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# What do our impressions say? The Stoic theory of perceptual content and belief formation

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**Abstract:** Here I propose an interpretation of the ancient Stoic psychological theory on which (i) the concepts that an adult human possesses affect the content of the perceptual impressions (φαντασῖαι αἰσθητικαί) she forms, and (ii) the content of such impressions is exhausted by an ‘assertible’ (ἀξιῶμα) of suitable complexity. What leads the Stoics to accept (i) and (ii), I argue, is their theory of assent and belief formation, which requires that the perceptual impression communicate information suitable to serve as the content of belief. In arguing for (i), I reject a rival interpretation on which conceptualization occurs subsequently to the formation of a perceptual impression. In arguing for (ii), I deny that perceptual impressions have two kinds of content: one formulated in an assertible, the other sensory, featuring independently of this assertible. I explore the implications of (i) and (ii) for the Stoic theory of emotions, expertise, and rationality, and argue that they shed new light on the workings of impression, assent, and belief.

**Keywords:** Stoicism, phantasia, expertise, lekton, assent

## Introduction

Stuck in traffic, Amy and John tune into a radio station broadcasting a Mozart concerto. Amy happens to be an accomplished music theorist, taking a special interest in the works of the classical period, while John has never listened to any such music. Given their different backgrounds, it is obvious that, in response to hearing the music, Amy and John will form different *beliefs* about what is playing in the car: Amy will come to believe, for example, that this is the second movement of Mozart’s clarinet concerto, that it is played in the key of D major, and so on, while John, that this music moves slowly, or perhaps that it sounds sad.

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Consider now the *perceptual experiences* which Amy and John undergo upon hearing the music. Are these two perceptual experiences the same in phenomenology (what it is like to hear the music) and in content (what information the experience itself conveys)?

One could answer ‘yes’ to this question. On this view, there is no difference in Amy and John’s perceptual experiences, only a difference in the beliefs which each comes to hold on the basis of undergoing this experience. What Amy and John *hear* is the same, but, in a distinct, non-perceptual activity, their minds ‘pick up’ on different aspects of this shared experience and thereby form different beliefs. One could support this view with the claim that one’s perceptual states are *insulated* from one’s concepts and bodies of expertise. Consequently, perception communicates only ‘raw feels’ standing in need of further interpretation. Given that the perceptual inputs are the same in this case – Amy and John are listening to the same piece, in identical auditory conditions – there is no reason to think that the raw feels in question will differ.

Alternatively, one might think that Amy’s perceptual experience is phenomenologically and informationally richer than John’s, in virtue of Amy’s advanced training in music. This is to endorse the claim that perceptual experiences are *cognitively penetrated*: the music sounds different to Amy than it does to John because the phenomenology and content of one’s perceptual experience depend on the concepts and bodies of expertise one has built up over time. Since Amy has available a wider array of classical musical concepts, thanks to her mastery of this subject matter, her perceptual experience of the music will differ from John’s. On this view, the concepts one possesses are called upon in generating every perceptual experience one undergoes: the mind’s activity of recognition and interpretation is thus a constituent of one’s perceptual experience, rather than a subsequently-performed, distinct activity.

Theorists attracted to cognitive penetration may also hold a further claim about the content of perceptual experience, namely, that it displays structure that is isomorphic with that of a sentence. If this claim is correct, then our perceptual experiences convey information that can be captured (in principle at least) by a linguistic entity, such as a sentence of suitable complexity. So then, to offer an adequate description of what Amy’s perceptual experience communicates to her, as she is sitting in the car listening to the concerto, one need only identify a sentence like ‘this is the second movement of Mozart’s clarinet concerto, which is played in D major, etc.’

This claim is controversial, since it denies that the information we receive from perception is more fine-grained than what is expressed by any single statement. However, in conjunction with the cognitive penetration thesis, it offers a neat explanation of how perceptual experience serves as the *source* of belief.

Consider Amy's belief that this is the second movement of Mozart's clarinet concerto, which is played in D major. The content of this belief makes use of the concepts Amy possesses – for example, her 'major key' and 'Mozart' concepts – and also comes in sentential form. Theorists who reject both cognitive penetration and sentential structure in the content of perceptual experience must then tell a further story as to how beliefs, whose content has both of these features, come to be held on the basis of perceptual experience, whose content does not. But if the content of one's perceptual experience, like that of belief, is both cognitively penetrated and sententially structured, then belief can follow straightaway upon endorsing the perceptual experience as true.

In this paper, I argue that the ancient Stoics defend a theory of perception along just these lines. According to my reconstruction, the Stoics maintain that the perceptual experiences of adult humans are both cognitively penetrated and sententially structured: on this interpretation, the Stoics claim both that (i) the concepts and expertise that a perceiver possesses affect the content of her perceptual experience, and that (ii) the content of these experiences displays a structure exemplified by that of a sentence. Motivating this view, I argue, is the Stoic theory of belief formation. Here the Stoics maintain that a perceiver forms a belief (ὑπόληψις) by giving mental approval, or 'assent' (συγκατάθεσις), to the content of her perceptual experience.<sup>1</sup> As we will see, this theory of belief formation imposes constraints on the kind of content that features in our perceptual experience, and by attending to it we will gain insight into what the Stoics think is revealed in perceptual experience.

I begin with a basic sketch of the Stoic account of the perceptual impression (φαντασία αἰσθητική), on which this kind of impression is a state of the subject's mind sensorily representing objects in her environment. Given that it plays this

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<sup>1</sup> It is unclear whether the Stoics acknowledge a generic psychological state – belief (ὑπόληψις) – which embraces as species opinion (δόξα), knowledge (κατάληψις), and even the perfected cognitive state of the Sage, understanding (ἐπιστήμη): cf. Arius in Stobaeus, Ecl. ii 111. Moss and Schwab forthcoming, n. 79, present some promising evidence in favor of this claim, while Vogt 2012a, 165–166, is skeptical that there is any generic state that covers both opinion and understanding. For my purposes here, I do not need to enter this debate. I will use belief (ὑπόληψις) only as a convenient shorthand to refer to the cognitive states produced by a rational perceiver's acts of assent – opinion and knowledge, in the case of the vicious, and understanding in the case of the Sage. Note also that, throughout the paper, I will translate κατάληψις as 'knowledge', following Perin 2005, n. 1, rather than 'cognition' or 'apprehension'. For general discussion of the similarities between κατάληψις and contemporary views of knowledge, see Nawar 2014, n. 1, Annas 1990, 187, and Long and Sedley 1987, i.157.

role in Stoic theory, an interpretation of the perceptual φαντασία provides a reasonable counterpart of what we would today call a theory of perceptual experience.<sup>2</sup>

With the basic sketch in place, I next show that, on the Stoic view, the perceptual impressions formed by adult humans – labeled ‘rational impressions’ (φαντασῖαι λογικαί) within Stoic theory, to indicate that they are created in a soul that has reason – are cognitively penetrated. While such a claim is not uncommon in recent studies of Stoic epistemology, no one has yet defended it against an influential alternative view, first proposed by Richard Sorabji, on which the impression communicates only raw feels.<sup>3</sup> One aim of the present paper is to fill this gap and to provide a new line of argument in favor of the cognitive penetration interpretation. To this end, I show that, according to the Stoic theory of adult human cognition, the mind contributes to the generation of every impression, insofar as it categorizes the sense-object on the basis of the concepts the perceiver possesses. So if two perceivers encounter the same sense-object, but differ in the concepts they have acquired, for instance because only one has attained the relevant kind of expertise, the impression each forms will differ. It is for this reason, I argue, that the Stoics distinguish expert and non-expert impressions (DL vii 51), crediting the former with greater informational detail than the latter. According to my proposal, the Stoic commitment to cognitive penetration emerges from their claim that expertise expands the range of objects disclosed in perceptual experience.

I next turn to examine more closely the structure which characterizes the content of our impressions. As several texts make clear, only rational impressions are related to entities which the Stoics call ‘sayables’ (λεκτά), and more specifically, to the sub-class of sayables which they term ‘assertibles’ (ἀξιώματα). These texts are most plausibly read as making a claim about content: what each of our impressions represents can be adequately specified by an ‘assertible’ (ἀξιωμα) of

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<sup>2</sup> In some texts, the Stoics distinguish impressions which are perceptual (φαντασῖαι αἰσθητικῆ) from those which are non-perceptual (οὐκ αἰσθητικῆ) (DL vii 51; Aëtius, SVF ii 54). What it means for an impression to be non-perceptual is controversial: see Sedley 2002, 150–151, Brennan 1996, 324, Brennan 2005, 52–53, Brittain 2014, 333, and Nawar 2014, 7–9. Minimally, a non-perceptual impression is one which is *not* created by directly encountering an external sense-object, a process I discuss below. Given my aim of reconstructing the Stoic theory of perceptual experience, this paper will focus exclusively on *perceptual* impressions, and henceforth my usage of ‘impression’ should be read as an abbreviation of ‘perceptual impression’.

<sup>3</sup> Those supporting cognitive penetration include Frede 1983, 153–155; Frede 1994a, 57; Brittain 2002, 256–259; Brittain 2006, n. 25; Long and Sedley 1987, i.240; Vogt 2012b, 659; and De Harven, forthcoming, 224–226. For the dissenting view, see Sorabji 1990, 309, Lesses 1998, 7, and Ioppolo 1990, 443–444.

suitable complexity. And given how the Stoics understand the assertible – it is distinguished from other sayables such as questions, oaths, or predicates, and canonically defined as the entity ‘by saying which we make a statement, which is either true or false’ (DL vii 66) – one can usefully describe its form as sentential.<sup>4</sup>

This paper breaks new ground by offering reasons to think that the content of a rational impression is *exhausted* by its corresponding assertible. On my interpretation, what our impressions say is *exclusively sentential*: their content is formulated in an assertible alone. This is not to deny, of course, that there is something it is like to undergo an impression – in other words, that our impressions have a phenomenological feel. Rather, my position denies that our impressions have *two distinct kinds of content*: one sentential and given by assertible, the other sensory or imagistic, featuring independently of this assertible. According to the view defended here, the Stoic rational impression has no content other than what is contained in its corresponding ἀξιωμα: this assertible gives a complete specification of how the impression represents the world as being.

Because our sources do not directly pronounce on whether the content of our impressions is exclusively sentential, as I propose, or sensory as well as sentential, arguments for one or the other of these two interpretations turn on the plausibility of the overall philosophical position which they attribute to the Stoics. Against the scholarly consensus, I will argue that we do not need to posit two kinds of content to understand (a) the Stoic theory of the emotions (πάθη), (b) the Stoic distinction between expert and amateur impressions, and (c) the Stoic account of how humans come to possess reason (λόγος).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> By using the term ‘sentential’, I do not mean to claim that the content of a rational impression could only be stated in a sentence of one natural language. Rather, I prefer this term to the more obvious choice of ‘propositional’ out of a desire to avoid wading into contemporary debates over the nature of propositions, as well as the connotations they may bring. For example, according to some contemporary views (Stalnaker 1984 being the most prominent), propositions are sets of possible worlds and so entities without parts. The Stoics, by contrast, are quite clear that ἀξιιώματα are composed from constituents. See Shields 1994, 209. Moreover, there are important differences between Stoic ἀξιιώματα and contemporary propositions, on any going view of them: for one thing, propositions can be asked or hoped for, while ἀξιιώματα cannot. See Bobzien 1999, 93 n. 48.

<sup>5</sup> Frede 1986, 104–107, appeals to non-sentential content to explain the distinctive feature of the impressions which prefigure emotions. Furthermore, Brennan 1998, 45, argues for independent non-sentential content on the grounds that positing such content makes the best sense of the distinction between expert and amateur impressions (e. g., at Cicero, *Acad.* ii 57). Here Brennan is followed by De Harven, forthcoming, 227–228; Reinhardt 2011, 300; and Brittain 2014, 334–335, who offers a clear statement of the view I mean to challenge: ‘the Stoics take that content [sc. of a rational impression] to come in two forms, which I will call “perceptual” or “representational” and “propositional” content.’

More fundamentally, however, I will show that alternative interpretations go wrong in their attempt to determine the content of our impressions in isolation from the Stoic theory of belief formation. According to this theory, the belief that  $p$  arises from the rational subject giving assent to the impression that  $p$ . In this model the Stoics presuppose that impressions and beliefs come with content of the same type. Thus what a subject believes in a given scenario derives entirely from, and is identical in form to, what her impression says about the world: there is no other source for belief than the impression to which she gives assent. Once we recognize this feature of Stoic theory, it is easy to see why the Stoics would be attracted to the claim that, just like what we believe, what an impression says is adequately captured in a sentence of suitable complexity.

## The Basic Sketch: Impressions as Sensory Representational States

We should begin with a basic sketch of the impression (φαντασία) and its role within Stoic theory. Consider the definition offered by Chrysippus:

φαντασία μὲν οὖν ἐστὶ πάθος ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ γινόμενον, ἐνδεικνύμενον αὐτό τε καὶ τὸ πεποιητός· οἷον ἐπειδὴν δι' ὄψεως θεωρῶμέν τι λευκόν, ἔστι πάθος τὸ ἐγγεγενημένον διὰ τῆς ὀράσεως ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ· καὶ τοῦτο τὸ πάθος εἰπεῖν ἔχομεν, ὅτι ὑπόκειται λευκὸν κινοῦν ἡμᾶς, ὁμοίως καὶ διὰ τῆς ἀφῆς καὶ τῆς ὀσφρήσεως.

An impression, then, is an affection occurring in the soul which shows itself and also what made it. For instance, when through seeing we observe something white, the affection is what is created in the soul through sight; and it is this affection which allows us to say that there is a white object which changes us. Likewise through touch and smell. (Aëtius, SVF ii 54, tr. Long and Sedley, modified)

This text operates with a psychological model on which external objects (e. g., ‘something white’) interact with the soul and produce changes in it. Since, on the Stoic view, both external objects and the soul are corporeal entities, there is nothing metaphysically peculiar about this kind of causal interaction.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Within the Stoic system, an entity possesses the capacity to act and be acted upon if and only if it is corporeal, and, in a further development of Plato’s *Sophist* (246a–247e), they also hold that to possess this capacity is to have being (SE M viii 263; cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 117.2). See Marmodoro 2017, 156–158, 167–171, and Vogt 2009, 137–145 for discussion of this fundamental Stoic commitment and its Platonic antecedents. Thus the Stoics infer that the soul is corporeal and has being from (e. g.) the observation that it acts upon the subject’s body, and is acted on by it in turn (Cleanthes in SVF i 518; Chrysippus in SVF ii 790). At the same time, the Stoics will

Other sources inform us of further details of this model. According to the Stoics, the subject's soul is spread throughout her body: some soul-parts animate the sense-organs, while the 'ruling' or 'commanding' part of the soul (ἡγεμονικόν) – also called the 'mind' (διανοία) – is located in the chest (Chrysippus, in Galen, PHP iii 1.10–15). These non-ruling parts are connected to the mind like the 'tentacles of an octopus' (Aëtius, SVF ii 836), or 'a spider to its web' (Calcidius, SVF ii 879), allowing for the changes taken on by the sense-organs to be conveyed to the ruling part.

The Stoics are quite clear, though, that for these non-ruling soul-parts and sense-organs to be changed, e. g. by something white, is not yet to form an impression. This is because an impression is generated only when the changes in the non-ruling parts reach the subject's mind and make an 'imprint' (τύπωσις) there (DL vii 50). So according to the Stoics, the impression is not a change 'in any chance part of the soul ... but in the mind, that is, in the ruling part, alone' (SE M vii 232–233).<sup>7</sup>

We can begin to appreciate the significance of this Stoic commitment by considering the functional role of φαντασία. Despite disagreeing on how exactly to characterize the impression at the anatomical level – against Cleanthes, Chrysippus argues that it is a mere 'alteration' (ἐτεροίωσις) of the mind, a physiological change that need not literally mirror the shape of the object encountered (SE M vii 228–231, 372–373) – the early Stoics are agreed on its representational function.<sup>8</sup> They hold that the impression is a psychological state revealing in a sensory mode 'what caused it', namely the relevant external object (Aëtius, iv 12.1). Moreover, each φαντασία is said to reveal itself, insofar as

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*deny* that the soul is composed only of matter: for the Stoics, matter is never found on its own but rather is always paired with the active principle, god (DL vii 134). The corporeal soul is one such compound of god and matter.

<sup>7</sup> See also Epictetus, *Diss.* ii 23.7–11, which claims it is not the 'capacity of seeing or hearing' (ὄρατική ... ἀκουστική δύναμις) but rather a capacity of the ruling part (προαιρετική δύναμις) that reveals external objects of perception. These perceptual capacities are said to be 'slaves' (δοῦλοι) and 'servants' (διάκονοι) to the ruling part.

<sup>8</sup> On Cleanthes's view, the pattern of indentation in the ruling part that is the impression must have the same shape as the object perceived (SE M vii 229). Here Cleanthes seems to assume that we perceive an object that is F by means of an entity that is also F. Chrysippus's criticism of Cleanthes's anatomical account can be understood as rejecting this assumption: Chrysippus wants to deny that the representational state must be strictly isomorphic with the object represented. The case of a map – which represents mountains and water without being craggy or wet – surely vindicates Chrysippus on this point.

it features in the subject's awareness (Aëtius, iv 12.5).<sup>9</sup> We can therefore understand the impression both as a physiological change – an imprint or alteration in the corporeal mind – as well as a vehicle for depicting external objects in a qualitative, sensory mode. It is the representational state through consulting which a subject becomes aware of (e. g.) something white in her surroundings.

Now, since the physical site of the impression is the subject's mind, not her sense-organs, the Stoic theory anticipates a role for the mind to play in bringing about each and every one of these impressions. Exactly what this role comes to, and how it interacts with that of the sense-organs, will be explored in more detail below. But for present purposes we can observe that the movement in the mind that is the *φαντασία* (Plutarch, *Ad. Col.* 1122b), and the objects and features it represents, will depend not only on the character of the perceptual stimulus but also partly on the perceiver's mind.

## Rational Impressions and Assertibles

To set the stage for our later discussion, we must now take up the crucial Stoic distinction between rational and non-rational impressions (*λογικαί* vs. *ἄλογοι φαντασῖαι*: DL vii 51). The Stoics hold that an impression is rational if it is formed in the mind of a rational perceiver – i. e., an adult human – but non-rational if it is generated by a non-rational perceiver, for instance, by a young child or non-human animal.<sup>10</sup> So the perceptual experiences adult humans undergo are 'rational' in a way that those of a young child or dog are not.

We can begin to flesh out this claim by noting that only rational impressions enjoy a relationship with entities the Stoics call 'sayables' (*λεκτά*). Recall that an impression is something corporeal, namely, the mind in a certain state. The same will be true of rational impressions, as a subtype of impressions. A sayable, by contrast, is incorporeal: it is an abstract object, conveying meaning (*ἐκφορά*), but causally inert, unable to act or be acted upon (DL vii 63; Seneca, *Ep.* 117.13). Sayables exist in a mode which the Stoics call 'subsistence' (*ὑφίστασθαι*) rather than 'being' (*εἶναι*), consistent with their claim that only bodies have being. Sayables are thus admitted into Stoic ontology – they are

<sup>9</sup> See Brittain 2002, 259–261, for discussion of the impression's self-revealing feature in the context of reconstructing the Stoic theory of the perceptual capacities of non-rational animals. See also Long 1996, 271, Long and Sedley 1987, i.239, and De Harven, forthcoming, 218–221.

<sup>10</sup> On this point I join the broad consensus of contemporary commentators: Gosling 1987, 180–182; Shields 1993, 345; Brennan 2003, 260; Brittain 2002, 257; Frede 1994a, 56; De Harven, forthcoming, 221–222.



‘somethings’ (τινα) – but at a distinct level from bodies. Despite their status as abstract, incorporeal objects, sayables are categorized in Stoic theory according to different pieces of language – some sayables correspond to individual names or terms, others to full sentences (DL vii 63, 66–68) – and so presumably display the same sort of structure as linguistic entities.

One plausible way to explain these various claims is that a sayable gives the *content* of a rational impression: it is the compositionally-structured statement of *what the impression represents*.

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

They say that a sayable is what subsists on the basis of a rational impression, and that a rational impression is one in which what appears can be set out in a statement. (SE M viii 70, tr. Long & Sedley, modified)

In a rational impression, the λεκτόν serves as a statement (λόγος) of what appears. Thus the rational impression does not merely make the subject aware of something white, for example, but also conveys *that* there is something white.<sup>11</sup>

In characterizing the content of a rational impression with a statement following a ‘that’ clause, we can respect the sources which indicate that, paradigmatically, it is not any λεκτόν which serves as the content of a rational impression, but rather the specific type labeled the ‘assertible’ (ἀξιῶμα) (Arius in Stobaeus, Ecl. ii 88). This kind of λεκτόν is often rendered as ‘proposition’, presumably to reflect the Stoics’ own examples of ἀξιῶματα, such as ‘It is day’ or ‘Dion walks’ (DL vii 65). But since propositions, in our contemporary usage, may be the objects of non-assertoric attitudes like hope or desire, the translation is somewhat misleading. According to their canonical definition, ἀξιῶματα are the entities ‘by saying which we make a statement, which is either true or false’ (DL vii 66), or ‘that which, considered in itself, asserts or declares something’ (DL vii 65). Indeed, to the extent that they entail an attitude of assertion, ἀξιῶματα differ from other sayables such as questions or oaths (DL vii 66).<sup>12</sup> Below I will

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Cicero, *Acad.* ii 21 and SE M vii 344–345, discussed below. In adopting this view, I do not mean to endorse the claim that non-rational impressions lack content because they lack content given by a λεκτόν. Even though what a non-rational impression represents is not spelled out in a compositionally-structured description, as the content of rational impressions is, it is still possible for such impressions to associate one thing with another. See Brittain 2002, 256–274 for a plausible interpretation along these lines.

<sup>12</sup> One might conclude from these considerations that ‘assertion’ is the best translation of ἀξιῶμα. However, I prefer ‘assertible’ to make clear that the ἀξιῶμα subsists even if no one thinks it or says it: like λεκτά more generally, ἀξιῶματα are mind-independent entities. As with

argue that the assertible corresponding to a given rational impression *exhausts* its content: there is no further content to a rational impression, above and beyond its statement in the form of an assertible.<sup>13</sup> For now, however, we only need a weaker claim, that, in linking rational impressions with λεκτά, and with assertibles more specifically, the Stoics mean to characterize the assertible as the *content* of such impressions.

From the perspective of constructing a theory of perceptual experience, why might the Stoics hold that the impressions of rational animals, but not those of non-rational animals, possess content given (at least partly) in the form of an assertible? The answer I offer, which will emerge fully by the end of the paper, is that, by positing sentential content in her impressions, the Stoics can explain how a rational subject's beliefs *originate* in these impressions. However, before beginning a defense of this claim, I will now turn to another point of similarity between beliefs and our impressions: namely, the use of concepts in formulating their content. This next section therefore serves to bolster my central contention that Stoics posit content *of the same type* in both our beliefs and our impressions.

## Rational Impressions and Conceptual Penetration

As we have already seen, the Stoics think that to undergo an impression involves more than just an alteration of the sense-organs: there must also be some contribution from the mind (SE M vii 232–233). But what precisely does this intellectual contribution come to, when an adult human forms a perceptual impression? This section argues that, in generating such an impression, the rational mind categorizes the sense-object on the basis of the concepts the perceiver possesses.<sup>14</sup> One consequence of this claim will be that the content of an impression – what it represents – depends not only on the nature of the sense-object encountered, but also on the condition of the perceiver's mind, including whether it has attained expertise relevant to the object.

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the other aspects of my reconstruction of the Stoic account of ἀξιώματα, on this point I follow Bobzien: see her 1999, 93 n. 48, and 2003, 86, n. 2.

<sup>13</sup> This claim is also made briefly in Inwood 1985, 56–57, but without the defense or extended argument I provide below.

<sup>14</sup> My aim in this section is to provide a new argument in favor of the interpretation offered in Frede 1983, 153–155; Frede 1994a, 57; Brittain 2002, 256–259; Brittain 2006, n. 25; Long and Sedley 1987, i.240; Vogt 2012b, 659; and De Harven, forthcoming, 226–228.

Let's recall the Stoics' favorite analogy of the signet ring and the wax (DL vii 45–46).<sup>15</sup> The seal made by imprinting a ring upon a surface will differ depending on the physical character of the surface. Thus, no seal will be formed if one impresses a ring upon wax which has completely hardened, or upon something even stiffer like wood or metal. Similarly, if one impresses the same ring on two stretches of wax, differing in their degree of hardness, the two seals which each stretch takes on will differ: the softer stretch is liable to receive more detail from the signet than the harder stretch. Analogously, the Stoics hold that the same sense-object can create impressions differing in their informational detail, depending on the (corporeal) character of the mind with which that object interacts.<sup>16</sup>

Attending to this feature of the analogy allows us to make good sense of the Stoic doctrine of the expert impression (φαντασία τεχνική):

καὶ αἱ μὲν εἰσι τεχνικαὶ [sc. τῶν φαντασιῶν], αἱ δὲ ἀτεχνοί· ἄλλως γοῦν θεωρεῖται ὑπὸ τεχνίτου εἰκῶν καὶ ἄλλως ὑπὸ ἀτέχνου.

Some impressions are expert, others inexpert. A picture, then, will be observed in one way by the expert and in another way by the non-expert. (DL vii 51, tr. Long and Sedley, modified)

To understand this distinction, we are invited to imagine two (rational) subjects perceiving the same object, a picture (εἰκῶν).<sup>17</sup> While other readings are possible – we will turn to these below – the text is most plausibly taken as claiming that these two subjects will form different *impressions* of the same object: the impression formed by the expert will represent features of the painting not found in that of the amateur. So, for example, the expert impression will convey that 'here is a Rothko painting', while the amateur's, that 'here are a few painted squares'. The state of the expert's mind, but not the amateur's, enables her to create a richer and more detailed impression of this object, just as a stretch of soft wax will form a seal that is more precise and intricate than one formed in harder wax.

<sup>15</sup> Within the Stoa, this analogy dates back to the founder Zeno of Citium, who, displaying his Academic background, avails himself of the model offered in Plato's *Theaetetus* (191a–196c). See Long 2002 and Ioppolo 1990 for further discussion of the influence of this dialogue on Stoic epistemology.

<sup>16</sup> Given the Stoics' metaphysical commitments, if two minds differ in their conceptual resources or body of beliefs, they will also differ in their corporeal make-up: The state of the πνεῦμα which constitutes each ruling part will differ. See Chrysippus in Galen, PHP v 3.2 et al. and general discussion in De Harven, forthcoming, 227–228.

<sup>17</sup> The context of the passage makes clear that the distinction between expert and non-expert impressions is a distinction among *rational* impressions alone and not among impressions more broadly.

Less metaphorically, to explain the added richness and detail in the impression of the expert, Stoic theory can advert to the fact that the expert has available a wider array of painting concepts, which her mind draws on in generating her impressions of paintings. When the expert and the amateur encounter the Rothko painting in the museum room, their sense-organs are altered in the same way. However, because of the difference in the two subjects' minds, the impression each forms will differ. The amateur's mind, in generating his impression, will call on the concepts 'square' or 'painting'. But since the expert's mind contains concepts such as 'Rothko', 'abstract expressionist', and so on, which it uses to categorize and process what the sense-organs have sent it, her impression will be more detailed than that of the amateur.<sup>18</sup> Specifically, it makes the expert aware of the origin and style of the painting, while the amateur's does not.<sup>19</sup>

Here the Stoics rely on the claim that concepts convey information of a generic or universal character, information which grounds the recognition and categorization of sense-objects falling under that concept. For instance, Cicero indicates that the assertible 'if it is human, then it is a mortal animal participating in reason' serves as the content of the concept 'human' (*Acad.* ii 21).<sup>20</sup> The

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**18** On the Stoic view, concepts (both those created 'through learning and preparation' and those formed 'naturally', in the normal course of human development) seem to be thought of as impressions of a certain kind. See Aëtius, SVF ii 83 and Plutarch, *De Communibus Notitiis*, 1084f = SVF ii 847, which reports that a concept (ἔννοια) is φαντασία τις. On this point, I agree with Caston 1999, 173 n. 64, and Long and Sedley 1987, i.182. See also Brittain 2005, 170–174, and Bailey 2014, 302–303. Moreover, DL vii 53 suggests a picture on which the concept depicts the prototypical features of its object, having been created from the mind's amalgamation of past encounters with it. See Brittain 2005, 173. For more general discussion of the Stoic theory of concepts, see Dyson 2009, chs. 4–5, and Frede 1994a, 51–55.

**19** As noted above (n. 16), the Stoics acknowledge a difference in the tension of the πνεῦμα constituting expert and amateur minds. Thus, it is open for them to hold that this physiological difference tracks the different ways the expert and amateur minds form impressions of the same sense-object: for instance, in response to the same Rothko painting, the physiological alteration of the art-expert's mind would differ from the physiological alteration of the amateur's mind, in virtue of each mind activating different concepts. I say this while noting that – at least for those following Chrysippus (see n. 8 above) – the Stoics do not commit themselves to a precise view on the general relationship between what an impression represents and the character of the physical alteration of the mind (e. g. something like supervenience).

**20** *Si homo est, animal est mortale rationis particeps*. For further discussion of this passage and its reliability as evidence for the Stoic theory of concepts, see Brittain 2005, 174 n. 40. Although 'human' is likely to number among the concepts we acquire naturally – our προλήψεις – Cicero's report on the *form* of the content of this concept will generalize to the concepts we acquire through special training as well. In every case, our concept will convey an assertible in a conditional form. On this point, cf. SE M xi 8–9, which reports that 'whoever says "Man is a

content of a concept would thus seem to specify the features which the objects answering to that concept possess, and thereby to enable the perceiver to recognize such objects when they are encountered in her surroundings. Since the expert possesses a greater set of concepts than the amateur, thanks to her training, her impressions will be formed under the influence of a more comprehensive informational background, allowing her to classify further aspects of the sense-object than the amateur.

This point comes out nicely in a passage of Epictetus, who appeals to the expert's more sophisticated conceptual repertoire to explain the added detail in their visual and auditory impressions (*Diss.* iii 6.8). In the background here is the Stoic claim that some concepts are common to all adult humans – the so-called 'primary notions' (προλήψεις) and 'common concepts' (κοινὰ ἔννοιαι), which are said to form naturally in the course of our development into adulthood (DL vii 53; Plutarch, SVF ii 104) – while others are acquired only through training and instruction (Aëtius, SVF ii 83).<sup>21</sup>

Ὡσπερ, φησίν, κοινή τις ἀκοή λέγοιτ' ἂν ἡ μόνον φωνῶν διακριτική, ἡ δὲ τῶν φθόγγων οὐκέτι κοινή, ἀλλὰ τεχνική, οὕτως ἐστὶ τινα, ἃ οἱ μὴ παντάπασιν διεστραμμένοι τῶν ἀνθρώπων κατὰ τὰς κοινὰς ἀφορμὰς ὀρώσιν. ἡ τοιαύτη κατὰστασις κοινὸς νοῦς καλεῖται.

[Epictetus] says that just as the kind of hearing which discerns sounds alone may be called common, while that which discerns musical notes [or: articulate sounds] is no longer called common but expert, so also there are things which anyone who has not been thoroughly corrupted sees, in virtue of our common starting points. It is a system of this kind that is called the common intellect. (*Diss.* iii 6.8, tr. Oldfather, heavily modified)

On the basis of our 'common intellect' – namely, our 'system' of common concepts – every adult human, insofar as they are not 'thoroughly corrupted', sees for instance that 'this is a square', or hears that 'that voice is making a sound'. This is because our common concepts acquaint us with the universal or generic features of squares, voices, and sounds, and so enable the mind to categorize them accordingly when they are encountered in the environment. Epictetus then distinguishes an impression that is generated on the basis of our common concepts, from one that is expert (τεχνική), e. g., 'this musical note is a minor third', the formation of which requires a conceptual repertoire beyond the common intellect

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rational animal" in effect says the same thing as "If something is a man, it is a rational mortal animal", although it differs in sound.' (ὁ γὰρ εἰπὼν "ἄνθρωπός ἐστι ζῶον λογικὸν θνητόν" τῷ εἰπόντι "εἴ τί ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος, ἐκεῖνο ζῶόν ἐστι λογικὸν θνητόν" τῇ μὲν δυνάμει τὸ αὐτὸ λέγει, τῇ δὲ φωνῇ διάφορον.)

<sup>21</sup> See Brittain 2005, 175–179, for discussion of the relationship between προλήψεις and κοινὰ ἔννοιαι. Fisher 2015, 24–28, provides a helpful overview of προλήψεις in Epictetus.

with which every normally-developed adult human is endowed.<sup>22</sup> Once acquired, specialized concepts refine or expand upon the information contained in our common concepts, enabling the mind to recognize additional features of the sense-object and render them in an expert impression.

The mind contributes to generating an impression, then, in the sense that it categorizes and interprets what it receives from the sense-organs, by means of consulting the perceiver's concepts. In creating an impression of an external object, the subject's mind selects from the store of concepts which she has built up over time, in order to process and articulate the affections conveyed to it from the relevant sense-organ.<sup>23</sup> In this sense, every impression formed by an adult human – whether expert or not – involves making a predication on the basis of information conveyed by concepts – whether specialized or common – and on these grounds is plausibly regarded by the Stoics as an exercise of reason: our perceptual impressions are 'rational' (λογικαί: DL vii 51) because they assert that one feature revealed by a concept holds of a given sense-object.<sup>24</sup>

Before leaving this topic, we must confront an alternative view, which attributes to our impressions a much more limited cognitive role. On this rival interpretation, the mind applies a concept only *after* forming an impression. Conceptualization thus occurs subsequently to, rather than being a constituent of, the generation of an impression, which is understood as a sensory state communicating only 'raw data' in need of further processing and translation by

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**22** See also the distinction drawn by the early Stoic Diogenes of Babylon between 'natural' and 'knowing' perception (αὐτοφύησ and ἐπιστημονικὴ αἴσθησις) in Philodemus, *On Music* iv 34.1–8: 'hot and cold things require natural perception, while that what is musically harmonized and what is not require knowing perception'. I thank Katja Vogt for first drawing my attention to this text. See also Cicero, *Acad.* ii 20 and discussion below.

**23** Recall that both concepts and rational impressions are, on one level of Stoic analysis, just alterations of the corporeal mind (Galen, PHP v 3.2), and so both spatially located in some area of the chest (DL vii 159). Note also that Chrysippus analyzes reason (λόγος) as a 'collection of certain concepts and primary notions' (Galen, PHP v 3.1) and further claims that the 'the rational animal is disposed naturally to use reason in all things and to be governed by it' (Plutarch, *On Moral Virtue* 450d). See Gosling 1987, 181; Frede 1994a, 51; Cooper 2004, 215; Liu 2008, 260–262; and De Harven, forthcoming, 221–228.

**24** It is tempting to think that this train of thought also explains why rational impressions have content in the form of an assertible and in this respect are truth-evaluable. Perhaps, like some interpretations of Socrates in the *Theaetetus* (cf. 186c7–10), the Stoics hold that truth-evaluability requires predication, and that predication is a kind of intellectual or rational activity. Note that the Stoics also describe rational impressions as 'thoughts' (νοήσεις): DL vii 51. Since to form a rational impression involves predicating concepts to objects, what a rational impression represents is apt to be captured by an assertible. See also the discussion below of SE M viii 275–276.

the mind. On this view, DL vii 51 (quoted above) does not attribute different *impressions* to the expert and amateur, only a difference in how each of their minds subsequently *interprets* such impressions: what their φαντασῖαι convey is, strictly speaking, the same.

Commentators attracted to this view also find support in an earlier passage from Diogenes Laertius's summary of Stoic logic (DL vii 49):

προηγείται γὰρ ἡ φαντασία, εἴθ' ἡ διάνοια ἐκκλαητική ὑπάρχουσα, ὃ πάσχει ὑπὸ τῆς φαντασίας, τοῦτο ἐκφέρει λόγῳ.

For the impression takes the lead, and then the mind, being capable of expression, puts that which occurs by the agency of the impression into an account (tr. Hicks, modified)

For advocates of the rival interpretation, this text shows 'not that perceptual appearance (φαντασία) sets out in words what appears, but that it comes first (προηγείται), and that subsequently (εἴτα) thought (διάνοια) sets out in words (ἐκφέρει λόγῳ) how one is affected by the perceptual appearance.'<sup>25</sup> The mind's conceptualization-cum-verbalization occurs only after the impression has been formed: on its own, the impression expresses nothing 'in words' and functions only to convey raw, unprocessed sensory information.

So interpreted, this passage seems like strong evidence against the view set out above, including the conceptual penetration thesis. If it is the mind, but not the impression, which is capable of expressing content in the form of an account, then it is hard to see how the impression itself draws upon the concepts the subject possesses, much less how it has content with sentential structure. However, nothing in the passage compels this reading, and its context rules it out. Immediately before the passage just mentioned, we read the following:

Ἄρῃσκει τοῖς Στωικοῖς τὸν περὶ φαντασίας καὶ αἰσθήσεως προτάττειν λόγον, καθότι τὸ κριτήριον, ᾧ ἡ ἀλήθεια τῶν πραγμάτων γινώσκεται, κατὰ γένος 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' ἡ διάνοια ἐκκλαητική ὑπάρχουσα, ὃ πάσχει ὑπὸ τῆς φαντασίας, τοῦτο ἐκφέρει λόγῳ.

It is the policy of the Stoics to present the account of the impression and perception first, since the criterion, by means of which the true nature of things is known, is generically an impression, and since the account of assent, knowledge, and thought, taking the lead over other [topics], is not established without [appealing to] impressions. For the impression

<sup>25</sup> Sorabji 1990, 309, offering his own translations here, which I do not endorse. See also Lesses 1998, 7: 'Genuinely conceptual thinking arises subsequently to the occurrence of impressions', a claim which he supports by citing DL vii 49.

takes the lead, and then the mind, being capable of expression, puts that which occurs by the agency of the impression into an account. (DL vii 49, tr. Hicks modified)

In context, then, the text discussed above is supposed to justify (hence, γὰρ) the manner in which the Stoics typically present various parts of their doctrine in didactic settings, for the purpose of maximal clarity and ease of understanding. Those approaching Stoic philosophy for the first time should begin with the doctrine of impression and perception, since it is necessary for understanding epistemology and logic ('the criterion'), parts which are *themselves* necessary for understanding yet other parts ('taking the lead over other [topics]'), such as ethics and physics: one gains confidence in Stoic ethical and physical doctrines by seeing how they are ultimately grounded in kataleptic impressions (φαντασῖαι καταληπτικαί), those which are guaranteed to be true (SE M vii 246–252), and so serve as the means by which 'the true nature of things is known'.

Reading the passage in this light, there is no reason to suppose, as the alternative interpretation does, that, in holding that 'the impression takes the lead', the Stoics mean to set out a chronological ordering of psychological events, beginning with the impression and next proceeding to a distinct 'conceptualization' by the mind.<sup>26</sup> Rather, the sense in which the impression 'takes the lead' is that one cannot understand the mind's ability to announce the significance of what an individual impression represents, with respect to a larger body of knowledge, such as that set out in Stoic theory, without first understanding what an impression is.

More problematic for the alternative interpretation, however, is that it cannot give a satisfactory account of why the Stoics seem to emphasize the difference between *impressions* in texts pertaining to expertise. For instance, the Stoics say that, on the basis of his expertise in love, the Sage forms

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**26** Note that the disagreement between the alternative interpretation and my own concerns the impression (φαντασῖα), not a change in the sense-organs. We saw above that the Stoics explicitly hold that the impression is a change in the mind (SE M vii 232–233). Clearly, this change will be chronologically preceded by a change in the sense-organs. But this is not the claim at issue. According to the alternative interpretation, it is the impression itself which 'takes the lead', in the sense of occurring temporally prior to a distinct act of conceptualization. See Sorabji 1990, 309 and Lessees 1998, 7. In addition to the textual difficulties discussed below, the alternative interpretation has the problematic consequence of attributing a kind of representational indeterminacy to each impression: what an impression represents, on the alternative view, cannot be determined in isolation of the temporally subsequent act of conceptualization. But such a thought is alien to Stoic psychology. The impression that *p* never changes into the impression that *q*. Rather, rational impressions seem to be individuated by content, and no single impression changes content over time. Here I agree with Brennan 2003, 261 n. 8, and Brennan 1998, n. 60.



impressions which grasp whether a young person has particular aptitude to attain virtue, and so whether they would be worthy of erotic companionship (DL vii 129; Arius in Stobaeus, Ecl. ii 66, 115).<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the character Lucullus in Cicero's *Academica* comments on the fact that 'so much detail in song escapes us which practitioners in this field pick up on: at the first notes of the flute, before we even have an inkling of it, they say that it's the *Antiope* or *Andromache*' (ii 20).<sup>28</sup> And in the same vein the Epicurean Philodemus mocks the Stoics for crediting the ears of the musician with a 'knowing perception' (ἐπιστημονική αἴσθησις) of the pitch of musical notes (*On Music* iv 115.26–116.5).<sup>29</sup> Together, these texts decisively show that the Stoic doctrine is not merely that the expert's *mind* differs from the amateur's, but, more radically, that her *impressions* do. According to the Stoics, the mind is not segmented into distinct modules of 'perception' and 'reason', in the way familiar to us from the later tradition: rather, in labeling our impressions as 'rational' (DL vii 51), the Stoics commit to the claim that our perceptual experiences are penetrated by the concepts which constitute our rationality.

## Sentential *and* Sensory Content?

We should now pause to take stock. The last section argued for the claim that, in virtue of our status as rational animals, the character of the impressions we form will be sensitive to the concepts and expertise we possess. These concepts therefore constrain not just the *beliefs* one can form regarding a certain object – the art expert but not the amateur, for example, knows that 'here is a Rothko painting'

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<sup>27</sup> See also Arius in Stobaeus, Ecl. ii 68–69, where 'intelligent perception' (φρόνιμη αἴσθησις) is said to attend the Sage at all times.

<sup>28</sup> Here I slightly modify the translation of Brittain 2006: *quam multa quae nos fugiunt in cantu exaudiunt in eo genere exercitati, qui primo inflatu tibiae Antiope esse aiunt aut Andromacham, cum id nos ne suspicemur quidem*. Strictly speaking, Lucullus claims to espouse the views of Antiochus of Ascalon (*Acad.* ii 10), but for a defense of his value as a Stoic source, see Perin 2005, 387, and Striker 1997, 258.

<sup>29</sup> In the same passage (*On Music* iv 115.26–116.5), Philodemus criticizes the Stoics for denying that the perceptual experiences of experts and amateurs 'make the same determination' (τὴν αὐτὴν ποιῶνται κρίσιν) with respect to sound. But note that on Sorabji's interpretation Philodemus's criticism here would completely miss the mark, as the Stoics would already accept the proposed view that the perceptual experiences of expert and amateur musicians do not differ.

when she encounters one in her surroundings – but also the level of detail in one's *impressions* of that object.

This section turns to another point of similarity between our impressions and beliefs: their shared use of sentential content. As we have already seen, our impressions communicate information in the form of an 'assertible' (ἀξιωμα): they convey *that* something is the case. But is the assertible all there is to what our impressions say? To specify what a given impression communicates, do we need to appeal to anything besides an assertible of suitable complexity?

In what follows, I will argue that a single assertible suffices to capture *all* the information contained in a rational impression. On the view taken here, there are no independent, non-sentential aspects of the content of a rational impression: its content is *exclusively sentential*. As we will see, this interpretation has the unique advantage of providing the Stoics with adequate resources to defend their account of belief formation. By attributing exclusively-sentential content to the rational impression, we can explain why the Stoics adhere to a simple model according to which belief is created from the subject giving her assent to what her impression communicates. If the content of the impression, like that of belief, is exclusively sentential, then the Stoics can plausibly maintain this simple model and go on to deploy it in the service of articulating their fundamental ethical and epistemological doctrines.

However, before elaborating on this proposal, we must take note of an alternative view – first defended by Michael Frede and more recently by Tad Brennan – on which the content of a rational impression comes in *two* forms: one sentential, given by an assertible, and another that is non-sentential, floating free of the assertible and purely phenomenological or sensory in character.<sup>30</sup> On this view, what an impression communicates *cannot* be fully captured by a single assertible because it is claimed that two impressions sharing the same sentential content may nevertheless convey different information, owing to differences in their phenomenology, i. e., differences in what it is like to undergo the impressions in question. The impression thus contains representational elements other than the assertible, namely the manner in which the assertible is sensorily depicted.

Frede presents three considerations in support of this interpretation.<sup>31</sup> We should note immediately, however, that these considerations are philosophical

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<sup>30</sup> For Frede's defense of this claim, see his 1983, 155; 1986, 104–107; and 1994b, 112. Brennan posits two kinds of content in his 1998, 45, and most explicitly in his 2003, n. 8. Brittain seems to endorse this view in his 2014, 334–335. Cf. also remarks sympathetic to two kinds of content in Long and Sedley 1987, i.240, Reinhardt 2011, 300, and De Harven, forthcoming, 227–228.

<sup>31</sup> See Frede 1983, 152–157, esp. 155, approvingly cited by Brittain 2014, n. 9.

in nature rather than textual: because our extant sources do not directly attest that the Stoics acknowledge independent non-sentential content in our impressions, the question of whether to accept such an interpretation turns on whether it attributes to the Stoa a consistent and plausible psychological theory.

The first of Frede's considerations appeals to the intuitive idea that one can access the very same assertible through different sense-modalities. Suppose a subject forms two impressions of a bumpy surface, one created through seeing this surface and another through touching it. Both impressions would seem to have the same sentential content – that this surface is bumpy – but differ in their non-sentential, sensory aspects: what it is like to feel the bumpiness of the surface differs from what it is like to see it.

Second, Frede contends that two impressions will have the same sentential content but different phenomenology depending on their causal history: a perceptual encounter with John's cat will create an impression differing in its sensory aspects but identical in its sentential content to one created by hearing from John's friend that John has a cat.

Third, Frede claims that, as a result of her background views, one subject could represent 'I am dying' as something bad and to be avoided, sensorily depicting the attendant pain and struggle, while another subject, with different views, could represent this same assertible differently, as something to be greeted with equanimity, in accordance with Stoic ethical teaching. Though these two impressions have the same sentential content, it is argued, they differ in the way the assertible is sensorily represented, and hence with respect to their non-sentential content.<sup>32</sup>

Independently of Frede's three cases, Brennan advances another example to the same effect, in which two impressions are held to convey the same assertible

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<sup>32</sup> Given the character of Frede's examples, I take it that he wants to distinguish between two kinds of content in a rational impression: One kind that is fully captured in a sayable and another that is not. This is also how Brittain 2014, n. 9, and Brennan 1998, 44–48 read him. However, one might interpret Frede as instead offering a distinction between the content of the impression, on the one hand, and its physiological or anatomical dimension, on the other. His claim would then be that there is more to the impression than its content, since its content cannot be collapsed or reduced to an alteration of the physical mind. But so construed, there would be no disagreement between us. I grant that there are many good reasons for the Stoics to keep apart what an impression says (its content) and its physiological aspect: As we saw above, the latter is corporeal while the former is not. Indeed elsewhere, in defining the emotion of grief (λύπη), the Stoics refer both to content (that something bad is present) and physiology (a 'contraction' [συστολή] in the soul) without supposing they are identical (Andronicus, SVF iii 391). In any event, since Frede is commonly taken to attribute to the rational impression both sentential and non-sentential content, and since this interpretation is in fact endorsed by several commentators (see notes above), it is worth evaluating here.

but vary in their sensory representation.<sup>33</sup> Here Brennan cites the Stoic distinction discussed above between expert and amateur impressions, interpreting this doctrine in such a way that, in some cases at least, the expert's impression has identical sentential content as one created by an amateur, but differs in the richness and detail of its sensory depiction. For instance, the expert perceiver of eggs – such as the Delian poultry farmer mentioned by Cicero (*Acad.* ii 57) – and the amateur are both said to form the impression that ‘this is an egg’ upon encountering one in their environment. But only the expert impression portrays this egg with a level of sensory detail that enables the expert to distinguish it from any other egg he comes across.

In what follows, I will argue that none of the four cases canvassed above succeeds in showing that we must ascribe to the Stoics a view on which the content of a rational impression comes in two forms, one sentential and another non-sentential. Indeed, as we will see, such a view clashes with deeply held Stoic commitments, and in each of the four cases there is a better explanation available that does not require positing independent non-sentential content. I will begin with Frede's third case, concerning the impressions depicting the value of things like death. In the next section, I consider Brennan's interpretation of the expert impression, and finally turn to Frede's remaining two cases focusing on impressions differing in sense-modality and causal history.

## Emotional impressions

Frede's third consideration in favor of independent non-sentential content calls attention to different ways that the same assertible may be sensorily depicted, as a result of differences in subjects' background views about the *ἀξιωμα* in question. Frede relies on this claim in developing his interpretation of another piece of Stoic theory – the account of the emotions (*πάθη*) – which makes prominent use of the theory of the impression: on the Stoic view, to undergo an emotion just is to assent to an impression of a certain kind (Chrysippus in Galen, *PHP* iv 7.3; Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* iii 74–75). For convenience, let's call these ‘emotional impressions’.<sup>34</sup> Here Frede argues that we can identify which impressions are

<sup>33</sup> Brennan 1998, 45.

<sup>34</sup> The Stoics use the term ‘kataleptic impression’ (*φαντασία καταληπτική*) to name the impressions in assenting to which the subject comes to possess knowledge (*κατάληψις*). But our sources do not record an analogous term for the impressions assent to which creates an emotion (*πάθος*). One might expect *φαντασία παθητική*, on the pattern of *φαντασία καταληπτική* and *φαντασία ὀρμητική* (‘impulsive impression’) – the latter being the name for the impressions assent to which creates an impulse (*ὄρμη*) (Arius in Stobaeus, *Ecl.* ii 86–87), of

emotional solely on the basis of their non-sentential, sensory features (the ‘way in which they are thought’, to use Frede’s phrase).<sup>35</sup> Thus, there can be two impressions with the same sentential content but differing in their emotional character, in virtue of differing in their non-sentential content. So, depending on the way ‘I am dying’ is sensorily depicted, for example, it will either prefigure an emotion (grief) or not. Independent non-sentential content therefore plays an indispensable role within Stoic philosophy, by distinguishing impressions of central importance to Stoic ethics, namely, those which are emotional.

However, Frede’s view leaves us with an unwelcome consequence, first noticed by Brennan.<sup>36</sup> According to the Stoics, to suffer an emotion typically involves assenting to an impression whose content is *false*: indifferents (e. g., being alive or dead, having wealth or not) are neither good nor bad, but, as in Frede’s case above, this is how they are depicted in an impression prefiguring an emotion.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Stoic ethics exhorts the subject progressing toward virtue (the *προκοπῶν*) to suspend assent on these false emotional impressions, and give her assent instead to impressions which accurately represent the real value of such things as life and death, health and illness, wealth and poverty, and so on.<sup>38</sup>

Now, on Frede’s view, an emotional impression is distinguished from one which is not *solely* through its non-sentential content. But how can two impressions, with the same sentential content, differ in their truth-value? Our sources unambiguously report that a rational impression is true or false if and only if the

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which the ‘emotional impression’ would be a species. Here recall that an emotion is defined by the Stoics as an ‘excessive impulse’ (DL vii 110), which is ‘disobedient and rejecting of reason’ (Galen, PHP iv 2.12).

**35** See Frede 1986, 105.

**36** Brennan 1998, 44–48. However, as we have already seen, Brennan’s disagreement with this aspect of Frede’s view does not lead him to reject, as a general matter, that there are two kinds of content in a rational impression: see Brennan 1998, 45, and discussion below.

**37** For the basic doctrine, see DL vii 110–111 and Arius in Stobaeus, Ecl. ii 88. I say emotional impressions ‘typically’ mistake the value of indifferents because the Stoics think it is possible to form an emotion in response to one’s own state of vice, which is genuinely bad (Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* iii 77). Here we could follow Vogt 2012a, 178–181, and conclude that the impressions prefiguring such emotions lack false content: in grieving at one’s present vice, one does not, on this interpretation, endorse a false impression. Cf. Brennan 1998, 48–50. However, not much hangs on this issue for present purposes, because the emotional impressions cited by Frede *do* mistake the value of an indifferent: They predicate badness to death. Cf. Chrysippus in Galen, SVF iii 480. So it is non-controversial both that the relevant emotional impressions will have content, and that Frede tries to account for their falsity through their non-sentential content.

**38** For texts detailing this strategy of ‘replacing’ one’s ethically deficient impressions, see, e. g., Epictetus, *Diss.* i 12.20–21, ii 18, iv 4, and Marcus Aurelius, *Med.* vi 13.

corresponding ἀξιῶμα is true or false (SE M vii 244, viii 10, viii 70).<sup>39</sup> Frede's view, then, seems to introduce a foreign element into Stoic logic, and into their account of the determination of the truth-values of impressions, namely, the 'way of thinking' about an assertible, i. e., the impression's non-sentential content.

To avoid this result, the putative difference in the non-sentential content of these emotional impressions should be cashed out as a genuine difference in their sentential content. By subsuming all representationally-salient features of these emotional impressions into the formulation of their *sentential* content – especially their mis-predication of value to indifferents – we can respect the texts which make clear that the truth-maker of a rational impression is the ἀξιῶμα. Thus the ἀξιῶμα which gives the content of Frede's emotional impression would not merely be 'I am dying', but rather a more expansive, conjunctive assertible incorporating the subject's mistaken evaluation of death, one of whose constituents (e. g., 'death is a bad thing') the Stoics will claim is false.<sup>40</sup> The virtuous agent's impression, by contrast, would not include this constituent but would rather reflect her correct evaluation of death (e. g., 'death is dispreferred but not bad'). Thus the urgency to posit non-sentential content subsides once we appreciate that the Stoics assess the truth or falsity of an impression solely by reference to the truth or falsity of its sentential content, and that this content will often take the form of a complex conjunction.<sup>41</sup> By amplifying the

**39** For a precise formulation of this 'inherited semantic value' of impressions, see Shields 1993, 336. For more recent discussion, see Vogt 2012a, 171–175.

**40** Note that in Stoic logic a conjunctive assertible may be composed of more than two simple assertibles. See Plutarch, *De Stoicorum Repugnantiis* 1047c-e and discussion in Bobzien 1999, 104. Recall also that, on the Stoic view, a conjunction is false precisely if at least one of its constituent assertibles is false (SE M viii 125, 128). See Bobzien 1999, 106, and Brennan 1998, n. 60.

**41** That our impressions often have conjunctive sentential content sheds light on the Stoic claim that 'memory is a storehouse of impressions' (SE M vii 373). Suppose I form the impression that both  $p$  and  $q$  at time  $t_1$ . According to Stoic psychological theory, I can retrieve this impression later at time  $t_2$  and thus become aware of  $p$  and  $q$  once again. This claim provides the rudiments of a Stoic explanation of revisiting a stored memory and focusing on a new dimension of it. Suppose that the perceiver is aware of both  $p$  and  $q$  at  $t_1$  but devotes more focus to  $p$ , in the sense that  $p$  is at the forefront of her attention while  $q$  is not. Even so, the perceiver still registers  $q$  at  $t_1$  and so  $q$  figures into the content of the impression at  $t_1$ . So when the perceiver ultimately focuses on  $q$  at  $t_2$ , for instance after being prompted by a friend about the scene perceived at  $t_1$ , her stored impression does not change content between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ : cf. n. 26 above. Here I do not attempt to rigorously formulate on behalf of the Stoics a distinction between 'awareness' and 'focus'. But I take the general idea – that we can be aware of some feature without actively attending to it – to be plausible. I thank Susanne Bobzien for discussion of this point.

sentential content of false emotional impressions so as to capture their misattribution of value, the Stoics can consistently uphold their claim that such impressions differ from the virtuous agent's in truth-value.<sup>42</sup>

## Assent, belief, and the content of rational impressions

We have just seen that there is no need to posit independent non-sentential content in order to distinguish emotional impressions from those figuring in the thought of the Sage. However, even if we reject Frede's account of the emotional impression, there still may be other areas of Stoic thought which suggest a commitment to two kinds of content in a rational impression: one sentential and given by an assertible, and another kind independent of this assertible that is purely phenomenological or sensory.

For Brennan, this is the doctrine of the expert impression. On his reading, when an expert and amateur encounter an object falling within the former's domain of expertise, these two subjects form impressions with identical sentential content: but while both the expert and amateur impressions convey (e. g.) that 'this is an egg', they differ in the level of detail in their phenomenological representation of the egg (cf. Cicero, *Acad.* ii 57). Only the expert impression sensorily depicts the egg in such a way that the features distinguishing it from every other egg are made manifest. Brennan's account therefore relies on the idea that the phenomenology of an expert impression conveys information of a kind that floats free from the assertible: what the expert impression says outstrips what is contained in its sentential content.

In response to Brennan's view, I will argue that positing independent non-sentential content is not necessary to respect the Stoic claim that the expert impression differs from the amateur's in phenomenological detail. As I will explain, acknowledging only sentential content in the rational impression does not threaten the well-attested Stoic commitment to the added sensory richness in the impressions created by the expert.

Moreover, I will show that there is an important further consideration against Brennan's interpretation, namely, that it cannot resist attributing

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<sup>42</sup> My view, on which the content of an emotional impression is given by a conjunctive assertible, is noted by Brennan 1998, 47, but quickly dismissed. Ledbetter 1994, 110–111, proposes a slightly different view than mine on which the content of an emotional impression is given by a *group* of atomic ἀξιώματα. Unfortunately, her proposal relies on the dubious assumption that the content of a single token rational impression can be given by multiple ἀξιώματα: On this point she agrees with Shields 1993, 341, but see Brennan 2003, n. 8, and Brennan 1998, n. 60, for a persuasive case for rejecting this assumption.

identical *beliefs* to the expert and amateur. This is because, on Stoic theory, the content of a subject's beliefs derives exclusively from the sentential content of her impressions: this claim falls out of the Stoic analysis of opinion and knowledge as assent to impressions of different kinds.<sup>43</sup> But since on Brennan's view the expert and amateur impressions do not differ in sentential content – they both are said to convey (e. g.) that 'this is an egg' – his view cannot secure the intuitive result that what the expert believes about objects in her domain of specialization differs from what the amateur believes. In rejecting Brennan's picture, I propose instead that the Stoics cash out the representational differences between expert and amateur impressions by attributing to each different *sentential* content, and therefore make available different ἀξιώματα for use in specifying what the expert and amateur believe.

Given its relevance to my argument against Brennan's account of the expert impression, we should examine in more detail the Stoic theory of assent and belief formation. To begin with a general characterization, while impressions serve a representational role, the power of assent allows a rational subject to evaluate her impressions, to pass judgment on whether they represent their objects *accurately*. In agreeing that the object is as the impression depicts it, she gives assent; otherwise, she will withhold it.<sup>44</sup> Giving assent is therefore the psychological reaction to impressions which strike the subject as true – the affirmation that what those impressions represent really obtains – while withholding assent reflects the subject's non-acceptance of the impression.

Here we should emphasize an important nuance in the Stoic understanding of assent. The Stoics often speak of giving assent *to an impression* (e. g., SE M vii 151; Epictetus, *Diss.* ii 18; Seneca, *On Anger* ii 1). Strictly speaking, however, this locution does not reflect their considered view. We learn from two sources that the object of assent is not an impression, but rather the assertible serving as the content of that impression (Arius in Stobaeus, *Ecl.* ii 88; SE M vii 154). Fully spelled out, then, to give assent, on the Stoic view, is to affirm that the assertible stating what the impression represents is true. Indeed, this idea sits nicely with the claim discussed in the last section, that according to the Stoics the ἀξιωμα is

<sup>43</sup> Recall that I use 'belief' as a convenient shorthand to refer to opinion and knowledge jointly, without implying that they are coordinate species of a single genus: see n. 1 above.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Bobzien 1998, 281–282, who describes assent as a 'two-sided capacity'. I follow Vogt 2012b, 651, and Brennan 2003, 262 n. 9, in denying that the Stoics acknowledge a third use of the capacity, besides giving and withholding assent: i. e., actively *rejecting* an impression (ἀνανεύειν). See Epictetus, *Diss.* iii 2. 'Rejecting' an impression is more precisely analyzed as withholding assent on an impression, and then assenting to a new impression, with different (often contrary) content. Cf. SE M vii 157–158: τὸ δὲ ἀσυγκαταθετεῖν οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἐστὶν ἢ τὸ ἐπέχειν.



the locus of the rational impression's truth-value. Since to give assent just is the psychological mechanism by which a rational subject affirms something as true, it is no surprise that what a subject gives assent to, strictly speaking, is an item that is non-derivatively truth-evaluable, namely, the assertible (DL vii 66). And, at the same time, it is easy to see how the Stoics themselves might slip into saying we assent to *an impression*. Although by the letter of their theory they should say we 'assent to the assertible which serves as the content of an impression', this is a more cumbersome expression than 'assent to the impression'. The latter phrase, where it appears, should be read as an abbreviation for the former expression – perhaps because the more precise expression is not needed in the particular dialectical context.

Now, the Stoic doctrine of assent plays a fundamental role in the school's epistemology, which is concerned with distinguishing opinion (δόξα) from knowledge (κατάληψις), each of which being analyzed as a cognitive attachment created by the subject's act of assent (Arius in Stobaeus, Ecl. ii 111–112).<sup>45</sup> In giving assent to the impression that *p*, i. e., in accepting *p* as true, the subject holds either the opinion that *p* or comes to know that *p*, depending on the impression in question. If the impression that *p* is kataleptic, of a sort which could not be false, then giving one's assent to it brings about knowledge (κατάληψις) (SE M vii 151). However, if the impression that *p* is not kataleptic – if it suffers from some sort of defect which means that its content is potentially false – then assenting to it produces only opinion, a less secure cognitive attachment than knowledge (SE M vii 156–157; Plutarch, *De Stoicorum Repugnantiis* 1056e; Arius in Stobaeus, Ecl ii 73–74, 112–113).<sup>46</sup>

Crucially, this account presupposes that if one subject believes that *p* and another that *q*, then these two beliefs must have been formed by assenting to the impressions that *p* and that *q*, respectively – and so also that the two subjects had created impressions with *different sentential content*. Thus if the Stoics wish to maintain that there is a difference in what the expert and amateur *believe* – in the assertibles which these two subjects endorse as true – then there must also be a difference in the sentential content of their *impressions*. This is because the Stoics deny that the content of belief has any other source than the sentential content of the impression assented to: what a subject believes derives entirely from the kind

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<sup>45</sup> Some texts suggest a stronger view on which the belief is identical to, rather than created by, the subject's act of assent: see, e. g., SE M vii 151 and discussion by Brennan 2003, n. 12. In any case, giving assent and forming a belief will be distinct from generating an impression: forming the impression that *p* is necessary but not sufficient to give assent to *p* and hold the belief that *p*.

<sup>46</sup> Here I follow the division set out in Brittain 2014, 336, and in Fine 2010, 505–506.

of content in a rational impression that figures into a ‘that’ clause. But on Brennan’s interpretation, the expert and amateur impressions do *not* differ in sentential content, only in their non-sentential phenomenology. It should be clear, however, that in conjunction with the Stoic account of assent and belief formation, this will entail that the expert and amateur form identical beliefs.

To retain the highly plausible idea that the expert and amateur form different beliefs about objects in the relevant domain, there is nothing stopping the Stoics from incorporating all the representationally-salient aspects of the phenomenology of an expert impression into its sentential content. So if, as the Stoics suppose, only the musician hears the chord structure or harmony in a piece of music (cf. Cicero, *Acad.* ii 20; Philodemus, *On Music* iv 115.26–116.5), then these sensory determinations will be reflected in the sentential content of the musician’s expert impression: she will hear, for instance, that ‘this is a minor third’, in contrast with the amateur, whose auditory impression conveys merely that ‘these two sounds are different’. A similar story could be told in the case of the poultry farmer cited by Brennan (Cicero, *Acad.* ii 57): this farmer’s expert impression, but not the amateur’s, will convey that ‘this egg has an oblong curvature and bumpy texture’.

In sum, there are strong considerations in favor of attributing to the Stoics the claim that experts form impressions with richer phenomenology than the amateur’s. But there are equally strong considerations, centering around the Stoic theory of belief formation, that these representationally-salient phenomenological differences do not float free of the sentential content but rather are incorporated within it.<sup>47</sup> By insisting on a difference in the sentential structure of expert and amateur impressions – that is, on a difference in the assertibles with which each corresponds – the Stoics can explain how these two subjects go on to form beliefs with different content about the objects in the expert’s domain.

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<sup>47</sup> Why can’t we explain the difference in expert and amateur belief by noting that the amateur has mere opinion, and so can be argued out of his belief, while the expert cannot, since she has understanding? Cf. DL vii 47, Arius in Stobaeus, Ecl. ii 111–112, and discussion in Vogt 2012a, 159–166. First, note that the Stoics define expertise in such a way that it is open to Sages as well as non-Sages (Galen, SVF ii 93; SE M xi 182). Consequently, if the expert is a non-Sage, her belief will not rise to the level of understanding and so could be given up as a result of misleading argumentation. Second, even if the expert is a Sage, and her belief is a case of understanding, there will still be more assertibles she endorses as true – e. g. about the music she is listening to – in comparison to the amateur. My claim, then, is that the difference in the assertibles the expert understands (ἐπιστάται), and which the amateur does not, must be mirrored in the sentential content of the impressions each of these subjects receives, rather than floating free of such content, as Brennan supposes.

## Exclusively-sentential content and phenomenology

To recap, the last two sections have argued that positing independent non-sentential content is not needed to respect a phenomenological distinction between (i) emotional impressions and the thoughts of the Sage, and between (ii) expert and amateur impressions. Rather, the differences in the representational character of such impressions can be fully captured by appealing to different assertibles specifying their sentential content. This proposal for the cases at issue in (i) and (ii) comes in the service of my overall interpretation that the Stoics acknowledge only *one* kind of content in the rational impression, namely, the sentential content formulated as a single assertible. By taking this view, the Stoics can plausibly maintain their analysis of belief.

However, reflection on the strategy I have pursued in (i) and (ii) – namely, positing a sentential analogue for the phenomenological differences between the impressions in each case, and denying a role for independent, non-sentential content – raises a more general question for my view, concerning the relationship between the phenomenology of our impressions and their sentential content. According to the interpretation I defend, on which there is only sentential content in the rational impression, do the Stoics think that there can be no change in the phenomenology of an impression without a change in its sentential content? In other words, do the Stoics hold that *any* difference in the phenomenology of two impressions entails a difference in the assertible that each conveys? If so, then the phenomenological character of a rational impression would supervene on its sentential content – a thought familiar from some debates today over the nature of perceptual experience.<sup>48</sup>

Ultimately, I do *not* think that this strong view, on which the phenomenology of a rational impression supervenes on its sentential content, is required to attribute a consistent and plausible psychological theory to the ancient Stoics. Rather, what I want to insist on is that the Stoic theory of assent and belief formation requires only that all *representationally-salient* phenomenological aspects of a rational impression are reflected in its sentential content – aspects of the rational impression, in other words, that make a difference to how it

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<sup>48</sup> If the supervenience interpretation is correct – and so there can be no change in the phenomenology of a rational impression without a change in its sentential content – then the Stoic view would resemble, in one respect, the contemporary representationalist or intentionalist theory of perceptual experience, versions of which have been defended by Byrne 2001, Dretske 1995, and Tye 1995. In particular, the Stoics would anticipate Byrne 2001, 200–204, that there can be no change in the sensory character of a perceptual experience (impression) without a change in its propositional content.

represents the world as being. My view therefore leaves open the possibility that there are two rational impressions differing very slightly in phenomenology, but with identical sentential content, because the slight phenomenological differences in these impressions do not amount to any difference in *information conveyed*.<sup>49</sup> In this sense, these slight phenomenological differences fail to be *representationally-salient*: they contribute nothing to how the impressions represent the world as being and so make no difference to what the impression says. But this means that there is no longer any reason for the Stoics to posit a difference in the sentential content of such impressions, since upon assenting to one or the other the subject would hold the very same belief. Representational-salience is thus an entirely familiar notion – it embraces the features of the phenomenology that would have an effect on what the subject believes.

Of course, none of the impressions cited above by Frede or Brennan will be of the sort envisaged here, since the phenomenological differences in cases (i) and (ii) *are* representationally-salient. In case (i), the difference in the sensory character of an emotional impression and the virtuous thought of the Sage corresponds with a difference in these impressions' truth-value: what the emotional impression represents is said to be false while the Sage's, true. Furthermore in case (ii), the special way that an expert sensorily depicts an object in her domain of expertise will reveal to her further features of that object, in comparison with the amateur. And the Stoics appeal to the difference in the information conveyed by expert and amateur impressions in order to explain how these subjects go on to form different beliefs. By contrast, phenomenological differences that *fail* to be representationally-salient will be much more slight than the ones at issue in (i) and (ii) – for instance, a subtle shift in the lighting conditions or color gradient – in the sense that their presence or absence has no effect on how the impression represents the world as being.

Having distinguished representationally-salient phenomenological features from those that are not, and proposed that only the former will affect the assertible used to formulate the impression's sentential content, we are now prepared to evaluate the remaining two cases offered in support of independent non-sentential content: impressions of the same object differing in sense-modality and in causal history. Recall that, on Frede's telling, seeing a bumpy

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<sup>49</sup> Such non-representational, phenomenological features of experience play a prominent role in the view of Block, who provides as one example the feeling of an orgasm (2003, 175–177). Whatever we might think of this particular example, Block's general idea seems plausible, that there may be some slight phenomenological differences between two token perceptual experiences (impressions) that make no difference to how these perceptual experiences represent the world as being.

surface and touching a bumpy surface (a difference in sense-modality) creates impressions of identical sentential content but different non-sentential content. Similarly, two impressions can both represent that John has a cat while differing in their non-sentential representation of John's cat, owing to whether the subject has directly encountered the cat or heard about it from John's friend (a difference in causal history).

But in light of the distinction drawn just now, between phenomenology that is representationally-salient and that which is not, we have available further explanations of these intuitive cases which do not require us to follow Frede in positing independent non-sentential content. For instance, depending on how we flesh out the case, we may be able to spot representationally-salient phenomenological differences in accessing the same object through different causal histories. If so, then, *pace* Frede, we should attribute different sentential content to the impressions in question. For example, the hearsay-based impression could convey merely that 'John has a calico cat', while the more detailed vision-based impression, that 'John has a calico cat with long hair and a white tail, etc.'

Alternatively, we could retain Frede's thought that a pair of impressions share sentential content but differ in phenomenology, so long as we reject the suggestion that the phenomenological difference in question is representationally-salient. For instance, there may be two impressions, one created from seeing a bumpy surface and the other from touching it, which each say no more than that 'here is a bumpy surface'. On my interpretation, the Stoics could acknowledge the possibility of slight phenomenological differences between these impressions if these differences fail to be representationally-salient – if the visual and tactile depictions of bumpiness do not differ in how they represent the surface as being. Such slight phenomenological differences will have no effect on the information being supplied to the subject, which would figure into what she believes about the world. Even in this case, then, the sole information-bearing component of the impression will be the assertible that gives its sentential content. More important than the verdict on any particular case, however, is the general principle that only representationally-salient phenomenological features are reflected in what our impressions say, i.e. in their exclusively sentential content.

## A Final Objection to Exclusively Sentential Content

I now wish to raise and respond to one final consideration which might incline the reader to adopt the alternative view that the content of rational impressions

comes in two forms – one sentential, the other non-sentential and purely sensory or phenomenological in character.

To begin, recall the Stoic distinction between rational and non-rational impressions (DL vii 51). If the perceiver is a rational animal – that is, an adult human, a being with a soul which has reason (λόγος) – then the impressions she forms will be rational (λογική). By contrast, if the perceiver is not rational – if it is either a non-human animal or a human child whose soul has not yet acquired rationality – then its impressions will likewise be non-rational (ἄλογος). Now, on the view I am proposing, it is distinctive of rational impressions (a) to make use of the subject's concepts as they are being generated and (b) to have content given *exclusively* in the form of an assertible. But neither of these features will be found in non-rational impressions, which are nonetheless representational states: like rational impressions, non-rational impressions have content.<sup>50</sup> We are now ready to state an objection to my interpretation. It seems that, on my view, there is a radical discontinuity between the content of rational impressions and that of non-rational impressions. Assuming that non-rational impressions have non-sentential content of the kind adumbrated by Frede and others, my interpretation appears to have the embarrassing consequence that this non-sentential content 'disappears' upon a child becoming rational, at which point her impressions have content which is exclusively sentential and conceptually penetrated. To avoid this unwelcome result, the objection runs, we should posit in the perceptual states of adult humans both sentential and non-sentential content.

The first thing to say here is that, in proposing that the content of a rational impression is exclusively sentential, I do *not* deny that this impression has phenomenology or a qualitative feel. Rather, I mean to deny that this phenomenology features *independently* of the corresponding ἀξίωμα in the specification of its content. On my interpretation of the Stoic view, the assertible in question tells the whole story about how a given impression sensorily represents the world as being.

Even so, the objection correctly detects some discontinuity, on the picture I offer, between the content of rational and non-rational impressions. But given that the Stoics bothered to draw this distinction among impressions in the first place (DL vii 51), this result should be hardly disconcerting. And the differences between non-rational and rational impressions that I have sketched are not so radical as to make the subject's transition to possessing rationality inexplicable.

The Stoics, as I interpret them, are happy to accept that a human being, at all stages of her postnatal development, receives perceptual φαντασίαί which represent objects in a sensory mode. But they will equally insist that, once she

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<sup>50</sup> See Brittain 2002 for more detailed discussion.

passes through the age of reason, these impressions will draw upon and make use of distinctly rational resources, principally the subject's store of concepts (cf. Chrysippus in Galen, PHP v 3.1).<sup>51</sup> This change in the way her impressions are generated effects a more wide-ranging transformation of her cognitive apparatus, by enabling her to grasp *what is true* about the object she perceives.<sup>52</sup> As we see in a passage of Sextus, discussing a doctrine likely of Stoic origin, as soon as a human being becomes rational, she generates perceptual impressions which convey information of a kind which is evaluable as true or false:

οὐ γὰρ μόνον λευκαντικῶς ἢ γλυκαντικῶς δεῖ κινεῖσθαι τὸ ληψόμενον ἀληθές ἐν τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς φαντασίαν ἀχθῆναι τοῦ τοιοῦτου πράγματος 'τοῦτο λευκὸν ἐστὶ' καὶ 'τοῦτο γλυκὺ ἐστίν'. καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων τὸ παραπλήσιον.

For, if something grasps what is true in the situation at hand, it must not only be changed in a white way or a sweet way, but also be led to [form] an impression of such an object that 'this is white' or 'this is sweet', and similarly with the other [senses]. (SE M vii 344-345, tr. Bury, heavily modified)

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51 Here one might question whether on the Stoic view the child's transition to becoming rational occurs gradually over a period of time or instantaneously. Brennan 1998, n. 5, argues for the instantaneous view, while Engberg-Pedersen 1990, 147, and Gosling 1987, 181, favor the gradual picture. I am sympathetic with a compromise position sketched by Cooper 2004, 213 n. 17, on which there is a 'gradual, cumulative process leading up to a final [instantaneous] transition'. Though Cooper does not spell out the details of this proposal, I will attempt to do so here along the following lines. Throughout childhood, young humans gradually amass concepts, in the sense of forming more and more prototypical representations of objects in their environment: see DL vii 53 and n. 18 above. However, once the subject has acquired a full complement of primary notions (προλήψεις), there is an instantaneous change by which her concepts begin to function as a psychologically-efficacious system controlling the process by which all of her subsequent impressions are formed: in this instant, the subject becomes rational and begins to form rational impressions. Cf. here Epictetus, *Diss.* i 20.5, reporting that reason is 'a system created from impressions of a certain kind', and Aëtius, SVF ii 83 lines 22–23, which suggests that the transition to rationality occurs once the subject has 'been filled up with primary notions'. Thus before passing through the age of reason, children possess some primary notions but fail to deploy them in generating their impressions of external objects. The change by which one's stock of concepts begins to structure the content of one's impressions occurs instantaneously, when the rational 'system' first comes online. There is no time, then, at which a subject's impressions are neither rational nor non-rational.

52 The Stoics distinguish between what is true (τὸ ἀληθές) and the truth (ἡ ἀλήθεια) (SE PH ii 80–83). While the truth is claimed to be a body, since it is a state of the corporeal mind, what is true is incorporeal, 'for it is an assertible, i. e., a sayable' (ἄξιωμα γὰρ ἐστὶ καὶ λεκτόν). See further discussion in Vogt 2012a, 224–226.

Admittedly, Sextus's talk here of 'being changed in a white way or a sweet way' is somewhat obscure. He may have in mind the changes in the subject's perceptual soul-parts which precede the generation of an impression (cf. SE M vii 232–233). Alternatively, this phrase may pick out the non-rational impressions of white and sweet things formed by children who have not yet filled up the store of concepts which constitute their rationality (cf. SVF ii 83), a conjecture made plausible in light of a parallel passage in Cicero (*Acad.* ii 21).<sup>53</sup> In either case, the upshot of Sextus's report here will be that only the impressions formed by rational creatures will hit upon what is true of the objects they sensorily depict, in virtue of being correlated with a true ἀξιωμα, such as 'this is white' or 'this is sweet'. Children, like non-human animals, form sensory representations of their surroundings but lack what the Stoics elsewhere call 'internal reason' (ἐνδιάθετος λόγος, SE M viii 275–276) – the power to deploy one's concepts in the process of generating an impression, which, as a result, becomes correlated with an assertible and thereby evaluable as true or false. To understand why adult humans stand alone in understanding what is true about the world (Cicero, *Acad.* ii 31), the Stoics think we must first understand what is distinctive about the impressions we form. While every ensouled creature undergoes perceptual experiences, only those which arise in rational creatures convey information with a structure appropriate to bear truth and falsity. And, according to Stoic logic, there is only one structure that plays this role: that of the ἀξιωμα (DL vii 65–66).

## Conclusion

At the heart of Stoic ethics and epistemology lies the rational impression, and unless we possess a correct account of its representational character, a full understanding of the Stoic system will be out of reach. This paper has adopted a new approach to uncovering the Stoic account of perceptual content, one that takes seriously the Stoic claim that what we believe originates in what our impressions say. According to my proposal, our impressions and beliefs employ content of the same type, that is, content which is both conceptually penetrated and exclusively sentential. This interpretation not only respects the Stoics' elegant model of belief formation, but also sheds new light on how the Stoics understand expertise, the emotions, and the development of rationality.

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<sup>53</sup> This is how Frede 1983, 153–154, understands the phrase. For further discussion of the parallel passage at *Acad.* ii 21, see Brittain 2006, n. 25, and Inwood 1985, 56–58. Cf. also De Harven, forthcoming, 224–226.



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