CHAPTER 8

"Becoming like God" in Platonism and Stoicism

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Few texts have more power to evoke the Platonic view of philosophy than the famous passage from Plato's *Theaetetus* that enjoins human beings to become like god as much as possible. If there is one claim we could squarely put on the side of the Platonist tradition, surely it would be this one? Yet in the wake of Hellenistic philosophy and especially Stoicism, this matter is quite a bit more complex (and philosophically interesting for that reason) in so-called Middle Platonism, the period, roughly, from the second half of the first century BCE up to Plotinus. The current revival of interest in this strand of Platonism is largely due to its wide range of positions and approaches, which have proven fertile ground for the honing of *aporiai* and unresolved tensions in Plato's work. As it turns out, answers to the questions *which god* and *which aspect of this god* humans are supposed to emulate reveal a distinctive cross-over of Platonic and Stoic themes in Middle Platonism. In this chapter, I will take a closer look at three such instances, from the Anonymous Commentary on Plato's *Theaetetus*, Alcinous, and Plutarch. The example attributed to Eudorus which Myrto Hatzimichali discusses in her contribution to this volume would also fit into this pattern, though the echoes of Stoicism are more faint in this case (Stobaeus 2.7.3f, 49.8–50.10 Wachsmuth).

Setting the Stage: The *Theaetetus*

The overall purpose of the *Theaetetus* passage in question (172c–177b) is to contrast the philosopher with those actors in the public arena – or in the agora, as Plato puts it – who deal in socio-political capital and success as measured by conventional standards. Compared to such actors, the philosopher comes across as a blundering fool, but only because he is, in fact, pursuing a higher goal (176a–177a).

(1) This higher goal is predicated on a certain *dualism*, namely, that there must always be something opposed to the good, and that evil "cannot

have its place among the gods, but must inevitably hover above this mortal nature and earth." Plato's claim hinges on the opposites of good/gods/heaven versus evil/mortals/earth. As such Plato's formulation does not entail that nothing good is to be found in human beings and the earthly realm, but merely stipulates that the heavenly and divine realm is free from evil.

(2) The stated dualism, however, should motivate us to "*escape* from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can."

(3) If they engage in such an escape, humans "become like God so far as this is possible" (φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν).

(4) Becoming like God implies becoming "just, holy, and wise" (δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως).

Plato's Socrates next uses the claims which he has established so far to state what *true* virtue and vice entail, as opposed to merely *seeming* good and *not seeming* bad. He elaborates that, given that God is perfectly just, "there is nothing so like him (ὁμοιότερον) as one of us who in turn becomes as just as possible." Thus:

(5) Wisdom and true virtue consist of the realization that one becomes like God primarily by being just.

(6) The penalty for being unjust is not death or other forms of suffering, as commonly assumed – penalties which one could avoid – but one "which it is impossible to escape."

If we combine the last two claims, Plato may imply that wisdom and true virtue are, in fact, *in themselves* the reward of being just, whereas ignorance and vice are *in themselves* the punishment for being unjust. The just human being, we can assume, "escapes" by becoming like god; the unjust, by contrast, remains stuck in, that is, does not escape from, "this mortal nature and earth." Or, as Plato goes on to state,

(7) Faced with the choice between two patterns (παραδείγματα) in reality, namely the divine and blessed, on the one hand, and the godless and wretched, on the other, the unjust human being will align him- or herself (ὁμοιούμενοι) with the latter, and his or her life too will conform to this pattern. As a result, in the afterlife such a person will not be received in the place that is free from evil (ὁ τῶν κακῶν καθαρὸς τόπος), and in this life too they will always be immersed in evil.

In this "digression" from the *Theaetetus* Plato leaves rather vague what he means by the "divine" and the realm that is opposed to earth. Moreover,

in the immediate context he has introduced Thales, who fell into a well because he was studying the sky (174a), as an example of the philosopher. Thales is meant to stand for the kind of person who is present to the city only in his body, but who with his mind wanders in all directions, both below, on earth, "measuring the surface of the earth," and above, in the sky, "studying the stars and investigating the universal nature of everything that is, each in its entirety" (πᾶσαν πάντῃ φύσιν ἐρευνωμένη τῶν ὄντων ἑκάστου ὅλου, 173e–174a; a wording that is reminiscent of one of the charges against Socrates in the *Apology*, 18b, 19b). So, which kind of inquiry is this philosopher actually engaging in? The Middle Platonist accounts which I will examine in this chapter tend to complement Plato's allusive use of the divine in this passage from the *Theaetetus* with information they can glean especially from the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*.

Which Justice?

In a recent article on Plutarch's view of the relation between the contemplative and the active life, Mauro Bonazzi (2012a: 149–50) argues that the divine's attribute of "justice" in the *Theaetetus* passage, which human beings are meant to imitate, would indicate that Plato here does not direct our attention exclusively to an other-worldly dimension, but also to a political responsibility that would keep human beings anchored in an active life in their communities.[1]

As attractive and well-argued as this reading is, however, I do not think it can stand. Plato's notion of justice does not, by itself, point to any straightforward endorsement of political or this-worldly involvement. This chapter would, of course, get stranded right away if we needed a full analysis of what justice means for Plato in order to forge ahead. Fortunately, we need only a working hypothesis that can, in effect, be derived from the *Theaetetus* passage in question. Based on this evidence, one could argue that justice for Plato primarily has an ontological connotation, coupled with a psychological-moral one. Rather like *Dikē* in Parmenides' poem, justice here is meant to affirm the right order of reality, according to which the higher realm of divine perfection, not the level of the "things on earth and mortal nature," constitutes the ultimate and

[1] The case can be made, though this would be a topic for a different essay, that the passages from Plutarch which Bonazzi cites are themselves much more indebted to Stoicism than he acknowledges. For a line of reasoning that is similar to Bonazzi's, see also Armstrong 2004, with excellent bibliography. For a very balanced assessment, see now also Bénatouïl (unpublished), end of ch. 3, 131–4.

appropriate normative frame of reference (at this stage in my argument, I am deliberately repeating Plato's vague language). Human beings, if they want to "become like god," need to imitate the proper order of reality, and turn toward this higher realm.

Without importing full-fledged Platonic psychology into the *Theaetetus* passage, we may be permitted to add that humans need to get their soul in proper order, to reflect the right order of reality. Such a "turn" can then be understood as entailing both true knowledge, or wisdom, and virtue, as Plato claims. If human beings do make this turn, they are rewarded, if they do not, they are punished by never being able to rise above evil. On this reading of the *Theaetetus* passage there would be no tension between the injunctions for humans, on the one hand, to become just by imitating divine justice and, on the other, to "escape" from "here to there." If, in general, justice for Plato refers primarily to the proper order of both reality and individual human souls, then it should not come as a surprise that he faces a major challenge with bringing in a communal and political dimension – that is, no doubt, quite the understatement given the range of scholarly positions on this issue, but it will have to do for my purpose here.

The first text of the Middle Platonist era to which we turn, the Anonymous Commentary on Plato's *Theaetetus*, gives us a glimpse of a debate between the Stoics and the Platonists about the proper foundation of justice (5.3–8.6). Whereas the Stoics, the author claims, derive justice from their notion of "appropriation" (*oikeiōsis*),[2] Plato bases it on human beings' likeness to God. The part of the commentary in which the author would have returned to this topic is unfortunately not preserved. But we can tell that it is precisely a polemic with the Stoics that leads the commentator to focus on the social aspect of justice, or our dealings with other human beings, in this section.

Succinctly put, the Stoic notion of "appropriation" states that human beings and animals are born with an awareness of and positive disposition towards themselves that directs them towards self-preservation. But even for irrational animals and pre-rational human beings, that is, children, the self-directed and other-oriented aspects of *oikeiōsis* are supposed to go hand in hand. With the advent of reason, which is of the order of nature for the Stoics, the self that is worth preserving is defined by the optimal functioning of this reason. Because both humans and gods derive their reason from the divine principle (see later), all adult human beings share in reason with

[2] See also Porphyry *Abst.* 3.19 = Plutarch F 193 Sandbach: τὴν δὲ οἰκείωσιν ἀρχὴν τίθενται δικαιοσύνης οἱ ἀπὸ Ζήνωνος.

one another and with the gods. Thus the so-called community of gods and men makes rationality intrinsically social and underscores the primacy of the political dimension of justice.

Plutarch has preserved evidence that Chrysippus took Plato to task precisely on the grounds that a focus on the individual soul's condition overlooks the social implications of injustice (Plut. *Stoic. rep.* 1041B–C; this passage is also discussed in Jan Opsomer's contribution to this volume):

> Since Plato had said of injustice that, being discord of the soul and intestine strife, it does not lose its force within those who themselves harbor it either but sets the wicked man at variance with himself, Chrysippus objects and says that to speak of doing oneself injustice is absurd, for injustice exists in relation to another and not to oneself; but this he forgot, and later in the Demonstrations concerning Justice he says that the wrong-doer is wronged by himself and does himself injustice whenever he wrongs another, for he has become a cause of transgression for himself and is injuring himself undeservedly. In the books against Plato this is what he has said concerning justice as a term used in relation not to oneself but to another: "For isolated individuals <are not unjust nor are> unjust men composites of several such individuals contradicting one another, injustice being understood anyhow as obtaining in the case of several persons so disposed to one another and no such condition pertaining to the individual save in so far as he stands in such relation to his neighbors" (trans. Cherniss).

There existed, then, quite a debate between the Platonists and the Stoics about justice and injustice.[3] Chrysippus' criticism also undercuts Platonic psychology, which assigns distinct functions or parts to the human soul in order to account for inner discord, a view that Stoic psychological monism rejects. The sequel to this passage shows that Chrysippus, if Plutarch's polemic rendering is accurate, does not deny that, in a certain sense, an individual can do injustice to him- or herself, but only in a derivative manner, that is, in doing injustice or wronging another. So, in other words, for Chrysippus, contrary to Plato, he avers, the social aspect of (in)justice is primary.

As a famous passage of the Stoic Hierocles shows (Stobaeus 4.27.23, 671.7–673.11 Hense = LS57 G), the goal of the other-directed aspect of appropriation for human beings is eventually to feel the same degree of appropriation towards all rational beings as one feels to oneself. This is the view with which the commentator takes issue, in a two-pronged attack. First, he rejects the claim that there are no different degrees of

[3] On the topic of doing injustice to oneself, see also Aristotle *EN* 5.11.

appropriation, or that appropriation does not progressively weaken as we move away from ourselves, first to those who are close to us, such as fellow citizens, then all the way up to the human beings who are most distant from us. Second, he argues that if the Stoics were to concede this point and to admit different degrees of appropriation, implying that appropriation to oneself is stronger than the one pertaining to others, then (a) they could not account for circumstances that necessitate self-sacrifice; and (b) they would really be no better off than the Epicureans who cannot preserve justice because they make self-interest their central concern. In sum, the notion of appropriation cannot provide a proper foundation for just dealings with other human beings, so the commentator argues. For this reason Plato does not make appropriation but godlikeness the basis of justice (7.14–19).

Ancient commentators often surprise us by making connections that to us look tenuous at best. In this case Socrates' opening statement in the *Theaetetus* (143d) that he cares more for Athens than Cyrene, the hometown of Theodorus, is enough of a pretext to launch an attack on the social aspect of Stoic *oikeiōsis*. But it is the context of this very specific polemic with the Stoics, I would argue, that leads the commentator to consider justice in the light of "love of mankind" (*philanthrōpia* 6.20) and to focus on the social dimension of a justice that is based on the likeness to god, a dimension that, as we have seen, is not prevalent in the *Theaetetus* "digression" itself.

Which God? The *Timaeus* and the *Laws*

When Middle Platonist authors try to fill out the picture of the divine in the *Theaetetus* passage, they tend to turn, as I have indicated, to Plato's *Timaeus* and his *Laws*. But the *Timaeus* presents its readers with at least two major challenges that are relevant here. First, it marshals a wide range of divine entities: the paradigm of Being, the Demiurge who orders the world, the younger gods, the traditional Olympian pantheon, and the World Soul. How are all these entities related? Second, the Demiurge appears to have both a noetic dimension, in that he "looks at" the paradigm of Being, and a relational one, in that he cares for the world and tries to make the *kosmos* as good as possible (A. A. Long 2010, Powers 2013). If one moves beyond Plato's notion of a divine Craftsman, can one and the same god in fact assume both of these functions?

I have argued elsewhere (Reydams-Schils 1999: ch. 1, 41–83) that the Stoics reinterpreted the *Timaeus* and provided a radical solution to the first

challenge: they unified all these aspects of the divine into one and the same active principle that as pure reason and creative fire or breath permeates the *kosmos* and constitutes its order. In a key passage preserved by Diogenes Laertius (7.87–8), for instance, we can see how Chrysippus co-opts the ending of the *Timaeus* (90a–d). Plato's Timaeus recommends that humans align their reason, which functions as a demon that has been allotted to them, with that of the World Soul.[4] But his audience would know that the order of the World Soul itself is a reflection of the transcendent reality of the paradigm of Being. Chrysippus, by contrast, leaves out this higher dimension of reality and enjoins human beings "always to do everything on the basis of the concordance of each man's guardian spirit with the will of the administrator of the whole" (κατὰ τὴν συμφωνίαν τοῦ παρ' ἑκάστῳ δαίμονος πρὸς τὴν τοῦ τῶν ὅλων διοικητοῦ βούλησιν). This "administrator of the whole" is Zeus as constituting universal law, "which is the right reason pervading everything" (ὁ ὀρθὸς λόγος, διὰ πάντων ἐρχόμενος). Thus virtue is living in accordance with nature, both the nature of oneself and that of the whole. As already mentioned, this view of the structure of reality comes with an intrinsic social and communal dimension, which manifests itself also in the Stoic notion of "appropriation."

The Stoics turn their active principle into a full-fledged Providence; one could thus say, in connection with the second challenge from the *Timaeus*, that they privilege the relational aspect of the divine, manifested in its direct care for the order of the universe. Plato's *Laws* too contains some important claims about this relational aspect. First, there is the argument in favor of the existence and reach of Providence in Book Ten, an aspect of divine agency that is not particularly emphasized in the *Timaeus*. Thus, for instance, in the *Laws* Plato claims that "he who cares for the universe has arranged everything with the aim of the well-being and excellence of the whole, of which also each part according to its power undergoes and does what is appropriate. Every one of them is under the command of a leader who always takes care, up to the smallest part, of their passivity and activity and who has achieved the ultimate goal up to the detail" (903b). From the context of this passage it appears that with the divinity that "cares for the universe" Plato here has something like a World Soul in mind, an immanent divine agency, in other words.

Second, there is a passage that plays a key role in Middle Platonist views of the divine, and that comes with some echoes of the *Theaetetus* passage

[4] For a full picture of this issue, one would also need to take into account other passages from Plato such as *Grg.* 507d–508a and *Phlb.* 28d–29a.

and its broader context (*Leg.* 715e–716d; see also the *Phaedrus* myth). According to an ancient story, Plato says, there is a god "who holds in his hands the beginning and end and middle of all things, and straight he marches in the cycle of nature" (ἀρχήν τε καὶ τελευτὴν καὶ μέσα τῶν ὄντων ἁπάντων ἔχων, εὐθείᾳ περαίνει κατὰ φύσιν περιπορευόμενος).[5] In this passage we are given a bit more information about this divinity than in the *Theaetetus*, and it seems not unreasonable, given the language used, to assume that this god is associated with the universe, probably with the heavens.

The god in the *Laws* passage is always accompanied by *Dikē*, who punishes those who deviate from the divine law. As in the *Theaetetus* "digression," the passage next focuses on the reward of those who follow *Dikē*, and the punishment, namely to be deserted by god, of those who are subject to vice and who think they can lead others, but in reality ruin themselves, their house, and their city (the political and communal dimension is more prominent here). The good man, by contrast, should aim at being among those who follow god. In a clear echo of the *Theaetetus*, god is said to be the measure of all things, not some human being, an allusion to the position of Protagoras, which is discussed and refuted in the *Theaetetus*. According to the principle that "like approves like," the moderate man would be dear (or a friend, *philos*) to god because he is like him (*homoios*); and vice versa, the immoderate one would be unlike god, separated from him, and unjust.

It is plausible that the Stoics arrived at their unified, immanent, and providential notion of the divine by superimposing some features derived from Plato's *Laws* onto the *Timaeus* (in spite of their criticism of the *Laws* in other respects: Persaeus wrote a work against the *Laws* – see A. G. Long 2013b). And sometimes our extant evidence, as fragmentary as it is, does oblige, revealing some breadcrumbs along the trail. According to Plutarch (*Comm. not.* 1074E) the Stoics endorsed the claim that "Zeus is beginning and middle and Zeus the fulfillment of all things," a variation of Plato's wording in the *Laws*, which the scholiast, who claims this god is the Demiurge, attributes to the Orphic tradition.

How then does this debate about the divine and its relation to the *kosmos* play out in Middle Platonism? Two examples can throw light on this question, the one, Alcinous' *Didaskalikos*, clearly displaying unresolved tensions, the other, in Plutarch, showing a marked influence of the Stoic perspective.

[5] For the later Platonist reception of this phrase, see Dillon 2001.

Which God? Alcinous

The example from Alcinous is the most complex case I will discuss in this chapter, because it requires that one combine his notions of (i) god; (ii) becoming god-like; and (iii) the relation between the active and the contemplative life. The advantage of this approach, however, is that it does not limit us to mere verbal echoes of Stoic terminology in any given passage, but allows for drawing out overall themes from an implicit polemic with Stoicism that runs throughout the entire text.

(i) God (ch. 10)

Contrary to the Stoics, the author of the *Didaskalikos* emphasizes the noetic aspect of his notion of the divine. The Platonic Forms become the thoughts of this god (see also 9.1) and, like Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, this god thinks himself. (Here we have a striking instance of the importance of Aristotelianism in this period.) But the label "father" (10.3), which also applies to god (as it does in Plato's *Timaeus*), would indicate a relational aspect that stands in tension with mere self-thinking thought, as the cause of all things. Moreover, Alcinous says of this god that "by his own will he has filled all things with himself" (κατὰ γὰρ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ βούλησιν ἐμπέπληκε πάντα ἑαυτοῦ). This claim creates a more intimate connection between god and the universe than the *Timaeus* itself indicates, which merely states that by his will the Demiurge prevents the destruction of the *kosmos* (41a–b). Alcinous' wording here appears to co-opt Stoic descriptions of this enhanced function of the divine as Providence.[6] Similarly, in the section on physics, Alcinous highlights the providential function of the Demiurge (12.1: κατὰ θαυμασιωτάτην πρόνοιαν; whereas the *Timaeus*, at 30c, merely has διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ πρόνοιαν, the only occurrence of *pronoia* in the text).

The *Didaskalikos* tries to resolve the tension between divine transcendence and care for the world by stipulating two levels of agency. First, god "wakes up" an already existing soul of the world and turns it towards himself and intelligible reality as expressed in his thoughts, and thus is the cause of the mind of the World Soul (see also 14.3). Second, it is this World Soul, after it has been ordered by the father (ὃς κοσμηθεὶς ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς), that, in turn, puts in order the entire realm within the *kosmos*

[6] See, for instance, ps.-Plutarch *De fato* 572F, Calcidius 205.3–5, and Marcus Aurelius 6.40; 9.1. On these passages from the *Didaskalikos*, see now also Torri in press.

(διακοσμεῖ; with perhaps an echo of the Stoic notion of *diakosmēsis*). This task of the World Soul is a significant enhancement of its role in the *Timaeus*, where it has a mainly cognitive function (37a–c) and stands for the order bestowed by the Demiurge. The enhanced responsibility of the World Soul is rather reminiscent of Book Ten of the *Laws* (with its many occurrences of *epimeleia/epimeleisthai*, see earlier in this chapter).

When he turns to the topic of physics (chs. 12–26), Alcinous follows more closely the language of the *Timaeus* itself, with its Demiurge. But in this earlier chapter of the *Didaskalikos* the demiurgic function of the divine seems to have been split between a transcendent god, on the one hand, and the mind of the World Soul, on the other (which is not to say that Alcinous equates the Demiurge with the World Soul, as Donini 1988b claims; see also Köckert 2009: 148–69).

(ii) Becoming Like God (ch. 28)

In line with this double agency, of transcendent god and World Soul, "becoming like god as much as possible" (ὁμοίωσιν θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν, ch. 28.1), now posited as the *telos* of human existence, entails imitating the god *in heaven*, that is, the mind of the World Soul we are meant to infer, not the god beyond heaven who in his perfection does not need virtue. So, *homoiōsis* would be inner-cosmic. As proof-texts, the author mentions the end of the *Republic*, the *Phaedo,* and the passage from the *Laws* discussed earlier. In keeping with this inner-cosmic dynamic of *homoiōsis*, Alcinous also quotes the *Phaedo* (82a) as equating moderation and justice with public and political virtue (28.2).[7] In doing so, with a technique of partial citation not uncommon in ancient authors (who often worked from memory or based on summaries or collections of passages), Alcinous elides Plato's irony, which is apparent in the context of the quote – that is, the context makes clear that this is precisely a view which Plato's Socrates does *not* endorse. So, by establishing a connection between the *Theaetetus* passage and a selective quotation from the *Phaedo*, Alcinous can enhance the socio-political aspect of justice.

Whereas the notion of divine will in the first chapter we looked at (ch. 10) runs counter to the transcendent and purely noetic aspect of the highest god, the injunction from the *Theaetetus* for humans "to try to flee from here to there as soon as possible" (28.1) this time creates a tension with

[7] Annas 1999, n. 23; I have found Annas' chapter on becoming like god, 52–71, very helpful for my purpose here.

the notion of an inner-cosmic *homoiōsis*. Or, as Alcinous interprets the injunction, humans "should turn away from most human matters, and remain always with the intelligible realm" (28.4: ὥστε ἐξίστασθαι μὲν τὰ πολλὰ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων, ἀεὶ δὲ εἶναι πρὸς τοῖς νοητοῖς). In this context, however, intelligible reality could well encompass both the mind of the World Soul and the Ideas in the mind of the highest god, and thus straddle the divide between the *kosmos* and the hyper-cosmic dimension of reality. We also know from the previous exposition that the mind of the World Soul functions precisely by turning towards the thoughts of the highest god. So, as in the *Timaeus*, which encourages human beings to realign their souls with the structure of the World Soul (see earlier), focusing one's attention on intelligible reality does not have to be an entirely other-worldly endeavor, as long as one keeps in mind that the World Soul itself points to a higher realm. But how can one both assume social and political responsibility and remain mostly aloof from human matters?

(iii) Theōria *and* praxis

Alcinous may already have provided an answer to this question when he turns his attention earlier in the work to the theme, ultimately inspired by Aristotle, of the relation between *theōria* and *praxis* (ch. 2; Bénatouïl 2009a; Sedley 2012d), a discussion that, like the Anonymous Commentary on the *Theaetetus*, shows traces of a polemic with the Stoics while also co-opting Stoic terminology.[8] *Theôria*, Alcinous stipulates, is an activity of the mind thinking the intelligibles (τοῦ νοῦ νοοῦντος τὰ νοητά); *praxis* is an activity of the rational soul that takes place through the body. A soul that contemplates the divine and the thoughts of the divine is said to be in a happy state (*eupathein*; see also *Phaedrus* 247d), and this state equals *phronēsis* and godlikeness (τῆς πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ὁμοιώσεως; see also *Republic* 500c–d). Godlikeness constitutes the *telos* for human beings, as we have seen already; it is most appropriate (οἰκειότατον), cannot be hindered, and is up to us (ἀκώλυτόν τε καὶ ἐφ' ἡμῖν). Action through the body, by contrast, exposes us to all kinds of disturbances and contingencies over which we have no control. Such action should be "engaged in when circumstances demand, by practicing the transferal to human affairs of the visions of the

[8] On this specific point I side with Whittaker 1990: 77–8, Dillon 1993: 55–6, and Bénatouïl 2009a: 26–7 *pace* Sedley 2012d: 174–5 and nn. 22, 23, and 33. For other traces of an implicit polemic against Stoicism in the *Didaskalikos*, see also Reydams-Schils 1999: 189–205 and Boys-Stones 2005: 208–23.

contemplative life" (πράττοιτο ἂν ἀπαιτούντων τῶν πραγμάτων, ἃ κατὰ τὸν θεωρητικὸν βίον ὁρᾶται, μελετῆσαι εἰς ἀνθρώπων ἤθη; cf. *Resp.* 500d).

Our doxographical evidence about the positions of the different philosophical schools has recorded that, according to the Stoics, the sage would engage in politics unless specific circumstances would not permit him to do so; the Epicureans, by contrast, would in general abstain from such responsibility, unless there would be a good reason for engagement.[9] A Platonist like Alcinous ends up occupying a middle ground in this debate (2.3). Whereas Plato in the *Republic* will have his philosopher-kings assume political leadership only in his *kallipolis*, because they owe their entire education to that system (520b–e), Alcinous claims that a sage will take up public matters if they happen to be badly governed, and thus, under certain circumstances (περιστατικά), will participate in military and judicial affairs or political deliberations. But the best *praxis* for a sage would be to devise laws, think about constitutions, or engage in the education of the young (which Plato, in effect, did, we may add, in his *Republic* and *Laws*).

There is an implicit polemic at work in this passage, with a clearly discernible doxographical background. Alcinous' position on involvement in public matters is actually the converse of the one commonly attributed to the Stoics. Like the Stoics, and contrary to the Epicureans, we may add, Alcinous accepts the moral obligation of political responsibility. But for the Stoics, participation in communal life would be the rule, and the sage would resort to devising laws and constitutions or teaching the young only because of a special aptitude or when circumstances do not warrant a more active involvement, as, for example, in deteriorating regimes or in exile (see, for instance, Seneca *Tranq.* 3–4; Reydams-Schils 2005: ch. 3, 83–114). By reversing the Stoic order of priorities, Alcinous can have his cake and eat it too: a philosopher should never let up in his contemplative activity, and yet, in keeping with this contemplation (or, following from it), he can make contributions to the socio-political dimension of human life (on this relation between *theōria* and *praxis* for political virtue, see also ch. 34.4). In sum, Alcinous posits both the primacy of contemplation over action and a connection between the two, in the sense that proper action is to be guided by the perfection of the intelligible realm. With such a position we could imagine a Platonist of Alcinous' stripe responding to a Stoic charge that Platonism neglects the practical life and socio-political concerns too

[9] Cf. Diog. Laert. 7.121, Stob. 2.7.11b, p. 94 and 2.7.11m, p. 111 Wachsmuth, Seneca *Ot.* 3.3–4, Cicero *Fin.* 3.68, *Off.* 1.70ff; for Epicurus, see Plutarch *Tranq.* 465F-466A.

much (a charge Plutarch did not fail to turn on its head and use against the founders of Stoicism).

Let us take stock of the results emerging from my discussion of the three themes in the *Didaskalikos*. By redistributing the demiurgic function and assigning its purely noetic aspect to a transcendent god and most of its relational aspect to the mind of the World Soul, the *Didaskalikos* attempts to come to terms with the tensions between those two aspects, as well as between an inner-cosmic form of *homoiōsis* and one that aims at the pure thought of the first god. Like the analysis of the Anonymous Commentary on the *Theaetetus*, this attempt too, I would argue, is shaped by a polemic with the Stoics, albeit a more implicit one in this instance.

It is not the case so much that Alcinous ends up with a Stoicized version of Platonism; Plato clearly comes out on top, and in this sense I would agree with scholars such as Mauro Bonazzi and David Sedley. But the engagement with Stoic ideas does shape the manner in which issues are raised and addressed. In a recent paper, by bringing in other, non-Stoic parallels David Sedley (2012d) counters, one by one, claims of potentially Stoic overtones in Alcinous' work. This approach raises a legitimate question: how can one adjudicate which echoes are real and matter? The answer, I submit, and as I have tried again to demonstrate here, would need to take into account at least two factors: (a) the cumulative impact of repeated echoes and allusions (i.e., any given instance may be relatively weak, but together such occurrences do form a significant pattern); and (b) the philosophical work these perform in the overall argumentation of an exposition. To Mauro Bonazzi's contribution in this volume, in turn, and his use of the notion of "subordinating appropriation" for the relation between Platonism and Stoicism (Bonazzi 2009), one could respond, first, that not all Platonist engagements with Stoicism are polemical, and second, that the Stoic material is not that easy to tame and subordinate – often it ends up pushing back, so to speak, leading to unresolved tensions and transformations of the manner in which Plato is interpreted or a Platonist position takes shape.

In the *Didaskalikos* a Stoic influence makes itself most felt in enhancements of the relational and providential aspect of the divine and, I would argue, in a renewed effort to make room for the demands of the practical life and of the socio-political dimension of justice.

Which God? Plutarch

To turn to a last set of texts, if we would like examples of Middle Platonist accounts that even further enhance the relational aspect of the divine, we

could find those in Philo and Clement of Alexandria (not surprisingly, perhaps, given the importance of the creator-god from Scripture for these authors), in Maximus of Tyre or Aelius Aristides (and here I am so bold as to cross over to texts that are not always included in analyses of Middle Platonism, though their authors show strong philosophical influences), and, last but not least, in Plutarch. In his *On the delays of the divine vengeance*, for instance, he stages a polemic with Epicurus and those who challenge the existence of Providence based on the fact that the wicked often appear to escape punishment.[10] So, in spite of some implicit stabs at Stoicism for not endorsing the immortality of the soul, Plutarch can draw support from an alliance with this school of thought for a strong case in favor of Providence.

Thus, in this context, the divinity humans are supposed to imitate and follow is none other than the Demiurge from the *Timaeus* in his relational aspect (550D–E). It is now this god who sets *himself* up as a paradigm for human virtue or excellence. Expanding on the point made in the *Timaeus* that the Demiurge, who is good, wanted everything to be like himself as much as possible (πάντα ὅτι μάλιστα ἐβουλήθη γενέσθαι παραπλήσια ἑαυτῷ, 29e), Plutarch states that in his act of ordering disorderly nature into a *kosmos*, he made the world resemble and participate in the form and excellence or virtue that pertain to *him*, not merely to the paradigm of Being. Humans are meant to order their souls by observing and imitating the orderliness of the heavenly bodies, as the *Timaeus* in fact does claim (see earlier). But in doing so they also imitate the beauty and goodness of the Demiurge who orders the world, Plutarch states, and in this crucial respect the passage goes beyond the *Timaeus*. Plato does not set the Demiurge up as a model to be followed by human beings, and he does not apply the language of justice to the Demiurge's relation with the *kosmos* as such (even though the Demiurge in his speech does reveal the "laws of fate," *nomoi heimarmenoi* 41e).[11] Plutarch's claim here needs a fuller account of the providential role of the Demiurge, and such an account, which he then puts to his own uses, he could find in Stoic adaptations of the *Timaeus*. It is Plutarch, not Plato, who applies the phrase 'craftsman of

[10] See also Sext. Emp. *Pyr.* 1.32.

[11] Cf., in contrast to Plato, also Cicero *Fin.* 4.11, who states that the study of heavenly phenomena bestows on humans the virtues, including "justice by realizing the will, design and purpose of the Supreme Lord and Ruler to whose nature we are told by philosophers that the True Reason and Supreme Law are conformed" (trans. Rackham). *Pace* Bénatouïl (2009a: 18), in a minor disagreement, I think, given the argumentation developed here: that Cicero's wording owes more to the divine, active principle of Stoic physics than to Plato, as a close comparison with the parallel passages from the *Republic* which Bénatouïl adduces would reveal (484c–d; 500d), see also *Fin.* 4.18.

justice' (*dēmiourgos dikaiosynēs* 550A), which Plato does use for the philosopher in the *Republic* (500d6–8), to the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*.

Here are some examples of the kind of Stoic material that Plutarch could have adapted to his own use. This is a passage from Musonius Rufus:

> In general, of all creatures on earth man alone resembles God (μίμημα θεοῦ) and has the same virtues that he has, since we can imagine nothing even in the gods better than prudence, justice, courage, and temperance. Therefore, as God, through the possession of these virtues, is unconquered by pleasure or greed, is superior to desire, envy, and jealousy; is high-minded, beneficent, and kind to mankind (μεγαλόφρων δὲ καὶ εὐεργετικὸς καὶ φιλάνθρωπος) – for such is our conception of God –, so also man as an imitation of Him (ἐκείνου μίμημα), when living in accord with nature, should be thought of as being like Him (ὁμοίως ἔχειν), and being like Him, being an object of emulation (ζηλωτόν), and being an object of emulation, he would forthwith be happy, for we feel emulation to none but the happy. Indeed it is not impossible for man to be such, for certainly when we encounter men whom people call godly and godlike (οἵους ὄντας αὐτοὺς θείους καὶ θεοειδεῖς ὠνόμαζον), we do not have to imagine that these virtues came from elsewhere than from man's own nature. (17, trans. Lutz, slightly modified)[12]

And this one is from Epictetus:

> The philosophers [i.e. Stoics] say that the primary thing to be learnt is that God exists and cares for the world (προνοεῖ τῶν ὅλων) and that he inevitably notices not only what one does but even what one intends or thinks. Next, it is necessary to learn what the gods are like; for however they are found to be, one who intends to please and obey them must try to become like them as far as possible (κατὰ δύναμιν ἐξομοιοῦσθαι). If the divinity is trustworthy, one too must be trustworthy. If the divinity is free, one too must be free, and so also in the case of beneficence (εὐεργετικόν) and high-mindedness. And so in everything one says and does one must act as an emulator (ζηλωτήν) of God. (Epictetus *Diss.* 2.14.11–13, trans. Long, slightly modified)[13]

There is a strong resemblance between these two passages, even in the wording, for instance, in singling out beneficence and high-mindedness as traits of the divine, or in the use of emulation (ζηλωτόν/ζηλωτήν). These similarities could be explained by the fact that Musonius Rufus was Epictetus' teacher, or perhaps both passages reflect an earlier source.

[12] For an in-depth analysis of this passage, see Laurand 2014: 144–92, now the most detailed study of Musonius Rufus available.

[13] See also the detailed analysis by A. A. Long 2002: 168–79 and 186–9.

In any case, the parallel shows that Musonius Rufus' influence on Epictetus is not limited to the fragments of the former in the latter (and this point is important in response to Brad Inwood's contribution to this volume). The opening of the Epictetus passage, (a) that God exists and (b) that he exercises providence, is an echo of the structure of the debate as Plato set it up in Book Ten of the *Laws*, which in turn became a doxographical schema for treatments of Providence (see for instance the exposition of the Stoic Balbus in Book Two of Cicero's *On the nature of the gods*). Whereas Musonius Rufus ascribes the traditional four cardinal virtues to his divinity, both he and Epictetus also highlight traits that underscore the relational and providential aspect of the divine, such as the beneficence already mentioned.

One can, in fact, trace a lineage for this theme in the Stoic tradition. We have the passage from Chrysippus, mentioned earlier, that humans should "always do everything on the basis of the concordance of each man's guardian spirit with the will of the administrator of the whole" (Diog. Laert. 7.87–8), which displays the kernel of the idea that human beings should align themselves with the divine principle. And in his Hymn to Zeus, Cleanthes uses the notion of human beings as μίμημα (l. 4). The line itself presents a crux, but has been reconstructed, plausibly, as expressing the same notion which we find in the passage from Musonius Rufus. In the version adopted by Long and Sedley (54I), for instance, the line reads, in their translation: "we bear a likeness to god" (ἐκ σοῦ γὰρ γενόμεσθα θεοῦ μίμημα λαχόντες).[14]

The divinity's love of mankind (cf. φιλάνθρωπος), included in the Musonius Rufus passage, allows us to close the circle of this chapter by returning to the Anonymous Commentary on the *Theaetetus*. It is almost as if Musonius Rufus provides a response to the kind of criticism which the commentator levels against the Stoics. Based on Musonius Rufus's statement, it makes no sense to pit Stoic "appropriation" against Platonic "godlikeness," as the commentator does, because the Stoics have their own form of godlikeness in the relation between human and divine reason (see also earlier). If indeed "appropriation" directs human beings to their nature and, in Musonius' words, the virtues are "in a human beings' nature" (ἀπ' αὐτῆς τῆς ἀνθρωπείας φύσεως), this human "nature," in turn, is a copy (μίμημα) of divine reason. Therefore, Musonius claims, to

[14] For a full discussion of the crux and an overview of the emendations proposed in the scholarship on the issue, see Thom 2005: 54–64. Though he does not end up printing this emendation in his text, Thom (62) comes down in favor of a version that "refers to a kinship between God and human beings," and the version adopted by Long and Sedley is the most widely supported.

"live in accord with nature" (ὅταν ἔχῃ κατὰ φύσιν) for a human being entails being like god (ὁμοίως ἔχειν). While we should be careful not to attribute too strong a valence to the phrase ὁμοίως ἔχειν all by itself, the language of imitation in the context of the phrase does allow one to read it as referring to the theme of likeness to god. Thus, for the Stoics too the divinity, but precisely of an immanent rather than a transcendent type, ultimately provides the basis of the love of mankind. Moreover, given that the Stoics posit a strong physical continuity between divine and human reason, with the latter literally being made up of the same stuff as the former, the issue for them is not *becoming* like god, but rather allowing the fact that humans *are* like god (ὁμοίως ἔχειν) to come to its full fruition.

For Middle Platonist authors there was no direct line back to Plato and the views of the Old Academy. Instead the questions they raised and the views they proposed had to come to terms with Stoicism as well as the legacy of Aristotle, as Antiochus of Ascalon, in fact, had already done. For the ancients to interpret a text – and this applies not only to philosophical works – was to read it together with all the layers of previous interpretations. In this chapter I illustrated this hermeneutical principle with a couple of instances of cross-overs between Platonism and Stoicism from the debate about what it means to become like god. But this theme, in turn, has far-reaching implications. The manner in which one accounts for the noetic and relational aspects of the divine, which human beings are supposed to imitate, affects the balance, or lack thereof, between the so-called contemplative and the active life, the relations between the different virtues, one's notion of justice, and the interaction between soul and body. To us, in hindsight, the answers to these questions which Plotinus and Platonism after him provided may seem a natural development of positions advanced by Middle Platonists, but taking a step back and doing full justice to the complexity of the debate in that earlier phase of Platonism should bring the point home that this outcome was far from inevitable, and that it has a significant element of historical contingency. There were other roads not taken, and that, in my opinion, is one of the main reasons why Middle Platonism is so fascinating and important.