COMMENTARY ON SAKEZLES

JOEL A. MARTINEZ

Abstract
In her study of the origins of Stoic determinism, Priscilla Sakezles investigates the action theories of Aristotle and the Stoics and discovers important similarities between the two. She claims this strongly suggests that Aristotle had some influence on the early Stoics, primarily on Chrysippus. Sakezles’ paper is part of a larger project to trace the Aristotelian thread of influence on Stoic compatibilism. In these comments I focus on her discussion of Aristotle’s EN III 5. First, I argue that EN III 5 does not offer as strong support as do other passages for the claim that Aristotle and the Stoics have similar action theories. Second, I raise F. H. Sandbach’s alternative explanation for the Stoic theory of physiology and ask why we should accept Sakezles’ explanation over Sandbach’s.

In her fascinating study of the origins of Stoic determinism, Priscilla Sakezles investigates the action theories of Aristotle and the Stoics and discovers important similarities between the two. She argues that this strongly suggests that Aristotle had some influence on the early Stoics, primarily on Chrysippus. Sakezles’ paper is part of a larger project to trace the Aristotelian thread of influence on Stoic compatibilism. Her project is certainly important. This is due largely to the fact that scholars have somewhat ignored F. H. Sandbach’s challenge more thoroughly to establish, and not simply assume, Aristotelian influence on early Stoicism.1 It is somewhat surprising that we do not have a detailed response to Sandbach. To see why this is surprising, and to set up the challenges Sakezles has set for herself, it is important to look back briefly at Sandbach’s argument.

In Sandbach’s monograph *Aristotle and the Stoics*, he does more than simply argue that we have no direct evidence supporting the claim that Aristotle influenced the early Stoics (I’ll call this claim the “thesis of influence”). Sandbach argues that a convincing defense of the thesis of influence must point to how this influence could have been exerted. Regarding Aristotle’s influence over the Stoics, there are three options:

1) The Stoics could have been familiar with Aristotle’s ‘school works’
2) The Stoics could have been familiar with Aristotle’s ‘exoteric works’
3) Word of mouth

---

1 Most major scholars cite F. H. Sandbach and, so, know of his challenge. See, for example, Brad Inwood, 1985, and Julia Annas, 1994.
Sandbach argues that Aristotle could not plausibly have exerted much influence in any of these ways. Regarding the school works, Sandbach relies on the argument that these were not available until Andronicus’ edition in the first century B.C.² Regarding the exoteric works, Sandbach’s basic argument comes in two phases. In the first, he argues that the direct evidence we have shows that the Hellenistic philosophers we know about were only aware of a few of the exoteric works (Sandbach 1985, 16). In the second, he anticipates an argument similar to Sakezles’ and argues that appealing to similarity of theory is not good evidence for the thesis of influence. This is because he claims there are better explanations for the similarities.³ Finally, regarding word of mouth, Sandbach argues that anti-Macedonian sentiment and the fragments we do have support the view that some (and importantly some Stoics) held Aristotle in low regard.

Now these claims are somewhat shocking. Sandbach offers us a picture of the early Hellenistic period in which Aristotle’s works are not widely available and discussion of his views is ambivalent at best. This does not square with how scholars tend to present Aristotelian philosophy during this period. Most scholars who work on this period see at least some important Aristotelian influence.⁴ However, if Sandbach is right, the interpretive assumption that there could have been such influence is unfounded.

I find Sandbach’s basic argument unpersuasive. The reason is that from the fact that we do not have much evidence that early Stoics discussed Aristotle’s views it does not follow that they did not know his views. Despite this, Sandbach raises an important point. If a historian of philosophy wants to argue for the thesis of influence, she must offer an explanation for how Aristotle’s influence was exerted. As far as I can tell, Sakezles has not of-

² Sakezles notes this argument in 1998, 128. However, references to Andronicus’ edition should perhaps be cautious, in the light of Barnes, 1997, 1-69. Thanks to an anonymous referee for the reference.

³ In particular cases, (for example the distinctive use of the phrase *sumphuton pneuma* or ‘connate breath’ by Aristotle and Chrysippus), Sandbach claims positing another influence (e.g., ‘theories proposed by doctors’) offers a better explanation. He also offers the following, more general explanation: “Not only has it to be remembered that Aristotle was not the only philosopher of his day and not, the evidence suggests, the most highly regarded, so that alternative sources ought to be considered, but something must also be recognized that searchers for influence are tempted to overlook. That is the possibility that two men can independently think in the same way or find the same solution of a problem. The most famous instance may be the almost simultaneous discovery of calculus by Leibniz and Newton. . . . Obviously, such independent coincidences of thought could not plausibly be invoked to explain all of many similarities; nevertheless it seems to me that there are instances where it provides an explanation at least as likely as that of influence” (Sandbach, 1985, 17).

⁴ See, for example, Inwood, 1985 and Annas, 1994.