

The Stoics on Mental Representation

Victor Caston
University of Michigan

§1. Representation as the mark of the mental

1. Orig. *Princ.* 3.1.2, 196.12–197.8 Koetschau (> LS 53A4)

ἐξ ἑαυτῶν μὲν τὰ ἄψυχα, ἀφ' ἑαυτῶν δὲ τὰ ἔμψυχα. καὶ ἀφ' ἑαυτῶν κινεῖται τὰ ἔμψυχα φαντασίας ἐγγυνομένης ὁρμῆν προκαλουμένης. καὶ πάλιν ἔν τισι τῶν ζώων φαντασία γίνεται ὁρμῆν προκαλούμεναι φύσεως φανταστικῆς τεταγμένως κινούσης τὴν ὁρμῆν, ὡς ἐν τῷ ἀράχῃ φαντασία τοῦ ὑφαίνειν γίνεται καὶ ὁρμῆ ἀκολουθεῖ ἐπὶ τὸ ὑφαίνειν, τῆς φανταστικῆς αὐτοῦ φύσεως τεταγμένως ἐπὶ τοῦτο αὐτὸν προκαλουμένης καὶ οὐδενὸς ἄλλου μετὰ τὴν φανταστικὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν πεπιστευμένου τοῦ ζώου, καὶ ἐν τῇ μελίσῃ ἐπὶ τὸ κηροπλαστεῖν.

Things without a soul move on their own while those with a soul move by their own [agency], viz. they move by their own agency because a representation is produced that elicits effort, and representations elicit effort in animals because their representational nature triggers effort in an orderly way. Thus, in the spider a representation of spinning arises and an effort to spin follows, because its representational nature draws it towards this in an orderly way, without the animal relying on anything other than its representational nature. Similarly with the bee building its hive.

§2. Making an impression: A causal theory of representation

2. Aet. 4.12.1–3, *Dox. Gr.* 401.14–402.9 (= LS 39B2–4)

φαντασία μὲν οὖν ἐστὶ πάθος ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ γιγνόμενον, ἐνδεικνύμενον αὐτό τε καὶ τὸ πεποιηκός· οἶον ἐπειδὴν δι' ὄψεως θεωρῶμεν τὸ λευκόν, ἐστὶ πάθος τὸ ἐγγεγεννημένον διὰ τῆς ὁράσεως ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ. καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο τὸ πάθος εἰπεῖν ἔχομεν, ὅτι ὑπόκειται λευκὸν κινεῖν ἡμᾶς· ὁμοίως καὶ διὰ τῆς ἀφῆς καὶ τῆς ὀσφρήσεως.

(1) REPRESENTATION [*phantasia*]: a modification occurring in the soul that reveals both itself and its producer. For example, whenever we observe something white by sight, the effect in the soul due to seeing is a modification, and in virtue of this modification we are able to assert that there is something white at its basis acting on us, and likewise for touch and smelling.

Aet. 4.12.1–2 (*cont'd*)

εἴρηται δὲ ἡ φαντασία ἀπὸ τοῦ φωτός· καθάπερ γὰρ τὸ φῶς αὐτὸ δείκνυσι καὶ τὰ ἄλλα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ περιεχόμενα, καὶ ἡ φαντασία δείκνυσι ἑαυτὴν καὶ τὸ πεποιηκός αὐτήν.

φανταστὸν δὲ τὸ ποιοῦν τὴν φαντασίαν· οἶον τὸ λευκὸν καὶ τὸ ψυχρὸν καὶ πᾶν ὅ τι ἂν δύνηται κινεῖν τὴν ψυχὴν, τοῦτ' ἐστὶ φανταστὸν.

The word '*phantasia*' [representation] is derived from '*phōs*' [light]. For just as light displays both itself and the things enveloped in it, so a representation displays both itself and what produced it.

(2) REPRESENTED [*phantaston*]: what produces the representation, e.g. something white, something cold, or in fact anything able to act on the soul—that is what is represented.

3. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 7.259–60

τῆς φύσεως οἶον ἐφέγγος ἡμῶν πρὸς ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς ἀληθείας τὴν αἰσθητικὴν δύναμιν ἀναδοῦσης καὶ τὴν δι' αὐτῆς γινομένην φαντασίαν. ἄτοπον οὖν ἐστὶ τοσαύτην δύναμιν ἀθετεῖν καὶ τὸ ὡς περὶ φῶς αὐτῶν ἀφαιρεῖσθαι.

... representation is the criterion, since nature provides us with the perceptual power and the representation that comes about through it as illumination, as it were, for recognizing the truth. It is absurd for them, then, to reject such a great a power and eliminate what serves as their own light.

4. Aet. 4.12.4–5, *Dox. Gr.* 402.10–20 (= LS 39B5–6)

φανταστικὸν δὲ ἐστὶ διάκενος ἔλκυσμός, πάθος ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ἀπ' οὐδενὸς φανταστοῦ γινόμενον καθάπερ ἐπὶ τοῦ σκιαμαχοῦντος καὶ κενοῖς ἐπιφέροντος τὰς χεῖρας· τῇ γὰρ φαντασίᾳ ὑπόκειται τι φανταστὸν, τῷ δὲ φανταστικῷ οὐδέν. φάντασμα δὲ ἐστὶν ἐφ' ὃ ἐλκόμεθα κατὰ τὸν φανταστικὸν διάκενον ἔλκυσμόν· ταῦτα δὲ γίνεται ἐπὶ τῶν μελαγχολῶντων καὶ μεμηνότων.

(3) REPRESENTATIONAL STATE [*phantastikon*]: an empty drawing [of attention], a modification in the soul that does not arise from anything represented, as happens when someone struggles against phantoms and grasps at emptiness. For at the basis of a representation there is something represented, but there is none at the basis of a representational state. (4) MERELY REPRESENTED [*phantasma*]: that towards which we are drawn by an empty representational drawing [of attention]. This is what happens with people who are disturbed or have gone insane.

§3. Varieties of representation

A secure representation is a representation that is

- i. from something that is [*buparchon*]
- ii. stamped and sealed in accordance with the very thing that is [*buparchon*]
- iii. such that it could not come from something that is not [*mē buparchon*]

Alternative readings:

1. THE EXISTENTIAL READING: ‘... what exists’

2. THE VERIDICAL READING: ‘... what is the case’ (or ‘obtains’)

3. THE PRESENT READING: ‘... what is present’

5. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 7.426, with variants at 8.86, 11.183; *PH* 3.242)

ἔτα πάλιν, ἐπεὶ πᾶν τὸ ὀρικῶς διδασκόμενον ἐκ γινωσκομένων διδάσκειται, προσανακρινόντων ἡμῶν τί ποτ’ ἐστὶ καὶ τὸ ὑπάρχον, ἀναστρέψαντες φασιν ὅτι ὑπάρχον ἐστὶν ὁ κινεῖ καταληπτικὴν φαντασίαν. ὥστε ἵνα μὲν μάθωμεν τὴν καταληπτικὴν φαντασίαν, προεληφέναι ὀφείλομεν τὸ ὑπάρχον, ἵνα δὲ τοῦτο, ἐπὶ τὴν καταληπτικὴν βαδίζειν φαντασίαν· καὶ οὕτω μηδέτερον γίνεσθαι σαφές, περιμένον τὴν ἐκ τοῦ ἐτέρου πίστιν.

But then, since everything taught through definition is taught on the basis of things known, when we further ask just what is present, they turn around and say that what is present is what triggers a secure representation. So in order to comprehend the secure representation, we need to have already grasped what is present; but to do that, we have return to the secure representation. So neither is made clear, as each rests on support from the other.

A secure representation is a representation that is

i’. from something that is *present*

ii’. stamped and sealed in accordance with the very thing that is *present*

iii’. such that it could not come from something that is not *present*

§4. Content

6. Diogenes Laertius 7.49 (= LS 39A1–2)

ἀρέσκει τοῖς Στωικοῖς τὸν περὶ φαντασίας καὶ αἰσθήσεως προτάττειν λόγον, καθότι τὸ κριτήριον, εἴ ἢ ἀλήθεια τῶν πραγμάτων γινώσκειται, κατὰ γένους φαντασία ἐστὶ, καὶ καθότι ὁ περὶ συγκαταθέσεως καὶ ὁ περὶ καταλήψεως καὶ νοήσεως λόγος, προάγων τῶν ἄλλων, οὐκ ἄνευ φαντασίας συνίσταται. προηγείται γὰρ ἡ φαντασία, εἴθ’ ἢ διάνοια ἐκλαλητικὴ ὑπάρχουσα, ὃ πάσχει ὑπὸ τῆς φαντασίας, τοῦτο ἐκφέρει λόγῳ.

The Stoics hold that the account of representation and perception should come first, insofar the criterion by which the truth of matters is recognized is a representation generically, and insofar as the account of assent, having a secure grasp, and thought, which precedes the other accounts, is not constituted without representation. For representation arises first and then thought, which is capable of speech, expresses in language what it undergoes due to representation.

7. Diogenes Laertius 7.63 (= LS 33F2)

φασὶ δὲ λεκτὸν εἶναι τὸ κατὰ φαντασίαν λογικὴν ὑφιστάμενον.

They state that a *lekton* is what subsists in accordance with a rational representation.

8. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.70 (= LS 33c)

λεκτὸν δὲ ὑπάρχειν φασὶ τὸ κατὰ λογικὴν φαντασίαν ὑφιστάμενον, λογικὴν δὲ εἶναι φαντασίαν καθ’ ἣν τὸ φαντασθὲν ἔστι λόγῳ παραστήσαι.

They state that a *lekton* is what subsists in accordance with a rational representation, while a rational representation is that in accordance with which what is represented can be set out in language.

9. Diogenes Laertius 7. (= LS 39A6)

ἔτι τῶν φαντασιῶν αἱ μὲν εἰσι λογικαί, αἱ δὲ ἄλογοι· λογικαὶ μὲν αἱ τῶν λογικῶν ζώων, ἄλογοι δὲ αἱ τῶν ἀλόγων. αἱ μὲν οὖν λογικαὶ νοήσεις εἰσὶν, αἱ δ’ ἄλογοι οὐ τετυχηκασιν ὀνόματος.

Some representations are rational, others nonrational: the ones that belong to rational animals are rational, the ones that belong to nonrational animals nonrational. The rational ones are thoughts, while the nonrational ones are not given a name.

STRICT DICHOTOMY READING: All and only rational representations have a *lekton* corresponding to them, specifically, an *axiōma* or proposition.

CONCEPTUAL READING: No rational representation has content prior to conceptualization.

Problems: (a) animal behavior; (b) children’s acquisition of concepts.

Every causal interaction involves a *lekton*: one body causes a predicate to become true of another body (LS 55B–D)

‘... forms a representation’

‘... forms a representation that —’

§5. Concepts

Perceptual vs nonperceptual representations:

Thick content vs thin content

Total content vs partial content

Concepts (*ennoiai*) as thin total contents

Basic notions (*prolēpseis*) as naturally acquired concepts