Plotinus and the Stoics on Philosophy as the Art of Life

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Even though the notion of philosophy as "a" or "the art of life" has Socratic-Platonic affinities (one could think, for instance, of Plato's *Gorgias* and his *Alcibiades I*), it became truly central in Stoicism. This view of the role of philosophy was pulled into debates between other schools of thought and Stoicism in the first three centuries AD. The secondary literature has tended to focus on Sextus Empiricus' critique of the notion,[1] but in this essay I would like to take the first steps in approaching this debate from a different angle, namely on the basis of one of Plotinus' expositions in which, I would argue, the same polemic is at work, albeit more implicitly. In the second part of this essay we will turn our attention to some of the later Stoics, namely Seneca, Musonius Rufus, and Epictetus. Two assumptions are central to my approach: first, that the later Stoics have a number of distinctive traits and crucial interests in common, and second, that the debate between Platonists and Stoics underlies many philosophical positions of this period.

In order to set the stage for my subsequent argument, it would be helpful to remind ourselves of the principal lines of attack Sextus Empiricus deploys against the Stoic notion of philosophy as the art of life:[2] (1) there are competing versions of what an art of life would amount to and we have no clear criterion of selection, hence a suspension of our judgment about this issue is called for; (2) given that only sages have virtue and can practice the art of life and the Stoics themselves do not claim to be sages, they cannot teach others; (3) given that the Stoics define an "art" as a system of cognitive impressions, this definition presupposes the very existence of cognitive (*kataleptic*) impressions (impressions, φαντασίαι, that give us absolutely dependable and true information about the world around us, derived either directly or indirectly from sense perception), which Sextus Empiricus calls into ques-

1 See the detailed discussion in J. Sellars, The Art of Living: The Stoics On the Nature and Function of Philosophy, London 2009, 86–103.

2 With parallel discussions in *P. H.* 3,239–249 and *Adv. math.* 11,168–215.

tion (as the so-called New Academy under Arcesilaus and Carneades had done before him); (4) this art, contrary to others, produces no distinctive "works" (ἔργα) because Stoic virtue and wisdom are a matter of one's inner disposition and the motivational structure behind one's actions, which cannot be assessed on the basis of external results; and (5) this art cannot be practiced (with a focus on some of the more shocking Stoic stances, for instance on cannibalism and incest).

I.

In *Ennead* 5 9 [5] Plotinus deals with the Intellect and the Forms. For the purposes of this essay I will focus on the implicit polemic with the Stoics that appears to run through the entire exposition. Key is Plotinus' elaborate division of the arts (5 9 [5] 11). This passage is structured around a series of dichotomous divisions. Plotinus contrasts (A) the mimetic arts as a whole with a second grouping, for which he does not provide a heading, but which, I submit, can best be called (B) the arts that are not (merely) mimetic. Under the first heading (A) he gives us a subdivision between (a) arts such as painting, sculpture, dancing, and mime, which do not partake of the intelligible realm (except as included in the forming principle of a human being) and (b) arts that do, such as music, which is like the "art concerned with intelligible number". In the second grouping each subdivision has two groups in turn, with, first, arts concerned with making, ποίησις, such as (B.a.i) building and carpentry and (B.a.ii) agriculture, medicine, and gymnastics.[3] At this juncture we get a sense that the divisions are not meant to be read in a linear manner: the productive arts under B.a, namely building, carpentry, agriculture, medicine, and gymnastics, clearly rank higher than the mimetic arts mentioned under A.a, painting, sculpture, dancing, and mime, because the former at least derive their principles from the intelligible realm, Plotinus states (and in Book Ten of Plato's *Republic* too the maker of the bed ranks higher than the painter). Yet these productive arts presumably rank lower than A.b, the mimetic arts such as music that do partake of the intelligible realm. The second grouping under B is again twofold, with (b.i) focusing on the type of πρᾶξις exemplified in rhetoric, generalship, household management, and kingship, which do not partake merely of the intelligible realm, but more

3 As Sara Magrin has pointed out to me, another way of grouping the arts is to posit a transition after the group B (a.i), building and carpentry: all the arts up to that point deal with proportions (συμμετρίαι).

specifically of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and (b.ii) geometry, and, last but not least, wisdom (σοφία).

It is the inclusion of wisdom among the arts, as "on the highest level and concerned with being" (ἀνωτάτω περὶ τὸ ὂν οὖσα), on which I would like to focus in this essay. At first glance this inclusion, which goes beyond a mere analogy between wisdom and the arts, should give us considerable pause. Should we not expect wisdom to transcend the realm of the arts altogether, especially given Plato's claim that it is, in fact, the sophists who reduce philosophy to a (mere) art (as in *Resp*. VI 493b6, 495d5)? In order to factor in this objection, one could argue that, given the sometimes lapidary style of Plotinus' expositions, his turn to knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) with rhetoric, generalship, household management, and kingship, leads him to break out of the frame of a discussion of the arts altogether.

At least three reasons, however, plead against this reading. First, τέχνη and ἐπιστήμη do not have to be disjunctive notions (as indeed, they are not for Plato either, see for instance *Resp*. VI 511b2, VII 518d; for Plotinus' complex associations of σοφία, τέχνη, and ἐπιστήμη, see for instance also 5 8 [31] 5–6).[4] Second, Plotinus explicitly closes the circle of his overview of the arts *after* his mention of wisdom: "this is enough about the arts and their works" (καὶ περὶ μὲν τεχνῶν καὶ τῶν κατὰ τέχνας ταῦτα, trans. Armstrong). Third, other expressions in the same exposition indicate that he is working with a broad notion of τέχνη, as when he uses the expression (5 9 [5] 12) "the arts which are products of the Intellect" (αἱ τέχναι νοῦ γεννήματα οὖσαι, trans. Armstrong,) right after the passage in question.[5]

Moreover, there are more general features of this specific exposition that could account for why Plotinus would be open to considering wisdom an art in this context. *Ennead* 5 9 is an early treatise, which embraces the language from Plato's *Timaeus* in describing the Intellect as the "true maker and craftsman" (5 9 [5] 3,25).[6] As Alexandra Michalewski has argued recently, an account of the divine as a kind of demiurgic causal agent modeled after human artisans, prevalent in so-called Middle Platonism, puts the Forms as the "thoughts of God" in a quasi subordinate position.[7] Plotinus in his fully

4 As per a comment made by Katerina Ierodiakonou in the discussion following the presentation of this paper at the conference.

5 On this point, cf. J. Igal, Observaciones al texto de Plotino, Emerita 41, 1973, 94–95. I am grateful to Alexandra Michalewski for drawing my attention to this reference.

6 Ποιητὴν ὄντως καὶ δημιουργόν, followed by an analogy with human craftsmen; see also 5 9 [5] 9, which mentions the "true living being" as a designation for the intelligible realm from the *Timaeus* 39e8.

7 A. Michalewski, La puissance de l'intelligible. La théorie plotinienne des Formes au miroir de l'héritage médioplatonicien, Leuven 2014.

considered view ends up developing a different model, a purely contemplative causality, for explaining the relation between the Intellect and the world. But in this early treatise, I would argue, the craft analogy still exerts a strong pull.

The other reason, I would submit, why Plotinus calls wisdom an art is his polemic with the Stoics, who are his primary opponents in this exposition. Plotinus starts out by alluding to the Stoics as some kind of metaphysical chickens, who, in contrast to the Epicureans, have at least "risen a little from the things below because the better part of their soul has urged them on from the pleasant to a greater beauty" (5 9 [5] 1, οἱ δὲ ἤρθησαν μὲν ὀλίγον ἐκ τῶν κάτω κινοῦντος αὐτοὺς πρὸς τὸ κάλλιον ἀπὸ τοῦ ἡδέος τοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς κρείττονος, trans. Armstrong), but who because of their inability "to see what is above" (ἰδεῖν τὸ ἄνω) still fall short of realizing the existence and importance of the intelligible realm. He mounts a multi-pronged attack against these rivals. The Stoics, he implies, belong with those thinkers who are stuck in sense-perception (5 9 [5] 1 and 5). It is fair to detect a faint echo here of a critique of the Stoic cognitive impressions, because the main reason why the Stoics would not need some higher realm and higher cognitive function anchored in the Intellect is that the right kind of impressions, which ultimately go back to sense-perception, can, in fact, give us access to the truth. Sextus Empiricus, we may recall, uses his rejection of the Stoics' notion of cognitive impressions also to undermine their idea of philosophy as the art of life, given that an art according to the Stoics is a system of cognitive impressions.[8]

Because of what he sees as the limitations of their epistemology, Plotinus posits as a corollary that the Stoics know only the side of philosophy that deals with πρᾶξις (see the heading B.b.i in the division of the arts outlined above). This critique opens the door for his own views elsewhere about the relation between θεωρία and πρᾶξις, on which I cannot dwell here, and his hierarchy of virtues (1 2 [19]).

The critique that the Stoics see the soul as generating intellect in a natural process (5 9 [5] 4, according to the Stoics human beings grow into the full use of their reason at age seven or fourteen) reinforces the point that the Stoics simply do not understand, from Plotinus' point of view, that there is an entirely different order over and beyond the natural realm, the order to which the Intellect belongs.

In addition to critiquing central notions, another strategy for dealing with rivals is co-opting some of their tenets. Thus Plotinus, in this treatise as

8 For a full discussion of the different positions on Plotinus' own view of the limited cognitive value of sense-perception, cf. S. Magrin, Sensation and scepticism in Plotinus, Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy 39, 2010, 249–297.

elsewhere, puts to use the Stoic idea of rational principles that work like seed generating things, the so-called λόγοι (σπερματικοί), at the level of nature (5 9 [5] 3 and 5 9 [5] 6). Similarly, and this is the crux of my argument here, Plotinus' ranking of wisdom among the arts is a co-optation of the idea of philosophy as the art of life that reorients the entire concept towards the intelligible realm, or reorients the soul towards the Intellect and the Forms.

II.

In the later Stoics of the Roman imperial era we find attempts to set philosophy apart from other arts in *some* respects – and this is the kind of nuance one cannot expect to find in a polemical source such as Sextus Empiricus. In his famous *Letter* on "liberal studies" (*Epist.* 88) Seneca also addresses the Greek notion of an ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία – about which Zeno too may already have had misgivings (D. L. 7,32). Traditionally the "free studies/arts" stood for those forms of knowledge that are appropriate for politically free men and that do not aim at moneymaking of practical outcomes. But the only study, Seneca claims, that makes human beings truly free is that which pursues the inextricable connection between wisdom and virtue.

Among the traditional liberal arts he includes grammar, literary studies, music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy. In contrast to Plotinus (and Plato himself, of course), and as one can expect from a Stoic, Seneca is not interested in a potentially anagogical function of music and the mathematical disciplines, that is, a capacity to turn our attention from "here" to "there", as Plotinus puts it, or to a higher level of reality. Thus Seneca emphasizes the practical dimension of mathematical knowledge such as measuring one's estates, bookkeeping, and settling land disputes (88,9–12). Even for the study of nature, mathematics merely provides preliminary information and serves as an aid (25–28). In short, in the eyes of Seneca, all the forms of knowledge traditionally listed under the liberal arts are beneficial only to the extent that they are pro-paideutic in the sense of preparing the soul for the reception of virtue (20) and on the condition that one limits one's efforts in these disciplines to the strictly essential rather than being carried away by a flood of useless tidbits of information. He denounces such excessive interests as motivated by pleasure, and thus as intemperate, in an echo of Chrysippus' criticism of the life in a philosophical school (Plut. *Stoic. rep.* 1033 C).

But if the goal of philosophy is to instill virtue and to make us better human beings, as Seneca holds here, then not even all of philosophy as included in the tradition will qualify as "free". There are plenty of thinkers, Seneca complains, who have either vied with scholars of grammar and geom-

etry in the pursuit of useless knowledge or have undermined the possibility of knowledge altogether. In his own polemic against potential rivals, Seneca throughout the *Letters* includes in the first group, which pursues useless knowledge, (i) people who focus too much on the technical aspects of Stoicism; (ii) people who engage in the practice of philosophical commentary (as in *Epist.* 33,7–8; 108,23; see also the contributions by Irmgard Männlein-Robert and Franco Ferrari to this volume); (iii) Plato because of his theory of the Forms (*Epist.* 58); and (iv) both Plato and Aristotle because they posit too many causes (*Epist.* 65). In the second group, of those who undermine the very possibility of knowledge he also includes the Academics (*Epist.* 88,44–45; for Epictetus' criticism of the so-called skeptical Academy, see *Diss.* 1,4; 2,20). Ultimately, Seneca concludes his letter on the arts, all forms of knowledge that do not teach us to live well in the context of a universe that is rationally ordered, or prepare the ground for this outcome, are superfluous.

Yet in spite of his ambivalence about the arts, Seneca too does hold on to the notion of philosophy as the art of life, or *ars vitae*. In the context of the pair of *Letters* 94–95, which together argue for the necessity both of doctrine (core philosophical teachings) and precepts (advice applied to concrete situations and challenges), Seneca refutes the argument that since philosophy is an art, like other arts it only needs precepts, not doctrine:

> Claim:
>
> *'Si aliae' inquit 'artes contentae sunt praeceptis, contenta erit et sapientia, nam et haec ars vitae est. Atqui gubernatorem facit ille, qui praecipit: sic move gubernaculum, sic vela summitte, sic secundo vento utere, sic adverso resiste, sic dubium communemque tibi vindica. Alios quoque artifices praecepta conformant: ergo in hoc idem poterunt artifice vivendi'.*
>
> 'If the arts in general are satisfied with precepts, wisdom will be satisfied too, since it is the art of life. The way you make a pilot is by precepts: "move the tiller this way, spread the sails like that, this is how to make use of a following wind, that's how to combat one blowing against you, here's the way to make the best of one that is gusty and variable." Precepts train other kinds of craftsmen as well, and so they will also be able to train this craftsman in the art of living.'
>
> Counter-claim:
>
> *Omnes istae artes circa instrumenta vitae occupatae sunt, non circa totam vitam.*
> *Itaque multa illas inhibent extrinsecus et inpediunt, spes, cupiditas, timor. At haec, quae artem vitae professa est, nulla re, quo minus se exerceat, vetari potest. Discutit enim inpedimenta et traicit obstantia.*

> *Vis scire, quam dissimilis sit aliarum artium condicio et huius? in illis excusatius est voluntate peccare quam casu, in hac maxima culpa est sponte delinquere.*
>
> 'The arts you are talking about are concerned only with the tools of life, not with life as a whole.
> There is much from outside that can hinder and impede them, such as hope, desire, and fear. But nothing can prevent a person from exercising the skill that proclaims itself to be the art of life: it shakes off hindrances and tosses obstacles aside.
> This is how different it is from the other crafts: in their case, it is more excusable to err intentionally than by chance, but here the greatest fault is to go wrong deliberately' (*Epist.* 95,7–8, trans. Graver and Long)

The reply Seneca records here belongs with an attempt to sidestep one of Sextus Empiricus' lines of attack by bringing out crucial differences between philosophy and the other arts. Philosophy concerns itself with "life as a whole," which refers to the maximal self-consistency of a Stoic sage (see also Stob. 2,66,14–67,4 = SVF III,560 = LS 61 G). Moreover, whereas other arts can be impeded, philosophy allegedly can overcome all obstacles. Seneca here does not primarily have externals in mind, but mentions the passions that can interfere with a correct functioning of reason. Something like the central distinction in Epictetus between "that which is up to us" and "that which is not" must be behind this claim. One can always have control over and change one's inner disposition, just as for Epictetus our moral purpose (προαίρεσις) is the only thing that is truly free and under our control. The right inner disposition can even turn obstacles and challenges into opportunities for virtue.[9]

The third reason given for the difference between philosophy and the other arts has a riddle-like quality,[10] and carries overtones of the Socratic motif that nobody errs willingly. Seneca goes on to explain what he means: someone who is in full control of his or her art can always choose not to apply it or to conceal this knowledge, as in the case of a physician who keeps to himself the knowledge that his patient is failing. In philosophy, however, to act against one's knowledge is unforgivable. (Of course, a crucial question remains to which extent one would even be able to act against knowledge in the plenary sense of that term, as not merely referring to content but implying also the right condition of the soul.)

9 As in *Diss.* 3,20,12–15. Marcus Aurelius uses περιτροπή to capture this idea, for instance in 5,20; the notion is also implied in passages such as 8,35.

10 For the same point, see also Arist. *E. N.* VI 5.1140 b 23 f.

Like the third counter-argument in the passage from Seneca, a passage from Musonius Rufus also hinges on the notion of making mistakes, in an exposition with the title "That man is born with an inclination toward virtue":

> Claim:
>
> καίτοι ἐχρῆν, εἰ ὅλον ἐπείσακτον τὸ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἦν, καὶ μηδὲν αὐτοῦ φύσει ἡμῖν μετῆν, ὥσπερ οὐδ' ἐν τοῖς ὑπὸ τὰς ἄλλας τέχνας οὖσιν ἔργοις οὐδεὶς ἀπαιτεῖται εἶναι ἀναμάρτητος, μὴ μεμαθηκὼς τὴν τέχνην, οὕτως μηδ' ἐν τοῖς κατὰ τὸν βίον μηδένα ἀπαιτεῖσθαι εἶναι ἀναμάρτητον, ὅστις ἀρετὴν μὴ ἐξέμαθεν, ἐπείπερ ἀρετὴ μόνη ποιεῖ μὴ ἁμαρτάνειν ἐν βίῳ.
>
> And yet if the whole notion of virtue were something that came to us from without, and we shared no part of it by birth, just as in activities pertaining to the other arts no one who has not learned the art is expected to be free from error, so in like manner in things pertaining to the conduct of life it would not be reasonable to expect anyone to be free from error who had not learned that virtue, seeing that virtue is the only thing that saves us from error in daily living.
>
> Counter-claim:
>
> νῦν δὲ ἐν μὲν θεραπείᾳ καμνόντων οὐδεὶς ἀναμάρτητον ἀξιοῖ εἶναι ἄλλον ἢ τὸν ἰατρὸν καὶ ἐν χρήσει λύρας οὐδένα ἄλλον ἢ τὸν μουσικὸν ⟨καὶ⟩ ἐν χρήσει πηδαλίων οὐδένα ἄλλον ἢ τὸν κυβερνήτην· ἐν δὲ τῷ βίῳ οὐκέτι μόνον ἀναμάρτητον εἶναι τὸν φιλόσοφον ἀξιοῦσιν, ὃς δοκεῖ μόνος ἐπιμελεῖσθαι ἀρετῆς, ἀλλ' ὁμοίως ἅπαντας καὶ τοὺς μηδεμίαν ἐπιμέλειαν ταύτης πεποιημένους.
>
> Now in the care of the sick we demand no one but the physician to be free from error, and in handling the lyre no one but the musician, and in managing the helm no one but the pilot, but in the conduct of life it is no longer only the philosopher whom we expect to free from error, though he alone would seem to be concerned with the study of virtue, but all men alike, including those who have never given any attention to virtue (2, trans. Lutz, slightly modified; see also Epict. *Diss.* 2,11,1–7).

In holding people accountable, the laws make no distinction whatsoever between young or old, strong or weak, Musonius Rufus has stated right before this passage. Similarly, unlike in the other arts (ἐν τοῖς ὑπὸ τὰς ἄλλας τέχνας οὖσιν ἔργοις), when it comes to virtue we expect not only the expert, which in this case would be the philosopher, to be free of error, but we hold all human beings accountable. Not every human being needs to be a carpenter, physician or ship pilot, but all human beings can be expected to aspire to virtue. Hence mistakes in this area, as Seneca claims too, weigh more heavily.

Musonius Rufus' point here is not to deny the value of a philosophical education or of training in the right kind of life, which are indeed indispensable for moral progress, but rather that human beings come by nature equipped with *some* sense of virtue so that it does not have to be learned from scratch, so to speak (εἰ ὅλον ἐπείσακτον τὸ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἦν). Implicit in this argument is also a claim, made explicit elsewhere, that philosophy itself as an expertise cannot be merely about mastering certain aspects of doctrine, and it is to this claim we turn next.

III.

If the Stoics themselves are so intent on pointing out the differences between philosophy and the other arts (and perhaps we find in the later Stoics a further stage in a polemic that has been going back and forth), we could legitimately ask why they bother holding on to the notion of philosophy as an art, the art of life, at all? The succinct answer is that like other arts, philosophy has to prove its worth in the results it produces, in this case the ability to lead a virtuous life.

Two examples will suffice here to register the point. Epictetus turns Seneca's claim about the arts from his *Letter* 88 on its head (*Diss.* 3,21,4–6; but see also Seneca himself *Epist.* 108,35–end). Just as we do not assess a builder based on his talk about his art, but by the house he has actually built, similarly one demonstrates one's philosophical ability not merely by talking about truths one supposedly has learned, but by correctly performing human actions, from the more basic, such as eating, drinking, or adorning oneself, to the more important social interactions, such as marrying, begetting children, and participating in politics, which often call for forbearance and patience with fellow human beings. Musonius Rufus, for his part, leaves no doubt that he considers philosophy to be "*nothing else* than to search out by reason what is right and proper, and by deeds to put it into practice" (14, trans. Lutz, emphasis added; οὐ γὰρ δὴ φιλοσοφεῖν ἕτερόν τι φαίνεται ὂν ἢ τὸ ἃ πρέπει καὶ ἃ προσήκει λόγῳ μὲν ἀναζητεῖν, ἔργῳ δὲ πράττειν; see also 4).

These passages are anchored in a very specific relation between θεωρία and πρᾶξις in Stoicism, which endorses the strongest possible version of the claim that philosophy as λόγος has to prove its mettle in its ἔργα. While it may be true, as Sextus Empiricus claims, that a sage, someone merely making moral progress, or even a fool all could carry out one and the same action, such as a valorous deed, only the sage's actions in their totality, and his life taken as a whole, as we discussed above, will consistently display the steadfastness the Stoics associate with virtue. And one makes moral progress

precisely by responding to situations and acting as a sage would. This is the steadfastness and maximal self-consistency displayed by Socrates facing his accusers and in prison, the Stoics claim, or by Epictetus' ideal Cynic, whose virtue shines through even in the health and radiance of his body (*Diss.* 3,22).

As Thomas Bénatouïl has clearly shown, for the Stoics "theory" has a quite different meaning than for their Platonist and Aristotelian counterparts.[11] The Stoics use θεωρία in two primary senses, as referring, first, to philosophical doctrine (which is similar to our common use of "theory") and, second, as allowing for a type of contemplation of the rational order in the universe, especially in the heavens (in nature, in other words). Thus Diogenes Laertius' testimony (7,130) that for the Stoics the rational life (βίος λογικός) embraces both the theoretical and the practical kind should not be interpreted along the lines of a "mixed life", in which there could be an alternation of contemplation and action or successive stages, but rather as indicating that θεωρία and πρᾶξις are inextricably intertwined. This connection manifests itself as much in the life of someone who has dedicated him- or herself to the study of philosophy as in that of a public figure.

IV.

So, if we return to Plotinus' assessment of the Stoics in *Ennead* 5 9, in a sense he is right when he states:

> Οἱ δὲ ἤρθησαν μὲν ὀλίγον ἐκ τῶν κάτω κινοῦντος αὐτοὺς πρὸς τὸ κάλλιον ἀπὸ τοῦ ἡδέος τοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς κρείττονος, ἀδυνατήσαντες δὲ ἰδεῖν τὸ ἄνω, ὡς οὐκ ἔχοντες ἄλλο, ὅπου στήσονται, κατηνέχθησαν σὺν τῷ τῆς ἀρετῆς ὀνόματι ἐπὶ πράξεις καὶ ἐκλογὰς τῶν κάτω, ἀφ' ὧν ἐπεχείρησαν τὸ πρῶτον αἴρεσθαι.
>
> Others [= the Stoics] have risen a little from the things below because the better part of their soul has urged them on from the pleasant to a greater beauty; but since they were unable to see what is above, as they have no other ground to stand on they are brought down, with the name of virtue to practical actions and selections of the things below from which they tried to raise themselves at first (5 9 [5] 1; trans. Armstrong, slightly modified).

11 T. Bénatouïl, Theôria et vie contemplative du stoïcisme au platonisme: Chrysippe, Panétius, Antiochus et Alcinoos, in: M. Bonazzi, J. Opsomer (ed.), The Origins of the Platonic System. Platonisms of the Early Empire and Their Philosophical Contexts, Leuven 2009, 3–31. See also G. Reydams-Schils, Authority and agency in Stoicism, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies 51, 2011, 296–322.

In the passage about the arts Plotinus indicates that wisdom is on the highest level (ἀνωτάτω), as concerned with being. By contrast – and with an allusion to the *Phaedrus* myth – Plotinus claims that the group of thinkers represented by the Stoics were "brought down" because "they were unable to see what is above", namely, in Plotinus' terms, the realm of the Intellect and the Forms.

Plotinus' wording echoes a later Stoic formula for the goal (τέλος) of human life such as the one attributed to Diogenes of Babylon (Stob. 2,76,9–15 = LS 58 K): "Diogenes [of Babylon represented the end as]: reasoning well in the selection and disselection of things in accordance with nature … (εὐλογιστεῖν ἐν τῇ τῶν κατὰ φύσιν ἐκλογῇ καὶ ἀπεκλογῇ)". Plotinus keeps the notion of selection (ἐκλογή) but parses the "things in accordance with nature" as "the things below" (τῶν κάτω), thus with one slight change indicating the gulf that separates him from the Stoics. For the Stoics, the implication is, nature is all there is, but not so for a Platonist who posits the existence of an intelligible realm. Thus it makes sense from Plotinus' vantage point to claim that the Stoics reduce philosophy "with the name of virtue to πράξεις". Similarly, in an exposition on the theme of happiness (*Enn.* 1 4 [46] 2) Plotinus critiques the role the Stoics attribute to reason in the selection of 'primary natural things' (πρῶτα κατὰ φύσιν) on the grounds that (a) animals too engage in this type of selection, and thus (b) the Stoic view would leave reason without a distinctive ἔργον of its own (this is a variation on the ἔργον argument Simplicius uses against the Stoics).

Plotinus, in other words, transposes the Stoic notion of the art of life to the intelligible realm, and this transposition is matched by other, similar ones. Matthias Vorwerk, for instance, points out that when Plotinus talks about the third group of people, a kind of "godlike men" who turn to the intelligible realm and thereby "come home after long wandering to a well-ordered fatherland" (5 9 [5] 1, ὥσπερ ἐκ πολλῆς πλάνης εἰς πατρίδα εὔνομον ἀφικόμενος ἄνθρωπος; see also 1 4 [46] 16), he is implicitly replacing the Stoic cosmopolis, that is, the universe considered as the community of gods and men, with his notion of humans' true fatherland.[12] Because Neoplatonist allegorical readings of Homer and traditional myths are behind this claim, it opens another avenue worth exploring further, namely to which extent Plotinus' recasting of the Odysseus and Heracles narratives too can be read as a polem-

12 M. Vorwerk, Citizenship of the heavenly fatherland: a Platonist alternative to the Stoic concept of cosmopolitanism, in: K. Boudouris (ed.), Polis and Cosmopolis: problems of a global era, vol. 2, Athens 2003, 230–240. See also his commentary on *Ennead 5* 9: Plotins Schrift "Über den Geist, die Ideen und das Seiende" (Enneade V 9 [5]). Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar, München–Leipzig 2001.

ical response to Stoic allegorical interpretations of those same narratives.[13] Seneca and Epictetus, for instance, interpret the travails of both heroes as representing, on an ethical level, the soul's fight against the passions.[14] So when Plotinus reorients his audience's attention away from Heracles' labors to his divinization reinterpreted in Neoplatonist terms, he is thereby also again putting Stoicism and its ethics in its place from his vantage point:

> Καὶ εἴποι ἂν ὁ Ἡρακλῆς ἐκεῖνος ἀνδραγαθίας ἑαυτοῦ, ὁ δὲ καὶ ταῦτα σμικρὰ ἡγούμενος καὶ μετατεθεὶς εἰς ἀγιώτερον τόπον καὶ ἐν τῷ νοητῷ γεγενημένος καὶ ὑπὲρ τὸν Ἡρακλέα ἰσχύσας τοῖς ἄθλοις, οἷα ἀθλεύουσι σοφοί, τί οὖν ἐρεῖ;
>
> And that Heracles might talk about his heroic deeds; but one who thinks little of these because he has migrated to a holier place, finds himself now in the intelligible realm, and has grown in strength beyond the Heraclean feats through the contests in which the wise compete, what will he relate? (*Enn.* 4 3 [27] 32–4 4 [28] 1; see also 27 and *Enn.* 1 1 [53] 12).

It is true that for the Stoics virtue as manifested in πρᾶξις may be at the heart of philosophy – and one could retort to Plotinus that the Stoic approach has its own merits – but this does not mean, as we have seen already, and *pace* Plotinus, that they had no sense of θεωρία at all. Moreover, the Stoics do have a very rich concept of rationality, and their sense of a higher realm that reorients human beings away from misguided preoccupations refers to a rational order that permeates and structures the cosmos, as the community of gods and men. That community may well be a viable alternative to the fatherland Plotinus prefers, and one worth dwelling in.[15]

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13 On this point, see also Porph. *Vita Plot.* 22.

14 As in Sen. *Const. sap.* 2,1 and *Epist.* 88,7–8; Epict. *Diss.* 2,16,43–end, 3,26,31–36. See also Dio of Prusa *Or.* 8; 32,47; 33,41–42; 60,8–10.

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