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The Growing Argument

The essential problem in Chrysippus' "Growing Argument" is whether an individual can survive (with its identity intact), when it suffers a partial loss (or a gain) of its material substance.

The Academic Skeptics argued that an individual cannot survive such material change. When any material is subtracted or added, the entity ceases to exist and a new numerically distinct individual comes into existence.

The Stoics, however, saw the identity of an individual as its *immaterial* bundle of properties or qualities that they called the "peculiarly qualified individual" or ἰδίος ποιὸν.

Following Aristotle, the Stoics called the material substance or substrate ὑποκείμενον (or "the underlying"). This material substrate is transformed when matter is lost or gained, but they said it is wrong to call such material changes "growth (αὐξήσεις) and decay (φθίσεις)." The Stoics suggested they should be called "generation (γενέσεις) and destruction (φθοράς)." These terms were already present in Aristotle, who said that the form, as essence, is not generated. He said that generation and destruction are material changes that do not persist (as does the Stoic peculiarly qualified individual).

It is therefore obvious that the form (or whatever we should call the shape in the sensible thing) is not generated—generation does not apply to it—nor is the essence generated; for this is that which is induced in something else either by art or by nature or by potency. But we do cause a bronze sphere to be, for we produce it from bronze and a sphere; we induce the form into this particular matter, and the result is a bronze sphere...

For if we consider the matter carefully, we should not even say without qualification that a statue is generated from wood, or a house from bricks; because that from which a thing is generated should not persist, but be changed. This, then, is why we speak in this way.¹

It is important to see that the Aristotelian view is very similar to the Stoic - that individuals are combinations of matter and form.

1 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book VII, § vii & viii



At times Aristotle made the matter the principle of individuation, at other times he stressed the immaterial qualities or “affections,” as did the Stoics, with their peculiarly qualified individual.

“The term “substance” (οὐσία) is used, if not in more, at least in four principal cases; for both the essence (εἶναι), and the universal (καθόλου) and the genus (γένος) are held to be the substance of the particular (ἐκάστου), and fourthly the substrate (ὑποκείμενον). The substrate is that of which the rest are predicated, while it is not itself predicated of anything else. Hence we must first determine its nature, for the primary substrate (ὑποκείμενον) is considered to be in the truest sense substance.

Both matter and form and their combination are said to be substance (οὐσία). Now in one sense we call the matter (ὕλη) the substrate; in another, the shape (μορφή); and in a third, the combination of the two. By matter I mean, for instance, bronze; by shape, the arrangement of the form (τὸ σχῆμα τῆς ιδέας); and by the combination of the two, the concrete thing: the statue (ἀνδριάς). Thus if the form is prior to the matter and more truly existent, by the same argument it will also be prior to the combination.”²

The Skeptics attacked the Stoics, saying Stoics were making single things into dual beings, two objects in the same place at the same time, but indistinguishable.

“since the duality which they say belongs to each body is differentiated in a way unrecognizable by sense-perception. For if a peculiarly qualified thing like Plato is a body, and Plato’s substance is a body, and there is no apparent difference between these in shape, colour, size and appearance, but both have equal weight and the same outline, by what definition and mark shall we distinguish them and say that now we are apprehending Plato himself, now the substance of Plato? For if there is some difference, let it be stated and demonstrated.”³

The Skeptic Plutarch described the Growing Argument,

“(1) The argument about growth is an old one, for, as Chrysippus says, it is propounded by Epicharmus.”⁴

² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book VII, § iii

³ Anonymous Academic treatise, Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 3008 in Stoic Ontology, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, p.167

⁴ See the Debtor’s Paradox in chapter 24



(2) For the argument is a simple one and these people grant its premises:

a all particular substances are in flux and motion, releasing some things from themselves and receiving others which reach them from elsewhere;

b the numbers or quantities which these are added to or subtracted from do not remain the same but become different as the aforementioned arrivals and departures cause the substance to be transformed;

c the prevailing convention is wrong to call these processes or of growth and decay: rather they should be called generation and destruction, since they transform the thing from what it is into something else, whereas growing and diminishing are affections of a body which serves as substrate.

(3) When it is stated and proposed in some such way, what is the judgement of these champions of the evident, these yardsticks of our conceptions? That each of us is a pair of twins, two-natured and double ...two bodies sharing the same colour, the same shape, the same weight, and the same place, no man previously has seen them.⁵

4) But these men alone have seen this combination, this duplicity, this ambiguity, that each of us is two substrates, the one substance, the other <a peculiarly qualified individual>; ...nowhere providing sense-perception with a grasp of the difference.

(5) . . . Yet this difference and distinction in us no one has marked off or discriminated, nor have we perceived that we are born double, always in flux with one part of ourselves, while remaining the same people from birth to death with the other.

(6) I am simplifying their account, since it is four substrates that they attribute to each of us; or rather, they make each of us four. But even the two are sufficient to expose the absurdity.

(7) If when we hear Pentheus in the tragedy say that he sees two suns and a double Thebes we say he is not seeing but mis-seeing, going crazy in his arithmetic...

(8) Here, actually, they can perhaps be excused for inventing different kinds of substrates, for there seems no other device available to people determined to save and protect the processes of growth.”⁶

5 See chapter 7 on Coinciding Objects.

6 Plutarch, On common conceptions 1083A— 1084A in Stoic Ontology, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, p.167

