

³²Plutarch, *Against the Stoics on Common Conceptions* 1085D. For the pervading spirit's ability to maintain the unity of bodies, see *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* 389, 391, 424, 445, 454, 457, 459, 462, 546, 1013; Philo, *On Flight and Finding* 112; Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.12.16-17; 1.14.1-17; Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 2.19, 31; Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Mixtione* 216-223.

³³Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 7.147.

³⁴Karl-Hermann Rolke, *Die bildhaften Vergleiche in der Fragmenten der Stoiker von Zenon bis Panaitios* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1975) 40-41, 184-187, 469; Hahm, *Origins*, 111, 142-174; Rosenmeyer, *Senecan Drama*, 103-107.

³⁵Michael Lapidge, "Lucan's Imagery of Cosmic Dissolution," *Hermes* 107 (1979) 344-370; "A Stoic Metaphor in Late Latin Poetry: The Binding of the Cosmos," *Latomus* 39 (1980) 817-837.

³⁶Lapidge, "Lucan's Imagery," 358.

doctrine of universal sympathy, a concept not unlike the peace mentioned in our passage.³⁷ The bond of the spirit exhibits great power and strength, an idea we see in Eph 1:19 (τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ κράτους τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ) and 5:10 (ἐν τῷ κράτει τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ).³⁸ Nevertheless, the internal tension supplied by the bond of the spirit is not invulnerable (ἄρρηκτος) but only hard to dissolve (δυσδιάλυτος).³⁹ Even with spirit the Stoic body needs a savior.

Ephesians' dependence on Stoic physical theory is also recognizable in the epistle's statements about God. We limit our investigation to two related themes: God as active cause and God as technical reason. According to Eph 1:11, God is "the one who works in all things (τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐνεργοῦντος)." God's "in-working" or energy (ἐνέργεια) is a theme repeated throughout the letter (1:19-20; 3:7, 20; 4:16). What is at stake in the presentation of God working from within as the principal cause of all things? It is the distinction between the Stoic understanding of the divine and the Epicurean:

But, they [Stoics and Epicurus] say, when you have conceived of a Being imperishable and blessed, regard this one as God....[L]et them tell us what a "blessed" thing is—whether it is that which energizes (τὸ ἐνεργοῦν) according to virtue and foreknows (προνοοούμενον) what is subject to itself, or that which is void of energy (ἀνενέργητον) and neither performs any work itself nor provides work for another. For indeed about this also they disagree interminably.⁴⁰

The term ἐνεργοῦν in the sense of "in-working" perfectly captures the Stoic theory of causation and helps us understand in what sense Stoic physics is hierarchical. It will be recalled that the universe for the Stoics is a continuum of matter; there is no void. Matter contains within itself two principles (ἀρχαί), the active (God) and the passive.⁴¹ All causation in the universe and in individual bodies is internal to the body. Unlike the Aristotelian distinction among causes, for the Stoics the various causes could be traced back to the active principle pervading the passive body.⁴² Epictetus states a complex matter concisely: God is present in his works.⁴³

Ephesians exploits the metaphors the Stoics invented to make this abstract theory of single, internal causation more intelligible. For example, Stoics were fond of saying that God dwells in the cosmos as a master dwells in his house.⁴⁴

³⁷Philo, *On Flight and Finding* 112; *The Migration of Abraham* 180, 220; *Who Is the Heir of Divine Things* 242; *The Eternity of the World* 75; Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 2.115. H. R. Neuenschwander, *Mark Aurels Beziehungen zu Seneca und Poseidonios* (Stuttgart: Paul Haupt, 1951) 14-23.

³⁸Hahm, *Origins*, 153-155.

³⁹Philo, *The Eternity of the World* 125.

⁴⁰Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 3.4-5.

⁴¹Philo, *On the Cherubim* 77-82, 88; *The Worse Attacks the Better* 172.

⁴²Susanne Bobzien, "Chrysippus' Theory of Causes," in *Topics in Stoic Philosophy*, ed. Katerina Ierodiakonou (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999) 196-242; R. J. Hankinson, *Galen on Antecedent Causes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 20-28.

⁴³Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.6.24.

⁴⁴Rolke, *Die bildhaften Vergleiche*, 35; 166-168; 300-305; Dirk Obbink, "The Stoic Sage in the Cosmic City," in *Topics in Stoic Philosophy*, ed. Ierodiakonou, 184-191.

Ephesians adjusts this metaphor so that God in spirit dwells in the church as in a house (κατοικητήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πνεύματι, 2:22; cf. 3:17). Another popular image was God as craftsman and the world as crafted object.⁴⁵ This brings out clearly the second point the Stoics wanted to make about God: God's relation to the world should be conceptualized through the idea of technical reason (τέχνη). Ephesians presents God as craftsman in three ways. First, the many terms in Ephesians describing divine action with the prefix προ (1:5, 9, 11; 2:10) suggest the Stoic concept of divine providence (πρόνοια), which, as we saw in the passage cited from Sextus Empiricus above, emphasized the planning and guidance provided by the active principle in opposition to the atomist understanding of a haphazard universe.⁴⁶ Second, in 2:10 the author characterizes his readers as the ποίημα (product) of God. Though not invented by a Stoic, the claim that the cosmos is the ποίημα of God was embraced by Stoics who wanted God to be understood as the crafter of the cosmos.⁴⁷ Last of all, in 3:10 the author praises "the much-variegated wisdom of God (πολυποίκιλος σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ)." Wisdom (σοφία) itself was originally a technical idea in Greek philosophy.⁴⁸ Technical reason is emphasized even more when σοφία is combined with the term ποικίλος, which for the Stoics called attention to the marvelous variety in the crafted cosmos brought about by just *one* active principle.⁴⁹

III. SAVIOR OF THE BODY

Enough evidence has been assembled to show the influence of Stoic physical theory on the way Ephesians speaks about the Spirit and about God in order to speak against atomism. We turn finally to the problem inherent in Stoicism's answer to atomism: the decline of bodies. Ephesians seeks to solve this problem by enlarging Stoic thought about the way bodies are preserved. We will focus on the title "savior of the body (σωτήρ τοῦ σώματος)" (5:23). This title is important because it is a gloss on Christ as head of the church, a notion that space does not allow me to develop in detail in this essay. The author makes clear what he means by "Christ as head of the church" by calling him "savior of the body." If we can figure out the conceptual framework of "savior of the body," we will have a clear advantage in understanding Christ as head and the precise form of hierarchy this latter formulation, so momentous for the history of christology and ecclesiology, entails.

At the time of the letter's composition, the natural context for speaking about "saving the body" would have been medicine. The care of the male body was a

⁴⁵Halm, *Origins*, 32. See also *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* 2.1132-1140; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 148-149; Philo, *On the Creation* 7-12; *The Unchangeableness of God* 29-30.

⁴⁶Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris* 369A; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 7.138-139.

⁴⁷Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 1.35; Epictetus, *Discourse* 2.8.16-23.

⁴⁸George B. Keford, "The Image of the Wise Man in Greece in the Period before Plato," in *Images of Man in Ancient and Medieval Thought*, ed. F. Bossier et al. (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1976) 17-28; Solmsen, *Kleine Schriften I*, 332-355.

⁴⁹Philo, *On Dreams* 1.202-212; Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 2.17; Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 12.34.

topic of much concern for philosophers, doctors, and the men leisured enough to read the self-help guides the former produced. Ephesians assumes that the readers have access to a body of knowledge pertaining to a man's love for his own body: "In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself" (5:28). Plutarch's advice about a wife's subordination to her husband relies upon the same assumption, namely, that there is a fund of knowledge available to the male for the proper and effective care of his own body:

[I]f they [wives] subordinate (ὕποτάττουσαι) themselves to their husbands, they are commended, but if they want to have control (κρατεῖν), they cut a sorer figure than the subjects of their control. And control ought to be exercised by the man over the woman, not as an owner has control of a piece of property, but, as the soul controls the body, by entering into her feelings and being knit to her through goodwill. As, therefore, it is possible to exercise care over the body (σώματος ἔστι κηδεσθαι) without being a slave to its pleasures and desires, so it is possible to govern a wife, and at the same time to delight and gratify her.⁵⁰

Plutarch does not need to say anything specific about a young male's "care over the body." That is the known thing, from which point the bridegroom can venture out into the unknown waters of marital relations. If we are to understand what it means for Christ to be "savior of the body," and ultimately "head of the church" and "head of the cosmos," then we shall have to learn what Plutarch and the bridegroom took for granted.

The physician Galen tells us just what we need to know about loving our bodies so as to save (σώζειν) them:

All bodies that come into being and pass away undergo two kinds of change: their substance is altered (in quality) and at the same time it flows away. It is altered when it is cooled, heated, dried, and watered....[I]t flows away in the visible secretions and also in that imperceptible process called transpiration; therefore in order to be preserved (σώζεται) it needs a double correction, one that curbs excess in the qualities, the other that refills the place of that which was lost.⁵¹

Preserving the body requires two activities: nourishing and warming. First, since the body needs refilling, one must nourish (τρέφειν) it.⁵² Second, since the body's loss of vital heat (in addition to its drying out) is an important factor in growing old and dying, bodily warmth must be maintained or heat introduced from the environment.⁵³ Vital heat plays a key role in transforming food into materials that are kidney-like, toenail-like, or like any other organ that needs replenishing; without in-

⁵⁰Plutarch, *Advice to Bride and Groom* 142E.

⁵¹Galen, *On the Elements* 7.2-4. Translation is Phillip De Lacy, *Galen: On the Elements according to Hippocrates*, *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* 5.1.2 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1996) 119.

⁵²Galen, *De Sanitate Tuenda* 6.6-7.

⁵³Ancient medicine and physics shared a keen interest in "vital heat." See Solmsen, *Kleine Schriften I*, 605-611. Loss of vital heat leads to old age and death. See Galen, *De Sanitate Tuenda* 6.319-320.

born heat there is no growth.⁵⁴ Any gentleman concerned to ward off the effects of old age and prolong his life must warm (θάλπω) his flesh through exercise, rub-downs, blankets, warm baths, or some combination of these as his physician sees fit.⁵⁵ Indeed, as the author of Ephesians, confident that his readers will know exactly what he is talking about, reminds them, “no one has ever hated his flesh, but he nourishes (ἐκτρέφει) it and warms (θάλπει) it” (5:29).

We can conclude, then, that Christ, savior of the body, preserves the church from decline as an upper-class male attends to his own flesh, by feeding it and maintaining its vital heat. The answer to the problem of corporeal decline generated by the fundamentals of Stoic physics turns out to be... more Stoic physics, mediated through physiology. Qualitatively, Christ’s role with respect to corporeal reality does not differ from the role Stoics assigned to spirit: to provide the vital heat necessary for bodily growth (αὔξησις, 4:15-16). Quantitatively, though, there is a difference. For Ephesians, no limits are placed on growth. Or, more accurately, with Christ as savior of the body, the church swells into his own unimaginably large proportions.⁵⁶ The Stoic body of the Stoic Christ grows very big but is controlled down to its most minute process by the benevolent, pervading spirit originating from the head that, because of the “in-working” of divine craftsmanship, makes for harmony, balance, and preservation. This is Ephesians’ gift of hierarchy to contemporary christology and ecclesiology. Whether we must accept it is another question. ⊕

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⁵⁴Solmsen, *Kleine Schriften I*, 436-459; Hahn, *Origins*, 68-72, 93-103, 142-151.

⁵⁵For the emphasis physicians and others placed on warming (θάλπω) the body, see Plutarch, *Advice about Keeping Well* 123A; 130D; 131B-D; 133F-134A.

⁵⁶Eph 3:18 (“what is the breadth and length and height and depth...”) sounds like the Stoic definition of body. See Hahn, *Origins*, 3-4, 10.