



HENRY DYSON

Prolepsis and Ennoia
in the Early Stoa

DE GRUYTER

Henry Dyson
Prolepsis and Ennoia in the Early Stoa



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Henry Dyson

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Note on Translations

The translations in the text and appendices are often my own, although I have made frequent use of the following translations as well: for Hellenistic sources in general, Long and Sedley (1987) and Inwood and Gerson (1997); for the Presocratics, Curd and McKirahan (1995); for Plato, Cooper and Hutchinson (1997); for Aristotle, Barnes (1995); for Philodemus, De Lacy (1941), Obbink (1997), and Janko (2003); for Cicero, Annas and Woolf (2001), Atkins and Griffin (1991), Brittain (2006), Graver (2002), King (1960), Rackham (1933), and Zetzel (1999); for Stobaeus, Pomeroy (1997); for Seneca, Gummere (1917); for Epictetus, Gill and Hard (1995); for Plutarch, Cherniss (1976a) and (1976b), Einarson and De Lacy (1967), and Sandbach (1969); for Sextus Empiricus, Annas and Barnes (2000), Bett (1997) and (2005), Bury (1936) and (1949); for Alexander of Aphrodisias, Todd (1976), Sharples (2004), and van Ophuijsen (2001); for Galen, De Lacy (1978); for Alcinous, Dillon (1999).

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Introduction: The Seeds of Virtue and Knowledge

One often finds in the Stoics the claim that all humans *qua* human possess the potential for virtue and wisdom.¹ At *Leg.* 1.30 Cicero explains that this potential is based upon the common possession of reason: “reason is shared by all, and though it differs in the particulars of knowledge, it is the same in the capacity to learn.”² This common capacity is, in turn, grounded in the possession of a certain stock of common conceptions, which he calls the *inchoata intellegentiae*. These conceptions are imprinted (*inprimuntur*) on the mind by the senses and are the same for all: “for all the same things are grasped by the senses, and those things that move the senses, move them in the same way in all humans.” Although language, which is “the interpreter of the mind,” may differ in the words that it uses to express them, the *sententiae* expressed are identical for everyone. “Therefore,” Cicero concludes, “there is no person of any nation who cannot reach virtue with the aid of a guide.”

A similar explanation is given at *Fin.* 5.43.³ Cicero tells us that human nature is designed in such a way as to achieve every virtue. Thus, children “without instruction” (*sine doctrina*) are moved by the appearance of various virtues.⁴ Indeed, we naturally possess the *semina* of the virtues as the *prima elementa* of our nature. Shifting metaphors, Cicero explains that we observe in children “those sparks (*scintillas*) of virtue from which the philosopher’s torch of reason is to be kindled so that by following a divine guide, as it were, he may arrive at nature’s end.”⁵ Philosophy is necessary to complete the work of nature since in our immature years the mind’s potential is still undeveloped and only discerned “through a mist, as it

1 In addition to the passages discussed below, cf. Musonius Rufus Frs. 2 and 3–4 (Lutz) on the rationality and equality of women and Seneca *Ep.* 47 and 49.12 on slaves and foreigners respectively. On the contrast between this doctrine and the prevailing cultural ethos, cf. Colish (1985, 34–5) and Baldry (1965, 177–203).

2 Cf. Appendix C1.

3 Cf. Appendix C8.

4 Cf. Seneca *Ep.* 120.4–5 with discussion by Inwood (2005).

5 On the Stoics’ use of the metaphors of sparks and seeds, and their pervasive influence in medieval and Renaissance philosophy, cf. Horowitz (1998).

were” (*quasi per caliginem*); but as the mind grows and matures it learns to recognize its natural potential. Again, at *Fin.* 5.59–60 he writes that nature “has given us a mind capable of receiving virtue and implanted in us at birth and without instruction (*ingenuitque sine doctrina*) small conceptions (*notitias parvas*) of the great things to come,” conceptions which are the *elementa virtutis*.⁶ Nevertheless, nature stopped short of giving us virtue itself: *Sed virtutem ipsam inchoavit, nihil amplius*. It remains for us to build upon the *principia* we have received from nature until we develop the virtues proper.⁷

What are the inchoate conceptions to which these passages refer? They seem to be closely related to what our Greek sources call the προλήψεις or κοινὰ ἔννοιαι. At *Fin.* 3.20 Cicero tells us that *intelligentia* and *notitia* both translate ἔννοια. Likewise, at *Luc.* 21 he says that by *notitiae* he means ἔννοιαι and speaks of these as being “imprinted” (*imprimuntur*) on the mind through the senses.⁸ Compare this with the early Stoic doctrine at *Plac.* 4.11.2: “each one of our conceptions is written (ἐναπογράφεται) upon the mind; and the first method of engraving is through the senses.” At *Luc.* 30 Cicero says that the *notitiae* derived from the senses are those conceptions which the Greeks sometimes call ἔννοιαι and at other times προλήψεις. Compare this with *Plac.* 4.11.3: “some of our conceptions come about naturally and without artifice, and others through our own learning and effort; the latter are called ἔννοιαι only, but the former are called προλήψεις as well.”⁹ Again, at *Top.* 31 Cicero tells us that by *notio* he means what the Greeks call sometimes ἔννοια and sometimes πρόληψις. But he adds that, although these conceptions are *insita* and *ante praecepta*, apprehension (*cognitio*) of them requires explication (*enodatio*). Similarly, at *Part. orat.* 123 he says that the *praeceptio* (= πρόληψις) corresponding to a definition is possessed *inchoata in animis*. Thus, at *Tusc.* 4.53–4 he speaks of the Stoic definitions of bravery as revealing the *tecta atque involuta notio* that we all possess. And at *Off.* 3.76 he speaks of unwrapping the *notio* of the good person that is *animi sui complicatam*.¹⁰ Finally, at *Ep.* 117.6 Seneca speaks of the *praesumptio*

6 Cf. Appendix C9.

7 Cf. Seneca’s statement at *Ep.* 120.4–5 (Appendix C18). Lucilius asks how we first acquire the *notitia* of the good and the fine. “Nature,” Seneca says, “could not teach us this directly; she has given us the *semina virtutis*, but not virtue itself.”

8 Cf. Appendices C6 and C3 respectively.

9 Cf. Appendices B6 and C4 respectively.

10 Cf. Appendices C15, C2, C11, and C16.

(= πρόληψις?) that the gods exist as *omnibus insita*. Compare this with similar claims made by Cicero at *Nat. d.* 2.12 (*omnibus enim innatum est et in animo quasi insculptum esse deos*) and *Nat. d.* 1.43–5 (*intellegi necesse est esse deos, quoniam insitas eorum vel potius innatas cognitiones habemus*).¹¹ The latter passage is, of course, reporting the Epicurean doctrine; but it makes the connection with πρόληψις explicit.

Let us set aside for a moment the question of Cicero's sources in each of these texts; and the question of how we should reconcile the apparent nativism of the latter passages with the claim, at *Leg.* 1.30 and *Luc.* 21 and 30, that our conceptions are imprinted upon us by the senses. Let's first look at the general picture that emerges from these passages as a whole. The mind contains certain moral conceptions (e.g. conceptions of bravery, the good and fine, the good person, and the gods). These conceptions tacitly contain the definitions of these moral properties. One of the major tasks of philosophy, by which we make progress towards virtue, is to explicate and systematize the knowledge already contained in these conceptions. Thus, Cicero writes at *Luc.* 30: "After the addition of reason, proof, and a wealth of countless facts, one's apprehension of all those facts" – i.e. the one's tacitly contained in our *ἔννοιαι* and *προλήψεις* – "becomes apparent and reason itself, having now been perfected in these stages, achieves wisdom."

We find a remarkably similar doctrine in Epictetus.¹² The beginning of philosophy, he tells us in *Diss.* 2.11.1, is the recognition of our own weakness and incapacity in those things that are most necessary for happiness. Consider our knowledge of technical terms in geometry or musical theory. We do not naturally have conceptions (*φύσει ἔννοιαι*) of these things; and so we clearly recognize that we must learn them from an expert. But when it comes to morality we are conceited and believe we need no instruction. The reason for this, Epictetus explains, is that we *do* have certain innate conceptions of moral properties: "for whoever came into the world without an innate conception (*ἔφϋτον ἔννοιαν*) of what is good and evil, honorable and base, what is appropriate to us and forms our lot in life, and what we ought and ought not to do?" (2.11.3). That

11 He adds just below: *Quae enim nobis natura informationem ipsorum deorum dedit, eadem insculpsit in mentibus ut eos aeternos et beatos haberemus*. See Appendix C17, C14, and A14.

12 Cf. Appendix D9. The most complete analysis of Epictetus' doctrine of prolepsis is offered by Bonhöffer (1890, 188–98). Cf. also Long (2004, 80–5) and Dobbin (1998, 188–94).

we naturally have such conceptions is clear from the fact that everyone uses the corresponding terms competently in ordinary language prior to any systematic instruction: in these matters “[we] come into the world already instructed, as it were, to some degree by nature” (τὸ ἥκειν ἤδη τινὰ ὑπὸ τῆς φύσεως κατὰ τὸν τόπον ὥσπερ δεδιδασκόμενοι; 2.11.5).

Indeed, not only do we all possess *some* conception of goodness and justice, we all possess the *same* conceptions of these things. “The prolepses are common to all people,” Epictetus says at *Diss.* 1.22.1–2, “and prolepses do not conflict with prolepses. For who of us does not assume that the good is advantageous and what we should choose and seek and pursue in all circumstances? And which of us does not assume that justice is fair and becoming?” Disagreements arise, he explains, not because we disagree about the meanings of these terms, but because we disagree about “the application of prolepses to particular realities” (τὴν ἐφαρμογὴν τῶν προλήψεων ταῖς ἐπὶ μέρους οὐσίας). Thus one observer says “He acted well; he is courageous” and another says of the very same action, “No, he is raving” (1.22.3). Each observer is able to understand the other’s claims because they possess the same conceptions of courage and raving; but they disagree about which conception should be applied in this case. The same thing occurs in medicine, Epictetus explains at *Diss.* 2.17.8–9. One person advises the patient to eat no food, another advises him to eat food; someone advises him to be bled, another to apply cupping-glasses. The reason for their disagreement is not that they have different conceptions of health, but that they are incapable of correctly applying their shared conception of health accurately in this particular case. “Thus too in life,” Epictetus continues at 2.17.10, “who of us does not talk of good and evil, advantageous and disadvantageous? For who of us has no prolepsis of each of these? But is it properly articulated and complete (διηρθρώμενη καὶ τελείαν)?”¹³

The reason we fail to properly apply our prolepses to particular cases is that “we have not properly articulated them and examined precisely which things are to be arranged under each prolepsis” (μὴ διαρθρώσαντα αὐτάς καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦτο σκεψάμενον, ποίαν τινὰ ἕκαστη αὐτῶν οὐσίαν ὑποτακτέον; *Diss.* 2.17.7). This is true both in medicine and in morality. Even before Hippocrates invented the art of medicine, Epictetus explains, human beings had a prolepsis of health; but they were unable to apply it properly in particular cases. To do so requires that our natural endowment be supplemented by artful examination. Just so, we each have

13 Cf. Appendices D4 and D11 respectively.

ἐννοιαὶ φυσικαὶ and προλήψεις of the good and the just, but the development of true virtue requires us to seek out the definitions of philosophers, by which our own natural prolepses may be articulated and systematized (*Diss.* 2.17.7). “What is it to be properly educated?” Epictetus asks at *Diss.* 1.22.9: “to learn to apply our natural prolepses to particular realities correctly and in accordance with nature.” Only when our prolepses have been thoroughly articulated and apprehended by means of a proper definition can they serve as standards for the judgment of particular beliefs (*Diss.* 2.11.17). And if we could apply our prolepses to particulars perfectly, our actions would themselves be perfect and unhindered and we would possess virtue and happiness (*Diss.* 2.17.14). Again, he says at *Diss.* 2.11.15: “This is the task of philosophy: to examine and establish the standards (κανόνες)” – i.e. properly articulated and apprehended prolepses – “and to make use of them when they have been understood is the function (ἔργον) of the fine and good person.”¹⁴

Despite the emphasis Cicero and Epictetus place on this doctrine of tacit knowledge, contemporary scholarship has tended to doubt that their views accurately represent the orthodox Stoic position. It is clear that Chrysippus and other early Stoics had a doctrine of prolepsis and common conception; and that they appealed to these as criteria of truth. But did the early Stoics think of these prolepses as innate and as tacitly containing knowledge within themselves, needing only to be explicated or articulated by definitions? Or, did Chrysippus rather think of prolepses as merely providing pre-theoretical conceptions of the corresponding qualities and nominal definitions of the corresponding terms; in other words, the starting points from which proper definitions might be discovered, but not as providing a tacit knowledge of the definitions themselves? The latter position was argued forcefully by Sandbach (1930) and has become the dominant position in the literature. Indeed, it would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that Sandbach’s argument against the doctrine of tacit knowledge found in Cicero and Epictetus has provided the starting-point for nearly all recent interpretations of the early Stoic doctrine of prolepsis.

Sandbach relies on three main arguments to discount the evidence that we find in Cicero and Epictetus. First, he argues that the nativist tendencies apparent in these authors are incompatible with the empiricist theory of concept-formation attributed to the early Stoics in passages

14 Cf. 2.17.1: “the function of the philosopher is to banish conceit,” i.e. the conceit that prevents us from inquiring into the meanings of moral terms.

such as *Plac.* 4.11.1–4 and *D.L.* 7.52–3 (1930, 48). These passages tell us that conceptions are derived from sense-perception, either directly or through certain processes of association (e.g. similarity, analogy, combination, opposition, etc.) that take the data of the senses as their basic elements. As Sextus forcefully puts the point at *Math.* 8.56–8: “every conception comes either from sense-perception or not without sense-perception and either from direct experience or not without direct experience.” Ps-Plutarch seems to be equally explicit in ruling out the idea that any conceptions are brought with the soul from its prenatal existence: “when a human is born the ἡγεμονικὸν of the soul is like a piece of paper ready to be written upon” (χάρτιν εὖεργον εἰς ἀπογραφὴν; 4.11.1) – i.e. a *tabula rasa*.¹⁵

Second, Sandbach argues that the suggestion that prolepses tacitly contain real definitions as their contents conflicts with the early Stoics’ claims that prolepses are “clear” or “evident” (ἐναργές): “To Chrysippus a preconception, though it might be incomplete as an account of a thing, was perfectly clear as far as it went” (1930, 49). This picture of prolepsis sits rather poorly with the more grandiose picture we get from Cicero and Epictetus, in which the *notio* “contains the whole truth, but is but dimly seen” (1930, 49). Indeed, Sandbach argues that the whole idea of tacit knowledge is made rather implausible when we replace the nativism of Cicero and Epictetus with the natural process of concept-formation by which prolepses are said to be derived from sense-perception. Ps-Plutarch says at *Plac.* 4.11.3 that prolepses are those conceptions that come about “naturally and without artifice” (φυσικῶς καὶ ἀνεπιτεχνήτικως). Sandbach takes this to mean that they come about spontaneously. Thus, he takes a prolepsis to be a “preconception” or “the first conception of a thing, arrived at without special mental attention” (1930, 46). This was what Chrysippus meant, Sandbach suggests, when he defined prolepsis as a “natural conception of the general characteristics of a thing” (ἡ φυσικὴ ἔννοια τῶν καθόλου). Thus, Sandbach concludes that one of the distinguishing marks of a prolepsis is that it is “an undeveloped conceptions, as opposed to the thought-out definition.”

Finally, Sandbach asks us to consider the likely sources for Cicero and Epictetus’ doctrines. For Cicero, the most likely sources are the “Platonizing” Stoics, Panaetius and Posidonius, or the “Stoicizing” Academic, An-

15 Cf. Appendices B5, B6, and F5.

tiochus of Ascalon.¹⁶ The sources for Epictetus are much less clear, but equally questionable. Sandbach writes: “Between Chrysippus and Epictetus lie the but half-charted waters of the syncretism of the first century, the results of which we find in Cicero” (1930, 49). Indeed, Sandbach argues that what we find in both Cicero and Epictetus is an uneasy combination of the orthodox Stoic doctrine of *prolepsis* and the Platonic doctrine of recollection. As evidence he directs our attention to Cicero’s account of recollection at *Tusc.* 1.57–8. What the arguments of the *Meno* and *Phaedo* show, according to Cicero, is that “it is impossible for us to possess from childhood such a number of important conceptions (*notiones*), which are innate and as it were impressed upon our minds (*insitas et quasi consignatas in animis*) and are called *ἐννοιαί*, unless the soul had been active acquiring knowledge before it entered the body.” Thus, the soul must have acquired this knowledge through its acquaintance with the Forms, when it existed separately from the body, and brought this knowledge with it at birth. Since the soul is confused by its association with the body, it “does not see these apprehensions (*cognitiones*) clearly; but when it has composed and recovered itself, it recognizes them by recollection.”

This argument in Cicero bears comparison to a somewhat later work that Sandbach does not mention, namely Alcinous’ *The Handbook of Platonism*. At *Did.* 4.6–7 Alcinous distinguishes two types of intellection (*νοήσις*): (a) that which the soul has while existing apart from the body, which is intellection proper; and (b) that which the soul has while connected with the body. This latter type he calls “natural conception” (*φυσικὴ ἐννοια*), describing it as a kind of intellection stored up in the soul (*νόησις τις οὖσα ἐναποκειμένη τῇ ψυχῇ*). Compare this with the early Stoic definition of an *ἐννοια* as *νόησις ἐναποκειμένα* (at Plutarch *Soll. an.* 961c and *Comm. not.* 1084f–1085a; and Galen *Med. def.* 19, 381).¹⁷ Again, at *Did.* 25.3 Alcinous argues that learning cannot occur except via recollection since in forming our conceptions of common qualities (*ἐνενοοῦμεν τὰς κοινότητας* = *κοινὰ ἐννοιαί*?) we could neither traverse the infinite series of particulars nor derive a truly universal conception

16 Cf. Hirzel (1877, 2:721–36 and 3:468–79). On the mutual interaction between Platonism and Stoicism in the first century and beyond, cf. the papers collected in Bonazzi and Helmig (2007).

17 Cf. Appendices B7–9. The passages from Alcinous are Appendices H1–4.

from an incomplete survey.¹⁸ “So,” he concludes, “we conceive of them through recollection on the basis of small sparks (μικρὰ αἰθυμάτα) under the stimulus of certain particular presentations, remembering what we knew long ago but forgot at the time of our embodiment.” The analogy of sparks – which appear to be none other than the natural conceptions that are the vestiges of the soul’s prenatal knowledge – call to mind not only *Tusc.* 1.57, but also the *scintillas* of Cicero’s account at *Fin.* 5.42–3.

These passages make it clear that some combination of Stoic prolepsis and Platonic recollection did occur in the first century B.C.E.; and since Cicero’s source for *Tusc.* 1.57 is most likely either Antiochus or Posidonius, this process must have begun at least in the first century, if not earlier.¹⁹ The critical question for reconstructing the early Stoic doctrine, then, is how would should regard evidence from sources writing after this combination occurred. Bonhöffer and Sandbach offers two different views on this. Bonhöffer argues that “if the bias were not so entrenched that Epictetus is an eclectic and cannot serve as a reliable source for orthodox Stoicism,” we would naturally begin an investigation of prolepsis by looking at his *Discourses*, since these offer by far our most extensive discussion of the Stoic doctrine (1890, 187–8). “We would then discover,” he continues, “that understanding what Epictetus means by πρόληψις in a single fully contextualized passage is worth more than mere references to these concepts in our secondary sources. For while in these [secondary] sources interpretive bias and differences in meaning produce more ambiguity, the meaning of πρόληψις can be easily and securely gleaned by comparing its use in Epictetus’ lectures, which we have already deemed a first rate source for Stoic doctrines.” The method that Bonhöffer himself follows in his chapter on prolepsis is to first reconstruct the doctrine based on Epictetus’ use of the term and then look to the fragments from the early Stoa for confirmation. Finally, he turns to Cicero – “whose pronouncements on conceptions truly are eclectic” – to examine both similarities and differences from the reconstructed Stoic position (1890, 188). Sandbach thoroughly disagrees: “Even if Epictetus were in general a good authority for the technicalities of Chrysippus – and in

18 The Stoic phrase κοινὰ ἔννοιαι almost always means a conception that is commonly or universally possessed (cf. the argument of chapter 3.1). The one possible exception is Epictetus *Diss.* 4.1.42 where τὰς προλήψεις τὰς κοινὰς are contrasted with μέρους οὐσίαις.

19 Cf. Hirzel (1877, 3: 342–405) and Dillon (1977, 47–8).

the opinion of J. von Arnim he is not – this would not be a sound method of procedure. The only safe way is to take first the statements which can be attached to the old Stoa, and having obtained our results from these, to see whether Epictetus does in fact agree” (1930, 44).²⁰

In principle, I agree with Sandbach on this methodological point and have largely followed his advice in reconstructing the interpretation offered here. The method is not without pitfalls of its own, however, and we would do well to heed Bonhöffer’s warning that the later sources, from which the fragments collected in *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* (*SVF*) have been culled, often suffer from prejudice and ambiguity in meanings. They cannot be taken at face value without considering their original context. Here, then, are a few of the problems that we must face as a prolegomenon to reconstructing the Stoic doctrine.

The first problem is the paucity of evidence we have concerning the early Stoics’ use of these terms. The word πρόληψις occurs only 18 times in the three volumes of *SVF*: once in connection with Antipater and 17 times in the fragments and *testimonia* for Chrysippus.²¹ The phrase κοινὰ ἔννοιαι occurs nine times; and φυσικὴ ἔννοια only once. Several of these occurrences, however, must be discounted since they almost certainly reflect the source’s choice of words.²² Compare this with 44 total uses of πρόληψις in Epictetus’ *Discourses* alone.²³ Moreover, even when we can be confident that our sources accurately relate the Stoics’ own words (e.g. in the direct quotation from Antipater’s *On the Gods* at *St. repugn.* 1052b), these fragments come to us with very little, if any, context. Compare this with Epictetus’ *Discourses* where we can see prolepses functioning within a more or less complete work. In the former case, the lack of any firm context invites us to substitute our own narrative about the development of the doctrine. For example, I think it is very difficult for scholars familiar with the subsequent history of western philosophy to read Ps-Plutarch’s comparison of the newborn soul to “a sheet of paper in good condition to be written upon” without, at least unconsciously, thinking of Locke’s *tabula rasa* in the first chapter of his *Essay Concerning Human Nature*.²⁴ The danger here is that we unconsciously

20 Sandbach cites von Arnim (1903, xvii).

21 Cf. Table B below.

22 E.g. Philo, *De incorr. mundi* 257,12 (= *SVF* 2.619,21) and Origin, *Contra Cels.* 4.14 (= *SVF* 2.1052). The list could probably be expanded.

23 Cf. Table D below.

24 Cf. Sellars (2006, 74–8) for discussion of Locke and Leibniz’ own use of κοινὰ ἔννοιαι and πρόληψις.

re-write the history of early Hellenistic philosophy along the lines of the 17th century debate, casting Plato in the role of the Descartes and the Stoics and Skeptics in the roles of Locke and Hume respectively.

Even if we carefully avoid such pitfalls ourselves, we must squarely face the fact that our ancient sources were not always so scrupulous. In some cases this was due to polemical attitudes; in others it resulted from the natural drift of the meanings of terms over the centuries. By far the majority of our knowledge of the early Stoic doctrine of *prolepsis* comes from three relatively late sources: Plutarch's polemical works (especially *On Stoic Self-Contradictions* and *On Common Conceptions against the Stoics*), Sextus Empiricus' *Against the Professors*, and Alexander of Aphrodisias' *On Mixture*.²⁵ Without these texts we would have just three passages that directly connect *πρόληψις* to the early Stoa: Diogenes Laertius 7.54, Ps-Plutarch *Plac.* 4.11.1–4, and Galen *PHP* 5.3.1. But if we take a wider look at the use of *πρόληψις* and *κοινὴ ἔννοια* in these later authors, we quickly discover that the terms have become common currency among the philosophical schools. Consider Sextus' statement at *PH* 2.246: "It is enough, I think, to live by experience and without opinions, in accordance with the common observations and *prolepses* (τὰς κοινὰς τηρήσεις τε καὶ προλήψεις), and to suspend judgment about what is said with dogmatic superfluity and far beyond the needs of ordinary life." Here Sextus is speaking *in propria persona* of *prolepses* as criteria for living, not as criteria of truth. This use of the term cannot carry the connotation of indefeasibility, as it must have for the Stoics who claimed that *prolepses* are criteria of truth. Similarly, at *Math.* 2.1 Sextus says that since it is impossible to inquire whether something exists or not without first having a conception (*ἔννοια*) of it, he will begin by setting out the expositions (*ἀποδόσεις*) that philosophers have given of rhetoric. At *Math.* 8.300–1 he says that he will begin his investigation of demonstration by pointing out the conception (*ἐπίνοια*) of it. At *Math.* 1.57 and again at *Math.* 11.21 Sextus cites with approval Epicurus' saying that it is not possible to inquire or even to be perplexed without a *πρόληψις*. And, finally, at *Math.* 8.321–2 he defends his methodology by arguing out that merely holding the conception of demonstration does not commit him either to the reality of it or to having clearly

25 Cf. Tables E-G on the use of these terms in Plutarch, Sextus, and Alexander. For Plutarch's likely sources and relationship to the Stoa, cf. Babut (1969, 15–46) together with the reviews of Long (1972) and De Lacy (1973); for Sextus and the Stoics, cf. Ebert (1991); and for Alexander and the Stoics, cf. Todd (1976, 21–8).

grasped the nature of demonstration; what he offers is merely an ἐπίνοια or πρόληψις that will serve as a basis for further investigation into these things. The same is true of κοινὰ ἔννοιαι. There are passages in which Sextus seems to be accurately reporting the Stoics' own words. For example, he says at *Math.* 9.138 that the Stoics put forward the following syllogism: "the animal is better than the non-animal; but nothing is better than god; therefore, god is an animal." He continues: "and in support of this argument is adduced also the common conceptions of mankind, since ordinary folk and the poets and the majority of the best philosophers testify to the fact that God is an animal. Thus, the steps of this inference are secured." But there are many other passages in which Sextus appeals to common conceptions in his refutations of dogmatic arguments. For example, at *Math.* 3.56 he argues that the method of intension, by which the geometers attempt to explain our conception of lines and points, if applied to bodies, would result in the conception of a non-solid body. "But such a conception," he complains, "is perfectly impossible and contrary to the common conception of mankind." Similar appeals to κοινὰ ἔννοιαι can be found throughout Sextus' discussion of theology (e.g. at *Math.* 9.143, 9.178, and 9.349); and these must cause some doubt on the authenticity of *Math.* 9.138. Finally, we should consider that there are passages in which Sextus uses κοινὰ ἔννοιαι and πρόληψις to formulate the dogmatic positions he is attacking, but which probably do not represent the Stoics' own use of the term. For example, *Math.* 9.50–1: "That god exists is held by the majority of philosophers and is the κοινὴ πρόληψις of ordinary life." Once we recognize that Sextus is capable of using the terms in this informal way, we have to question even those passages, such as *Math.* 11.22, that are generally thought to represent the Stoics' own choice of words.²⁶

The same can be said of our other two major sources, Plutarch and Alexander. This is not the place to belabor examples, but in both authors πρόληψις and κοινὴ ἔννοια name the ordinary, pre-theoretical opinions that we hold about things. The strategy of Plutarch's *On Common Conceptions against the Stoics*, for example, may be summarized as follows: the Stoics claim that their philosophy is grounded in our prolepses and common conceptions, but their conclusions are often paradoxical – i.e. contrary to our ordinary preconceptions of things. This line of argument probably goes back to Carneades; but the objection is so obvious that it must have occurred to Chrysippus himself. Thus, I do not think that

26 All of these passages from Sextus are collected in Appendix F.

Chrysippus could have understood prolepses and common conceptions as being simply identical to our ordinary preconceptions. Instead, I suggest that Plutarch's strategy represents a willful misreading of Chrysippus' doctrine by Carneades, who initiated this line of attack by reducing Stoic common conceptions to ordinary opinions, perhaps by assimilating the Stoic and Epicurean uses of the term.²⁷

We must face the possibility, then, that our most important sources for the early Stoic doctrine may have, willfully or otherwise, misunderstood what the early Stoics meant by these terms. This does not by any means rule them out as sources; but it should make us cautious about appealing to passages that cannot be directly attributed to a particular Stoic author or text.

Let me conclude this prolegomenon with one final word of caution. It might be thought that texts that discuss the Epicurean doctrine of prolepsis provide a contemporary context by which we may evaluate the fragments from the early Stoa. Especially those that come from Epicurus' own hand: *Ep. Hdt.* 37–8 and 72, *Ep. Men.* 123–4, and *RS* 36–8.²⁸ These texts might be thought particularly authoritative since we are told by Cicero (at *Nat. d.* 1.43) that Epicurus first introduced the term πρόληψις into philosophical usage; and since it is widely accepted that the Stoics adopted the term from Epicurus. Indeed, many scholars assume that the doctrine of prolepsis is identical in the two schools.²⁹ This is far from clear. There are important philosophical differences between the schools that make it unlikely that they hold the same doctrine. Glidden (1983 and 1985) cites the two schools' disagreement about the existence of incorporeal λέκτα as one such difference. Goldschmidt (1978, 43–6) notes that whereas Epicurus seems to posit a prolepsis as providing the meaning of every word in a language, the scope of Stoic prolepses

27 Cf. the argument of chapter 4.2–4.

28 Whether by *πρῶτον ἐννοήμα* at *Ep. Hdt.* Epicurus means πρόληψις is a matter of much discussion. Sedley (1973, 14–7) suggests that Epicurus had not yet coined the term when he wrote the letter. Glidden (1985) denies that he means πρόληψις in this passage; Hammerstaedt (1996) argues against Glidden and in favor of the traditional interpretation. I tend to agree with the traditional reading, although I do not believe that anything in the reconstruction offered here depends too heavily upon the point and I borrow other aspects from Glidden's interpretation of Epicurean prolepsis.

29 E.g. Schofield (1980, 293) writes: "This Epicurean theory was taken over virtually lock, stock, and barrel by the Stoics." I do not mean to single Schofield out for criticism; I take this to be a widely held opinion.

seems to be significantly narrower.³⁰ Again, we might note the two schools' disagreement about the need for philosophical definitions gained through the practice of dialectic. Epicurus argued that the prior possession of prolepses precludes the need for any further definition.³¹ But the Stoics, since they took seriously Socrates' practice of seeking precise definitions, could not have accepted this argument; nor, I suggest, could they have ignored it.

In light of all these considerations we might sympathize with Hirzel, who in a moment of exasperation asks: "How much do we really know about this Stoic doctrine?" (1877, 3: 529). The situation is not hopeless; but the first issue to be addressed is the question of textual evidence. I have attempted to do so in constructing the tables and appendices at the end of this book. I have gathered together what I believe to be a nearly comprehensive collection of the relevant texts on prolepsis and conception in Hellenistic philosophy, organized chronologically according to source. For reasons stated above, I begin in Appendix A with the texts related to the Epicurean doctrine, including the fragments from Epicurus himself, from later Epicureans such as Philodemus, and from doxographical reports.³² I next move, in Appendix C, to the most important collection, namely those texts that we can most reliably attribute to the early Stoa. I have selected these texts according to the following criteria: (i) they mention specific Stoics by name (usually Chrysippus, but also Zeno, Cleanthes, and Antipater), (ii) they are attributed to a specific text, or (iii) they most likely reproduce the Stoics' own words faithfully (e.g. if they offer us definitions of the Stoics' own terminology). In questionable cases I have tried to err on the side of caution. Thus, many of the passages that are often mentioned in discussions of prolepses and common conceptions (e.g. *Math.* 9.138 and 11.22) are not in this collection, but instead listed by their original source. Note that the term *πρόληψις* itself is not used in connection with any Stoic prior to Chrysippus, to whom the term is connected almost exclusively. This probably indicates that it was Chrysippus who appropriated the term from Epicurus and introduced it into Stoic vocabulary. Nevertheless, I have included a number of pas-

30 For the Stoics' own theory of meaning, cf. Atherton (1993) and Schubert (1994).

31 Cf. Asmis (1984, 35–47).

32 I have not included Lucretius *RN* 5.1164–1225, which is often taken as an explanation of the origin of our prolepsis of god since he does not use terminology specifically related to Epicurean prolepsis.

sages that offer some idea of the Zenonian predecessors to the Chrysippean doctrine of prolepsis (viz. his doctrine of ἐννοήματα).

In the subsequent appendices I have collected passages from Cicero and Seneca (C), Epictetus (D), Plutarch (E), Sextus Empiricus (F), and Alexander of Aphrodisias (G). In each case I have tried to present these in such a way as to provide some sense of the author's own understanding of these terms. Although I have attempted to provide a comprehensive collection of the relevant texts, I have not reproduced every passage mentioning conceptions or conceiving in Sextus, or every argument mentioning common conceptions from Plutarch's *On Common Conceptions*, since in both cases these are so frequent as to become tedious. Likewise, in the case of Alexander, I have mostly limited myself to passages from *On Mixture*, since this text is the most directly relevant for reconstructing the early Stoic doctrine. Alexander uses the phrases πρόληψις, φυσικαὶ ἔννοιαι, and κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι in various combinations in a number of his other texts.³³ He consistently means by these the common opinions of ordinary people, as opposed to the often paradoxical theses of the philosophers. In short, for Alexander the common prolepses and conceptions comprise one subset of the Aristotelian ἐνδόξα.³⁴ A complete breakdown of Sextus, Plutarch, and Alexander's use of these terms can be found in Tables E, F, and G.

The final appendix (H) contains the passages mentioning natural conceptions from Alcinous' *Handbook of Platonism*, which I have included as a sample of the Middle Platonic appropriation of Stoic terminology. The terms πρόληψις, φυσικὴ ἔννοια, and κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι continue to be used well into late antiquity by Plotinus and the Neoplatonic commentators and by Christian authors such as Origen.³⁵ But one has to draw a line at some point and we face quickly diminishing returns for the construction of the early Stoic position once we get past the 2nd century C.E. There are two exceptions. First, Augustine's *Civ. Dei* 8.7 connects *no-*

33 Cf. Table G.

34 Cf. Alexander *In Top.* 73,16 and 78,25–79,1 for an especially clear example of his use of κοινὴ πρόληψις as equivalent to κοινὴ δόξα.

35 On Plotinus' use of κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι, cf. Phillips (1987). Von Arnim included two passages from Origen mentioning κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι (*SVF* 2:964 and 3:218) and one mentioning φυσικὴ ἔννοια (*SVF* 2:1052). But in neither case does there seem to be anything distinctively Stoic about the use of these terms which, as I have mentioned above, became part of the common philosophical vocabulary shared by all the schools. The same is probably true of *SVF* 2:619 from Philo, although in this case the Stoics are mentioned a few lines above.

tiones (= ἔννοιαι) with the Stoics' account of definitions, which are they are said to explicate. I wish that I could give more weight to this passage, since it supports the reconstruction that I offer in chapter four. It seems likely to me, however, that this statement is derived second-hand from Cicero (perhaps from *Top.* 31?) and so does not have much independent evidentiary value. Second, there are several passages that discuss prolepses in Simplicius' commentary on Epictetus' *Handbook*. But, again, they seem to be of questionable value in reconstructing the early Stoic position.

On the basis of these texts, I have constructed an outline of the doctrine of prolepsis and common conception in the early Stoa. In general orientation, I have attempted to defend as orthodox the basic features of the doctrine of prolepsis and common conception that we find in Epictetus. In particular, I argue that prolepsis is an often unconscious, yet teleological secured, process by which humans derive conceptions of basic natural kinds and moral properties; and that the resulting conceptions tacitly contain the definitions of the corresponding properties, at least in outline. These conceptions are tacit in the following sense: they are psychologically functional in the formation of presentations and impulses, but their content is not readily available to conscious reflection and must be recovered through a process of investigation. This lack of awareness prevents humans from fully grasping the definitions contained in their own prolepses and is an important source of moral error. One of the primary tasks of philosophy is the articulation, systematization, and correct use of our prolepses as standards. In the early Stoa, as in Epictetus, the name for this process seems to have been διαρθρώσις. I suggest that this process, and indeed the doctrine of prolepsis in general, was offered by Chrysippus as an alternative to the Platonic theory of recollection. I argue that the common conceptions are the articulations of prolepses that result from διαρθρώσις. As such, they are capable both of being fully grasped in themselves and of being used as criteria of truth. Prolepses and common conceptions can thus be viewed as identical with one another insofar as they have the same propositional content, but can also be distinguished since in the former category they are tacit and in the latter they are articulated. Indeed, I suggest that the conceptions that Chrysippus called κοινὰ ἔννοιαι are precisely those Epictetus calls διηρθρωμέναι προλήψεις, a phrase that does not appear in any of our early Stoic fragments.

I begin in chapter 1.1–3 by considering the evidence for thinking that πρόληψις, κοινή ἔννοια, and φυσικὴ ἔννοια are technical terms used in

connection with a particular Chrysippean doctrine. The fact that both prolepsis and common conception are said to be criteria of truth provides *prima facie* evidence for taking these to be alternate designations for the same cognitive function. I then turn, in 1.4–6, to Sandbach's arguments against the identification of prolepses and common conceptions. I conclude that although his terminological arguments are unfounded, Sandbach raises difficult questions about the Stoic theory of concept-formation. First, this theory suggests that prolepses and common conceptions may be criteria in different senses, viz. that prolepses may be criteria for sense-presentations while common conceptions are criteria for philosophical theories. Second, there is some reason to think that certain common conceptions are formed by a process of reflection and inference that makes it unlikely that they are possessed by all humans.

These questions are addressed in chapters two and three respectively. In each case I argue is that the key to solving these difficulties is to treat prolepsis as a form of tacit knowledge. Prolepses are natural conceptions that are derived from experience by an unconscious reasoning process linking together concepts of universals.³⁶ The prolepses are derived from the class of apprehensive presentations that are guaranteed to be true; and their formation is providentially secured, on the one hand, by the causal influence of these apprehensive presentations and, on the other hand, by certain dispositions and mechanisms that are innate to the human soul. Thus, the prolepses themselves are guaranteed to be accurate representations of the corresponding universals. The common conceptions, as I suggested above, are articulations of these common prolepses and correspond to essential definitions and axioms in the Stoic system. They are the products of philosophical reflection upon the prolepses and so are consciously possessed by relatively few individuals. Nevertheless,

36 I use "universals" here as a term of convenience for what the Stoics' κοινὰ ποῖα. These are the properties corresponding to appellatives such as "human" or "animal" as well as to adjectives such as "rational" and "moral." The Stoics hold that these qualities are corporeal and thus individuated in each particular instance; they are not identical in their various instances in the way that Aristotelian universals are; cf. Long and Sedley (1987, 1:172–6) and Sedley (1985). Strictly speaking, we should speak of "commonly qualified things" to resist the urge to reify these common qualities into something that we think of as identical in each instance. Nevertheless, I will often fall back on the more familiar way of speaking and refer to these as universals. If the wording of Chrysippus' definition of prolepsis as φυσικὴ ἔννοια τῶν καθόλου (D.L. 7.54) is accurate Chrysippus himself must have occasionally fallen into this way of speaking.