

Space Oddity: Exercises in Art and Philosophy

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The ‘Odd’ Conception of Space in Stoic Philosophy

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Abstract The complex Stoic conception of space is expressed through three distinct but complementary notions: the void, the place and the room. These are incorporeal entities to be investigated within the rigid corporealism traditionally attributed to the Stoics. First of all, this work intends to provide an organic and coherent reconstruction of the Stoic conception of space, despite the fragmentary nature of the sources at our disposal. Furthermore, it is shown that spatial notions play a fundamental role in Stoic philosophy – think of the theory of universal conflagration – despite the ontological status of incorporeality.

Keywords Ancient Stoicism. Ontology. Incorporeals. Void. Place. Room. Conflagration.

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1 Introduction

The Ancient Stoa (III-II century BC) is one of the most important philosophical schools of antiquity, due to the enormous influence it had on the history of thought. However, the works that can be attributed to Ancient Stoicism have been lost, therefore we can only read fragments provided by the indirect tradition, from sources

that are often conflicting and hostile to the Stoic school.¹ Obviously, this makes the reconstruction of the theories of Stoic philosophy particularly difficult.²

This work is based on a linguistic and conceptual analysis of the Stoic fragments dealing with space: this latter concept proves to be extremely complex, encompassing three different notions, namely the void (*kenòn*), the place (*tòpos*) and the room (*chôra*). In particular, the ontological status of these spatial notions is analysed in detail, to identify their mutual relations. Thus, it is shown that the Stoic conception of space is profoundly unitary, since it is based on interdependent and complementary notions, albeit very different at first sight.

The Stoic philosophical system is divided into three closely inter-related parts: logic, physics and ethics. The study of the Stoic conception of space certainly belongs to physics, but also ontology, in the sense that the Stoics have always endeavoured to carefully define and classify the ontological status and the nature of the entities they studied. Stoic ontology is traditionally defined as corporealist, in that only bodies exist in the full and proper sense. However, the Stoics also admit a series of incorporeal entities in their ontology: these are the so-called 'canonical incorporeals',³ namely the void (*kenòn*), the place (*tòpos*), the time (*chrònos*) and the sayable (*lektòn*). According to the traditional interpretation of Stoic corporealism, these incorporeals merely subsist: therefore, they would be endowed with an inferior ontological status to that of bodies, to which incorporeals are subordinate and on which they depend. On the contrary, the present work intends to demonstrate that the void, the place and the room (which, as we will see, is also fully included among the incorporeals) play a leading role in the Stoic philosophical system, despite their incorporeality.

The following discussion opens with an overview of Stoic ontology, to precisely contextualise the Stoic reflection on space within a cohesive, organic and unitary philosophical system, such as the Stoic one. The three notions that constitute the Stoic conception of space are then analysed, starting with the void and following with the place and the room. It must be pointed out that the notions of place and room are treated together because of their close relation-

1 Works from the Middle Stoa (II-I century BC) have also come to us by indirect tradition; only the production dating back to the New Stoa (I-II century AD) has come to us by direct tradition.

2 The critical edition for the fragments of the Ancient Stoics used in this paper is Von Arnim 1903-05. The entire work is abbreviated as *SVF*; to refer to a single fragment, the abbreviation *SVF* is followed by the Roman number of the volume in which the fragment is contained, and then there is the Arabic number of the fragment itself.

3 Cf. Brunschwig 1994, who employs this expression to indicate that, in the sources, the incorporeals appear systematically together, so that they constitute a fixed and canonical list.

ships and semantic proximity: consider that, in common Greek, the terms *tòpos* and *chôra* were often interchangeable. We examine the ontological status of the three spatial notions, their reciprocal relations and the important role they play in the Stoic system, despite the ontological status of incorporeality. In this way, it is firstly possible to restore a unitary and coherent image of the 'odd' conception of space in Stoic philosophy, despite the fragmentary nature both of the sources and their interpretations; then it is shown the centrality of spatial notions in some fundamental doctrines of Stoic philosophy, such as the universal conflagration.

2 Ontology: Bodies and Incorporeals

The Stoics strongly argued that "all that is, is body" (*SVF* II 467; Author's transl.), hence the label of 'corporealism' traditionally attributed to their ontology. For the Stoics, indeed, reality and everything it contains are constituted by the inseparable union of two corporeal principles: the active principle (god, *lógos*, the forger of natural reality and the orderer of the universe) shapes the passive principle (the formless matter). Therefore, everything is configured as a material substratum permeated by the divine *lógos*.

However, as already mentioned, the Stoics also admit in their ontology a series of incorporeal realities, which cannot be constituted by the union of the two corporeal principles, precisely because of their incorporeality. In fact, one of the most controversial and debated issues in Stoic philosophy is the ontological status to be attributed to the incorporeals within the rigid Stoic corporealism, which is based on the equation between existence and corporeality. However, for the Stoics, the domain of reality does not end with what is fully existent: the Stoic conception of space testifies to the importance that the incorporeals have in the Stoic philosophical system.

Stoic ontology can be condensed in the so-called doctrine of 'something' (*ti*) as the supreme genus.⁴ It means that, from an ontological point of view, 'something' has a greater extension than 'being' (*òn*): indeed, 'something' includes within it both the bodies, which are properly existent and fully *ònta*, and the incorporeals, which are given the ontological status of subsistence (*hypòstasis*). If *òn* had been the supreme genus, the incorporeals would have been naturally excluded from Stoic ontology, because they cannot be attributed the ontological status of existence. Nevertheless, the incorporeals are endowed with some form of being ensured by their belonging to

⁴ See *SVF* II 329, 331, 332; Long, Sedley 1987, 1; Brunschwig 1994; 2003; Alessandrelli 2016.

'something': they are subsistent, a way of being as defined and objective as that of bodies. Moreover, the verb *hypàrchein*, which is difficult to translate,⁵ often appears in the sources, and it is attributed to both bodies and incorporeals, ensuring the objectivity of both these types of entities.

The analysis of the void, the place and the room, which, together with time, constitute the so-called 'physical' incorporeals,⁶ shows that the incorporeals could hardly be relegated to one of the lowest rungs of the ontological hierarchy, as the traditional interpretation of Stoic ontology would say. First of all, this is evident if we consider the doctrine of *ti* as the supreme genus already described: the Stoics consider the 'something' as the supreme genus of reality, which includes within itself both the bodies and the incorporeals. Therefore, these two types of entities are not radically opposed on the ontological level, precisely because they belong to the same genus. Thus, it is not possible that bodies are fully existent and, on the other hand, incorporeals correspond to mere nothingness: precisely as 'something', both types of entities are equally objective and real, so much so that they can be placed on the same level.

The centrality of the notion of incorporeality in a corporeal ontology fully emerges if we consider the Stoic conception of space from a unitary perspective: indeed, it is shown that the incorporeals themselves are the object of organic and structured reflections, as well as the focus of fundamental theories for Stoic philosophy, such as universal conflagration.

3 The Void

The void is also defined as the incorporeal *par excellence* (cf. Brunschwig 1994, 138; 2003, 213), because, at a first glance, it appears as the simplest case, whose incorporeality is not problematic. In the course of the exposition on the void, it will also be necessary to call into question the place and the room, because they are interconnected concepts that refer to one another. In particular, it will become clear that the void is a sort of negative counterpart of the place.

The definition of void given by the sources is "vacancy of body" (SVF II 504; Algra 1995, 265), that is deprivation, absence of bodies.⁷

⁵ The most common translations are "to belong" (Long, Sedley 1987, 1: 162-6) and "to be the case" (Brunschwig 2003, 216).

⁶ Cf. Brunschwig 1994, 134. However, he does not include the room among the canonical incorporeals and classifies the *lektòn* as a 'logical' incorporeal. The examination of the notions of time and *lektòn* is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁷ See Sedley 1982; Todd 1982; De Harven 2015.

More specifically, as Sextus Empiricus states:

The Stoics say that *kenòn* is what can be occupied by an existent but is not occupied, or an interval empty of body, or an interval unoccupied by body. (SVF II 505; Long, Sedley 1987, 1: 294)

In order to fully understand the nature of void in light of the other spatial notions, it is necessary to quote a long account by Stobaeus, which is the starting point for examining the Stoic conception of space in detail:

Chrysippus declared *tòpos* to be that which is fully occupied by being or that which is able to be occupied by being and is *de facto* fully occupied whether by one thing or by several things. If, of that which is able to be occupied by being, part is occupied and part not, the whole will be neither *kenòn* nor *tòpos*, but a different something which has no name. For we speak of *kenòn* on the analogy of empty vessels and of *tòpos* on the analogy of full ones. *Chôra* is either that which is larger and can be occupied by being, like a larger vessel of a body, or that which can contain a larger body. The *kenòn* is said to be infinite for that which is outside the cosmos is suchlike, but *tòpos* is finite because no body is infinite. Just as the corporeal is finite, so the incorporeal is infinite; for time and the *kenòn* are infinite. For just as the nothing constitutes no limit, so also is there no limit to the nothing, *e.g.* to the *kenòn*. For by its own nature it is infinite; but it is being limited when it is filled up; but when that which fills it is taken away, you cannot conceive of its boundary. (SVF II 503; Algra 1995, 264)

As it is evident, both the void (*kenòn*) and the place (*tòpos*) presuppose the existence of bodies for their definition:⁸ in effect, the void is an incorporeal extension that can be occupied by a body, but which is actually left free by the bodies themselves; similarly, the place is an incorporeal space that can contain one or more bodies and which is currently occupied by them, unlike the void. Stobaeus also informs us about the fundamental characteristic of the void, which is described as infinite. The term used here is *àpeiron*, to be understood in its etymological sense as *a-pèras*, 'without limit' (cf. Inwood 1991, 254-66; Powers 2014, 426-9). However, limitlessness is only one of the characteristics of the void, that Cleomedes describes as follows:

⁸ This is true if we consider the definitions of void and place, but actually, void and place do not have the same degree of dependence on bodies: the void seems to be the incorporeal that is most independent of bodies; on the other hand, the place seems to be highly dependent on them.

So *kenòn* must have a kind of subsistence. The notion of it is very simple since it is incorporeal and without contact, neither has shape nor takes on shape, neither is acted upon in any respect nor acts, but is simply capable of receiving body. (SVF II 541; Long, Sedley 1987, 1: 294)

From this passage, it is clear that the notion of void is extremely simple, as if it had been obtained *ex negativo*, stripping it of all positive determinations (cf. Algra 1995, 314). Indeed, the only positive characterisation here attributed to the void is its capacity to accommodate bodies. In light of this, it seems that the notion of void coincides *sic et simpliciter* with that of incorporeality, if we also consider the definition of the incorporeal provided by Zeno:

The incorporeal is that which can be occupied by bodies, but which cannot be contained. (SVF I 95; Author's transl.)

For this reason, the void can rightly be regarded as the most incorporeal of the incorporeals.

Returning to Cleomedes' fragment, the term *hypòstasis* and not the verb *einai* is used in order to indicate the reality of the void, and this is perfectly in line with the traditional attribution of the ontological status of subsistence to the incorporeals, whereas 'being' in the full sense is reserved only to bodies.

It is possible to give the void other characteristics: first of all, the fact that it is located only outside the cosmos, then the three-dimensionality. Indeed, the void, like the place, shares with bodies the characteristic of three-dimensionality, but differs from them in that it lacks resistance (cf. SVF II 502). The absence of internal differentiation and orientation are the last two characteristics (always *ex negativo*) that the sources attribute to the void.⁹

As for the reasons given by the Stoics in support of the existence of the extra-cosmic void, the first and most important is of a physical-cosmological order: there must be an empty space where the cosmos can expand during the conflagration, and which will be left free again when the cosmos itself will have cooled and contracted. One of the cornerstones of Stoic philosophy is precisely the theory of universal conflagration (*ekpýrosis*):¹⁰ according to the Stoics, a cosmic event of

⁹ Indeed, we read: "in the void there exists no difference by which bodies are drawn in one direction rather than another" (SVF II 550; Long, Sedley 1987, 1: 294-5); "the incorporeal void has neither top nor bottom, neither front nor back, neither right nor left nor centre" (SVF II 557; Author's transl.); "the void is homogeneous and the same everywhere in terms of receptivity" (SVF II 552; Author's transl.).

¹⁰ See Hunt 1976; Lapidge 1978; Mansfeld 1979; Long 1985; 2006; Furley 1999; Algra 2003; White 2003; Salles 2009; Alessandrelli 2019.

a cyclical nature develops over time. Each phase, after it has reached its full development, ends with a great conflagration, an immense explosion that will bring all things back to the initial stage of the primordial fire. The story of cosmogony will then resume its course in a new cycle, destined to repeat in an identical way all the stages of each of the cycles already concluded; the cycles will follow one after the other indefinitely. In this regard, Cleomedes states:

Even if the entire substance is resolved into fire, as the most refined of the natural philosophers [the Stoics] think, it must occupy a vastly greater *tòpos*, just like the vaporizations of solid bodies into smoke. Therefore the *tòpos* occupied by substance flowing out during the conflagration is now *kenòn*, since no body has filled it. (SVF II 537; Long, Sedley 1987, 1: 295)

If the void were not an objective absence of body, there would not be anything for the cosmos where to disperse during and after the conflagration at the end of a cosmic cycle. In this perspective, the void is configured as a condition of the conflagration (cf. Alessandrelli 2016, 28).

The other argument in favour of the existence of the extra-cosmic void is that of the so-called space traveller (cf. SVF II 535, 536), which has become very famous. Let us imagine that a traveller is at the extreme limit of the cosmos and stretches his hand upwards: if he can actually stretch out his hand, it is evident that there is something outside the cosmos towards which he can stretch it; but this something cannot be a body, which would offer resistance to the movement of the hand. On the contrary, if there were a body outside the cosmos, we could always hypothesise that the traveller goes to the extreme border of this body and tries to stretch out his hand again, thus obtaining a regress to infinity. Therefore, outside the cosmos, there can only be an unlimited void, as it turned out.

From what has been said so far, it can be concluded that the Stoic conception of the void has two aspects, one physical and the other metaphysical, which are closely interrelated (cf. Inwood 1991, 265-6). The first aspect concerns the conflagration, during which the cosmos expands in the surrounding infinite void; the metaphysical aspect goes in the same direction, since limitlessness is a structural characteristic of the void precisely because it is not occupied by bodies which would delimit it.

The unity and organicity of the Stoic conception of space fully emerge if we consider that there is a generic notion of space or extension (expressed by the term *diàstema*),¹¹ underlying the concepts of

11 Cf. Algra 1995. It is worth noting that the term *diàstema* is also employed in the Stoic definition of time, understood as the "dimension of motion" (SVF II 509; Long, Sedley 1987, 1: 304).

kenòn, *tòpos* and *chôra*. Indeed, the place is a *diàstema* currently occupied by a body; on the other hand, the void is a *diàstema* left free by the bodies; whereas the room is a partially occupied *diàstema*. In line with this notion of absolute space and generic extension underlying the spatial concepts used in Stoicism, it is also the position of Hahm (1977): according to him, for Chrysippus, the place and the void are coordinated species of a third reality, namely the space or extension that can be occupied by bodies. More recently, Powers (2014) also comes to the conclusion that the Stoics admit a notion of absolute space, which is configured as a three-dimensional extension that is partly occupied by the cosmos (place) and partly left free by the bodies (void).

Among the incorporeals, the void seems to have a very particular status, insofar as it appears to be independent of bodies: thus, the traditional interpretation of Stoic corporealism seen before proves to be partial and reductive.¹² As anticipated, this is most evident in the Stoic theory of conflagration: indeed, there must be something, namely the infinite void, where the world can expand at the moment of its final explosion. During the conflagration, the cosmos uses the void, which is thus pre-existent. From this point of view, the extra-cosmic void is logically configured as a condition of possibility of conflagration, namely as a condition for the actualisation of the potential of the cosmos itself.

The close link between void and universal conflagration is emphasised by the Middle Stoic Posidonius,¹³ who departs from the ancient Stoic view that the void outside the cosmos is infinite. Indeed, he believes that the extra-cosmic void is extended just enough to allow the cosmos itself to expand during the conflagration. According to the account of the ps.-Plutarch:

The Stoics say that outside the cosmos there is a *kenòn* into which the cosmos is dissolved at the conflagration; it is infinite. Posidonius maintains that it is not infinite, but just as large as is sufficient for the dissolution of the cosmos. In the first book of the *On the Void*. (ps.-Plut., *Placita* 2.9; Algra 1995, 323)

For Posidonius, the void is neither infinite nor simply finite, but it is finite in relation to the dissolution of the whole: indeed, the void exists in sufficient quantity to allow the cosmos to dissolve.

However, what is certain is that the void is configured as a necessary condition for the occurrence of universal conflagration. Then, it seems that the very existence of the cosmos depends on the incorporeal void that surrounds it: indeed, without the void, the cosmos

¹² See Inwood 1991, 249; Algra 1995, 308-16; Powers 2014, 411-12.

¹³ The most important study on this topic is certainly Algra 1993; cf. also Tieleman 2014.

would not have the space to periodically expand during conflagrations, it could not destroy itself and then reconstitute itself. In such a way, one should renounce one of the cornerstones of Stoic thought, namely the theory of *ekpýrosis*, by virtue of which the cosmos derives its existence by periodically regenerating itself.

4 The Place and the Room

Also with regard to the place and the room, the most important evidence is that of Stobaeus already seen in relation to the void, and that we will now analyse in more detail. The notion of *chôra* is difficult to understand.¹⁴ 'room' is the most common translation, although it is probably more appropriate to leave the Greek term, also because of the different interpretations of *chôra* that have been proposed. Certainly, the absence of *chôra* from the list of canonical incorporeals is immediately evident. Sedley (1999, 396-7) suggests that the Stoics introduced this notion in order to account for the approximate use of spatial coordinates in common language: when we ask where Nelson's Column is located, it is possible to answer that it is situated in Trafalgar Square, even though the latter is also occupied by other bodies (whereas, as we shall see, the place is generally considered to be coextensive with the body that occupies it). However, also the *chôra* can be rightly counted among the incorporeals, as it is, so to speak, a 'median' spatial notion between void and place, whose nature and definition are partly assimilable to those of void and place, as will become clear from the following reflections.

The sources show that the place is a relational notion, which is precisely defined in relation to the bodies that occupy it. Indeed, the definition of place previously seen and reported by Stobaeus is the following:

Chrysippus declared *tòpos* to be that which is fully occupied by being or that which is able to be occupied by being and is *de facto* fully occupied whether by one thing or by several things. (SVF II 503; Algra 1995, 264)

Therefore, unlike the void, the place is that space currently occupied by one or more bodies; the expression translated as 'fully' indicates the equality of extension that is realised between the place and the bodies that occupy it.

It is now necessary to clarify two fundamental expressions for the Stoic definition of spatial notions, namely 'unoccupied' and 'occupied'. In a first sense, 'unoccupied' can indicate the complete ab-

¹⁴ Alessandrelli (2014, 62) defines *chôra* as "an apparently bizarre spatial reality".

sence of bodies and thus denotes the void. In a second sense, it can refer to the absence of impenetrable bodies, which, opposing resistance, would occupy portions of space inaccessible to other bodies: therefore, in this second case, there would be the presence only of diffuse and penetrable bodies such as air. Similarly, 'occupied' indicates a completely full space; or a space that is not free as it is occupied for the most part by bodies that oppose resistance to others that would like to occupy it. In the fragments relating to the place, 'unoccupied' and 'occupied' are always understood in the first sense, whereas in the definitions of *chôra* the second sense is used (cf. Alesandrelli 2014, 55-8).

Proceeding with the analysis of the passage from Stobaeus, he then gives the definition of an entity that has no name and that has been long debated by critics: it is a space that is partly occupied and partly not, which, therefore, cannot correspond *sic et simpliciter* either to place (which is entirely occupied by bodies) or to void (which is completely left free by the bodies themselves). Presumably, it is an anticipatory definition of the *chôra*, and this is perfectly in line with the actual definition of *chôra* that is quoted immediately after:

Chôra is either that which is larger and can be occupied by being, like a larger vessel of a body, or that which can contain a larger body. (SVF II 503; Algra 1995, 264)

Therefore, if the *chôra* is a space or a container larger than the bodies that occupy it, it is clear that it will be partly occupied and partly not, in line with the definition of the nameless entity seen before.

Nevertheless, several times in the sources, *chôra* is attributed precisely the same definition of the nameless entity:

Zeno and his school argue that *kenòn*, *tòpos* and *chôra* differ. The *kenòn* is vacancy of body whereas *tòpos* is that which is occupied by body, *chôra* being that which is partly occupied like in the case of a wine jar. (SVF II 504; Algra 1995, 265)

Again:

Tòpos is what is occupied by an existent and made equal to what occupies it (by 'existent' they now mean body, as is clear from the interchange of names). And they say that *chôra* is an interval partly occupied by a body and partly unoccupied. (SVF II 505; Long, Sedley 1987, 1: 294)

It is immediately evident that these accounts agree in considering the *chôra* as a space only partially occupied, in line with the definition of the nameless entity previously seen.

Returning to the characteristics of place, the sources attribute to it the ontological status traditionally reserved for incorporeals, namely subsistence;¹⁵ then, they describe it as three-dimensional (endowed with length, breadth and depth) and as having six directions, that is up and down, right and left, back and forth (cf. *SVF* II 501); finally, as incorruptible (cf. *SVF* II 319). In fact, Brunschwig (2003, 214) even hypothesises that the Stoics doubted the incorporeality of place, which is evidently the most corporeal of the canonical incorporeals (and this supports the thesis that the void, considered as the incorporeal *par excellence*, is the negative counterpart of place). However, the Stoics desisted from considering place corporeal because, when a body tries to move another body to another place, the two bodies resist each other, whereas this is not the case with place, which remains completely inert. Therefore, if the place were itself corporeal, it would resist the bodies attempting to occupy it, with the absurd consequence that the bodies themselves would have no place where to exist (cf. Alessandrelli 2014, 58).

Even Alessandrelli (2016, 28-30) considers place as the most corporeal of the incorporeals: however, if the place were a body, it would in turn have to be located in a place, thus incurring a regress to infinity. Therefore, the place must be considered as an incorporeal portion of space, objective insofar as it is 'something' and subsistent in connection with the existent body that occupies and delimits it.

Nevertheless, the most problematic notion remains that of *chôra*. At first reading of the fragments, we have seen that it appears to be simply a space that is partly occupied and partly left free by bodies. This definition of *chôra* seems to correspond to the generic notion of space, understood as the total sum of place and void, thus coming to overlap with the nameless entity of Stobaeus' fragment (cf. Long, Sedley 1987, 1). On the other hand, on the cosmic level, *chôra* may well coincide with the Stoic notion of 'all' (*pán*), namely the whole of the cosmos (which occupies a place) and the infinite extra-cosmic void (cf. *SVF* II 524, 552).

However, the issue is extremely complex: for example, for Algra (1995, 261-340), *chôra* is a relational notion since it is always defined in relation to the particular body that partly occupies it. Therefore, *chôra* is always the *chôra* of a particular body and it can neither correspond to the simple and generic sum of place and void nor be considered a third kind of space: indeed, it is a section of space only if understood as the *chôra* of a particular body. Inwood (1991, 248-9), for his part, argues that the *chôra* is only partially occupied by a particular body, while the rest is occupied by something else, such as air.

¹⁵ The verb used to express this concept is *parýfistánaí* (cf. *SVF* II 507).

On the cosmic level, as Algra maintains, the *chôra* identifies a large but finite space that surrounds and encompasses the cosmos and provides the space for the conflagration. According to him, Chrysippus distinguished between the space that can be occupied by the cosmos only in principle and the space that will actually be occupied by the cosmos itself during the conflagration. In other words, according to Algra, Chrysippus drew a distinction between the void as an empty space in itself and the void as a space for the expansion of the cosmos during the conflagration (the *chôra*): only the former is infinite, while the latter is simply larger than the cosmos itself. Therefore, it can legitimately be stated that Chrysippus introduced the notion of *chôra* to collimate his finitist theory of the cosmos and his theory of the infinity of both void and *pán*. Thus, it is possible to summarise Algra's interpretation in this way: the *chôra* is a space that is larger than the body that occupies it and therefore it can contain more than it contains. On a cosmic level, the *chôra* corresponds to the finite receptacle that encompasses and surrounds the cosmos and which provides it with the space for periodic conflagrations. Hence the ambiguous distinction between the void in itself, considered on an ontological level, which is an infinite empty space; and the void as a space for conflagration, considered on the cosmological level, which coincides with the finite *chôra*.

Hence, according to Algra, there are two main meanings of *chôra* that can be found in the sources: *chôra* understood as an infinite sum of place and void (a probably not Chrysippean conception, but widely spread in the Stoic school); *chôra* understood as a larger (presumably finite) space that can contain a larger body and that can be entirely occupied or not by bodies (Chrysippean position).

According to Alessandrelli's interpretation (2014, 60-6), for Chrysippus *chôra* is the space of common sense, the space only partially occupied by animate and inanimate bodies, the space as it is ordinarily perceived, namely not empty, but full of air, which is a penetrable body that makes space itself accessible and free. My desk located inside my room, which in turn is located in my house, and so on, are all examples of *chôra*, of portions of space that are partly occupied and partly not. Therefore, for Ancient Stoicism, *chôra* does not coincide with the simple coexistence of place and void, but, according to Alessandrelli, it must be interpreted as a resumption of the nameless entity, through a reinterpretation of the notions of 'occupied' and 'unoccupied'. As we have seen, in the definition of *chôra*, 'occupied' and 'unoccupied' should not be understood in a rigorous sense as that which is completely full or empty, but in the more informal sense of what is accessible or not to other bodies, thanks to the possible presence of penetrable bodies such as air.

It is then reasonable to conclude that the *tòpos* and the *chôra* are at the centre of Stoic philosophical reflection. In particular, spatial

determinations are those essential conditions for bodies themselves to exist, since, even simply to exist, they need a place where they can express their ontological status. Evidently, the critics have always focused on the general dependence of the incorporeals on bodies, without ever adequately highlighting this indispensability of the place and the room for the existence of bodies themselves. Moreover, examining the ontological status of bodies without in any way placing them on the spatial level would render the entire Stoic corporealism abstract and scarcely intelligible, far from the Chrysippean intention of bringing philosophy closer to common sense (cf. *SVF* II 473, 964).

5 Conclusions

The sources at our disposal show that the space topic constitutes one of the cornerstones of Stoic philosophical reflection. Indeed, three notions are necessary to exhaust the complex and multifaceted Stoic conception of space: *kenòn*, *tòpos* and *chôra*. These are distinct notions, but, at the same time, co-implicating. The void and the place are complementary notions: both are defined as spaces that can be occupied by bodies, but the former is only potentially occupied, whereas the latter is currently occupied. The notion of room 'mediates' between these two, indeed it is partly occupied, like the place, and partly left free by bodies, as in the case with void. The underlying notion of *diàstema*, from and through which *kenòn*, *tòpos* and *chôra* are defined, makes the link between the spatial notions even closer and much more evident.

On a cosmological level, the cosmos delimits the place where it is located and it is surrounded by the infinite void, which makes universal conflagration possible. The room can coincide either with the Stoic notion of *pán* (which indicates the cosmos together with the infinite void) or with the finite space that will actually be occupied by the cosmos during the conflagration.

These reflections are sufficient to provide an idea of the complexity, relevance and 'oddity' of the Stoic reflection on space. Therefore, the label of 'corporealism', traditionally attributed to Stoic ontology, is misleading. Far from being merely subordinate and dependent on bodies, also the incorporeals are the object of structured theories and reflections in Stoic ontology. Even the highest degree of incorporeality that characterises the void¹⁶ does not prevent it from playing a fundamental role in the constitution of the whole reality: indeed, the void allows the universal conflagration, therefore it is configured

¹⁶ For this reason, it is also defined as a pure incorporeal (cf. Goldschmidt 1989, 26; Brunschwig 1994, 138).

as a necessary condition for the very existence of the cosmos and its periodic destructions and reconstitutions. Furthermore, the determination of place is a necessary condition for the bodies to exist, because they need a place where to be what they are, thus manifesting the interdependence between the domain of corporeality and the domain of incorporeality. The room turns out to be essential in order to adequately account for space as it is understood by common sense, namely a space only partially occupied. Therefore, in the Stoic system, the incorporeals play a role as important as that of bodies, such as the 'odd' conception of space in Stoic philosophy has attempted to demonstrate.

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