



## ZENO OF CITIUM (335–263 B.C.)

Founder of **Stoic** philosophy, born at Citium on Cyprus, probably of Phoenician ancestry. In 313 he went to Athens to attend the Platonic Academy, but converted to Cynicism, in which vein he wrote his earliest treatises.

He taught in the *Stoa Poikile* (Painted Porch) at the foot of the Acropolis in Athens, where he drew many listeners. When Antigonus Gonatas, king of Macedonia, invited him to his court in Pella, he dispatched a disciple instead of going in person, breaking **Plato's** and **Aristotle's** tradition of serving tyrants. Zeno's complete philosophical system borrowed physics from Heraclitus and Aristotelian logic from Antisthenes and Diodorus the Megaran, but it was his ethics, according to which virtue is the only good and vice or moral weakness the only real evil, that comforted many during the wars and tyrannies of the successors of **Alexander the Great**, the late Roman Republic, and the Empire. A protégé of the Scipios, Paenatius of Rhodes (ca. 150 B.C.), introduced Stoic **philosophy to Rome** and harmonized it with the *mos maiorum* to make it the favorite philosophy of Romans until the third century when **Neo-Platonism** replaced it.

Antigonus of Carystus named Zeno as having been an exclusive boy-lover with no interest in women. Ethically Zeno regarded the choice of sexual object, whether male or female, as a purely personal matter. No objective criteria, he opined, can be adduced for preferring either homosexuality or heterosexuality. What is important is the management of one's life in accordance with enlightened

self-interest. Zeno was also one of the first Greek philosophers to end his life by **suicide** when he believed that his usefulness was at an end, an example emulated by such followers as Cato the Younger and Seneca the Younger, the most famous Roman adherents except for the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, himself also an expounder of Stoicism.

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*William A. Percy*

## ZOROASTRIANISM

The most important indigenous religion of ancient **Iran**, Zoroastrianism bears on the history of homosexuality because of its crucial influence on this aspect of **Judaism** and its sacred writings, as well as on the folk angelology and demonology of the intertestamental period and later centuries. The religion of Zoroaster survives today among the small Parsi community in India.

Although it reached its apogee during the Achaemenid Period (ca. 550–330 B.C.), the roots of Zoroastrianism extend much further back into Persian religious traditions relating to nature worship and good and evil spirits, and beyond these to **Aryan (Indo-European)** mythology with its division of celestial beings into two warring classes. This ancient dualism appeared in Greek mythology as the gods versus the titans, and in Indian tradition as the gods (*devas*) versus the demons (*asuras*), but in Persia the labels were reversed, so that the Aryan asuras became the good *ahuras* and the devas became the evil *daevas*. The prophet Zoroaster (from a

Greek version of Zarathustra), believed to have lived about 630–550 B.C., refined the ancient faith into a belief in seven good spirits and seven evil spirits, perpetually at war. Zoroaster said that Ahura Mazda, the chief of the good spirits, would triumph in the end.

The war between good and evil that is being waged in the universe has its counterpart within each individual. Zoroastrians were encouraged to seek piety by leading pure lives and doing good works. This would lead to a victory of good over evil in their personal lives and in the world. This worldview, which can be seen emerging in the sixth century B.C., exerted tremendous influence on Judaism, especially the later Essenes, the Greek and Roman Stoics, the early Christian gnostics, the *Manichaeans*, and the Mithraists, a hero cult which competed with early Christianity. The emphasis on sexual purity in early Christianity may well stem ultimately from this Iranian influence.

Shortly after Zoroaster, the Achaemenid family under Cyrus the Great (d. 529 B.C.) established the Persian Empire, which conquered most of western Asia, including Judea, homeland of the Jews. Darius I (d. 486 B.C.), the first Persian ruler certain to have been a Zoroastrian, placed Jews in positions of power and encouraged the restoration of their destroyed main temple and the adoption of a statute book to govern their reorganized community. This included the Holiness Code of Leviticus 12-26; it is here that the death penalty for certain forms of homosexuality appears for the first time (20:13).

The Persian influence can be seen if we compare Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 with the following passage from the Zoroastrian *Zend Avesta*: "Who is the man who is a Daeva? . . . Ahura Mazda answered: "The man that lies with mankind as man lies with womankind, or as a

woman lies with mankind, is the man that is a Daeva; this one . . . is a female paramour of the Daevas, that is a she-Daeva.'" (Vendidad, Fargard VIII, V:31–32). Noteworthy here is the equal guilt of both parties, unusual for the ancient world, and the ascription of femininity to the guilty. The same chapter proscribes 800 stripes for involuntary emission of semen. Elsewhere in Zoroastrian tradition permission is given for the killing of a homosexual man caught in the act (Commentary on Fargard VIII, VIII:74). Leviticus 20:13 similarly rules: "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them." The Levitical laws, like the comparable Zoroastrian rules, are cultic—certain behaviors are condemned because they pollute the cult. They may never have been intended to condemn anything other than cohabitation of males with male cultic prostitutes, who were sacred functionaries of the old religions that preceded Zoroastrianism and Judaism.

The major contribution of Zoroastrianism to Western religion, however, was its extreme emphasis on moral dualism, the irreconcilable and never-ending conflict between Good and Evil. This dualism has had incalculable effects, painting any deviation from what is termed Good as something abhorrently Evil, thus giving rise to the notion that sodomites were "in league with the Devil" and had to be combatted with every available means.

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Tom Horner