Chrysippus

Chrysippus of Soli (c. 279 - 206 BCE) was the third head of the Stoa and the thinker who gave Stoicism the shape it kept. The ancient verdict was blunt: had there been no Chrysippus, there would have been no Stoa. He is said to have written more than seven hundred books, and none of them survives whole. What we know of him comes through quotation, often by opponents, which is a measure of how much there was to oppose.

Logic

Chrysippus built the first system of propositional logic. Where Aristotle had analysed arguments by the terms inside sentences, Chrysippus took whole propositions as units and studied the connectives between them: if, and, or, not. He isolated five indemonstrable argument forms, among them what is now called modus ponens, and showed how other valid arguments reduce to them. He treated the conditional with care, asking under what conditions "if p then q" is true, and his answer, that the denial of q must conflict with p, anticipates later accounts of entailment.

Physics and fate

For Chrysippus the cosmos is a single living body, pervaded by a rational breath he called pneuma, and everything that happens in it happens by fate, the unbroken chain of causes. The obvious objection is that fate abolishes responsibility. His reply distinguishes kinds of cause. A cylinder pushed on a slope rolls because it was pushed, but it rolls the way it does because it is a cylinder. The push is the external, proximate cause; the shape is the principal cause in the thing itself. Our assent to an impression is likewise ours, from our own character, even though the impression came from outside. Fate works through us, not around us.

Ethics

The good is virtue alone, and virtue is knowledge of what is and is not up to us. Everything else, health, wealth, reputation, is indifferent, though some indifferents are preferred and may reasonably be pursued so long as they are not mistaken for the good. The passions are false judgements, not brute feelings: fear is the judgement that a coming evil is unbearable, and it is cured by correcting the judgement. The wise person is free because nothing that can be taken away was ever counted as theirs.

Style

He was known for arguing both sides of a question so thoroughly that his pupil Carneades, founder of the sceptical Academy, said he needed no other source for objections to Stoicism. Chrysippus is a philosopher one meets almost entirely through the people who tried to refute him, and who found they had to learn his logic first.