The Reflection of Some Traditional Stoic Ideas in the Thirteenth-Century Scholastic Theories of Beauty*

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The scope of the present paper is to follow several traditional Stoic ideas on their way from Antiquity to the high Middle Ages. A study of the manuscript tradition of a particular work of antiquity, or a study of the ancient textual sources of a particular author usually needs no justification. However, dissemination and availability of ancient texts is only one aspect of their life. It is equally interesting to consider how they were read and incorporated. And for the Middle Ages such a task will often involve a study of the history of ideas, rather than texts. Ideas had a life and value of their own and spread, sometimes without considerable loss of their integrity, through various sources and authors. It would seem ideal, however, despite obvious difficulties, to ground the study of the history of ideas on a thorough study of textual tradition.

Medieval ideas of beauty in the 12th and 13th centuries are usually discussed against the background of medieval versions of Platonism or Neoplatonism which originated in the texts of pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Augustine and some commentaries on Plato (e.g., Calcidius’ commentary on the Timaeus) and were supported by the authority of Biblical parallels (e.g., the “cosmology” of Genesis).¹ The majority of general accounts of 13th-century philosophy are dedicated fully to the reception of Aristotle.² However, during my study of 13th-century scholastic discussions of beauty a slightly different picture appeared. Apart from an abundance of references to typically Platonic or Neoplatonic theories, I found a large number of ideas that are traditionally attributed to the Stoics, together with texts that are contained in the ancient and early medieval sources which have a Stoic background.

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Stoicism in the Middle Ages, in particular in the 12th century, has been the object of little study. The general consensus seems to be, as expressed by M. Lapidge, that "... to speak of Stoic influence in twelfth-century thought is to misrepresent the case" (the 13th century in this respect does not seem to be an exception, according to the cited secondary literature). Praising Verbeke for choosing the term "presence" as he speaks of Stoicism in the Middle Ages, Lapidge continues that he will "attempt to indicate where and how this 'presence' was felt, without implying at any point that it was a decisive presence" (Lapidge, op. cit., p. 84). Given this opinion, as well as the scarcity of literature on the subject, the present study might become a further contribution to the question of the "presence" of Stoicism in the medieval period, and especially in the 13th century.

However, a scholar who attempts to trace exclusively Stoic ideas and sources in the Middle Ages, especially regarding the medieval theories of beauty, immediately faces the problem of how to separate the Stoic theories from those of other schools, mainly Platonism and Neoplatonism. First of all, the origins of some doctrines of the ancient Stoae were Platonic (in the case of theories of beauty there are distinct parallels with the *Hippias Major*, *Timaeus* and *Symposion*). Secondly, a few ideas that are reminiscent of Stoicism come to the Middle Ages, sometimes transformed, through the prism of Neoplatonism (in particular that of the Church Fathers) which makes it almost impossible to trace their exact origins. The only possible solution appears to be, first, to exclude all interest in the influences on the Stoics (as Plato) and draw a line carefully between the primary (e.g., Platonic) origins of ideas, on the one hand, and their immediate (Stoic) sources on the other. The second task will be to avoid all ideas coming indirectly through the context of other schools (e.g., Neoplatonism). Thus an attribution may only be made when a phrase or an idea can be traced back directly to a professed Stoic, or comes from a source traditionally recognized as Stoic within a reliable ancient tradition (e.g., from Cicero’s statements etc.). Arguments based on the resemblance with traditional Stoic “themes” may be used sparingly, and mostly to confirm already established textual dependence.

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