The Art of Quotation: Plutarch and Galen against Chrysippus

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The anti-Stoic attitude of Plutarch and Galen is a well-acknowledged phenomenon. Plutarch of Cheronea wrote abundantly against the Stoics. The Catalogue of Lamprias lists nine treatises explicitly directed against the Stoics, three of which have come down to us. Furthermore many other works from the Moralia display anti-Stoic arguments (such as On Moral Virtue, On Making Progress in Virtue, On the Cleverness of Animals, and so on). The critique of Stoicism also played an important role in Galen's work: he wrote against Stoic logic, and the most manifest case of his confrontation with Stoic psychology is to be found in books two through five of his On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato. Despite the openly hostile stance toward Stoicism, it has been more and more acknowledged that Plutarch's and Galen's relation to Stoicism is more complex than one of stark opposition. For instance, Opsomer has claimed that the close proximity with many Stoic ideas and techniques led Plutarch to mark his own difference and to attempt to subordinate Stoicism to Platonism, and Gill has shown that Galen shares some fundamental assumptions with the

1 The extant works bearing an explicit anti-Stoic title are On Stoic Self-Contradictions (No. 76); Against the Stoics on Common Notions (henceforth, Comm. not.; No. 77) and an Epitome of The Stoics Talk More Paradoxically than the Poets (No. 79), which is not Plutarch's original work but a literal extract from it (see Cherniss, LCL 470, 13.2, 606–9). The lost treatises listed in the Lamprias Catalogue are: Against Chrysippus on Justice (Lampr. No. 59); Against the Stoics on Common Experience (No. 78); Reasons Why the Stoics Vacillate (No. 149); Against Chrysippus on the First Consequent (No. 152); On What Lies in Our Power: Against the Stoics (No. 154). To this list should be added a treatise dealing with both the Stoics and the Epicureans: Selections and Refutations of Stoics and Epicureans (No. 148).

2 We learn from Galen's own testimony that he wrote six treatises discussing Stoic logic (Lib. Propr. 19.47) toward which he was, on the whole, hostile (see Morison, “Logic,” 88–115).

3 Opsomer, “Plutarch and the Stoics,” 89–102. What is more, Babut has shown that Plutarch displays a genuine sympathy for his Stoic contemporaries (Babut, Plutarque et le stoïcisme, 239–70; Babut, “Stoïciens et stoïcisme,” 203–27) and has argued that Plutarch's stance against Stoicism should not be seen as the expression of a personal antipathy but rather as conforming to the laws of the genre (Babut, “Polémique et philosophie,” 11–42).
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Stoics, such as a physicalist approach to psychology and a teleological view of natural entities.4

Whereas it is beyond doubt that the content of Plutarch’s and Galen’s argument against Stoicism is of great interest for the history of Stoicism in general and for the better understanding of their thoughts in particular, my focus will not be on the content of their attack on Stoicism but on their polemical strategy, and more particularly on their use of quotations. My contention is that both Plutarch’s *On Stoic Self-Contradictions* (henceforth, *De Stoic. rep.*) and Galen’s *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* (henceforth, *PHP*) represent the best instances of a new genre of polemic, based on the accusations of self-contradictions and characterized by an abundant use of the opponent’s *ipsa verba*. These texts thus constitute important milestones in the history of polemics, for they mark the emergence of a new kind of polemic that will be variously adopted and declined in the following decades and centuries.

With a view to identifying the key features of this polemical genre, my analysis will be mostly devoted to Plutarch’s *De Stoic. rep.*. First, I will map out the different types of accusations leveled against Chrysippus, and then I will examine the way in which Chrysippus’s quotations are employed within this polemical framework. An overview of the parallel strategy used by Galen in his polemic against Chrysippus will enable us to better localize the genre that Plutarch’s *De Stoic. rep.* represents.

1 **Plutarch’s *On Stoic Self-Contradictions***

*On Stoic Self-Contradictions* (*Peri Stōikōn enantiōmatōn*) constitutes, with its lost parallel anti-Epicurean tract, an *unicum* in the history of philosophy. It is entirely devoted to showing that the Stoics, and especially Chrysippus, are guilty of many inconsistencies. The forty-seven chapters cover various topics in ethics, physics, and logic and intend to prove that in all these domains Chrysippus is found faulty of many self-contradictions. Plutarch does not explicitly offer any alternative view to the ones he criticizes, since as he himself states, “my intention is not to examine if they say something wrong, but only how much they say in disagreement with themselves” (*ὅσα πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς

4 Thus, according to him, Galen’s polemic against Chrysippus in books 2–3 of *PHP* is a “localized disagreement conducted from within a partly common conceptual framework” (Gill, “Galen and the Stoics,” 92).