

THE ORIGINS OF PLATONISTS DOGMATISM

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The philosopher Plato, as all his friends would agree was a man of strong views on most subjects, but it is a notable fact that, in his published works, he chooses to present these views in a distinctly devious way. The Platonic dialogue, after all, is a literary form designed to advance philosophical positions *aporetically* and *dialectically*, not dogmatically. If we derive doctrines from them, it is, so to speak, at our own risk.

Nonetheless there is indubitably a body of doctrine associated with the Platonic School. Even within Plato's own lifetime, we have the (admittedly tendentious) testimony of Aristotle as to the existence of certain philosophical principles of Plato which he on occasion¹ terms *agrapha dogmata*, and which have come to be known as the 'unwritten doctrines'. I have taken up a certain position on these myself,² seeking to strike a judicious balance between what I would regard as the extreme views of Harold Cherniss and his followers, such as Leonardo Tarán, on the one hand, and the 'Tübingen School' of Konrad Gaiser, Hans-Joachim Krämer, and *their* followers (such as Giovanni Reale), on the other. To summarize my position here, I see no problem about there being a body of doctrines, or at least working hypotheses, which do not find their way into the dialogues, except in devious and allusive forms, and that these doctrines, such as that of the derivation of all things from a pair of first principles, a One and an Indefinite Dyad, should be of basic importance to Plato's system; but I see no need, on the other hand, to hypothesise a full body of secret lore, present in the Academy from its inception, which is preserved as a sort of 'mystery' for the initiated.

Short of this, however, it seems to me entirely probable that a great deal of philosophical speculation went on in the Academy which does not find its way into a dialogue. After all, Plato never promises to reveal his whole mind in writing – very much the opposite, indeed, if one bears in mind such a text as *Phaedrus* 275DE, or the following notable passage of the *Seventh Letter* (341C-E):³

¹ E.g. *Met*, A 6, 987b29ff. A useful collection both of Aristotelian passages and of Neoplatonic commentaries on them is to be found in H.-J. Krämer, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik*, Amsterdam, 1964.

² *The Heirs of Plato* (Oxford, 2003), Ch. 1: 'The Riddle of the Academy'.

³ Which I would certainly regard as authoritative (that is to say, emanating from sources in the Old Academy who knew what they were talking about), even if its provenance from the hand of Plato himself is disputed.

“But this much I can certainly declare concerning all these writers, or prospective writers, who claim to know the subjects which I seriously study (*peri hón egó spoudazó*), whether as having heard them from me or from others, or as having discovered them themselves; it is impossible, in my judgement at least, that these men should understand anything about this subject. *There does not exist, nor will there ever exist, any treatise of mine dealing therewith.* For it does not at all admit of verbal expression like other studies, but, as a result of continued application to the subject itself and actually living with it, it is brought to birth in the soul all of a sudden (*exaiphnés*), as light that is kindled by a leaping spark, and thereafter it nourishes itself.”

Even if this not Plato himself talking, as I say – though I believe it is – it is surely someone who was well acquainted with the situation obtaining in the school. Plato never really gave up on the Socratic idea that philosophy must always be a primarily oral activity, and also an open-ended process. So talk and argumentation prevailed in the groves of the Academy. And the members of the Academy of whom we have any knowledge – figures such as Speusippus, Xenocrates, Aristotle, Eudoxus of Cnidus, or Heraclides of Pontus – were a pretty talkative and argumentative bunch; not the sort of people to sit around as mute as cigar-store Indians until Plato had completed another dialogue!

At any rate, whatever the status of these ‘unwritten doctrines’, we are, it seems to me, left with the interesting problem that, from the perspective of the later Platonist tradition, beginning with Antiochus of Ascalon in the first century B.C.E., a firm conviction arose that Plato and the Old Academy had put forth a consistent and comprehensive body of doctrine on all aspects of philosophy, and this belief continued throughout later antiquity. Not that Platonism was ever seen to be a monolithic structure; there was room for a fairly wide spectrum of positions on most ethical and physical questions. But there was a solid consensus that Plato *did* dogmatize, and did not, as the New Academicians, from Arcesilaus to Carneades, maintained, simply raise problems and suspend judgement.⁴ What I would like to enquire into on this occasion is (a) whether there might be any justification for this belief, and (b), if there is, at what stage might this dogmatism have arisen.

It seems to me best, in approaching this question, to start at the end, so to speak – that is, with the evidence of Antiochus – and work back. What we find with Antiochus – or rather, in a number of significant texts of Cicero, in

⁴ Cf. the discussion of the question at the beginning of the *Anonymous Theaetetus Commentary*, a work emanating possibly from the late 1st. cent. B.C.E., but more probably from the following century. As regards the New Academy, indeed, an interesting belief arose in later times (doubtless a pious fiction) that the New Academics did not believe this themselves, but only maintained this position in public to combat the Stoics, while dogmatizing in private! Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *PH* I 234, and Aug. *C. Acad.*, 3. 20, 43 (quoting a lost section of Cicero’s *Academica*).

which his spokespersons are expounding Platonic doctrine along Antiochian lines⁵ – is, first of all, a clear division of the subject-matter of philosophy into the three domains of ethics, physics (including what we would consider rather ‘metaphysics’, or the discussion of first principles), and logic, and then a set of confidently proclaimed doctrines, under each of those heads. It has long been assumed, without much dissent that this construction is very largely a fantasy of Antiochus’, concocted by dint of extrapolating back onto his heroes in the Old Academy a body of doctrine largely gleaned from the Stoics, by whose teachings he was deeply influenced.

I entered a plea against this assumption in *The Middle Platonists*, some thirty years ago now, arguing on the one hand that there was little point in Antiochus’ trying to put over on a fairly sceptical and well-informed public a claim for which there was no justification whatever,⁶ and on the other hand recalling how little we really know of doctrinal developments within the Old Academy, especially under the leadership of Xenocrates and Polemon. I was still, however, in that work pretty wary of attributing too much in the way of doctrine to Polemon in particular, since we seemed to know so little about him, despite his forty-year tenure of the headship. But since then I have been much encouraged by a most perceptive article of David Sedley’s, ‘The Origins of Stoic God’, published in 2002,⁷ which, it seems to me, opens the way to recovering much of Polemon’s doctrinal position, and I have rather taken this ball and run with it, I’m afraid, in Ch. 4 of *The Heirs of Plato*.

I will return to David Sedley’s article presently, but for the moment I want to concentrate rather on the topic of ethics, and even before that to focus on the question of the formal division of philosophy into topics at all, which seems to me to be bound up with the establishment of a philosophical *system*. We learn from Sextus Empiricus, in fact (*Adv. Log.* I 16), that the first phi-

⁵ We are concerned chiefly with such works as *De Finibus* IV and V (for ethics), and the *Academica Priora* and *Posteriora* (for ‘physics’), but there are a number of other significant passages also. For a fairly comprehensive treatment of Antiochus, see *The Middle Platonists*, Ch. 2; but also, in a more sceptical mode, Jonathan Barnes, ‘Antiochus of Ascalon’, in *Philosophia Togata*, eds. M. Griffin & J. Barnes, Oxford, 1989, 51-96.

⁶ He is never, as I pointed out, accused of anything like this by Cicero, who himself, despite his great personal affection and respect for Antiochus, maintains a position loyal to the New Academy. All that Cicero accuses him of is being himself too close to the Stoics (*si perpauca mutavisset, germanissus Stoicus, Acad. Post.* 132; *a Chrysippo pedem nusquam, Acad. Post.* 143; and cf. also *Acad. Pr.* 135, where Cicero seeks to nail him on the particular point of virtue being sufficient for happiness, which he declares was *not* the view of the Old Academy). All this, I maintain, does not amount to a dismissal of Antiochus’ overall project – and it is, in any case, inter-school polemic.

⁷ In *Traditions of Theology: Studies in Hellenistic Theology, its Background and Aftermath*, eds. D. Frede and A. Laks, Leiden, 2002, 41-83.

philosopher formally to distinguish the three main areas or topics of philosophy, which Sextus names in the order 'Physics – Ethics – Logic', but which can occur in virtually any order, was Xenocrates.⁸ However – and, I think, significantly – Sextus precedes this announcement by saying that Plato himself had already made this division 'virtually' (*dynamai*), since he discussed many problems in all these fields.⁹ The true significance of this statement, I think, is that Xenocrates himself, in making this formal division, sought to father the concept on Plato himself, possibly in his attested work *On Philosophy* (DL IV 13). He could, after all, without difficulty have adduced various passages from the dialogues, and indeed whole dialogues, such as the *Timaeus*, for physics, *Republic IV* for ethics, or the *Theaetetus* for epistemology (as part of logic) – or indeed the second part of the *Parmenides* in the same connexion – which would support his contention, very much as is done by later composers of Platonist handbooks, such as Alcinous or Apuleius.

If this be so, it can be seen as the tip of a rather large iceberg. First of all, in order to make appeal to the works of Plato, one needed to have a definitive edition of them. It was the suggestion long ago of Henri Alline¹⁰ that the first edition of the works of Plato was instituted in the Academy under Xenocrates, and although this has been much impugned over the years as unproven, I must say that it seems to me an entirely probable conjecture. Such an early edition was certainly made, since we have what appears to be Plato's entire oeuvre surviving to us – something that cannot be claimed for any other ancient philosophic author, except perhaps Plotinus (and we know how *that* happened) – and I feel it to be unlikely that Speusippus ever got around to such an enterprise. It would most effectively underpin what seems to have been Xenocrates' main project, which is that of defending the tradition of Platonism against the attacks of Aristotle and his associates, such as Theophrastus, since to perform this duty plausibly he needed to have the Master's works to hand in a definitive format.

Once he had an authoritative corpus, he could proceed – though I think also that he had no hesitation in appealing to 'unwritten doctrines' when required, relying not only on his personal experience of what went on in the Academy, but on such a text as that from the *Seventh Letter* quoted above (if he did not actually compose that himself!). His purpose will have been to hammer out something like a coherent body of doctrine from this rather unpromising material.

⁸ Actually, if Antiochus is following Xenocrates in this, Xenocrates' order will have been 'Ethics – Physics – Logic', and Sextus is merely following the preferred Stoic order.

⁹ He might also have added that Aristotle seems to recognise a tripartition of philosophy at *Topics I 14* (105b19 ff.).

¹⁰ In *Histoire du text de Platon*, Paris, 1915.

If we take the sphere of ethics for a start, the sort of issues that were arising, in the wake of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (in whatever form that might have been available), would have been the relative importance of the virtues and the lesser goods, those of the body and external circumstances, in the achieving of happiness, or *eudaimonia*, and the overall purpose of life, whether *theoria* or *praxis*. From Plato himself, one might derive rather mixed signals, after all. From the *Phaedo*, for instance, one might conclude that the concerns of the body are simply a distraction for the philosopher, and should be unhitched from as far as possible, even before death (the philosopher should, precisely, practice death!), whereas from the *Republic*, particularly Book IX (cf. esp. 580D-592B), one might deduce that the lesser goods, desired by the spirited element (*thymos*) and the passionate element (*epithymia*), though far inferior to the goods of the soul, are to be accorded a limited status, in a suitably controlled and moderated form. This ambiguity continues in the *Laws*, where, in Book I, 631BC, we learn that "goods are of two kinds, human and divine; and the human goods are dependent on the divine, and he who receives the greater acquires also the less, or else he is bereft of both." These 'human' goods, such as health, beauty, strength and wealth, Plato goes on to say, are far inferior to the 'divine' goods of the soul, which are the four virtues, but they are not to be dismissed from consideration. He goes on to characterize them, however, somewhat later (II 661A-D), as 'conditional goods', which are really good only for the virtuous man, and actually evils for the bad man, who will be liable to misuse them.¹¹

In face of all this, let us consider the definitions of happiness put forth by Xenocrates and Polemon respectively, as relayed to us by the Alexandrian Church Father Clement (*Strom.* II 22). First that of Xenocrates, presumably derived from his treatise *On Happiness*:

"Xenocrates of Chalcedon defines happiness as the acquisition of the excellence (or virtue, *aretê*) proper to us, and of the resources with which to service it. Then as regards the proper seat (*to en hōi*) of this, he plainly says the soul; as the motive causes of it (*hyph' hōn*) he identifies the virtues; as the material causes (*ex hōn*), in the sense of parts, noble actions and good habits and attitudes (*hexeis kai diatheseis*); and as indispensable accompaniments (*hōn ouk aneu*), bodily and external goods."

There is much of interest here, if we can trust the basic fidelity of Clement. First of all, can we conclude from this that the distinctive 'metaphysic of prepositions', presumed by such an authority as Willy Theiler to be a product of the scholasticism of the first century B.C.E. or later, is already being utilized by Xenocrates at the end of the fourth century? I'm not sure why not, really. There is nothing inherent in the formulation, I think, that could

¹¹ This topic has recently been discussed, in rather exhausting detail, by Christopher Bobonich, in Ch. 2 of his vast work, *Plato's Utopia Recast* (Oxford, 2002).

not have been derived by a scholastically-minded man from the existing, somewhat less systematic usage of prepositions for this purpose by Plato and Aristotle, and I am not sure how or why Clement would have arrived at this application of the prepositional terms, had he not had some stimulus to it from Xenocrates.

More important, however, is the content of the doctrine. We can deduce from this, I think, that *eudaimonia* is for Xenocrates not solely a matter of the acquisition or possession of *aretê*, but "the resources with which to service it," that is to say, the bodily and external goods which are its *hôn ouk aneu*, which I have rendered its 'indispensable accompaniments.'¹²

This in turn may be connected with evidence that can be derived from Cicero in *De Finibus* IV 15-18, where, in confutation of the Stoics, he is presenting the Antiochian view of the doctrine of the Old Academy and Peripatos, or more specifically, of Xenocrates and Aristotle. After declaring that these two start out from the same ethical first principles as do the Stoics later, the 'first things according to nature', or *prôta kata physin* (*prima naturae*, in Cicero's Latin), he proceeds to give a summary of their position. As this account does not accord particularly well with Aristotle's surviving views (though it may have accorded better with early works of his available to Cicero, but not to us), it seems reasonable to claim it, broadly, for Xenocrates:¹³

"Every natural organism aims at being its own preserver, so as to secure its safety and also its preservation true to its specific type.¹⁴ With this object, they declare, man has called in the aid of the arts to assist nature; and chief among them is counted the art of living, which helps him to guard the gifts that nature has bestowed and to obtain those that are lacking. They further divided the nature of man into soul and body. Each of these parts they pronounced to be desirable for its own sake, and consequently they said that the virtues (or excellences) also of each were desirable for their own sakes; at the same time they extolled the soul as infinitely surpassing the body in worth, and accordingly placed the virtues also of the mind above the goods of the body. But they held that wisdom is the guardian and protectress of the whole man, as being the comrade and helper of nature, and so they said that the function of wisdom, as protecting a being that consisted of a mind and body, was to assist and preserve him in respect of both."

¹² The issue of the role of the *hexeis kai diatheseis* as the 'parts' out of which happiness is constructed is also of interest, as it seems to embody a doctrine, also expressed by Aristotle at the beginning of Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1.1103a14-b25), that *ethical* virtue arises from *ethos*, from good training and from the *practice* of noble deeds.

¹³ I borrow the Loeb translation of H. Rackham.

¹⁴ *Omnis natura vult esse conservatrix sui, ut et salva sit et in genere conservetur suo.*

The principle with which this passage begins does not, admittedly, seem to reflect closely anything appearing in the Platonic dialogues; but it could well be a development of a principle enunciated by Plato's companion Eudoxus of Cnidus, who was noted for maintaining that pleasure was the highest good, on the grounds that the maximization of pleasure was the first thing sought by any sentient organism from its birth on.¹⁵ If so, Xenocrates has adapted it to a rather different purpose, to establish a justification for maintaining a concern for physical survival and comfort as a base on which to build. On the other hand, the sentiments expressed in the rest of the text are readily derivable from the passages of the *Laws* mentioned above.

The establishing of 'the things primary according to Nature' as the basis for an ethical theory is attributed by Antiochus also to Polemon (e.g. *De Fin.* IV 50-1), but we may discern from reports of his position a slight increase in austerity, in comparison with his master Xenocrates. It can only have been slight, as they are consistently lumped together in the doxography, but it is significant that Polemon was the teacher of the future Stoic founder Zeno, and he plainly transmitted to him an austere ethical stance, which Zeno then developed further.

Clement reports Polemon's position, immediately following that of Xenocrates (*Strom.* II 22):

"Polemon, the associate of Xenocrates, seems to wish happiness (*eudaimonia*) to consist in self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) in respect of all good things, or at least the most and greatest of them. For he lays it down that happiness can never be achieved apart from virtue, *while virtue is sufficient for happiness even if bereft of bodily and external goods.*"

It is in this last specification, if in anything, that Polemon is distinctive. One can see here, I think, traces of an on-going argument within the Academy as to the precise status of the so-called 'mortal' goods. Nevertheless, it would seem from Antiochus' evidence that Polemon did not entirely dismiss these lower goods. Here is the passage alluded to above (IV 50-1). Cicero is in the process of criticizing Cato for indulging in various specious Stoic arguments:

"As for your other argument, it is by no means 'consequential', but actually dull-witted to a degree – though, of course the Stoics, and not you yourself, are responsible for that. 'Happiness is a thing to be proud of; but it cannot be the case that anyone should have good reason to be proud without virtue.' The former proposition Polemon will concede to Zeno, and so will his Master (sc. Xenocrates) and the whole of their school, as well as all the other philosophers who, while ranking virtue far above all else, yet couple some other thing with it in

¹⁵ Cf. Aristotle, *EN* I 12, 1101b27-31; X 2, 1172b9-18. Aristotle remarks, in the second passage, that Eudoxus' views gained considerably in credibility because of his own high personal standards of morality.

defining the highest good; since if virtue is a thing to be proud of, as it is, and excels everything else to a degree hardly to be expressed in words, Polemon will be able to be happy if endowed solely with virtue, and destitute of all besides, and yet he will not grant you that nothing except virtue is to be reckoned as a good.”

We have here, then, the lineaments of a Platonist doctrine on the first principles of ethics and the components of happiness, which, while allowing for variations of emphasis, yet can form the basis for a coherent position. In later times, it rather depended on whether you were more concerned to combat Stoics (as, for example, was Plutarch) or Peripatetics (as was the later Athenian Platonist Atticus) that you took a more or less austere line in ethics – that you favoured, for example, *metriopatheia* over *apatheia* or the reverse – but in either case there was a deposit of Platonist doctrine to fall back on, and that doctrine, I would maintain, was laid down by Xenocrates and Polemon, not immediately by Plato.

The case is similar in the area of the first principles of physics. Plato had left a rather confusing legacy to his successors – or so it must seem to us. We have, on the one hand, the Good of the *Republic*, a first principle which is in some way ‘beyond’ (*epekeina*) the rest of existence, of which it is the generative ground, as well as an object of desire; but then there is the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*, who is described as an Intellect, but who is represented as contemplating a Model in some way above and beyond himself, in his creation of Soul and of the world (unless the Demiurge and his creation are a myth, and to be deconstructed, as was stoutly maintained, against the criticisms of Aristotle, by both Speusippus and Xenocrates); then there is the One of the hypotheses of the second part of the *Parmenides*, which may or may not have been intended by Plato as a first principle, but which was certainly taken as such in later times; further, there are the first principles set out in the *Philebus* (26Cff.), Limit, the Unlimited, and the Cause of the Mixture, which seem to have a fairly close relationship to the One and Indefinite Dyad of the Unwritten Doctrines; and then, last but not least, we seem to have the doctrine, firmly enunciated first in the *Phaedrus* (245Cff.), but also dominant in Book X of the *Laws*, of a rational World Soul as the first principle of all motion, and therefore of all creation. What are we to do with this embarrassment of riches?

It is fairly plain what Xenocrates did with it; it is less plain in the case of Polemon, but I think that his position is recoverable, if certain minimal clues are probed closely. In either case, the result is interesting. In the case of Xenocrates, what is attested (though only by the doxographer Aetius, who is a rather doubtful witness)¹⁶ is a pair of Monad and Dyad, the former being characterized as ‘Zeus and Odd and Intellect’, and spoken of in addition as “having the role of Father, reigning in the heavens” – which latter descrip-

¹⁶ *Placita*, I 7, 30, p. 304 Diels = Fr. 15 Heinze / 213 Isnardi Parente.

tion seems to connect him, remarkably, with the Zeus of the *Phaedrus* Myth (246E), and to place him, not in any transcendent relation to the physical cosmos, but rather as resident in the topmost sphere of it. In respect of his consort, however, there is what seems to me a serious difficulty in the text, which I have had various stabs at solving over the years, but which still bothers me. Here is the text as it appears in the *Placita*:

“Xenocrates, son of Agathenor, of Chalcedon [holds] as gods the Monad and the Dyad, the former as male, having the role of Father, reigning in the heavens (*en ouranôî basileuousan*), which he terms ‘Zeus’ and ‘odd’ (*perittos*, sc. numerically) and ‘Intellect’, which is for him the primary god; the other as female, in the manner of the Mother of the Gods (*mêtros theôn dikên*), ruling over the realm below the heavens, who is for him the Soul of the Universe (*psychê tou pantos*).”

Here, on the face of it, it seems that the female principle which is the counterpart of the Monad, while being characterized as ‘the mother of the gods’, is also presented as a World Soul, whose realm of operations is ‘below the heavens’. Now I am on record as declaring that either Aetius has gone seriously astray here, or the manuscript tradition has suffered corruption.¹⁷ My reason for maintaining that is that we learn also, from the rather more reliable source that is Plutarch (*Proc. An.* 1012D-1013B = Fr. 68 H/188 IP), that, when Xenocrates is interpreting the creation of the soul in the *Timaeus* (35AB), he takes the ‘indivisible substance’ (*ameristos ousia*) as being in fact the Monad, and ‘that which is divided about bodies’ (*hê peri ta sômata meristê*) as Multiplicity (*plêthos*),¹⁸ or the Indefinite Dyad, while the Soul, characterized as a ‘self-moving number’ is the product of these two. So the Indefinite Dyad cannot itself be the World-Soul.

I would like to think that what is happened is that a line has fallen out of the Aetius passage, between *metros theôn* and *dikên*, in which we learned that the Dyad was female, “holding the rank of Mother of the Gods, which he terms ‘Rhea’ and ‘even’ and ‘Matter’”, while *dikên* actually is to be taken as a proper name, Dikê – the assessor of Zeus in Hesiod’s *Works and Days* (256-7), and his ‘follower’ in *Laws* IV 716A – characterizing the World Soul as the offspring of these two entities, rather like Athene (who may also have been mentioned). This would, at any rate, provide us with a coherent account of Xenocrates’ system of first principles, which in turn can be seen as an attempt to bring some order into the Platonic *testimonia*.

If we can take this as being the position, we can see, I think, Xenocrates going to work to create a coherent Platonist doctrine to counter the attacks

¹⁷ ‘Xenocrates’ Metaphysics: Fr. 15 (Heinze) Re-examined’, *Ancient Philosophy* 5, 47-52 (repr. in *The Golden Chain*, Aldershot, 1990). I have set out my arguments at more length in *The Heirs of Plato*, Oxford, 2003, 98-107.

¹⁸ This is actually Speusippus’ preferred term for the female principle, but Xenocrates doubtless employed it as well.

of Aristotle (e.g. in the *De Caelo* I 12). An important part of his strategy is insisting on a non-literal interpretation of the *Timaeus*, since a literal interpretation creates various major embarrassments, which indeed Aristotle picked on. The first problem is the inconsistency of postulating something, to wit, the physical cosmos, that has a beginning but (by arbitrary decree of the Demiurge) no end. That is a logical absurdity, but there is also the difficulty of the Demiurge, though he appears to be a supreme deity, nonetheless contemplating a *paradeigma*, or 'model', in accordance with which he performs his creative work, which is independent of, and co-ordinate with, himself; and there is also the oddity (though it is explained away by ingenious feats of modern exegesis) that, although Timaeus has stated that an intellect cannot be present in anything without a soul (30b2-3), the Demiurge is precisely that – an intellect without a soul.¹⁹

However, once one has postulated that the account of demiurgic creation is a myth, all these problems dissolve satisfactorily. What the Demiurge then becomes, it seems to me, is nothing other than a divine Intellect, contemplating its own contents, which are the totality of the Forms, conceived by this stage as numbers, or at least numerical formulae of some sort, and projecting them, eternally, onto a substratum – which Plato himself, notoriously, does not present as matter, but which Aristotle, and very probably both Speusippus and Xenocrates also, did. This is also the Zeus of the *Phaedrus* myth, and perhaps also the Good of the *Republic*.

What, however, of the World Soul of *Laws* X, which would seem to be Plato's last word on the subject of supreme principles? It is not entirely clear to me what is going on here, and I am not sure that Polemon may not have had a slightly different take on it from Xenocrates, but I would suggest that, for Plato in the *Laws*, the supreme principles are indeed still the One and the Indefinite Dyad, but that they are seen as somehow, when considered separately, only *potential* principles, which must come together to be actualized, and the result of their coming together is the generation, first of the whole system of Form-Numbers, and then, with the addition of the principle of mobility, of Soul. Since this whole process must be conceived of as being eternal, and indeed timeless, the actively cosmogonic principle, and the cause of motion to everything else, is in fact the World Soul.

At any rate, that is one version of a system of first principles that is bequeathed to later generations of Platonists, in the form of the triad of God – Forms, or even Form (*Idea*) – Matter, and this goes back, I suggest, primarily to Xenocrates, who, however, was assiduous in fathering it on Plato, and

¹⁹ The ingenuity I refer to is to make a distinction between *having* an intellect, which would require something to have a soul, and *being* an intellect, which need not involve having or being anything else. That is all well and good, but, in the myth, the Demiurge is more than just a disembodied intellect; he is presented as a divine personage who *has* an intellect, and thus must also have a soul.

was able to quote a number of proof texts in support of this. That is not, however, the only system that emerges from the Old Academy, and this brings me back to Polemon, and to David Sedley.

We had long had the problem, and it was one that bothered me when I was surveying the Old Academy in the first chapter of *The Middle Platonists*, and for a long time after that, that, although Polemon presided over the Academy for fully forty years, and was a deeply respected figure, all we seemed to know of him, apart from a cluster of anecdotes and sayings, was a modicum of ethical theory; he did not seem to have had any view on physics or logic at all. And yet could that be true? How could one profess to be a Platonist, after all, and disregard the whole metaphysical structure that underlay Plato's ethical theories? Certainly, Antiochus' spokesman Varro, in a passage of Cicero's *Academica*, I 24-9, gives us what purports to be a survey of Old Academic physics, but it comes across as so palpably Stoic in content that no one gave it a second thought.

However, one small clue does exist to Polemon's doctrine in this area which, if properly pressed, can yield interesting results, and it was this that David Sedley fastened on in his article, 'The Origins of Stoic God'. Immediately following on Aetius' rather extensive report of Xenocrates' theology, he appends a single line: "Polemon declared that the cosmos is God (*Polemôn ton kosmon theon apephênato*)."

There were some who noted this doxographic snippet without finding it very interesting, as they felt that it could be rendered, "Polemon declared that the cosmos is *a god*"—which would be a fairly uninteresting piece of information. But, in the context, it cannot mean that; Aetius is presenting various philosophers' views about the supreme deity, not about any old god. So we are faced with the testimony, albeit baldly doxographic, that, for Polemon, Platonist though he was, the supreme principle is none other than the cosmos. How can that be so?

We must first of all, I suggest, think back to Plato's last thoughts on the subject in *Laws X* – and, more particularly, to his faithful amanuensis, Philip of Opus', appendix to that work, the *Epinomis*.²⁰ Philip, in the *Epinomis* (e.g. 976Dff.; 981B-E), comes out unequivocally in support of the position that the supreme principle is a rational World Soul immanent in the cosmos, and indeed that the study of astronomy is the highest science, since one is in fact thereby studying the motions of the divine mind. Philip had presumably convinced himself that this was indeed Plato's final view on the question, but he is actually presenting a rather radical take on Plato's thought, which was plainly not shared by his colleagues Speusippus or Xenocrates. Polemon, however, I would suggest, may have been attracted by it. But if in-

²⁰ I must say that I am entirely convinced by the arguments of Leonardo Tarán in his fine edition of this work, *Academica: Plato, Philip of Opus and the Pseudo-Platonic Epinomis* (Philadelphia, 1975), that this work is by Philip.

deed one adopts this view of the active first principle, what follows for one's doctrine of the dynamic structure of the cosmos as a whole? Let us consider Antiochus' account of the Old Academy's physical theory:

“The topic of Nature, which they treated next (sc. after ethics), they approached by dividing it into two principles, the one the creative (*efficiens = poiêtikê*), the other at this one's disposal, as it were, out of which something might be created. In the creative one they considered that there inhered power (*vis = dynamis*), in the one acted upon, a sort of 'matter' (*materia = hyle*); yet they held that each of the two inhered in the other, for neither would matter have been able to cohere if it were not held together by any power, nor yet would power without some matter (for nothing exists without being necessarily somewhere).²¹ But that which was the product of both they called 'body' (*corpus = sôma*), and, so to speak, a sort of 'quality' (*qualitas = poiôtês*).”

What we have here is a two-principle universe admittedly very similar to that of the Stoics – but it is also, interestingly, similar to that attributed to Plato himself by Theophrastus in his curious little work, the *Metaphysics* (6a24-5). These two principles can, after all, be taken as the One and the Indefinite Dyad, or Limit and the Unlimited, neither of which can exist without the other, and the union of which generates, first Number and Soul, but ultimately the cosmos. Even the denominating of the active principle as a *dynamis*, and the formal principle (for that is what is being referred to) as *poiôtês*, could be seen as deriving from a scholastic exegesis of the *Theaetetus*, first of 156A, where Socrates refers to active and passive principles in the cosmos as *dynameis*, and then to 182A, where he coins the term *poiôtês*. So even if we are driven to admit that Antiochus is giving something of a Stoic gloss to the material here, it seems reasonable to argue that he cannot have done so without some warrant from the Old Academic sources available to him.

A little further on, in ss. 27-8, the active principle is identified as a rational World Soul, residing primarily in the heavens, but pervading all parts of the cosmos (it is in this sense that the cosmos as a whole can be described as God). It is “perfect intelligence and wisdom (*mens sapientiaque perfecta*), which they call God, and is a sort of providence, presiding over all things that fall under its control.” There is nothing here, I think, that cannot be derived from a non-literal interpretation of the *Timaeus*.

We can see, then, I think, as in the case of ethical theory, something of a difference of emphasis between the doctrinal positions of Xenocrates and Polemon, though without constituting anything like a contradiction. The first beneficiaries of Polemon's doctrinal stance were the Stoics, but he then became available to such later figures as Eudorus of Alexandria, Nero's court philosopher Thrasyllus, and even the Platonizing Jewish philosopher Philo,

²¹ An interesting reference, this, to a passage of the *Timaeus*, 52B: “Everything that exists must necessarily be in some place (*en tini topôi*).”

all of whom adopted a rather Stoicizing logos-theology; while other philosophers, such as Plutarch and Atticus, will have been more influenced by Xenocrates. Between the two of them, however, they provided the basis for a body of Platonist dogma.

I will pass lightly over the topic of logical theory and epistemology, since really most later Platonists adopted as Platonic the whole Aristotelian system of logic, together with such innovations as were added by Theophrastus and his successors. The Old Academic system of division of all things into categories of Absolute and Relative was not entirely forgotten, but relegated rather to the background. The section of the *Academica* (I 30-2) devoted to logic, though, is not without interest, and indicates that Polemon was not oblivious to that either.

I could also have gone in considerably more detail into the areas of ethics and physics, but I hope that enough have been said here to make my point, which is that the exigencies of inter-school rivalry, initially between the Academy and the Peripatos, but then between later Platonists and both Stoics and Aristotelians, demanded that Platonism become more formalized than it was left by Plato himself, and that it was primarily Xenocrates, in a vast array of treatises, both general and particular, who provided the bones of this organized corpus of doctrine. Not that the Platonists were ever subject to anything like a monolithic orthodoxy. Platonic doctrine was not anything handed down centrally, from above; it was rather a self-regulating system, in which everyone knew what it meant, broadly, to be a Platonist (which could, in later times, embrace being a Pythagorean as well), and managed to stay within those parameters, while squabbling vigorously with each other, as well as with the other schools.