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HOMOIŌSIS THEŌI.
A STUDY OF THE *TELOS*
IN MIDDLE PLATONISM

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Introduction

In the first century B.C., the formulation of the ethical ideal, the so-called *telos*, underwent a significant change within the Platonist tradition. In the previous centuries, the Academy had always formulated the *telos*, the goal of human life, as “life according to nature”, which was also the traditional Stoic moral aim, embraced by Antiochus of Ascalon too. It is only from Eudorus of Alexandria (I century BC)¹ that all the Platonic philosophers adopted the formula inherited from Plato’s dialogues, and from a digression in Plato’s *Theaetetus* in particular: ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν, which can be translated as “assimilation to God as far as it is possible”. From this moment to Plotinus and Late Neoplatonism, this expression would indicate the Platonic *telos*.

The aim of my research is thus to offer a systematic study of such doctrine. The originality of my study lies in the fact that a complete study of *homoiōsis theōi* in Platonism has yet to see the light,² except for a few articles or book chapters. Moreover, only quite a few pages have been devoted to this formula in Plato, due to the fact that modern interpreters of Plato have not generally considered it a core doctrine in Platonic works themselves.³

That of the *telos* is certainly one of the most interesting and original doctrines within Early Imperial Platonism. It is important first and foremost from a historical point of view, in order to understand the switch that took place in the domain of ethics and its consequences for the interpretation of Plato; secondly, it offers a new approach to the understanding of Plato’s ethics, through the eyes of his first ‘scholars’.⁴ In my dissertation, I will collect, translate, discuss and compare with one another all the sources related to this doctrine.

¹ The most ancient testimony of the new formulation of the *telos* is a fragment in Stobaeus’s *Anthologium*, traditionally attributed to Eudorus. In my dissertation, I briefly discuss this traditional attribution in chapter five, see *infra* pp. 88–102. The fragment is Ioann. Stob. *Anth.* II, 7, 3 49, 8 ff. Wachsmuth in Mazzarelli (1985).

² David Sedley has noticed it too, at the beginning of Sedley (1999).

³ The most recent are: Neschke-Hentschke (1990), Annas (1999), Sedley (1999), Pradeau (2003), Armstrong (2004). Lavecchia (2006) is an exception: in my view, however, he overemphasizes the omnipresence of the ideal in Plato’s dialogues, ending up with providing a ‘Neoplatonist’ picture of Plato.

⁴ See, for example, the introduction in Annas (1999), where she describes the importance of studying the early imperial Platonists also in order to bring into question our modern view on Platonic ethics.

My work opens with those passages from Plato that represented the basis for the doctrine: the *locus classicus* in the *Theaetetus* (176 d–e), the final passage from the *Timaeus*, two passages from the *Republic*, a passage from *Laws IV*, and other important parts from the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium*.⁵

After this section and after introducing the historical context of the period wherein the doctrine originates (the so-called Middle Platonism), I present the origins of the concept of the *telos* with regards to Aristotle’s raising of the question in the *Nichomachan Ethics*, on the one hand, and of Stoic position, on the other.⁶

The very core of the dissertation is devoted to Early Imperial Platonism (I century BC – III century AD). Within the history of Platonism, such period, traditionally labelled as ‘Middle Platonism’,⁷ has puzzled scholars for many years as being rather confusing. It is, in fact, characterized by a “turn to dogmatism”,⁸ which led philosophers to the attempt at systematizing the various interpretations of Plato’s dialogues. A distinctive trait of such period is therefore the proliferation of polemical pamphlets and debates both amongst members of a single philosophical tradition or directed towards those of other schools, with the aim to restore the ‘lost’ identity of the ‘Platonic school’. It is precisely in this context that the *telos* began to be formulated in polemic with the Stoics as *homoiōsis theōi*; the passage in the Anonymous Commentary on Plato’s *Theaetetus* that will be discussed in chapter seven is quite clear in this respect.⁹

I then analyse all the appearances of the doctrine, moving from the short but extremely meaningful passage from Stobaeus’s *Anthologium*, traditionally attributed to Eudorus, which is the first witness to this doctrine. I also take into consideration the enormous *corpus* of Philo of Alexandria, in which the topic of the assimilation (or likeness) to God occurs very often, Plutarch of Chaeronea’s *Moralia*, and *De sera numinis vindicta*, *De genio Socratis*, *De E apud Delphos* and *De Iside et Osiride* in particular, as well as some passages from the *Lives*.

⁵ These are important passages from Plato’s dialogues so as to understand the *formula*: *Phaed.* 80 a3– b7; *Th.* 176 b5 –177 b7; *Phdr.* 252c3 - 253c5; *Rsp.* 613a7 –b1; *Tm.* 90b6–e8; *Leg.* 716c1–717 a.

⁶ Arist. *Eth. Nich.* 1094 a. For the Stoics, see Long–Sedley, section 63–64.

⁷ For this label and for this period of Platonism see, among others, Dillon (1977), Donini (1982) and Bonazzi (2015).

⁸ Dillon (1977) 52.

⁹ See *infra*, pp. 116–128.

Indeed, the main sources for my study are the two handbooks on Platonism, namely Alcinous' *Didaskalikos* and Apuleius' *De Platone et eius dogmate*. I also consider the testimony in the Anonymous Commentary on Plato's *Theaetetus*, which is rather essential so as to understand the polemical context wherein the doctrine developed. As I argue, Stoic influences on the interpretations of the doctrine, which I analyse in comparison with the Platonist ethical ideal, are also vital to fully comprehend such historical period.

A recurring *motif* in the dissertation is the discussion on two collateral topics that arise from the analyses of the testimonies. First, I insert the reception and the interpretation of the doctrine in the context of the problem of the two kinds of life, the practical and the contemplative (*praxis* and *theōria*), so as to establish which one best represents the ideal of godlikeness, and to question the idea of Platonism as a completely ascetical and theological philosophy. Secondly, and strictly related to this, I discuss the idea of the divine in Middle Platonism in order to understand the meaning of God as an ethical paradigm and the consequences that this brings about in ancient ethics.

In my work, I always limit myself to furnish an extremely essential biographical and historical introduction to each author, for a twofold reason: first, because complete introductions on those authors are already available (to which I refer in my footnotes), secondly, because biographies of such authors are not at the core of my research. The aim of this work is instead to provide a systematic account of the doctrine of the assimilation to God in Early Imperial Platonism. Therefore, I deal not as much with the authors themselves as with their 'interpretations' of the doctrine; however, my reconstruction will not linger on the differences among such interpretations, rather on their similarities. For this reason, about each author, I only report the essential information needed to fully and correctly understand the peculiarity of every 'interpretation'.

Chapter One

Assimilation to God in Plato's dialogues

1. *Introduction: the homoiōsis theōi formula*

Σωκράτης, Πλάτων ταῦτὰ τῷ Πυθαγόρᾳ, τέλος ὁμοίωσιν θεῶ. Σαφέστερον δ' αὐτὸ διήρθρωσε Πλάτων προσθεὶς τὸ 'κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν'.

Socrates and Plato agree with Pythagoras that the *telos* is assimilation to God. Plato defined this more clearly by adding “according as is possible”.¹

This passage, preserved in Stobaeus' *Anthology*, and tentatively attributed to Arius Dydimus or Eudorus (who lived between the 1st century B.C. and the 1st century A.D.),² marked a highly significant turning point in the Platonist formulation of the purpose of life, the *telos*. Before this, as already mentioned, Antiochus had adopted the Stoic standard exhortation “to live in accordance with nature”, as Cicero attests.³ This formulation of the *telos* of the human being was shared by almost all the Middle Platonists, from Eudorus up to Plotinus, as it was a standard Platonic doctrine. Moreover, the Neo-Platonists and the Christian philosophers were to adopt this formulation of the aim of life as well.

In the earlier period, the one we are more interested in, we can find at least some echoes of this formulation in the huge *corpus* of the Jewish Philo of Alexandria as well as in Plutarch, in addition to the two ‘handbooks of Platonism’ by Alcinous and Apuleius.

¹ Stob. *Anth.* II, 7,3 p. 49, 8 ff. Wachsmuth in C. Mazzarelli (1985).

² We will deal with the problem of the attribution of this fragment, as well as with the mysterious figure of Eudorus of Alexandria later on, in chapter five, see *infra*, pp. 80–102.

³ Cic. *Fin.* V 26. We will deal with the Stoic *telos* in chapter three, see *infra*, pp. 59–70, and with Antiochus in chapter four, see *infra* 71–79. However, as notorious, all the Stoic testimonies are collected in Long–Sedley. For an introduction to Antiochus' philosophy, I will refer – among other works – to Dillon (1977), Donini (1982) and Bonazzi (2015). See *infra* p. 71 for more specific bibliography.

Therefore, the history of Platonism presents the concept of *homoiōsis theōi* as one of the most meaningful enduring features of the Platonist tradition. In the philosophies of people who claim to stand in absolute continuity with Plato's thought, the idea of *homoiōsis theōi* is considered to be an essential element of the master's doctrine. So, everyone worthy of the name of Platonist seems to agree that our ultimate aim, according to Plato, is to become like God, "as far as possible" (κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν). As we shall see in the second chapter, Aristotle himself, who on many crucial issues diverges from his teacher, identifies the *telos* as the ideal of divinization, which seems to me not so far from the idea of *homoiōsis theōi*.⁴ In this matter there would appear to be complete agreement among all these different authors who did not belong to one distinct school but were rather, in a sense, contributing to build one.⁵

In my work, I shall attempt to present the positions of all the above-mentioned authors on this topic. But first of all, in the light of what has just been said, it is worth addressing the question of why the expression *homoiōsis theōi* does not appear in the index of any modern study of Plato.⁶ The answer might be that understanding what this expression means in all the different contexts in which Plato employs it is not a simple task at all. Moreover, at least at a very first glimpse, it does not look like a proper doctrine – assuming, that is, that proper doctrines are to be found in Plato's *corpus*. Moreover, what makes this topic even more complex is the fact that Plato does not always speak of the need for man to assimilate himself to God in an ethical context. Sometimes this exhortation does not seem to be a moral instruction at all.

Homoiōsis theōi is indeed a 'formula' which appears in some Platonic dialogues, in different contexts and with different meanings.⁷ Ὁμοίωσις is a Greek noun which derives from the verb ὁμοιόω, which in turn comes from the adjective ὅμοιος, meaning

⁴ I am referring of course to Arist. *Eth. Nich.* book X, especially 1177b31–1178a8, a passage we will be dealing with in the next chapter. See Sedley (1999) and Lavecchia (2006) 293.

⁵ I will here refer to the introduction of some important scholarly works for how we should understand the terms 'Platonists' or 'Middle-Platonists'. See the introductions to the Middle Platonism by Dillon (1977), Donini (1982) and Bonazzi (2015).

⁶ I am borrowing this question from Sedley (1999) 309–328. For the issue of *homoiōsis theōi* in Plato I will refer to the most recent and important studies, which are not so many. Of course, there are some remarkable exceptions, such as Neschke-Hentschke (1990), 207–216, Annas (1999), Pradeau (2003), Lavecchia (2006), Van Riel (2013) 19–24, and also the less recent Merki (1952), who was the first to devote some attention to the formula, and then Passmore (1970) and Roloff (1970).

⁷ *Th.* 176 b5–177b7, *Resp.* 500b8–d3 and 613a7–b1, *Tim.* 90b6–e8, *Leg.* 716c1–717a.

“like, resembling”, and is usually constructed with the dative of the person or the thing that another resembles or is equal to.⁸ However, it is important to consider the fact that ὁμοίωσις does not derive directly from the adjective ὅμοιος, but rather from the verb ὁμοιόω. Such a verb does not mean just “to be like” and does not denote a state; even the common translation “to become like” runs the risk of being misleading. The verb ὁμοιόω is an *active* verb, which denotes an active process performed by an active subject. For this reason, the related noun ὁμοίωσις must be translated as “assimilation”, or “establishment of a resemblance”, rather than simply as “likeness, resemblance”. The noun indicates the process that brings a thing or person to resemble another thing or person, more than the existence of an actual resemblance, or its mere occurring without the subject playing any active role.⁹ This meaning can be easily expressed in English by the term “assimilation” as many translators (whom it would be superfluous to list) have done. Therefore, the most correct translation of the *formula* is “assimilation to God”, rather than, as sometimes has also been suggested, “likeness to God”.

This is of interest in order to set the stage for one important feature that this concept seems to present, namely the fact that it must be thought of more as an *activity* than a *state*, which is what scholars have sometimes taken it to describe. And this fact proves particularly meaningful in relation to Aristotle’s statement in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that *eudaimonia* is an *activity* (ἐνέργεια) rather than a *possession* (ἔξις).¹⁰ In other words, the Platonist *formula* of the *telos* suggests the idea that these philosophers followed Aristotle in thinking of *eudaimonia* as an activity rather than as a mere state of the soul, in spite of the fact that *eudaimonia* conceived as the good state of the soul (the inner *daimōn*) is an undeniable Platonic *motif*.

Returning to Plato, in the dialogues he seems to use and explain this *formula* in a variety of different ways. As has been anticipated, this fact has not really attracted much attention from modern Plato scholars, if not in very recent times and to a very limited extent. The likely reason for this, as has also been anticipated, is the simple fact that this *formula* either appears in digressions (as is the case in the *Theatetus*), or is presented as a

⁸ See LSJ, 1224–25.

⁹ See LSJ, 1125.

¹⁰ See Arist. *Eth. Nich* I. We will deal with the question, providing all the relative passages, in the next chapter. See *infra*, pp. 45–49.

sort of metaphor, which is why it is never introduced by a proper dialectic reasoning. As we shall see, the interpretation of the *formula* as a sort of figure of speech is quite reasonable or even perfectly acceptable. Why, then, should one pay any attention to it? The main reason is the fact that every Platonist from the first century B.C. onwards states that, according to Plato, that formula represents the *telos*, which is the aim of human life. In other words, according to the ancient Platonists assimilation to God would be the official Platonic ethical ideal.

2. *Assimilation to God in Plato's dialogues*

2.1 *Setting the stage: the human quest for immortality*

First of all, we must try to understand what Plato meant in each of these passages by taking account of the main studies on the topic; then, in the next chapters, we must examine the Middle Platonists' interpretations of Plato's statement. In doing so we can take advantage of some authoritative supports. Ada Neschke-Hentsche, one of the main scholars to have dealt with this doctrine, has collected seven passages from Plato's works that seem to be about this topic, going beyond the usual evidence presented by scholars.¹¹

Moving from Neschke-Hentsche's work, in a famous article, David Sedley has sought to trace the chronological development of the theme in Plato's thought.¹² He identifies Plato's 'debut' on this topic with Diotima's words in the *Symposium*. Here the priestess explains to Socrates that every mortal creature can find a way to participate in the immortality of God, "so far as this is possible" (κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν),¹³ through the mechanism of procreation. By begetting children, the human being allows something of him/herself to survive after his/her own death, and in doing so has a share in immortality, the main divine feature. But, of course, this is only a first step towards the human

¹¹ Neschke-Hentschke (1990), 207–216. What I mean is that she did not limit her analysis to the passages in which the *formula* appears as such, but even dealt with other passages where the idea of divinization or of a divine paradigm are in some way evoked.

¹² Sedley (1999), 309–328.

¹³ Plato. *Sym.* 207d1. The expression κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν always qualifies the idea of assimilation to the divine, out of realism or out of reverence.

possibility of having a share in the divine. On a different level, the quest for fame and the engendering of moral goodness are also, in a sense, fulfilments of our desire for immortality. So, according to Sedley, this is the “first serious brush with the idea...that god *sets the standard for all lower life forms to emulate*”.¹⁴ Moreover, and perhaps even more meaningfully, behind all this one might discern the underlying assumption that human beings yearn to have a share in the divine realm, and are therefore called to it; and that this very desire is the reason why people beget children, strive for fame and so on. These human endeavours are regarded by Plato as a sort of proof for this very human yearning for the divine.

However, as Sedley notes, according to Plato all souls already possess immortality as an intrinsic and inalienable feature and so, “the need to strive for it [immortality] by biological, moral or intellectual procreation starts to look redundant” and, indeed, “recedes after the *Symposium*”.¹⁵ But in this passage (which is not among those mentioned by Ada Neschke–Hentsche), the idea that God represents a paradigm for man, something that he has to strive to imitate, is already present, and human behaviour is put forward as a sort of proof of it.

2.2 *The locus classicus of the Theaetetus, the Republic, and the Laws*

The source and the real *locus classicus* for all Late Platonism is the famous digression of the *Theaetetus*.¹⁶ The digression begins with Socrates sketching out a contrast between the philosopher and a sort of politician, a ‘litigious man’,¹⁷ that is a person entirely involved in politics and law. These two characters are presented as embodying two opposite life choices.¹⁸ The philosopher is ‘self-motivated’ and completely ‘unworldly’.¹⁹

¹⁴ Sedley (1999) 310.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 311.

¹⁶ Pl. *Th.* 176b–e.

¹⁷ This is how Annas (1999) calls this character. It is an effective description, not least because it would make little sense to speak about ‘politicians’ in Ancient Greece, for there were no professional ones: every free male citizen of the *polis* was called to take up politics. The ‘litigious man’ is rather he who decides to devote himself entirely to the public sphere.

¹⁸ Of course, it really can be considered a precedent, if not a source, of Aristotle’s treatment of the two ‘genres of life’ in *Nicomachean Ethics* I and X.

¹⁹ 172c–177c. Cf. Annas (1999) 54–55.

Paradigmatically, Socrates tells us that he does not even know his way to the *agora*, which is the place for public affairs *par excellence*, and he is completely uninterested in laws, political struggles and the personalities of his *polis*. Julia Annas effectively paraphrases and summarizes this character as follows:

“It is only his body which lives and sleeps in the city”, while his mind takes off and wings its way through the universe. As a result, he is helpless in practical matters; he is like Thales, who watched the stars and fell down a well.²⁰

By contrast, the “litigious man has his life organized for him by the necessities of others: court timetables, deadlines, the consequences of the friendships and enmities his ambitious career has produced”.²¹ After this description of the two characters Socrates says to Theodorus (and here comes the *locus classicus*):

Ἄλλ’ οὐτ’ ἀπολέσθαι τὰ κακὰ δυνατόν, ὃ Θεόδωρε— ὑπεναντίον γάρ τι τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἀεὶ εἶναι ἀνάγκη—οὐτ’ ἐν θεοῖς αὐτὰ ἰδρῦσθαι, τὴν δὲ θνητὴν φύσιν καὶ τόνδε τὸν τόπον περιπολεῖ ἐξ ἀνάγκης. διὸ καὶ πειρᾶσθαι χρὴ ἐνθένδε ἐκεῖσε φεύγειν ὅτι τάχιστα. φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίως θεῶν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν· ὁμοίως δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὄσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι.

But it is not possible for evils to be eliminated, Theodorus – there must always exist some opposite to the good – nor can evils be established among the gods. Of necessity, it is mortal nature and our vicinity that are haunted by evils. And that is why we should also try to escape from here to there as quickly as we can. To escape is assimilation to God so far as is possible. And assimilation to God is to become just and holy, together with wisdom. (tr. Sedley, 1999, slightly modified)

Let us analyse these few lines, of paramount importance for the development of Platonist ethical theory. This passage, which is one of the best-known in the scholarship on Neoplatonism,²² can provide the basis for any number of philosophical elaborations. Here I wish to focus on what to my mind are the two most interesting conceptual points made

²⁰ Annas (1999) 54.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² I say this because the central idea of Neoplatonic ethics is rooted firmly in the doctrine of *homoiōsis theōi* which is founded on this passage, as it is commented by Plotinus in *Enn.* I.4. See Gerson (2005), 242-243.

in the passage. *Homoiōsis theōi* is here presented as a “flight (φυγή) from here to there” that man will endeavour to accomplish “as far as he can”, but it also corresponds to becoming “just and holy (δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον) together with – or maybe “through” – wisdom (μετὰ φρονήσεως)”. So, firstly, Socrates identifies the flight “from here to there” – a flight aimed at escaping the evils that inevitably inhabit mortal nature – with the assimilation to God. Secondly, assimilation to God is here identified with “becoming just and holy together with wisdom” (δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι).

It is quite evident, in my view, that these two identifications create a certain conceptual tension between, on the one hand, the ideal of a flight from the world, a flight which leads to an ‘otherworldly’ ethics, and, on the other hand, a more ‘worldly’ ethics, grounded on the possession and practice of virtue.²³ The word φυγή “flight, escape” unmistakably reminds us of the description of the philosopher Socrates has just made. Indeed, in his life the philosopher performs a certain kind of flight, for he escapes the tasks and obligations of the ‘litigious man’. So, we might conclude that here Socrates is showing a strong preference for the life of the philosopher over and against the litigious man’s – or for a contemplative life over and against a practical one, if we wish to put it in Aristotelian terms.²⁴ To assimilate ourselves to God we would have to escape from *here*, which is to say from this world full of engagements and activities that inevitably mixes up goods and evils.

However, at the same time, Socrates is also arguing that assimilation to God requires one to be right and just (δίκαιον), for (as he had said a few lines before) God is first of all the just *par excellence*. And is justice not a virtue to be applied to practical matters? How is it possible to be just while leading a life completely devoted to mere contemplation? Of course, as we can also read in the *Republic*, in its Platonic meaning

²³ See Annas (1999), 70-71. Gerson does not see any tension here between two kinds of ethics. See Gerson (2005) 243–245. The question is a complicated one. While it is true that for Plato virtue does not need to be applied to practical matters in order for it to be virtue, for it is a state of the soul rather than a set of morally good actions, it is also true that this flight to gain knowledge of the divine realm and, in such a way, obtain virtue, seems to be linked to a ‘descent’ of the philosopher into the world, a return from the Cave, as is noted for example in *Resp.* 500d1. I will not address this problem now. See Armstrong (2003).

²⁴ I am making this transition because that is how the Platonists work with Plato’s text, as we shall see. When they read Plato they always bear Aristotelian terminology in mind, and often they try to lead Aristotelian trends back to Plato. For a sketch of the Platonists’ methodology, I will refer to Dillon (1977), Donini (1982) and Bonazzi (2015). In particular, for the relationship with Aristotelianism, one can refer to the recent article by Chiaradonna (2015). The exercise of looking at Plato through Aristotle is a good one to understand Plato’s reception in Antiquity as well as Plato’s legacy in the history of philosophy.

justice can be understood simply as a state of the soul, with no need for any practical application of it. For this reason, some scholars refuse to see here a tension between two tendencies, a theoretical and more unworldly one and a practical one. Still, later discussions on this very *formula* testify that this exhortation to justice has a social implication that continued to influence the Platonists' speculations on philosophical topics in general.

Moreover, coming back to Plato, we can also add that there are many differences between the philosopher that Socrates describes and Socrates himself. As Pradeau sharply notices, while Socrates must generally be considered the paradigm of the philosopher in the Platonic dialogues, the philosopher depicted in the *Theaetetus* does not resemble the character Socrates tells us about at all. For instance, Socrates certainly knew his way to the *agora*, where he usually spent a lot of time. Moreover, whilst the philosopher in the digression is explicitly described as not being aware at all of the personalities of the *polis*, Socrates in the *Theaetetus* shows himself to be far from indifferent to the prestige of Theaetetus' father, who is an important personality in the *polis*. In addition, at the end of the dialogue, Socrates declares that he knows the way to the *archōn*'s house, whereas the philosopher of the digression does not even know his way to the *agora*. Socrates, then, is significantly involved in political matters, if only in a way that differs from the approach of a litigious man.

On this problem, I might refer to Rachel Rue, who argues that in this digression Plato, through Socrates' words, is not recommending the contemplative life of the philosopher as the most perfect mode of life, but rather outlining the two extremes. Socrates' life, which appears to be a kind of 'mixed' life that falls in between the two extremes just described, would be the real perfect life.²⁵ This idea of a 'middle life' lying between the two opposites of the unworldly philosopher and the busy politician is an interesting one. We will see later on that the Stoics, one of the 'heirs' to the Socratic tradition, developed the concept of the *bios logikos*, a life that embraces in itself both Aristotelian genres of life, the practical and the theoretical.²⁶ Even though there is no real

²⁵ See Rue (1993).

²⁶ Even if it is not quite the same thing to say that a life is fulfilled in *praxis* or in *theōria* and that a life is fulfilled by the *alternation* of *praxis* and *theōria*, as in the *bios logikos*. We will come back on the issue

textual evidence to support it, this idea of a ‘Socratic middle life’ could contribute to clarifying the tension in this passage from the *Theaetetus* between the necessity of a flight from this world, and the suggestion that one must be “just and holy” in order to accomplish it.

The passage continues with some more details on God. God is set as the paradigm of justice, and therefore to become like God means to become “as just as possible”.²⁷ Finally, Socrates states that the “recognition” (γνώσις) of this fact – that God is the paradigm of justice – is *true wisdom* (φρόνησις) and *true virtue* (ἀρετή).²⁸

While assimilation to God here seems to correspond to virtue and wisdom, which are described more as an acknowledgement of the nature of the divine as the paradigm of justice, other passages suggest that *homoiosis* may be pursued through the “*practice of virtue*” (ἐπιτηδεύων ἀρετήν). If we look for example at the last book of the *Republic*, another text taken into consideration by the Middle Platonists, we find that:

οὐ γὰρ δὴ ὑπὸ γε θεῶν ποτε ἀμελεῖται ὃς ἂν προθυμεῖσθαι ἐθέλη δίκαιος γίγνεσθαι καὶ ἐπιτηδεύων ἀρετήν εἰς ὅσον δυνατὸν ἀνθρώπῳ ὁμοιοῦσθαι θεῶ.

For assuredly that man will never be neglected by the gods, that man who is willing and eager to be just, and *by the practice of virtue* to be likened to God so far as that is possible for man. (*Resp.* 613a7-b1)

Even here, the emphasis is on justice and virtue.

Some important remarks have now become necessary. As has been already anticipated, it might be objected that in itself the Platonic concept of justice does not imply the performance of practical actions. According to Plato’s definition of justice, especially in the *Republic*, it consists in a state of the soul rather than in a set of moral actions, and more specifically in the order of the three parts of the soul.²⁹ As such, the identification between assimilation to God and justice would not create any

later on in the work, especially when we will deal with the Pseudopythagorean ethical treatises. See *infra* 108–110.

²⁷ Pl. *Th.* 176c1–3.

²⁸ Pl. *Th.* 176c5.

²⁹ The bibliography on the Platonic concept of justice is huge. Here I think it is enough to refer to Annas (1999) and the further studies she refers to.

inconsistency, and not even any tension, with the ideal of a flight from the world. On the other hand, this passage not only makes a reference to justice, but specifies that assimilation to God is performed “ἐπιτηδεύων ἀρετὴν” (“by the practice of virtue”). Now, the verb ἐπιτηδεύω is a verb that unequivocally refers to the realm of *praxis*, as it is commonly used for trade and crafts.³⁰ Moreover, the use of the participle suggests the idea that the practice of virtue is the *means* by which assimilation to God must be accomplished, as I tried to suggest in my translation (“by the practice of virtue to be likened to God”). In addition to this evidence, I can mention that in the tenth book of the *Laws* we find that the wise (σώφρων) man is dear to God since he is like him, and also the adjective σώφρων is usually related to the sphere of action, as opposed to the more theoretical σοφός.³¹ However, even if one does not detect such a tension in this passage, as is the case with some scholars, at least it must be conceded that an emphasis on the need to flee from our world, where good and evil are inevitably mixed up, does not occur each time that Plato deals with the *formula*.

In another passage in the tenth book of the *Laws*, quoted by many Platonists with reference to the doctrine of *homoiōsis theōi*,³² Plato describes God as “the measure of all things in the highest degree, a degree much higher than is any man they talk of (ὁ δὴ θεὸς ἡμῖν πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἂν εἴη μάλιστα, αἱ πολὺ μᾶλλον ἢ πού τις, ὡς φασιν, ἄνθρωπος)”.³³ That is of course Plato’s answer to Protagoras’ famous *dictum*, according to which man is the measure of all things (πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄνθρωπος). Here, as Julia Annas has pointed out, assimilation to God is just the equivalent of being virtuous (and especially wise), and in a very traditional way; furthermore, virtue is apparently viewed in terms of actual behaviour rather than of the attainment of knowledge about how to behave.³⁴ The passage continues as follows:

³⁰ See LSJ, 666: ἐπιτηδεύω.

³¹ Pl. *Leg.* 716 c–d. Of course, there is no absolute and rigorous terminological coherence. But also, the LSJ, 1751 translates it first of all as “prudent”.

³² Most remarkably Eudorus, in Stob., *Ecl.* 2,49.23–25 and Alc., *Did.* 28.

³³ *Leg.* 715 e – 718 c. In the *Laws*, we find a *formula* that is a little bit different: “to follow God”. This is considered a Pythagorean *motto* that will be regarded as essentially a variant on “becoming like God” by all Platonists from Eudorus onwards.

³⁴ Annas (1999) 57.

καὶ κατὰ τοῦτον δὴ τὸν λόγον ὁ μὲν σώφρων ἡμῶν θεῶ φίλος, ὅμοιος γάρ, ὁ δὲ μὴ σώφρων ἀνόμιός τε καὶ διάφορος καὶ ὁ ἄδικος, καὶ τὰ ἄλλ' οὕτως κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον ἔχει.

And, according to the present argument, he among those us who are wise that is wise is dear to God, since *he is like him*, while he that is not wise is unlike [God] and different and unjust, and so likewise with the rest, by parity of reasoning. (*Leg.* 716 c–d).

As Gerd Van Riel has sharply pointed out, this passage from the *Laws* sounds like a commandment to abide by an external measure, which is God, and thus has a moral and religious meaning more than an intellectual one.³⁵ Man is required to step back from being the measure of all things and is urged instead to commit to God's superior measure. Paradoxical as this might sound, assimilation to God can be taken here more as an invitation to moderation rather than an exhortation to transcend our nature and to 'think God's own thoughts'.³⁶ Through the *dictum* 'take God as a measure' Plato would be admonishing human beings to be moderate, and not to take themselves to be God.³⁷ According to Van Riel, this passage is key for grasping the thorough meaning of the "κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν" ("in so far as possible"), an expression that very often accompanies Plato's brush with the idea of assimilation to God:³⁸ full divinization remains impossible.³⁹

If we turn into the *Timaeus*, the main idea we find is instead a more intellectual and epistemological version of the *dictum*. In the famous passage at the end of the dialogue (90 b–d) Plato claims that the best state of man is when the highest part of the soul (i.e. reasoning) controls the other two, which are more affected by the body. In order to do so, man should engage in certain kinds of thoughts, and conform to the circularity of the movements of the heavenly bodies. With a physical image Plato states that we basically have to assimilate our thoughts to a form that is different from the one they have when we are engaged in ordinary thinking. What is most startling here is that Plato seems

³⁵ Van Riel (2013) 23–24.

³⁶ Bordt (2006) 184, n. 70.

³⁷ Van Riel (2013) 3.

³⁸ The main passages are *Tht.* 176b; *Symp.* 207d; *Resp.* X 619a.

³⁹ And this is important in order not to over-interpret the *formula*, as, in my view, Lavecchia (2006) has done.

to identify human happiness with this kind of abstract thinking: that we should assimilate ourselves to abstract objects, the heavenly bodies and, among them, God.

As Julia Annas has shown in her chapter ‘Becoming like God’, among the passages from the *Theaetetus*, *Laws* and *Timaeus* seem to share very little in common.⁴⁰ This variety of ways of discussing the theme of assimilation to the divine is probably the reason why in the modern scholarship about Plato the expression *homoiōsis theōi* has not been regarded as a real Platonic doctrine to the same extent as the doctrine of Forms, for instance.⁴¹

To summarize what we have learned from these first passages, what we find is: (i) in the *Theaetetus*, the need for a flight from our world of evil, through the traditional virtues of justice, holiness and wisdom; (ii) in the *Laws* the exhortation to a traditional behaviour according to virtue in order to become dear and similar to God, as well as a commendation of the *practice* of virtue (behaviour rather than knowledge about behaviour); (iii) in the *Timaeus* an abstract study of the movements of the cosmos that may lend our thoughts a different form. Of course, there are some common features in the different accounts of the ideal of deification. Annas reasonably describes the main underlying idea of all these passages as “thinking of virtue as produced by the dominance of the rational part of the soul”⁴² and, I would add, as the identifying of wisdom with the virtue of moderation.⁴³ Moreover, as Annas argues, the *Theaetetus* does not allow us to simply identify God with our reason, as seems to be implied in a famous passage from the *Alcibiades* (133 b–c). She rather connects the *Theaetetus* passage to *Phaedo* 64a–67e, where Plato describes wisdom as a purification and release from the body: here the philosopher’s virtue is described as being utterly different from that of everybody else,

⁴⁰ Annas (1999) 58.

⁴¹ Plato did not write treatises, so it is rather difficult to recognize doctrines in his *corpus* (according to the later Academy, for instance, there will be no doctrines at all in Platonic philosophy). But some ideas are commonly considered to be Platonic doctrines, while others are not. In the scholarship, we read about the ‘doctrine of Forms’ or the ‘doctrine of recollection’. Assimilation to God is not as easily recognizable as a doctrine as are these two.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ On this point see Van Riel (2013), chapter 2. Van Riel warns against interpreting the Platonic exhortation to become like God to the greatest extent possible in Aristotelian terms. Plato does not tell us, as some modern scholars assume, that we should somehow become like Aristotle’s divine Intellect by thinking the thinking God’s own thoughts. As the addition “as far as it is possible” indicates, there exists an essential difference between God and mankind. To become like God is to recognize this difference and act accordingly, i.e. with moderation. (See Robbert M. van den Berg, review in BMCR).

for it amounts to a striving for philosophical understanding and is opposed to the practice of ordinary “civic” virtue. In this sense, Annas is surely right in detecting in this passage an echo of *Theaetetus*’ flight from the mix of good and evil in the world.

2.3 A cosmological happiness. *Telos* and *eudaimonia* in the *Timaeus*

Quite surprisingly, if we go through all the Platonic passages which represent the sources for the doctrine of *homoiōsis theōi* in Late Platonism, we soon discover that in none of the dialogues in which the formula appears Plato states that it represents the *telos* of human life. The first reason for this, of course, is simply the fact that Plato did not use *telos* as a technical term, and for him the formulation of the *telos* was not yet part of the philosophical *agenda*, for the ‘*telos* problem’ as such only arose with Aristotle and was formalized by the Stoics, as we shall see. On the other hand, Plato, as an ethical thinker, certainly had a theory of *eudaimonia*. There are of course many passages in which *eudaimonia* is discussed. Nonetheless, the only passage in Plato’s *corpus* in which the idea of divinization is presented as the *telos* of life is at the end of the *Timaeus*. Whereas in the *locus classicus* of the *Theaetetus* digression ὁμοίωσις θεῷ is said to be necessary to escape from evil, Plato never explicitly designates ὁμοίωσις θεῷ as human fulfilment and happiness.⁴⁴ The passage does not explicitly share the Aristotelian characterization of the *telos* that shaped the Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic discussion of the topic, but connects *telos*, *eudaimonia* and the best possible life in the characteristic fashion of later debates about the *telos*. As Gabor Betegh has noted, this certainly encouraged later Platonists to treat it as the Platonic definition of the *telos*.⁴⁵ Perhaps the most intriguing fact is that here *telos* (which coincides with human happiness) is described in a very peculiar way. Let us examine the whole passage:

⁴⁴ In the aforementioned passage in the digression of the *Theaetetus* (*Tht.* 176a5-c5) the word τέλος does not appear, nor is the idea of assimilation to God as the supreme aim of human being explicitly stated. That is why I believe that in the Middle Platonist development of the doctrine an important role must have been played by the passage at the end of the *Timaeus* where the idea of divinization is associated with the terms τέλος and εὐδαιμονία. See Sedley (1999) and Betegh (2003).

⁴⁵ Betegh (2003).

τῷ μὲν οὖν περὶ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας ἢ περὶ φιλονικίας τετευτακότι καὶ ταῦτα διαπονοῦντι σφόδρα πάντα τὰ δόγματα ἀνάγκη θνητὰ ἐγγεγονέναι, καὶ παντάπασιν καθ' ὅσον μάλιστα δυνατὸν θνητῷ γίγνεσθαι, τούτου μηδὲ σμικρὸν ἐλλείπειν, ἅτε τὸ τοιοῦτον (5) ἠϋξηκότι· τῷ δὲ περὶ φιλομαθίαν καὶ περὶ τὰς ἀληθεῖς φρονήσεις ἐσπουδακότι καὶ ταῦτα μάλιστα τῶν αὐτοῦ γεγυμνασμένῳ φρονεῖν μὲν ἀθάνατα καὶ θεῖα, ἄνπερ ἀληθείας ἐφάπτηται, πᾶσα ἀνάγκη που, καθ' ὅσον δ' αὖ μετασχεῖν ἀνθρωπίνη φύσει ἀθανασίας ἐνδέχεται, τούτου μηδὲν μέρος ἀπολείπειν, ἅτε δὲ αἰεὶ θεραπεύοντα τὸ θεῖον ἔχοντά τε αὐτὸν εὖ κεκοσμημένον τὸν δαίμονα σύνοικον ἑαυτῷ, διαφερόντως (5) εὐδαίμονα εἶναι. θεραπεία δὲ δὴ παντὶ παντὸς μία, τὰς οἰκειάς ἐκάστῳ τροφὰς καὶ κινήσεις ἀποδίδοναι. τῷ δ' ἐν ἡμῖν θεῖῳ συγγενεῖς εἰσὶν κινήσεις αἰ τοῦ παντὸς διανοήσεις ἡμῖν θεῖῳ συγγενεῖς εἰσὶν κινήσεις αἰ τοῦ παντὸς διανοήσεις (d.) καὶ περιφοραί· ταύταις δὴ συνεπόμενον ἕκαστον δεῖ, τὰς περὶ τὴν γένεσιν ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ διεφθαρμένας ἡμῶν περιόδους ἐξορθοῦντα διὰ τὸ καταμανθάνειν τὰς τοῦ παντὸς ἀρμονίας τε καὶ περιφοράς, τῷ κατανοουμένῳ τὸ κατανοοῦν ἐξομοιωσάι κατὰ τὴν ἀρχαίαν φύσιν, ὁμοιώσαντα δὲ τέλος ἔχειν τοῦ (5) προτεθέντος ἀνθρώποις ὑπὸ θεῶν ἀρίστου βίου πρὸς τε τὸν παρόντα καὶ τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον.

Hence if someone has devoted all his interest and energy to his appetites or to competition, all his beliefs must necessarily be mortal ones, and altogether, so far as it is possible to become *par excellence* mortal, he will not fall the least bit short of this, because it is the mortal part of himself that he has developed. But if someone has committed himself entirely to learning and to true wisdom, and it is this among the things at his disposal that he has most practised, he must necessarily have immortal and divine wisdom, provided that he gets a grasp on truth. And so far as it is possible for human nature to have a share in immortality (μετασχεῖν ἀθανασίας), he will not in any degree lack this. And because he always takes care of that which is divine, and has the *daimōn* that lives with him well ordered (εὖ κεκοσμημένον τὸν δαίμονα σύνοικον ἑαυτῷ) he will be supremely happy. Now for everybody there is one way to care for every part, and that is to grant to each part its own proper nourishments and motions. For the divine element in us, the motions which are akin to it are the thoughts and revolutions of the whole world. Everyone should take a lead from these. We should correct the corrupted revolutions in our head concerned with becoming by learning the harmonies and revolutions of the whole world, and so make the thinking subject resemble the object of his thought, in accordance with its ancient nature; and by creating this resemblance (ὁμοιώσαντα) bring to fulfilment (*telos*) the best life offered by the gods to mankind for present and future time. (Plato, *Timaeus* 90b1–d7, tr. Sedley slightly modified)

In the quoted passage, the *telos* is described as a commitment to learning (φιλομαθίαν) and true wisdom (ἀληθεῖς φρονήσεις), as opposed to a life devoted to appetites (ἐπιθυμίας) or to competition (φιλονικίας). This commitment allows man to gain a share in immortality (μετασχεῖν ἀνθρωπίνη φύσει ἀθανασίας), “as far as it is possible” (κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν) and, consequently, in εὐδαιμονία, literally understood as the ‘good state of the *daimōn*’ who lives in us. To reach this state we have to “correct the corrupted revolutions in our head concerned with becoming by learning the harmonies and revolutions of the whole world, and in doing so make the thinking subject resemble the object of his thought”. Knowledge is the key to fulfil our *telos*. For this reason, such a characterization of the *telos* is an anticipation of Aristotle’s ideal of *theōria*: it is in virtue of the contemplation of the heavenly motions (and thus of the *knowledge* of them) that one can obtain ‘a well ordered *daimōn*’, *eudaimonia*, happiness. The convergence between the notion of *telos* in the *Timaeus* passage and Aristotle’s *theōria* becomes explicit in Middle Platonism, as we shall see.⁴⁶

This passage might be regarded as surprising for several reasons, but for the sake of my argument I wish to focus on two aspects: (i) what does it mean that the “correction” of the “corrupted revolutions in our head concerned with becoming”, performed by “learning the harmonies and revolutions of the whole world”, makes the thinking subject similar to the object of his thought? (ii) How does this achieved resemblance represent the ultimate fulfilment (*telos*), the most perfect life, and human happiness?

⁴⁶ For example, in the second chapter of Alcinous’s *Didaskalikos* we read: Ἡ ψυχὴ δὴ θεωροῦσα μὲν τὸ θεῖον καὶ τὰς νοήσεις τοῦ θεοῦ εὐπαθεῖν τε λέγεται, καὶ τοῦτο τὸ πάθημα αὐτῆς φρόνησις ὠνόμασται, ὅπερ οὐχ ἕτερον εἶποι ἂν τις εἶναι τῆς πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ὁμοιώσεως. “The soul, when contemplating the divine and the intellections of the divine, is said to be in a good condition, and this condition of it is called wisdom. And that, one could say, is nothing other than assimilation to the divine”. (Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 153,5–6, tr. Dillon). In this passage, φρόνησις corresponds to the “good state (εὐπαθεῖν) of the soul while it contemplates the divine”. This clearly echoes the *Timaeus*, in which the contemplation of heavenly bodies is the way to acquire divine φρόνησις. Interestingly, for Alcinous, the object of contemplation is no longer the heavenly motions but explicitly the “divine” (τὸ θεῖον) and the “intellections of the divine” (τὰς νοήσεις τοῦ θεοῦ). More specifically, in Alcinous’s *Didaskalikos*, the contemplation of heavenly bodies of the *Timaeus* becomes the contemplation of the Forms, according to the Middle Platonic doctrine of the Forms as the thoughts of God; Ὁμοίωσις θεῷ corresponds to contemplation of the Forms, which is true divine wisdom (φρόνησις). It is through knowledge of the divine and its intellections that we become virtuous and just, and therefore ‘godlike’. See *infra*, pp. 154–159.

2.3.1 Kinship and corruption

To answer the first question, we have to look back at an earlier section of the dialogue. In the first part of Timaeus' account Plato has introduced a particular psychological and astronomical theory according to which there is a close *structural* and *functional* correspondence between the rational part of the individual soul and the world soul, which is responsible for the movements of the heavenly bodies. In other words, there is a perfect correspondence between the human microcosm and the macrocosm. Timaeus has explained that the Demiurge produced the two circles of the world soul (those respectively responsible for the movements of the fixed stars and that of the planets); secondly, *from the residue of the same mixture*, which was less pure in quality, he fashioned the rational individual soul (the νοῦς).⁴⁷ So there is a very strict kinship, a real *isomorphism*, between the two souls.⁴⁸

Moreover, later on in the dialogue, Timaeus speaks of a 'corruption' undergone by our thoughts. At 42e–44c, when Plato is describing the work carried out by the lesser gods in fashioning bodies for human souls, he speaks about disorderly motions set up in the body, which "violently shake the orbits of the soul". These motions – Plato continues – "mutilated and disfigured the circles in every possible way so that the circles barely held together and though they remained in motion, they moved without rhyme or reason".⁴⁹ Our thoughts have been disfigured by the *stimuli* coming from the body, but *originally* they were shaped like the heavenly motions. In this *original* kinship resides our possibility to *re-shape* our thoughts by looking at the heavenly motions, just as you can reshape a crumpled piece of paper by looking at one that is not crumpled. Furthermore, the argument that the knower *becomes like* the known is stated in the *Republic* (500 c–d), and in a very similar context,⁵⁰ and it is also found in Aristotle.

But, once we have established that this 're-shaping' is possible, how can we conclude that it represents human happiness and the fulfilment or aim (*telos*) of human life?

⁴⁷ Pl. *Ti.* 41d.

⁴⁸ See Betegh (2003).

⁴⁹ Pl. *Ti.* 43d–e.

⁵⁰ In the passage of the *Republic* 500c–d the philosophers are said to become as similar as possible to the divine realm by studying the stability and order that distinguishes the intellectual realm.

2.3.2 Thinking about becoming

We know that it is a central feature of Socratic and Platonic ethics that the good and virtuous life is explained not so much in terms of actions to perform or decisions to take or in terms of wealth, health, or fame, but rather as a particular psychological state or condition.⁵¹ So it is not surprising that here happiness is described as a state of mind. Nonetheless, what makes this description of *eudaimonia* peculiar is perhaps its cosmological turn. The majority of scholars have interpreted this passage as an anticipation of the ideal of *theōria* as opposed to *praxis* which Aristotle expounds in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁵² In this view the ethical ideal for human beings would be a life of contemplation and therefore of detachment from the world of becoming. A *flight* (*phygē*), as Plato says in a passage of the *Theatetus* destined to become the *locus classicus* of the doctrine of *homoiosis theōi* in Late Platonism. For example, in a very famous article⁵³ David Sedley states:

I take the obvious sense of the text (90d1–2) to be that it is by focusing our thoughts on becoming, rather than on being, that we have distorted our intellect’s naturally circular motions ... the text strongly suggests that our assimilation to ‘the revolutions of the world soul’ is meant to get us away from our thoughts about becoming. What we are urged to share with the world soul, then does not include its practical reasoning.

Sedley interprets the passage to mean that our original circular motions have been distorted by thinking about becoming instead of being. The conclusion of such a claim would be that we are urged to abandon practical reasoning. But, if we look at the text, we are not said to *stop thinking about becoming altogether*, but rather to *correct* (the verb used is ἐξορθοῦντα) *our way of thinking about becoming*. Mahonley in a recent paper has suggested a solution which seems to me more in keeping with the context of the dialogue. What would it mean to correct our way of thinking about becoming?

⁵¹ See the next chapter, where I analyse the definition of *eudaimonia* as a ‘disposition of the soul’ provided by Socrates in the *Philebus* and I compare it with Aristotle’s notion of *eudaimonia* as *energeia* (*infra*, pp.45–48).

⁵² Arist. *Eth. Nic.* X. See again the next chapter, *infra*, pp. 32–58.

⁵³ Sedley (1997) 335.

The most basic error in thinking about becoming is to mistake becoming for the true reality [the very same mistake of the prisoners of the Cave of the *Republic*]. The cure of this mistake could be accepting the three fundamental principles that the character Timaeus articulates at the beginning of his story: (i) there is a distinction between being and becoming (27d) [and so our correction would consist in stop thinking about becoming as if it were being]; (ii) everything that is generated has a cause (28a); (iii) the world of becoming must have been modelled on an eternal exemplar that is comprehensible by rational discourse (28a–29a).⁵⁴

In this respect, the dialogue itself would represent the contemplation of the heavenly bodies which has the aim of correcting our thoughts about becoming.

2.3.3 *The Demiurge as an ethical paradigm*

If we think of the divine paradigm as it is described in the dialogue, we have another reason to believe that our *telos* is not to be achieved merely via contemplation. The Demiurge, as he is described in Timaeus' account of the generation of the world, is a deity which does not only contemplate but rather *acts*, and his action has the aim of creating order (*kosmos*).⁵⁵ More specifically, the Demiurge of the *Timaeus* is best identified with the divine $\nu\omicron\delta\varsigma$, as is clear from the following three passages.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Mahonley (2005) 81.

⁵⁵ The major problem in the exegesis of Plato's theology is whether the Demiurge represents the highest metaphysical principle or not. Here I do not take a position on this point, for it is not essential for my present aim. See Van Riel (2013) and the next n.

⁵⁶ There is no agreement among scholars about the fact that the Demiurge is to be thought of as a *nous*, especially because of Plato's repeated statement that intellect does not exist apart from soul. In particular, one of the most remarkable studies against this interpretation is Van Riel (2013). "In this study Van Riel resists this reduction of theology to metaphysics, arguing that for Plato the gods are not metaphysical principles, but souls – of an admittedly superior type – in charge of the sensible universe" (in Review by Robert M. van den Berg, in BMCR). In particular, in Van Riel's view the Demiurge cannot be an intellect without a soul, but must rather be conceived as the personification of the property of the gods/souls to contemplate the intelligible and to transmit order to the *kosmos*, thus performing the divine task of taking care of what is inferior to him. For the Demiurge as a *nous*, see instead Menn (1995) and Bordt (2006) that argue that for Plato God is a metaphysical principle, be it intellect and/or a manifestation of the Good. All in all, though refuting the existence in Plato's theology of a first metaphysical principle which would correspond to the Demiurge, described in terms of a divine *nous*, Van Riel agrees in identifying in the maintenance of order the main function of the divine souls (the gods). See 119–121: "they have their own tasks, their own ranges of operation in the universe, and they care about 'lower' beings; but they are not all-embracing principles".

- (i) when Timaeus says: “I have presented what has been crafted by Intellect (τὰ διὰ νοῦ δεδημιουργημένα)”,⁵⁷
- (ii) When the Demiurge is described as a νοῦς persuaded and overruling Necessity,⁵⁸
- (iii) When the model of the Demiurge is described as “what νοῦς contemplates”.⁵⁹

The Demiurge, as the νοῦς, does more than just contemplate, since by his very nature he is a cause that orders things towards their goodness:

He was good, and the one who is good can never become jealous of anything. And so being free of jealousy he wanted everything to become as much like himself as possible...The God wanted everything to be good and nothing bad so far as that was possible. (*Ti.* 29e –30a)

Moreover, we have seen that our soul should emulate the World Soul (by looking at the latter’s motions and turning its own thoughts towards them). But the World Soul is specifically fashioned by the Demiurge, so as “to be the [world’s] body’s mistress and to rule over it as her subject” (*Ti.* 34c). As Sedley says, “the world soul is not detached intellect, it is the governing principle of the world, concerned with the good of the whole cosmic organism”.⁶⁰

If our *nous* shares the functions and the aims of the divine *nous* of the Demiurge, and our soul shares the functions and aims of the World Soul, it follows that a care for the whole universe is an essential part of human happiness. This conclusion fits well with the other passages in which Plato deals with the concept of assimilation to God. After all, in the *locus classicus* of the *Theatetus* assimilation to God is not just an escape, but an escape which corresponds to “being just and pious together with intelligence (μετὰ φρονήσεως)”.⁶¹ And it also fits with some later Platonists’ portrayal of the doctrine of assimilation to God as the *telos* of human life, as we shall see.

⁵⁷ Pl. *Ti.* 47e4.

⁵⁸ Pl. *Ti.* 48a2.

⁵⁹ Pl. *Ti.* 39e7–9

⁶⁰ Sedley (1997) 334.

⁶¹ Pl. *Th.* 176d–e.

Our fulfilment corresponds to the fulfilment of our best or most divine part (the *nous*), which, as the divine *nous*, not only contemplates the perfect idea of the world but also tries to put it in practice – κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν, of course.

2.4 Assimilation to God in the Republic

We then have the final book of the *Republic*.⁶² Here assimilation to God is not described as a flight from our world at all, but is rather identified with being “willing and eager to be just” (προθυμεῖσθαι ἐθέλη δίκαιος γίγνεσθαι) and, more interestingly, with *practicing* virtue (ἐπιτηδεύων ἀρετήν). In this passage Socrates sets out to refute the argument that the unjust person does better in worldly terms than the just one, and he shows the convenience of justice with regard to happiness. The identification between assimilation to God and the practice of virtue could not be clearer than it is here, and no flight from practical concerns is required.

There is on the other hand another point in the *Republic* in which Socrates shows how assimilation to God is possible. Here the ‘unworldly trend’ makes a strong comeback. The passage undoubtedly echoes *Theaetetus* 176 and *Timaeus* 90, and it is worth quoting it in its entirety:

Οὐδὲ γάρ που, ὦ Ἀδείμαντε, σχολὴ τῷ γε ὡς ἀληθῶς πρὸς τοῖς οὕσι τὴν διάνοιαν ἔχοντι κάτω βλέπειν εἰς ἀνθρώπων πραγματείας, καὶ μαχόμενον αὐτοῖς φθόνου τε καὶ δυσμενείας ἐμπίμπλασθαι, ἀλλ’ εἰς τεταγμένα ἅττα καὶ κατὰ ταῦτ’ αἰεὶ ἔχοντα ὀρῶντας καὶ θεωμένους οὐτ’ ἀδικοῦντας οὐτ’ ἀδικούμενα ὑπ’ ἀλλήλων, κόσμῳ δὲ πάντα καὶ κατὰ λόγον ἔχοντα, ταῦτα μιμεῖσθαι τε καὶ ὅτι μάλιστα ἀφομοιοῦσθαι. ἢ οἶε τινὰ μηχανὴν εἶναι, ὅτ’ τις ὁμιλεῖ ἀγάμενος, μὴ μιμεῖσθαι ἐκεῖνο; Ἀδύνατον, ἔφη. Θεῖον δὲ καὶ κοσμίον ὅ γε φιλόσοφος ὁμιλῶν κόσμιός τε καὶ θεῖος εἰς τὸ δυνατόν ἀνθρώπῳ γίγνεται.

Adeimantus, there is no time for someone who has his mind truly fixed on reality to cast his gaze downwards on to the affairs of men and so be infected with resentment and malice, but he looks at the things that are organized, permanent and unchanging,

⁶² *Resp.* 613a.

where wronging and being wronged don't exist, where all is orderly and rational; and he makes these things the model for him to imitate and to assimilate himself to as much as is possible. Don't you think that one's behaviour is bound to resemble anyone or anything whose company one enjoys? Inevitably, he said. So, because a philosopher's links are with a realm that is divine and orderly, he becomes as divine and orderly as is humanly possible. (*Resp.* 500c–d)

The philosophers are said to become as much like the divine realm as possible by studying the stability and order of that intellectual realm. Up to this point, this seems to be the same concept expressed at the end of the *Timaeus*. Nevertheless, immediately below, the philosophers are said to produce the same order not only in their own souls, but also in those of others. So, as once again Annas points out: “they are to do good to others who are imperfect, not to flee from them”.⁶³

Thus, the *Theaetetus*' flight is necessary to assimilate ourselves to the divine realm, but may represent just the first step in a process that entails also a *return* into the world of evil, in order to recreate the order and the divinity we had become similar to. However, if this reasoning is correct, assimilation to God becomes no longer the supreme aim for a human being and should not be identified with *being* virtuous, but rather with *becoming* virtuous, not with a *state* of the soul, but with a process within the soul. The practice of virtue would be the next step that comes after one's assimilation to God.

This conclusion might fit with the *Theaetetus* passage if we translate the verb γενέσθαι as ‘becoming’ and not as ‘being’. In this case the passage would read as follows: “to become like God is to become just and holy, together with wisdom”. The point that is being made might be this: we need (i) to escape from the world if we want to contemplate and study the order and the divinity of the heavenly realm; (ii) in doing so we become just and holy, as God is just and holy (see *Th.* 176c: “God is mainly just”); (iii) after that we are supposed to return into the world of evil with the aim of making others partake of the order of universe by practising the virtues of justice, holiness, and wisdom. This might be the argument that Plato is seeking to make, although this last step is not stated in the *Theaetetus*.

⁶³Annas (1999), p. 62.

This process we have tried to describe inevitably echoes the Myth of the Cave in the *Republic*: after having contemplated the real world, the philosopher must return to the Cave (this world), aware of the true and supreme reality. In a similar way, we may interpret the fact of being “willing and eager to be just” (προθυμεῖσθαι ἐθέλη δίκαιος γίγνεσθαι)⁶⁴ in the last book of the *Republic* as a striving to escape from our world, the flight of the *Theaetetus*. Even though the idea of a flight is not at all expressly present in this passage from the *Republic*, as Annas has noted, this does not necessarily mean that Plato is contradicting himself. In the economy of the context, it is certainly more useful to emphasize the active task of the philosopher and the previous need for a flight may have been consciously omitted.

In this way, everything seems to work, even the passage from the *Laws* quoted above.⁶⁵ The wise man here would be similar to God as, to become wise, he has fled our world by devoting himself to the contemplation of the divine realm.

3. ‘What God’ and which life?

There is another perspective from which we can address the question, even in order to understand later Platonists’ interpretations, by asking ourselves which idea of God is implied in the doctrine. As far as the practice of virtue is concerned, God can be identified with human reason, the most divine part of the soul, the rational part. The idea of a flight, instead, seems to suggest a concept of God as a supreme being who lies outside the human world and experience, and so does not possess the virtues, being superior to those.⁶⁶ But how can this conception of a God who is above all human virtues fit with the statement made in the *Theaetetus* about the supreme justice of God?

I am aware that the solution presented here cannot solve all the problems that Plato’s passages raise. A strong tension between the ideal of a pure contemplative life,

⁶⁴ *Resp.* 613a.

⁶⁵ *Leg.* 716c–d.

⁶⁶ With regard to this point, we will see Alcinous’ the position (*Alc. Did.*, 28), which echoes Arist, *Et. Nic.* 1178 b8–18, where Aristotle says that there is something ‘vulgar’ in praising the gods for justice and temperance, since they have no base desires they must learn to overcome. Later, also Plotinus will embrace this argument (*Plot, Enn.* I.2, “On virtues”), rejecting the idea of becoming like God by practising the traditional virtues, which he calls ‘civic’ or ‘political’ virtues.

utterly devoted to the study of the heavenly bodies and to God, and the need for the philosopher and wise man to strive to bring justice and order to our world still permeates all Plato's philosophy. And this very tension runs through the whole Platonist tradition, as we shall see.

Annas concludes her chapter on the topic by stating that it is not at all possible to combine these two 'strands' – the civic strand and the unworldly one – into a single set of ideas, because "one or another will suffer too much strain".⁶⁷ At any rate, the solution I have proposed seems to reconcile these two strands, at least to some degree: it is likely that Plato, fascinated by the ideal of a life utterly devoted to the contemplation of the Forms (an idea that will be developed by his greatest disciple, Aristotle), still cannot abandon his interest in practical and civic virtues, in bringing order to this world. But these two ideals compete for precedence, which is probably why Aristotle decides to split those two ideal lives by putting forward the two ideals of the *practical life* and the *contemplative life*. Which one is more Platonic, or rather Platonist? This is the question we need to address. It is tempting to think that the theoretical life is the most Platonic one, and this because of the great influence that Plotinus has exercised on our own perception of Platonism: an influence that has all too often distorted scholars' interpretation of Platonists before Plotinus. My own view on the topic is the opposite of Plotinus' one, as we shall see. It may be that, according to Plato, the flight from this world is not the higher level of the ascent to virtue, as maintained by Plotinus. After all, the philosopher is supposed to return into the Cave, once he has contemplated the real world. But – and this will be our main concern in this work – what is the position of the Ancient Platonists on this topic?

⁶⁷Annas (1999), 71.

Chapter Two

Aristotle and the origin of the concept of the telos

1. *Introduction: the ancient approach to Ethics*

In the *Academica Priora* Cicero observes that, ultimately, there are only two philosophical problems: on the one hand, the problem of determining the criterion of truth (*iudicium veri*, in Greek κριτήριον τῆς ἀληθείας), which is what guarantees the very possibility of knowing something; and, on the other hand, the “end of the goods” (*finis bonorum*, in Greek τέλος τῶν ἀγαθῶν), which is the aim of life, the final goal of every human action.¹ These philosophical problems are, respectively, the epistemological and the ethical problems *par excellence*: the starting and the final point of every philosophical speculation. My work deals with the τέλος ἀγαθῶν, and more specifically, with its formulation in the Platonist tradition. First, before examining this in greater depth, it is necessary to clarify the concept of τέλος.

In her book *The Morality of Happiness*, Julia Annas affirms the following: “in ancient ethics the fundamental question is: ‘How ought I to live?’ or: ‘What should my life be like?’”² This is the question posed by Socrates in the first book of the *Republic* (352d): ὄντινα τρόπον χρῆ ζῆν, literally: “in which way is it necessary to live?” This is also the meaning of the first question that Aristotle puts forward in *Eudemian Ethics*: “what is it to live well or successfully (εὖ ζῆν)?”³ In Antiquity, several answers, all very different from each other, were given to such questions. However, as Julia Annas argues, “there is no serious disagreement as to *this being the right question to ask*, and as to *its*

¹ Cic. *Ac. Pr.* 29,41, 17:... *etenim duo esse haec maxima in philosophia, iudicium veri et finem bonorum...*

² Annas (1993) 27.

³ Cf. Arist., *Eth. Eud.* I.1.1214a14–b6.

being philosophy which provides an answer".⁴ Unlike the majority of contemporary ethical theories, which interrogate our duties or rights following a Kantian approach, the ancient ethicists' concern is, first and foremost, happiness in our life, or the way in which our life has to be conducted in order for it to be a happy one. Furthermore, our life is conceived not as a set of singular decisions, but rather *as a whole*, a whole that in turn is understood as having a direction, as being oriented towards something, namely a *good*. In other words, in Ancient ethical reflection it is agreed that our life has a *telos*, an aim.

2. *The telos: origins of the concept*

The concept of the *telos* in Ethics was formalized in Hellenistic Philosophy. Long and Sedley, in their commentary on the sources of Hellenistic Philosophy, point out that in this period "the different schools were regularly characterized by their different specifications of the end".⁵ Despite their differences in specifications, however, all schools could agree on the formal definition of the concept, such as we find it in Stobaeus' rendering: "that for the sake of which everything is done and what is itself done for the sake of nothing else".⁶ Thus, the investigation of the *telos* is a functionalist inquiry aimed at identifying what kind of life, or what kind of activity, will enable a person to fulfil his or her human nature, "to act in the way that human nature requires".⁷

This definition is Aristotelian in origin. Aristotle was the first to set the stage for later discussions about the *telos*, even though he did not use the word *telos* as a technical term. Right at the outset of the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle introduces an argument, which has been interpreted either as a simple fallacy or as an argument with "extreme but hidden complexity".⁸ Our interest here is neither to conduct a comprehensive analysis of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, nor to take a position in the several scholarly discussions about it. What is interesting for our purpose is the very fact

⁴ Annas (1993) 27.

⁵ Cf. Long–Sedley (1987) 398.

⁶ SVF 3.16. The source of this fragment is Stobaeus, *Anth.* 2.77,16–27. It is also included in Long–Sedley (1987): 63A.

⁷ Long–Sedley, 398.

⁸ Annas (1993), 31. See Kenny (1969); Williams (1962); Kirwan (1967); Pakaluk (2005) 48–53.

that Aristotle is introducing into the history of ethics the possibility, one might even say the plausibility, of the existence of a final end, an end which is superior to every other for it alone is the one to which every other aim in one's life is eventually directed. In other words, what we need to focus on here is the Aristotelian *definition* of the concept of *telos*, and not so much his further specification about what the *telos* consists in. This analysis is necessary if we are to understand the question to which Hellenistic and Post Hellenistic debates will try to furnish an answer. For these reasons, we will exclusively focus here on the passages and elements that will be of interest to our understanding of later debates.

Aristotle opens his inquiry by claiming that “every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice, is thought to aim at some good”. Every human action has an end-directed structure: it is aimed at some good. Aristotle does not ignore, of course, that a person can perform a bad action; here the implicit claim is that an agent, even while performing a bad action, would do so in order to bring about an outcome that he considers a good, even if only for himself. Here we are in the framework of Socratic ethical intellectualism: nobody chooses to do evil unless he thinks it is a good.⁹ The second claim, which we shall deal with further below, is more problematic. This claim states that “for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim”. Here we have a first definition of *the* good as the aim at which all things aim. The end of an activity – Aristotle continues – may be either the activity itself or something produced by the activity and distinct from it (1094a1–5). Aristotle then sets up a hierarchy of aims (and therefore of goods). It can be summarized by the very intuitive claim that an aim is superior to another aim (and thus one good is better than another) if the second is aimed at the first (I will return later to this criterion of determining the hierarchy of goods/aims).¹⁰

⁹ As is known, Aristotle does not accept Socratic intellectualism and moreover he explicitly criticizes it. However, it is at the same time undeniable that he moves within an ethical intellectualist framework. He rejects it because it does not think that a theoretical knowledge of the good is, in itself, enough to pursue it. On the other hand, as far as we can infer from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he would agree with the claim that whatever one does is aimed to pursue *some* good, even if this good is not a real one, and even if one can be corrupted and therefore fail in pursuing it consistently. This, surely, comes from Socratic influence.

¹⁰ I am here using aim as a synonymous of good, for this is what Aristotle does in all the *Nicomachean Ethics*. According to Pakaluk, in this first page Aristotle wishes exactly to propose a definition of ‘good’ as ‘aimed at’. In the rest of the chapter Aristotle seems to presuppose this identification. After the first sentence, he stops talking about goods and starts to talk solely about aims. (Pakaluk, 2005, 49).

But let us go back to what we have just said. Many scholars claim that, at the very beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle is committing a Quantifier Shift fallacy.¹¹ Of course, as has been claimed by scholars, the fact that our actions are directed to some good/goal does not necessarily imply that there is a unique final goal, namely the good. I think that a correct way to understand the argument is proposed by Sarah Broadie when she shows that here Aristotle is not making any argument at all, and that to accuse him of committing a fallacy is thus misguided. Aristotle starts, as we have seen, with a universal claim, as he usually does in his major works:¹² “every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice, is thought to aim at some good (ἀγαθοῦ τινὸς ἐφίεσθαι)”. Now, the mere fact that all the quoted human activities always have some aim, and are aimed at something, is quite clear. An art (τέχνη) is aimed at producing something, an inquiry (μέθοδος) at finding something. Even an action, at least in the Greek sense of the term,¹³ has an aim, and it is quite plain also that a decision (προαίρεσις) must be aim-directed. Aristotle is taking this to be self-evident; he does not think that we need more arguments to accept this claim, and, in fact, we intuitively agree with this statement. Nonetheless, here Aristotle is also making another point: human activities are not just end-directed, but they are directed towards a good, a statement which is not surprising within the framework of Socratic ethical intellectualism.

The second claim, however, if it is taken to be a conclusion, would be problematic. This passage reads as follows: “for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim”. Aristotle would here be drawing a conclusion that does not necessarily follow from the premise he has made. In fact, from: “Each thing aims at some good or other” it does not follow that “there is *some single good* at which *all things aim*”. If it did, this would mean that from the claim: “Every road leads somewhere” it would follow that “There is a single place to which all roads lead”.¹⁴ The ‘Quantifier Shift’,

¹¹ See for example Pakaluk (2005) 49–51. According to this view Aristotle would here be drawing a conclusion that does not necessarily follow from the premises he made.

¹² It is the byzantine commentator Eustratius of Nicaea, who observes that some of Aristotle’s works (and in general the major works) open with a universal statement. See also Heylbut (1892) XX 1. The *Nicomachean Ethics* does not represent an exception to this ‘rule’.

¹³ For Aristotle πράξις is not something that can be performed pointlessly or spontaneously, it is always end-directed.

¹⁴ I take this effective example from Pakaluk (2005) 49. It is the criticism stated by Anscombe (1957), 21, who finds an ‘illicit transition’ from ‘all chains must stop somewhere’ to ‘there is somewhere where all

then, is a fallacy in logic “since it involves an illicit shift from an expression of the form ‘Every...some...’ to the one of the form ‘Some...every...’¹⁵ Of course, as has been claimed by several scholars, the fact that our actions are directed to some good/goal does not necessarily imply that there is a unique final goal, namely the good. According to this not uncommon interpretation of the opening lines of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, then, we simply have to lower our expectations of Aristotle as a logical thinker.¹⁶

This strikes us, however, as somewhat misguided; Aristotle in a sense ‘invented’ Logic, and before we conclude that he is making such a gross mistake we should analyse the passage more carefully. Luckily, as I have anticipated, somebody has done this job. Broadie elaborates in her first chapter of *Ethics with Aristotle* a very persuasive way to restore, so to speak, Aristotle’s skills as a logical thinker. I shall now briefly present her reading. If we glance over the following page or so of the *Ethics*, Aristotle “writes in such a way as if he had not yet asserted but had only hypothesised the proposition that there is a supreme end/good”.¹⁷ The passage reads:

Εἰ δὴ τι τέλος ἐστὶ τῶν πρακτῶν ὃ δι’ αὐτὸ βουλόμεθα, τὰλλα δὲ διὰ τοῦτο, καὶ μὴ πάντα δι’ ἕτερον αἰρούμεθα (πρόεισι γὰρ οὕτω γ’ εἰς ἄπειρον, ὥστ’ εἶναι κενὴν καὶ ματαίαν τὴν ὄρεξιν), δῆλον ὡς τοῦτ’ ἂν εἴη τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ τὸ ἄριστον. ἄρ’ οὖν καὶ πρὸς τὸν βίον ἢ γνῶσις αὐτοῦ μεγάλην ἔχει ῥοπήν, καὶ καθάπερ τοξόται σκοπὸν ἔχοντες μᾶλλον ἂν τυγχάνοιμεν τοῦ δέοντος;

If then there is some end of the things we do,¹⁸ which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers

chains must stop’. See also Hardie (1968), 12–27, who goes very carefully through this passage, facing all the difficulties and implications of it.

¹⁵ Pakaluk (2005) 49.

¹⁶ I take this expression from Broadie (1991) 8, who summarizes in this way the results of most of scholars’ interpretations of the passage.

¹⁷ Broadie (1991) 8.

¹⁸ τέλος τῶν πρακτῶν: Ross in Barnes (1984) translates this as: “end of the things we do”. The literal translation would be: “end of the things to be done” (see LSJ, 1458). The term derives from the verb πράσσω and thus is connected with the sphere of πράξις. For Aristotle, πράξις is not something that can be performed pointlessly or spontaneously; it is always end-directed. Julia Annas observes: “It leaves it open that much that we do is not action in this sense, but assumes that action is what ethics is mostly concerned with” (Annas, 1993, 30).

who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what we should? (Arist. *Et. Nic.* 1094a18–24, tr. W.D. Ross's revised by J.O. Urmson, ed. J. Barnes, Oxford 1984).

If we carefully examine the bracketed text, we see that here Aristotle is arguing for the truth of the statement 'there is a final end'. What Aristotle is in fact saying is that there *can* be a final end ("If there is some end...") – and – this is the argument – that if there is not, the consequence is that our desire would be "empty and vain". Since, apparently, it is not the case – our desire does not appear to be empty and vain – it is reasonable to think that there is a final goal that is desired for its own sake. In other words, in order to avoid an infinite regress (which would be absurd, at least in Aristotle's view) it must be conceded that if there is anything which is desired but not desired for itself, there must be something which is desired for itself. This unequivocally suggests, as Sarah Broadie claims, that "he is regarding the statement – there is a final end, i.e. the good at which everything is aimed at – as not yet firmly established".¹⁹ If he thought to have already logically demonstrated with an argument that this good exists, why should he be putting forward further arguments to prove it? If Aristotle actually believed himself to have made the argument at the beginning of the treatise as we reconstructed it, there would not be "any place for doubt or any need for further persuasion".²⁰

So, how are we to understand the first lines? Well, the first one ("Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice, is thought to aim at some good") is put forward as intuitively and evidently true, in almost tautological terms. It is taken to be a true and evident statement since we can hardly deny that, for instance, the aim of a craft is an effective performance in that craft *et similia*. The second sentence, in both Broadie's view and in my opinion, must not be understood as a proper conclusion; otherwise, we repeat for the sake of clarity, we would be compelled to say that: i) Aristotle is committing a gross fallacy; and ii) we can hardly make sense of the necessity of adding further proofs to prove the existence of a good as such. It is instead, as Sarah Broadie has rightly suggested, a "tacit hypothetical".²¹ Broadie paraphrases the passage in this way:

¹⁹ Broadie (1991) 8.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ Broadie (1991) 9.

The good (i.e. the supreme good) – if there is such a thing (and he is going to argue for it later on) has rightly been characterized as that at which all things aim.

We are allowed to regard it as a hypothetical because this is later “felt to stand in need of further argument”.²² So, even though Aristotle’s actual move from claim 1 to claim 2 is not strictly formally valid, it does at least not pretend towards formal validity in the manner in which it has been read by many scholars. Therefore, it is neither an argument nor is it a fallacy. What, then, is the logic of this passage of thought? In my view, and as is suggested by Broadie and Pakaluk in their works on the *Nicomachean Ethics* it is intended to establish a certain definition of *the* good in terms of aiming.²³ The logic is this: every human activity aims at some good. Thus, every activity has its own goal which is a good and which is limited to this activity, for instance: health for medicine. In this picture, then, if one has to define what *the good*, namely the supreme good, would be, it would not be just the object of another activity among the many. For, if it were the aim of just *some* activity, and not of *every* activity of human life, it would be just a *partial* good.

To summarise, I quote again Broadie’s conclusions:

Whether or not there really is a supreme good, for an end to be a supreme good is for it to be an absolute and unqualified end, which means not in relation to some activities and not to others but in relation to all. Only such an end could rightly be termed ‘*the*’ as distinct from *some* (limited kind of) good.

As Pakaluk observes, since we *need* not take Aristotle to be reasoning in such a way as many scholars have done – charging him with a fallacy – therefore we *should* not.²⁴ Aristotle is proposing a definition, rather than arguing that there is some particular good at which all things aim. “What Aristotle wishes to claim – Pakaluk observes – in effect, is that ‘good’ should be defined as ‘aimed at’, or better *to be good is to be goal*”. Another proof that Pakaluk brings about for this reading is that the remainder of the chapter presupposes this identification: since in the very next sentence Aristotle drops all talk of

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ Broadie (1991) 8–9, and Pakaluk (2005) 48–49.

²⁴ Pakaluk (2005) 49.

goods and starts speaking about goals, and continues to do so for the remainder of the chapter.²⁵

His introductory lines are therefore designed not to give a grand argument, but to replace talk about goods with talk of goals.²⁶

3. *Ranking goods*

This move is essential for Aristotle in the chapter. As many commentators, both ancient and modern, have observed, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is written in the form of a search for the highest, or best, good. Therefore, at the very beginning, Aristotle is fulfilling the first condition of searching for something, namely verifying that such a thing *actually exists* and that *it can be found*.²⁷ Well, how might one establish that there is a best good? Again, Pakaluk, in his introduction to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, suggests that 'best' as a superlative is typically understood through the comparative: the best good is the good that is better than any other. But it would be very difficult to compare and rank goods, for what would be the criteria according to which I might establish one good to be *better* than another? If we think of goods as aims, however, such a method of ranking is more intuitive, and that is what Aristotle explains in the same chapter:

But a certain difference is found among ends; some are activities, others are products apart from the activities that produce them. When there are ends apart from the actions, it is the nature of the products to be better than the activities [...] for it is for the sake of the former that the latter are pursued. (*Eth. Nic.* 1094a24–26)

Pakaluk effectively summarizes the principle of comparison among goods/aims that Aristotle is proposing:

²⁵ The passage continues: 'But a certain difference is found among ends...'

²⁶ Pakaluk (2005) 49.

²⁷ Pakaluk (2005) 48.

When X and Y are goals, and X is for the sake of Y, then Y is better than X.²⁸

The ‘for the sake of which’ relation establishes a ranking. Once Aristotle has explained in the comparative ‘better’, he can then construct a description of the superlative ‘best’, which is precisely what he is looking for in *Nicomachean Ethics*. The supreme good Aristotle is looking for is the *end* of the chain of aims. If I ask myself why I am writing my PhD dissertation, I could answer that I am doing it for the sake of pleasing my professor. But this immediate end of the action does not provide a full explanation of why I am doing it. There certainly exists another aim, perhaps ‘having a satisfying career’, which is superior to the previous aim, for the former is aimed at the latter. And so forth: I have a satisfying career for the sake of living a happy life. This is for Aristotle “the end of the things we do”, for a happy life would be the only thing to be desired just for the sake of itself. The happy life – in Greek εὐδαιμονία, is the τέλος τῶν πρακτῶν.

The word τέλος, which became instituted as a technical term in Hellenistic Philosophy, is here used to designate this final aim at which every human action is ultimately directed. Since every aim is a good, it is clear why the final *telos*, the one desired for its own sake, cannot be anything but the *supreme* good, the best (τὸ ἄριστον). Therefore, Aristotle continues, knowledge (γνώσις) of the final *telos* is the most important means through which we can better conduct our actions, and so to answer the fundamental ethical question. Aristotle affirms immediately afterwards that the highest good for man corresponds to human happiness (εὐδαιμονία) and he claims this because both “ordinary people and people of quality” agree on this point.²⁹

Let us add some further remarks on the concept of the *telos* as it appears to us. First, the Aristotelian meaning of *telos* does not refer to something that a single man or woman decides to pursue. On the contrary, it is something that is desired *by nature* and not as the result of a rational decision. In other words, we do not decide to pursue our final end, namely happiness; rather, it simply ‘happens’: we cannot help pursuing happiness, for the very fact of tending to it is inscribed in the essence of human being. On

²⁸ Pakaluk (2005) 50.

²⁹ Arist. *Et. Nic.* 1095a18–20. When there is this convergence of opinions between “ordinary people” and “people of quality” we can be quite sure about one thesis, according to Aristotle’s method in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. After all, he states, it would be absurd to try to reach in ethical questions the same kind of certainty that we reach in a mathematical inquiry.

this point one cannot fail to remark, alongside Henry Veatch, the distance separating Aristotelian (and, in general, ancient) *teleology* in ethics from its modern incarnations, be these contractarian or utilitarian in character.³⁰ In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, after all, we do not find arguments for the thesis that human beings pursue their own happiness. Aristotle makes just two statements in regards to this: (i) the first, in the quoted passage, says that there *can* be an end to what we do, and it is reasonable to think so, otherwise our desire would be “empty and vain”; the second, ii) there is a convergence among all men in calling this final end ‘happiness’. Such a convergence of views is not the consequence of a deliberation; rather, for Aristotle it is simply self-evident that every human being has this goal, and we can hardly disagree with such a statement. Who would not desire his or her own happiness?

For this reason, with regards to Aristotelian ethics, Gauthier has spoken about a “duty to be happy” (as opposed to the modern ‘right to be happy’ of the American Constitution for example), for “man is happy when he realizes that for which he is made; and to realize that for which he is made is the *duty* of man, for it is that which reason prescribes from him”.³¹ This statement is at best a metaphor, since the idea of deontology as such is not at all present in Aristotle’s discourse. However, it can be used to fully convey that, according to Aristotle, pursuing happiness is not a free rational choice, but rather something that our nature in a certain way ‘prescribes’ to us, and we follow this impulse *as if* it were a duty. It is not a proper duty, but something that our nature leads us to pursue, regardless of our will.

4. *Just one final aim? The τελειότατον telos*

Of course, Aristotle is aware of the fact that different individuals can have different aims for themselves. At the outset of *Eudemian Ethics* we read:

ἅπαντα τὸν δυνάμενον ζῆν κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ προαίρεσιν θέσθαι τινὰ σκοπὸν τοῦ καλῶς
ζῆν, ἥτοι τιμὴν ἢ δόξαν ἢ πλοῦτον ἢ παιδείαν, πρὸς ὃν ἀποβλέπων ποιήσεται πάσας τὰς

³⁰ Veatch (1981) 278.

³¹ Gauthier (1958) 47–48.

πράξεις, ὡς τό γε μὴ συντετάχθαι τὸν βίον πρὸς τι τέλος ἀφροσύνης πολλῆς σημείον ἐστίν.

Every one who has the power to live according to his own choice should dwell on these points and set up for himself some object for the good life to aim at, whether honour or reputation or wealth or culture, by reference to which he will do all he does, since not to have one's life organized in view of some end is a sign of great folly. (Arist. *Eth. Eud* 1214b6–11)

Some scholars individuate here a contradiction between the two *Ethics*.³² But, in saying that there is one supreme aim, Aristotle is not denying the existence of different aims in life. How, then, among the multiplicity of the existent ends which every human being sets for his life, is it possible to individuate the supreme *telos* Aristotle is looking for in the *Nicomachean Ethics*? Aristotle has answered, as we have seen, with the principle we have stated above: an aim x is superior to an aim y if y is desired for the sake of x. But what if there are more goods that are chosen for the sake of themselves? What if the chain of aims ended up in many branches not linked to each other through an aiming–at relationship? This could easily be the case. That is why Aristotle comes back to the same topic in the first part of chapter 7 of the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in order to establish two other criteria for the specification of the supreme end:

ὥστ' εἰ μὲν ἐστὶν ἓν τι μόνον τέλειον, τοῦτ' ἂν εἴη τὸ ζητούμενον, εἰ δὲ πλείω, τὸ τελειότατον τούτων.

Therefore, if there is only one *final/complete* end, this will be what we are seeking, and if there are more than one, the most *final/complete* of these will be what we are seeking. (Arist. *Eth. Nich.* 1097a 28 – 30).

There could be more than one *telos*, as we have found also in the *Eudemian Ethics*, but still we must be capable to individuate the *τελειότατον* amongst those.

We need now to focus on the terms that Aristotle uses here in two forms: *τέλειον* and its superlative *τελειότατον*. In my translation, I voluntarily and temporarily left two

³² I think it is reasonable to give more importance to the NE since the idea of a final end given by nature will remain a common place of all later speculations in Antiquity. As Julia Annas argues, “the *Eudemian Ethics* passage may merely mean that, while we all do in fact have a final end at some level of articulation, it is a sign of stupidity not to have one's life so organized in an explicit and articulate way”. (Annas 1993, 32, note 16). See Cooper (1975) for the defence of the opposite vision.

options. The term τέλειον has in Greek both the meaning of ‘complete, perfect’ and the one of ‘end-like, final’. In the original Oxford translation by W.D. Ross the term τέλειον is translated as ‘final’, and so it is also in Hardie’s translation (1968, 22),³³ but in his revision J. O. Urmson (Barnes, 1984) changed the translation by substituting ‘final’ with ‘complete’. Most of the current translations follow this choice, probably because ‘complete’ is the most common meaning of τέλειον.

The best way to proceed in making a choice such as this is always to look closely at the context. Here, in fact, Aristotle furnishes some further determinations of what he means by τελειότατον. What would the most complete, or final (τελειότατον) *telos* be? Aristotle answers again that the most complete/final is the one that is *unqualifiedly* so (ἀπλῶς τέλειον 1097a33), which amounts to saying that it is worthy of pursuit for the sake of itself. The passage reads:

τὸ διωκτὸν τοῦ δι’ ἕτερον καὶ τὸ μηδέποτε δι’ ἄλλο αἰρετὸν τῶν <καὶ> καθ’ αὐτὰ καὶ δι’ αὐτὸ αἰρετῶν, καὶ ἀπλῶς δὴ τέλειον τὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ αἰρετὸν αἰεὶ καὶ μηδέποτε δι’ ἄλλο. τοιοῦτον δ’ ἡ εὐδαιμονία μάλιστα εἶναι δοκεῖ· ταύτην γὰρ αἰρούμεθα αἰεὶ δι’ αὐτήν καὶ οὐδέποτε δι’ ἄλλο, τιμὴν δὲ καὶ ἡδονὴν καὶ νοῦν καὶ πᾶσαν ἀρετὴν αἰρούμεθα μὲν καὶ δι’ αὐτὰ (μηθενὸς γὰρ ἀποβαίνοντος ἐλοίμεθ’ ἂν ἕκαστον αὐτῶν), αἰρούμεθα δὲ καὶ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας χάριν, διὰ τούτων ὑπολαμβάνοντες εὐδαιμονήσειν. τὴν δ’ εὐδαιμονίαν οὐδεὶς αἰρεῖται τούτων χάριν, οὐδ’ ὅλως δι’ ἄλλο.

Now such a thing happiness, above all else, is held to be; for this we choose always for itself and never for the sake of something else, but honour, pleasure, reason, and every excellence we choose indeed for themselves (for if nothing resulted from them we should still choose each of them), but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, judging that through them we shall be happy. Happiness, on the other hand, no one chooses for the sake of these, nor, in general, for anything other than itself. (Arist., *Eth. Nich.* 1096a36 – b7)

Aristotle is here moving on the ground of common sense statements. We could paraphrase the passage as follows. Different people have different goals in their life: one wants to have success in their career and, in order to achieve that goal, does not build up

³³ Hardie (1968) 22.

a family; another might renounce his promising career in order to get married and have children. Those are two examples of two different *final* ends, each desired for the sake of themselves. What Aristotle says in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is that neither one nor the other of these two aims are properly the final aim we are looking for in our ethical inquiry, for they are pursued not exclusively for the sake of themselves, but also for the sake of an external aim, namely happiness or the happy life (εὐδαιμονία, which is also described in terms of ‘living good’ or ‘acting well’, εὖ ζῆν, εὖ πράττειν). Aristotle does not prove the existence of such a final end because he does not need to prove it: it is simply evident if we look at human behaviour. For, as we have seen, on this point there is a complete agreement among people, be those wise men or ordinary people.³⁴ The *telos* of *eudaimonia* is not a goal one may choose or not choose for himself or herself. We can say that Aristotle conceives it as the *structural* goal of human being.

In this picture, we can give a solution to the problem of translation we have left unsolved. In my opinion, both of the translations we quoted are in part correct and at the same time neither is specific enough. It is clear from what we just read that here τέλειον means for Aristotle that “which is chosen for the sake of itself and not because of something else”. The translation ‘final’ is certainly more appropriate to convey this idea of end-likeness: the aim that is the very last (*final*) in the chain of the aims. At the same time, we can think of it in terms of completeness: the τέλειον good is something that has to be complete in the sense that it does not lack of anything in order to be pursued. Cooper is indeed correct in noticing that “upon introducing the word τέλειον in this context (1097a25–29), Aristotle clearly emphasizes its derivation from the word τέλος – end”. Cooper also refers to Aspasius’ commentary on 1097a24–b6. Aspasius says that Aristotle is going to show that “*eudaimonia* is an end, an end in the strict sense” (κύριως τέλος) and a “most final end” (τελειότατον τέλος).³⁵ It is clear that here the emphasis is on the end-like nature of the *telos* more than on its completeness.

The second criterion Aristotle puts forward to individuate the τελειότατον *telos* among all the final goals is ‘self-sufficiency’ (ἐκ τῆς ἀνταρκείας). Aristotle describes this

³⁴ Arist. *Et. Nic.* 1095a18–20.

³⁵ Aspasius, *In Ethica Nicomachea*, ed. G. Heylbut, *CAG* 19.1,15; 18–19. See Cooper (2004) 280, n. 13. Cooper notices that recent translators have not followed Aspasius’ lead here. An exception is, as I have said, the original Oxford translation by W.D. Ross (1915) and R. Gauthier and J.Y. Jolif, *Aristote: L’Éthique à Nicomaque*, 2nd ed.

criterion as follows: ὁ μονούμενον αἰρετὸν ποιεῖ τὸν βίον καὶ μηδενὸς ἐνδεᾶ (“something which when isolated makes life desirable and lacking in nothing”, 1097b14–15). The *telos* of *eudaimonia* is a good that renders the life that possesses it choice-worthy by itself, and lacking in nothing. We will shortly be dealing with a passage from Plato’s *Philebus* in which this very criterion is used by Socrates to exclude both the two possible candidates for being the good in the dialogue: pleasure and reason. How can one single good have such a power in our life? This is *eudaimonia*, which is both the “most desirable of all things” while not being counted as one good thing among others (b16 – 17).

Long and Sedley explain, with regards to the Stoics and more in general to the Hellenistic schools, that the agreement among all Hellenistic schools on the concept of the *telos*, according to the two scholars, “was made possible by the scarcely questioned assumption that human life must be purposive by nature, and by the identification of the end with ‘happiness’ (*eudaimonia*) or ‘living well’ (εὖ ζῆν)”.³⁶ However, agreement could not be found, either among different individuals (according to Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*) or among the Hellenistic schools, as to what exactly the *telos*, and thus happiness, consists of. What is the aim proper to the human being? Or, to reformulate this in light of the terms outlined above: what is human happiness? Given that the human being is *by nature* made for happiness,³⁷ it is clear that to detect what happiness consists of is the most crucial ethical problem. The answer that has been given in the Platonist tradition will be the main topic of my work. But, before moving to it, there are some other remarks we need to make on the concept of the *telos*.

5. *Finality and self-sufficiency, activity and possession*

Scholars such as John Cooper have rightly noted that the two criteria employed by

³⁶ Long – Sedley (1987) 398.

³⁷ This is a common place in ancient ethics. That is why modern scholars call ancient ethics ‘eudaimonistic’ (see for example Annas 1999). It is agreed, as we have shown, by all the ancient traditions that human being desires by nature his or her happiness, and from this observation it is derived the fact that happiness is the aim for which human being exists. In this picture the main task of ethics becomes to state what happiness is and how it is possible to reach it.

Aristotle to characterize the *telos* are quite reminiscent of the two criteria of the supreme good as set out by Socrates in the *Philebus*.³⁸ This very fact deserves some attention. Cooper has shown how, while starting from very similar (if not identical) criteria, the Platonic Socrates in the *Philebus* and Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* respectively reach two completely different conclusions with regards to the supreme good.

In the *Philebus* the main topic is indeed *the* good, described at the very outset of the dialogue as “the possession or disposition of the soul” that “can provide for all human beings a happy life” (11d4–6). In 20d, Socrates enunciates and receives Protarchus’ preliminary agreement on two conditions that the good must fulfil in order to be recognized as such: first it has to be τέλειον, or better, as Protarchus points out in his answer, τελεώτατον; then it has to be ικανόν (sufficient), a concept which is very close to Aristotelian criterion of αὐτάρκεια (self-sufficiency). After having agreed on these two features that the Good must possess, Socrates adds one thing that he defines as “the most necessary [thing] to say about this [the good]”. The passage reads:

ὡς πᾶν τὸ γιγνώσκον αὐτὸ θηρεύει καὶ ἐφίεται βουλόμενον ἐλεῖν καὶ περὶ αὐτὸ κτήσασθαι, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων οὐδὲν φροντίζει πλὴν τῶν ἀποτελουμένων ἅμα ἀγαθοῖς.

Anything that knows the good hunts and pursues it, wishing to choose it and possess it *for its own*, and does not bother about anything else except what is accomplished always together with things that are good. (20b3–6)

The περὶ αὐτὸ clearly must have been on Aristotle’s mind when he established, as we have just seen, that the good must be something that is chosen καθ’αὐτὸ, ‘for its own sake’. This very criterion leads Socrates and his interlocutors in the *Philebus* to reject the two candidates that might be taken for the good: namely, pleasure and reason. From the dialogue between Socrates and Protarchus it emerges that neither a life full of pleasure but completely devoid of reason nor the opposite kind of life are choice-worthy in themselves, and for this very fact neither pleasure nor reason can be the good. The criteria imposed by Socrates at the beginning turn out to be very strict: to be τελεώτατον and ικανόν means that the good has to be something that is completely sufficient for making a

³⁸ Cooper (2004). The relevant passage from the *Philebus* is 20b–23b.

life choice–worthy. If, possessing a good, one needs something else, it follows that this good cannot be the good. For this reason, I have to disagree in part with John Cooper who chooses to translate even the Platonic τέλειον and τελειότατον as ‘final’ or ‘endlike’. The way in which this criterion is applied by Socrates shows that the very core of the concept lies in the idea of absolute sufficiency and *completeness*. A few lines below Socrates repeats this idea, saying that the good, to be recognised as such, must not lack anything (μηδενὸς ἔτι προσδεῖσθαι):

δεῖ γάρ, εἴπερ πότερον αὐτῶν ἔστ’ ἀγαθόν, μηδὲν μηδενὸς ἔτι προσδεῖσθαι· δεόμενον δ’ ἂν
φανῆ πότερον, οὐκ ἔστι που τοῦτ’ ἔτι τὸ ὄντως ἡμῖν ἀγαθόν.

If either of them is the good, it must lack nothing at all; and if either of them is shown to be lacking, then clearly it is not the real good for us. (20e6–21a1)

The idea of completeness is crucial in Socrates’ argumentation, but is it not in Aristotle’s use of it. After all, in Aristotle we have the definition of the good as aim, which is not at all present in the Platonic dialogue. Nonetheless, as a matter of fact, and as John Cooper also notes, the use by Aristotle and Plato of what appear to be the same criterion leads the two towards different results. To fully give account of this fact is to acknowledge the different ways in which the two philosophers deal with these multiple meanings of this word. If one can accept Cooper’s argument with regard to Aristotle’s criteria to find the good, i.e. that “they require that we present the first criterion in terms of ‘finality’ and not, as often happens nowadays, completeness and perfection”,³⁹ this does not preclude the possibility that things can stand differently in Plato’s *Philebus*. Indeed, the diversity of these results – which Cooper himself recognises and analyses – could encourage such a reading.

We have already said that thinking the good in terms of aim (τέλος) is the Aristotelian way of making the search for the good easier and, I would say, less abstract. It is more intuitive to think about the goals of our actions rather than starting via theoretical speculation about how the good should be recognised as such. In Socrates’ thinking on the good, there is no such a move at the beginning. After all, for the dialogical context, agreement of the interlocutors is sufficient in order to proceed. In this

³⁹ Cooper (2004) 270.

way, Socrates is not forced to further specify the two criteria for the good and to give reasons for having picked them instead of others. Once Protarchus has agreed on them, the dialectical reasoning can go on with no further explanation. Not so for Aristotle, who has the ambition of creating a universal science of ethics.

It is equally interesting to notice the difference between the two definitions of the supreme good that the two philosophers provide. For Aristotle, as we have seen, the supreme good corresponds to εὐδαιμονία. In its turn εὐδαιμονία has to be thought of as “an activity of the soul according to best and most final virtue” (1098a16–18). For the Platonic Socrates in the *Philebus*, the good seems rather to be thought of as the *condition of possibility* of εὐδαιμονία, or rather the ingredient of the happy life that makes it happy: “the possession or disposition of the soul that can provide for all human beings a happy life”, 11d4–6. Activity *versus* possession or disposition. With Aristotle, we have this radical change in the conception of happiness and the happy life: εὐδαιμονία is not just a possession and a disposition but rather an *activity* of the soul.

This very fact is very important for a correct understanding of the doctrines of the *telos* that follows in Hellenistic and post–Hellenistic philosophy. From Aristotle onwards, *eudaimonia* will invariably be thought of as an activity rather than as a state of mind. The later debate on the *telos* will turn out to become a debate on which human *activity* corresponds to happiness more than what we can do to achieve the *state* of happiness.

We can sum up what has so far emerged about the concept of the *telos* this way:

- i) The *telos* is the final end of our actions, the end of the chain of human aims.
- ii) The *telos* is human happiness.
- iii) The main characteristics of the *telos* are to be *teleion*, which amounts to saying that it should be an end in the strictest sense, and *self-sufficient*, which means that it does not need anything beyond itself in order to be desired.
- iv) As such, the *telos* has to be thought of as an *activity* of the best part of the human being, namely the soul, rather than as a state or a possession (and in this there is a big difference from the Platonic model of the *Philebus*).

6. *The function of man*

At this point a question may be raised: why does Aristotle think of *eudaimonia* as an activity (*energeia*) and what does it mean? The answer is that thinking of happiness as an activity is the direct consequence of thinking it as an aim. Aristotle then declares his method for further detecting what happiness is: we have to figure out what is the ἔργον of the human being.

ὥσπερ γὰρ αὐλήτην καὶ ἀγαματοποιῶν καὶ παντὶ τεχνίτη, καὶ ὅλως ὧν ἔστιν ἔργον τι καὶ πρᾶξις, ἐν τῷ ἔργῳ δοκεῖ τὰγαθὸν εἶναι καὶ τὸ εὖ, οὕτω δόξειεν ἂν καὶ ἀνθρώπῳ, εἴπερ ἔστι τι ἔργον αὐτοῦ.

As for the flute-player, and a sculptor, and any artist, and in general for all things that have a function and activity, the good and the ‘well’ is thought to reside in the function (ἐν τῷ ἔργῳ), so would it seem to be also for man, if there is a function of him. (1097b25–28, tr. Ross, rev. by Urmson, slightly modified)

In the case of every human action it is clear that the end of an activity resides in the activity itself (well-performed, as Aristotle shall add later on).⁴⁰ But is there an activity that is proper to the human being as such, so that it can be considered as the *function* (ἔργον) of man?⁴¹ For Aristotle it is reasonable to think that there is such an activity, for we can observe that, for anything that exists, there is a proper activity, a function. As Pakaluk points out, even in reference to the *Physics*, Aristotle’s view implies that “every conception of a *kind* of things involves the formulation of an ideal, at which things of that sort are meant to aim, and which they achieve only for the most part”.⁴² After all, “nature

⁴⁰ I am not interested in further presenting here Aristotle’s argument in the passage. For an accurate analysis of the ‘Function argument’ I refer to Pakaluk (2005) 74–82.

⁴¹ ἔργον, generally speaking, means ‘work’ and ‘activity’. With a genitive, it indicates the ‘work to be done’ by the person at the genitive (and that is the translation of Pakaluk, 2005, 74) or the proper activity of a person, therefore his/her/its function (that is Ross’s translation in Barnes 1984, 1735).

⁴² Pakaluk (2005) 76: Pakaluk indicates that perhaps Aristotle is emphasizing “the distinction between acquired and natural functions, and the priority of the latter over the former: we could not *acquire* any role, such as being a carpenter or shoemaker, if we did not originally have a role that was *not* acquired: art imitates and completes nature (see *Physics* 2.8.199a15–18); therefore, any learned occupation is simply the giving of some specific form to our natural ‘occupation’ as human beings”. The thesis is in principle quite interesting, but it is not really useful to argue for the existent of a specific function or for a *telos* of the human being as such. After all, one could simply claim that human being has no natural occupation at all, and for this very reason he becomes a carpenter or a shoemaker.

does nothing in vain”, is written in the *De Caelo*.⁴³ The human being has been made by nature, with different parts (eyes, hands, feet) each having its own function (as Aristotle himself claims in 1097b30–33). Therefore, it is not reasonable to think that the human being as a whole has no proper function.⁴⁴ The search for the human *telos*, therefore, becomes the search for the *peculiar activity* (ἴδιον) of human being. And this is of great relevance to our topic. The problem of the *telos* turns out to be the problem of human happiness, as we have seen, but also the problem of the human ‘function’ in the world, the question as to which activity constitutes the *function* of the human being as such.

There are, of course, many studies that reconstruct, question and analyse this argument, known as the ‘function argument’.⁴⁵ However, for our purposes it is more useful to look at this in the most intuitive way. After all, as Pakaluk has also noted, it is not necessary to present it in terms of a distinction between acquired and natural functions or between functions of the part and functions of the whole. Nor do we have to be committed to an Aristotelian teleological philosophy of nature to understand the plausibility of such a statement (that the human being – like everything else – has a distinctive function). A good example to explain this point is put forward by Pakaluk. If a person has some extraordinary talent that sets him or her apart from others, then we tend to think that this person is *made* to develop this talent, to put it in practice. We are intuitively sure that this talent establishes for the person who has it a kind of duty, and we also tend to think that his or her own happiness depends very much on how this person makes use of this extraordinary talent. We would also say that somebody not developing an extraordinary talent would be the waste of a gift. If, instead of a single person, we put human kind, we can understand Aristotle’s point. In order to figure out what the human *telos* consists in, we should try to figure out what extraordinary talent sets us apart from anything else that exists. That is why Aristotle rejects the notion that human fulfilment could reside in pleasure or leisure, for this is something we share with every other animal. Living no differently from other animals would correspond to a ‘wasting of our gift’. Even Plato, at the end of the *Republic* had defined the function of a thing as what it alone

⁴³ Arist. *Cael.* 1.4.271a33.

⁴⁴ “Aristotle does not take seriously the possibility that human beings do not have a function” (Pakaluk, 2005, 75). This belief is firmly rooted in its teleological conception of nature.

⁴⁵ See once again Pakaluk (2005) 75–82, but also, among others, Gomez–Lobo (1991) and Lawrence (2001).

can do.⁴⁶ Of course this kind of ‘talent’, the peculiar activity of the human being as such, cannot be anything but a rational activity, which amounts to saying an activity of the rational part of the soul (πρακτική τις τοῦ λόγον ἔχοντος). It is interesting to notice that this life or activity is not only presented as rational (or rather literally “with rationality”, τοῦ λόγον ἔχοντος), but also as πρακτική, which means *practical* in the sense of ‘displayed in action’.⁴⁷ Reason would probably not be enough to represent human peculiarity. It is, in fact, commonly objected that ‘a life involving’ reason would not be distinctive enough, at least for Aristotle, for he believed that the gods (or at least one God, the Unmoved Mover of *Metaphysics* book 12) exist and are rational. But *action* is distinctive of the human being, action ‘not without *logos*’. Only human beings act.

Anyhow, through some arguments that it is not necessary here to focus on, Aristotle reaches the definition of happiness as rational *or not irrational activity (or actualization) of the soul* (1098a8), and later on he shall add “according to virtue” (1098a16), and *the most complete/final* virtue (1098a18).⁴⁸ As we have seen, the idea of the *telos* is strictly connected with the idea of happiness as an activity (*energeia*) which, we have also noticed, is not the conception that seems to emerge in Plato’s *Philebus*, where instead *eudaimonia* is described as “possession and disposition of the soul”, or, to we could rephrase it in our terms, a ‘state of mind’.⁴⁹

7. *The theoretical activity as the best and most perfect eudaimonia*

We should now turn to the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In this book Aristotle, after having presented a big variety of ethical issues, goes back to *eudaimonia* (which is the *telos*) trying to better define what it corresponds to. What kind of activity can fulfil

⁴⁶ Plato, *Rsp.* 353d. However, in the passage Plato reaches the conclusion that the function of the soul is to live, whereas in Aristotle mere ‘living’ is excluded as something which is shared with all other living beings.

⁴⁷ Pakaluk (2005) 78.

⁴⁸ We find again the ‘mysterious’ adjective τέλειος. It is not important for our purpose to solve the translation problem in this passage so I have just kept the two alternatives.

⁴⁹ In the tenth book of *Nicomachean Ethics* again, Aristotle denies the possibility that *eudaimonia* is a habitual state (ἔξις). If it were the case, the absurd consequence would be that a man who sleeps for his entire life could be considered happy.

the requirements as he has fixed them in the first book? The answer that Aristotle gives in this final book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is of paramount importance for subsequent developments within the Platonist tradition. The choice he made for *theōria* instead of *praxis* as the most perfect of human activities will be an inescapable term of comparison for the entire Platonist tradition.

The applied criterion for finding such activity is, once again, its finality (or end-likeness) and self-sufficiency. Among the plurality of human activities some are necessary (ἀναγκαῖαι), i.e. chosen “for an external reason” (δι’ ἕτερα αἰρεταί), while others are instead αἰρεταί καθ’ αὐτάς. It is among the latter that we have to look for *eudaimonia*; if it was chosen for something else out of itself, it would neither be *final* (in the chain of desire), nor would it be self-sufficient, for it would need something else in order to be desired. *Eudaimonia* is indeed an activity from which we do not expect anything outside the activity in itself (μηδὲν ἐπιζητεῖται παρὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν, 1176b7).

Now, among the activities that are intuitively chosen for the sake of themselves there are of course the ‘pleasant amusements’ (τῶν παιδιῶν αἰ ἡδεῖαι, 1176b9).⁵⁰ Aristotle excludes quite quickly that they can correspond to the end-like happiness we are looking for. We might be led – Aristotle argues – to think that they are indeed *eudaimonia* because people choose them even at the price of suffering some damages (1176b10), or of not taking care of their body and wealth (1176b11). Furthermore, the vast majority of those “who are believed to be happy”, namely people of power or wealth, tend to spend time on amusement (1176b 15-17).⁵¹ Nonetheless, Aristotle explicitly states that he generally does not consider powerful people trust-worthy, simply because “virtue and intelligence, from which virtuous activities come about, does not correspond to exercising a power” (1176b 17-21). Therefore, we do not have to consider their tastes as something reliable in such a way as we do not trust children’s opinions with regards to the best things. It is also not likely that amusement is the end because, if it were the case, we would have to conclude that we act seriously *for the sake of* amusement. At any rate, amusement is not condemned by Aristotle, but it is taken to be useful as a necessary break from serious work, following Anacarsis’ statement.

⁵⁰ Παιδιά is etymologically linked to παῖς, which means “boy, child”. Aristotle uses it in the passage in opposition to σπουδή, which means “seriousness”, but also moral excellence.

⁵¹ This argument is used by Aristotle even in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095b 21–22.

After having briefly got rid of the pleasant amusements as candidates for being *eudaimonia*, Aristotle goes back to the definition of happiness he had given in the first book. This passage is of paramount interest for our topic, and that is why it deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

Εἰ δ' ἐστὶν ἡ εὐδαιμονία κατ' ἀρετὴν ἐνέργεια, εὐλογον κατὰ τὴν κρατίστην· αὕτη δ' ἂν εἴη τοῦ ἀρίστου. εἴτε δὴ νοῦς τοῦτο εἴτε ἄλλο τι, ὃ δὴ κατὰ φύσιν δοκεῖ ἄρχειν καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι καὶ ἔννοιαν ἔχειν περὶ καλῶν καὶ θείων, εἴτε θεῖον ὄν καὶ αὐτὸ εἴτε τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν τὸ θειότατον, ἢ τούτου ἐνέργεια κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρετὴν εἴη ἂν ἡ τελεία εὐδαιμονία. ὅτι δ' ἐστὶ θεωρητικὴ, εἴρηται.

If happiness is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it be activity in accordance with *the best virtue* (τὴν κρατίστην). This would be the virtue of the best part (τοῦ ἀρίστου). Whatever this part is the intellect (νοῦς) or some other thing which is regarded as by nature governing and leading and taking thought of admirable and godlike things, and whether it is also godlike itself or the most godlike thing in us – the activity of this part in accordance with the virtue proper to it would be perfect happiness (ἡ τελεία εὐδαιμονία). That this activity is theoretical (θεωρητικὴ) [speculative, contemplative, with the character of viewing] has already been said. (1177a12–18).⁵²

Aristotle here connects *eudaimonia* with the best virtue, which is the virtue of the best part in us. This ‘best part’, which is the intellect (νοῦς), is also addressed as the ‘most divine (θειότατον)’ part in us. One could say, though, that it is actually not very striking to consider intellect, or mind, as the most divine part of man and as a sort of ‘god’ for the individual. If we look at Aristotle’s background, we can find that Plato in the *Timaeus* describes man’s divine part as his δαίμων. Aristotle himself, in his *Protrepticus*, alludes to a verse by Euripides that says: ὁ νοῦς γάρ ἐστὶν ἐν ἐκάστῳ θεός.⁵³ But here Aristotle is also making the claim that the activity of this most godlike part of us corresponds to human happiness. This activity cannot be anything else but θεωρητικὴ, which is usually translated as ‘theoretical’ or ‘contemplative’. Aristotle explains in the remainder of the chapter why this life matches all the characteristics that he had previously attributed to

⁵² The translation is taken from Pakaluk (2005) 316 – 17, slightly modified.

⁵³ Arist. *Protr.* fr. 10c Ross, B 110 Düring. Cicero quotes Euripides as well: *ergo animus, ut ego dico, divinus est, ut Euripides dicere audit, deus.* (Cic. *Tusc. disp.* 1,65).

eudaimonia. It is the best activity (κρατίστην) because it is the activity of the best part in us, the νοῦς, and because the object of this activity is “the most excellent of the things we have some knowledge of”.⁵⁴ It is also the most “continuous” (συνεχυστάτη), for we are able to contemplate with much more continuity than we can act. Then it is the most pleasant activity, for it encloses “marvellous pleasures in purity and firmness” (θαυμαστάς ἡδονὰς καθαριότητι και τῷ βεβαίῳ). Moreover, it is also the most self-sufficient: the just man needs people towards whom he can perform just actions, as is the case for every other virtuous man with the exception of the theoretical one, who is able to contemplate even when he is in solitude. Theoretical activity is loved for its own sake (δι’ αὐτὴν ἀγαπᾶσθαι) and not for any outcome, for there is not any outcome at all from theoretical activity, whereas there are usually many outcomes from practical actions. Theoretical activity also has the characteristic of being absolutely ἄσχιλος (“devoid of concerns”) whereas practical activities are full of them. Since common sense agrees that we go through concerns in order to be free from them, it is clear that an activity that would be completely free from concerns would come to be more end-like and therefore the happiest.

For all the reasons that I have briefly summarized Aristotle reaches the conclusion that theoretical activity corresponds to the complete (or final, or perfect) human happiness (ἡ τελεία εὐδαιμονία ἀνθρώπου). In both *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics*⁵⁵ the virtue of theoretical reasoning (*sophia*) takes higher rank than the virtue of practical reasoning (*phronesis*).⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Arist. *Eth. Nich.* 1177a 20–21. This is indeed an interesting Aristotelian way of reasoning. Aristotle thinks that we can be quite sure about the fact that an activity is the best among others because it is the activity of the best part and because the object of this best part is the best among the things we know.

⁵⁵ Both the chronology and the relation between the two Aristotelian treatises are difficult to determine with absolute certainty, and many studies have been devoted to this issue. Recently the tendency is to consider both *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics* as genuinely Aristotelian and the former earlier than the latter. As for the *Magna Moralia*, it is generally held that they are a spurious work by an Aristotelian philosopher. Since our theme does not involve any substantial divergence between the two treatises, we will not develop the question further. I refer to the introduction in the recent Barnes–Kenny (2014) 1–21 for a short but complete *status quaestionis*. The most recent joint studies of the two ethics are, to my knowledge, the second edition of Kenny (2016) specifically devoted to the relation between the two ethics, and Hughes (2001), who provides a systematic account of Aristotelian ethics based upon both the ethical works.

⁵⁶ See Barnes–Kenny (2014) 16.

8. 'Immortalizing' (*ἀθανατίζειν*)

Here is the passage in which we are most interested, the most relevant Aristotelian precedent of the Platonist doctrine of the assimilation to God as the *telos* of human life:

ὁ δὲ τοιοῦτος ἂν εἴη βίος κρείττων ἢ κατ' ἄνθρωπον· οὐ γὰρ ἡ ἄνθρωπος ἐστὶν οὕτω βιώσεται, ἀλλ' ἡ θεῖον τι ἐν αὐτῷ ὑπάρχει· ὅσον δὲ διαφέρει τοῦτο τοῦ συνθέτου, τοσοῦτον καὶ ἡ ἐνέργεια τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἄλλην ἀρετῆν. εἰ δὴ θεῖον ὁ νοῦς πρὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον, καὶ ὁ κατὰ τοῦτον βίος θεῖος πρὸς τὸν ἀνθρώπινον βίον.

A way of life that would be better than a life suited to a human being. Because it is not insofar as someone is human that he will live like that, but rather insofar as there is something *godlike* within him. The extent of the difference between this godlike part and the composite which he is, is the extent of the difference between this activity [scil. theoretical] and that of the other virtue [scil. practical]. Hence, if the human intellect is godlike, in comparison with a human being as a whole, so also is the way of life corresponding to that part godlike, in comparison with a merely human way of life. (1177b26–31)

The best life, human happiness, the *τέλος τῶν πρακτῶν*, does not only correspond to accomplishing our function as a human being, but rather to living in accordance with what is godlike in us, and in doing so “immortalizing” ourselves “as far as it is possible”.

οὐ χρὴ δὲ κατὰ τοὺς παραινούντας ἀνθρώπινα φρονεῖν ἄνθρωπον ὄντα οὐδὲ θνητὰ τὸν θνητόν, ἀλλ' ἐφ' ὅσον ἐνδέχεται ἀθανατίζειν καὶ πάντα ποιεῖν πρὸς τὸ ζῆν κατὰ τὸ κράτιστον τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ· εἰ γὰρ καὶ τῷ ὄγκῳ μικρόν ἐστι, δυνάμει καὶ τιμότητι πολὺ μᾶλλον πάντων ὑπερέχει. δόξειε δ' ἂν καὶ εἶναι ἕκαστος τοῦτο, εἴπερ τὸ κύριον καὶ ἄμεινον. ἄτοπον οὖν γίνοιτ' ἂν, εἰ μὴ τὸν αὐτοῦ βίον αἰροῖτο ἀλλὰ τινος ἄλλου. τὸ λεχθέν τε πρότερον ἀρμόσει καὶ νῦν· τὸ γὰρ οἰκεῖον ἐκάστῳ τῇ φύσει κράτιστον καὶ ἡδιστόν ἐστιν ἐκάστῳ· καὶ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ δὴ ὁ κατὰ τὸν νοῦν βίος, εἴπερ τοῦτο μάλιστα ἄνθρωπος. οὗτος ἄρα καὶ εὐδαιμονέστατος.

But we must not follow those who advise us, being man, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and do everything in order to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if it be

small in bulk, much more does it in power and dignity surpass everything. This would seem, too, to be each man himself, since it is the authoritative and better part of him. It would be strange, then if he were to choose not the life of himself but that of something else. And what we said before will apply now; that which is proper to each thing is by nature best and most pleasant for each thing; for man, therefore, the life according to intellect is best and pleasantest, since intellect more than anything else *is* man. This life therefore is also the happiest. (1177b31–1178a8)

The human goal corresponds to transcending human boundaries. According to this view, the goal of human life does not lie only in the realization of our human nature but is, first and foremost, an exhortation to transcend our human condition in order to reach the nature of the divine (or of what is divine in us). This constitutes a radical shift from Greek common sense, which usually exhorts us not to overcome the limits of our mortal nature (the μηδέν ἄγαν of Greek tragedy).

This revolution is allegedly grounded in Plato’s philosophy: in many passages Plato seems to consider philosophy as a way of transcending our nature and somehow of partaking in the divine realm. This revolution, as we shall see, will become a proper Platonist mark in the Early Imperial Age.

The life “in accordance with the other kind of virtue” (κατὰ τὴν ἄλλην ἀρετὴν) is happy but only “in a secondary degree” (δευτέρως) according to Aristotle.⁵⁷ Even “just and brave acts” (δίκαια καὶ ἀνδρεῖα) are indeed “properly human” (ἀνθρωπινά), specific to the human being. As such, the virtuous practical life is also *eudaimonia*, but, as we have said, only insofar as it is δευτέρως.

That is indeed an interesting observation. How can a life be happy but just in the second degree? That is the origin of one of the most intriguing debates in Ancient Ethics, the problem of the two lives, the *theoretical* life and the *practical life*. We will deal with this debate at greater length further below.

Another problem has been raised by scholars about Aristotle’s inconsistency between *selection* (is happiness some single activity in accordance with virtue?) and *collection* (is happiness all activities in accordance with virtue?).⁵⁸ Without going too far

⁵⁷ 1178a9–10.

⁵⁸ See for instance Pakaluk (2005) 316. For the compatibility of book I and book X regarding the two conceptions of *eudaimonia* (‘selection’ and ‘collection’) see, among the others, Donini (2013) 141–153.

into the details of this debate we may notice that Aristotle undoubtedly considers all activities in accordance with human virtue (which is virtue that is *particular* to man) to be *constitutive of* happiness. But, since there is a ranking in those virtues, for there is one most perfect virtue, and a ranking which is established following the usual criteria of finality and self-sufficiency, it is reasonable to assume that there can be a ranking of different ‘constituents of happiness’. That is the meaning of that puzzling δευτέρως. We must beware that *eudaimonia* and human *telos* are also thought of in terms of *fulfilment* (that is one of the meanings of the word *telos* after all). Living a life in accordance with virtues such as justice and courage is clearly something specifically human, something that sets the human being apart from other animals. Therefore, it surely corresponds to human fulfilment and human happiness. And yet, theoretical life is ‘more’ happy because it is intuitively more final (it does not produce any effects and therefore it is loved and chosen just for its own sake), and more self-sufficient (it does not need people towards whom virtuous acts are to be performed).

9. *What is theōria?*

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as we have seen, happiness is itself identified with the exercise of understanding. Happiness (which is the *telos*) is the “activity of the soul in accordance with virtue” and, if there are several virtues, with the best and most perfect and end-like one. In the course of the treatise, Aristotle displays that there are both moral (*ethical*) and intellectual (*dianoethical*) virtues and that the latter are superior to the former. Among the intellectual virtues, understanding (*sophia*), which concerns eternal truth, is in turn superior to wisdom (*phronesis*), which concerns human affairs. The criterion to rank the virtues appears to always be the same as we have mentioned with regards to the *aims*: their perfection, finality and self-sufficiency. In this vein, ultimate happiness cannot be anything but activity in accordance with *sophia*, which Aristotle calls *theōria*, and it is usually translated as ‘contemplation’.

However, this translation might be misleading. Although Aristotle does not furnish a wholly satisfactory description of what *theōria* actually is, at least two things

are absolutely clear. First, *theōria* is not an ascetic activity: Aristotle holds that a moderate supply of ‘external goods’ represents a precondition even for a ‘happy’ theoretical activity. Secondly, as Barnes and Kenny put it, “contemplation is not, as we might be tempted to imagine, an exercise of discursive reasoning: it is not a matter of intellectual questing or research”.⁵⁹ *Theōria* is rather the activity of acquiring any knowledge whatsoever, as we can infer by the main Aristotelian argument in defence of the happiness of the theoretical man: “it stands to reason that those who possess knowledge pass their time more pleasantly than those who are still in pursuit of it”.⁶⁰

In the *Eudemian Ethics* we find a slight difference: happiness is not identified with the exercise of a single dominant virtue, but rather with the exercise of all virtues. And yet, even here *theōria* has a dominant role in the life of the *eudaimōn* person, for Aristotle sets the standard for measuring virtuous choices in terms of their relationship to *theōria*, and, even more interestingly for us, to *theōria* of God: “what choice or possession of natural goods...will most conduce to the contemplation of God is best, and this is the noblest standard”.⁶¹ Since activity in accordance with the virtues is pleasant, the happy man will also have a pleasant life. In this way, as Barnes and Kenny have suggested, the ideal of happiness sketched in the *Eudemian Ethics* can claim to combine the features of the traditional three lives, the life of the philosopher (*theōria*), the life of the politician (*praxis*), and also the life of the ‘pleasure-seeker’, which is immediately ruled out in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁶² In this picture, then, all three lives are constituents of the happy life, but the happy man will value *theōria* above all. *Theōria* is indeed for Aristotle the *teleia eudaimonia* (1177a18), the final, ultimate happiness, that is the happiness most characterised by having the nature of an end, a *telos*.⁶³

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁰ *Et. Nich* X.7-27-28 (transl Crisp, 2014).

⁶¹ *Et. Eud.* 1.1.

⁶² Barnes-Kenny (2014) 17.

⁶³ Pakaluk (2005) 317 refuses to translate here *teleia* as ‘goal-like’, for happiness necessarily has to be ‘goal-like’ and therefore the specification would be absurd. He opts here for ‘complete’. I think instead that, if on the one hand it is true that ‘every’ happiness has to be goal-like, it is also true that one has to be more *final* than another. In this very sense the most final can also be called ‘final’ in a more proper way than any other one.

Chapter Three

The Stoic formalization of the concept of telos

1. *Platonism and Stoicism: a complex love-hate relationship*

When dealing with Middle Platonism, and particularly with Ethics, one ought to consider Hellenistic Stoicism adequately. The relationship between Imperial Platonists and Early Stoics is rather complex. At the same time, one also needs to take into account that Platonists usually have a polemical attitude towards the Stoics, as they generally approach Stoicism by criticizing and pinpointing their inconsistencies.¹ Indeed, the best example of such an attitude is Plutarch, to the extent that he devotes entire works to Stoic self-contradictions, or to the fact that the Stoics “talk more paradoxically than the poets”.² But he is not the only one: the Anonymous Commentator to Plato’s *Theaetetus*, who is in all likelihood a Middle Platonist,³ throws a considerable number of attacks against the Stoic doctrine.

Yet, within such explicit hostility, these Platonists, Plutarch over all, are all remarkably influenced by Stoicism. Quite definitive evidence of this can be found in the

¹ On the complex and intriguing relationship between Platonism and Stoicism, see the new volume edited by Troels Engberg-Pedersen, which collects contributions by most of the leading scholars on Ancient Platonism and Stoicism given at the conference held in Copenhagen between the 19th and the 23th August 2014. I attended the conference and therefore I had the privilege to read such contributions in advance. I refer to the volume as Engberg-Pedersen (2017). See also previous works such as Bonazzi (2007), Long (2013), Reydams-Schils (1999).

² Plutarch employs three of the works that have come to us to polemicize with Stoicism. The sole titles will give an idea of his rather brutal attitude towards Stoicism: *De Stoicorum repugnantibus* (Περὶ Στωικῶν ἐναντιωμάτων, “On Stoic self-contradictions”), *Compendium argumenti Stoicos absurdiora poetis dicere* (Σύνοψις τοῦ ὅτι παραδοξότερα οἱ Στωικοὶ τῶν ποιητῶν λέγουσι, “Conspectus of the essay *The Stoics talk more paradoxically than the poets*”), and *De communibus notis adversus Stoicos* (Περὶ τῶν κοινῶν ἐνοιῶν πρὸς τοὺς Στωικοὺς, “Against the Stoics on common conceptions”) – I reported the traditional Latin titles, the original Greek, and their translation.

³ The dating between 45 B.C. and II century A.D. is certain. Although his philosophical affiliation to Platonism has been challenged by Barnes, we can at least infer that he is much more sympathetic with Plato than with the Stoics. We will deal with him later on in this work (*infra*, pp. 116–128). See the introductory essay by Bastianini–Sedley CFP (1995) 227–260.

fact that the boundary between a Stoic and a Platonist philosopher is not always clear, such are the cases of Antiochus, Philo of Alexandria and, to a lesser extent, Cicero.⁴ Although Platonism could be seen as the result of exegetical efforts on Plato's dialogues, and therefore there should be no room for Stoicism in the analysis of a Platonist doctrine, many studies have recently shown that Stoicism has had a much more active role in the development of Platonism than Platonists themselves would have recognized. As early as 1982, in his survey on Imperial Platonism, Donini wrote: "In generale l'etica medioplatonica appare poco unitaria e poco coerente: forse si può dire divisa da un contrasto di fondo fra la *tendenza aristotelizzante e le influenze dello stoicismo*",⁵ attesting to the key role Stoic influences played in Platonist ethics.

In her volume on the figure of the Demiurge and the theme of providence, Gretchen Reydam-Schils has shown how Stoic readings of Plato's dialogues had become common readings in the Imperial Age, making therefore impossible for Platonists such as Plutarch or Alcinous to glance at those dialogues if not through the lenses of previous Stoic interpretations.⁶

As we saw, Platonism represents a much more complex phenomenon than a mere systematization of the doctrines that are present in the dialogues.⁷ As Bonazzi has recently argued, the definition of Platonism as the result of the interpretation of Plato's dialogue is correct but not exhaustive.⁸ This is so not only for the massive presence of Aristotle's philosophy in Platonist texts; yet, Aristotle is a 'special case', for he was usually regarded as a Platonist himself, and therefore the use of his philosophy was not felt as contradictory, provided that the aim was to explain and systematize Plato's doctrine.⁹ From all these considerations, it follows that a correct account of a Platonist doctrine such as the *telos of homoiōsis theōi* should not be restricted to Plato and

⁴ The most "burning" case is undoubtedly that of Antiochus of Ascalon, which has recently raised a debate on whether he should be considered a Platonist or rather a Stoic. Cf. Bonazzi (2012), Sedley (2012) and Schofield (2013).

⁵ Donini (1982) 375.

⁶ Reydam-Schils (1999).

⁷ The opposite one is the position held by many scholars: from Mathias Baltes to Lloyd Gerson, and by the supporters of an 'exoteric' Plato in particular. See Dörrie-Baltes (1987-200), Gerson (2013) and in between these two works: Krämer (1964,) Halfwassen (1992), Thiel (2006) and Helmig (2012). For a similar point about the complexity of the sources of Platonism see Bonazzi (2017).

⁸ Bonazzi (2017) 120.

⁹ See Gerson (2005). See also Bonazzi (2013) on this topic.

Aristotle. The often–polemic confrontation with other schools, and amongst them, with Stoicism, has usually proven to be of paramount importance for the development of Platonism.

Yet, in the case of Stoicism there is more to be said. The image Bonazzi sketches about this is rather efficacious: in the Imperial Age, Platonists resembled Alcibiades in Plato’s *Symposium* (212c–213d), in that they arrived late at the party (*scil.* of philosophy) and had to find a seat. After centuries of philosophical debates, the other Hellenistic schools had developed a “common language and a unification of the problems to be discussed in the philosophical agenda”.¹⁰ And the doctrine of the *telos* of the assimilation to God represents a perfectly suitable example of this. The Stoics determined that an ethical theory should provide the determination of the *telos* of life, following up on the way in which Aristotle had started his ethical inquiry in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.¹¹ Now, in order to be ‘competitive’ with the other philosophies of the time, Platonists needed to have a *telos* and evidence to demonstrate that this *telos* had been established within the Platonic dialogues themselves. Moreover, as we shall see, the testimony of the Anonymous Commentary to Plato’s *Theatetus* suggests that the doctrine of the assimilation to God might originate in explicit polemic with the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiōsis*.

In sum, the relation between Early Imperial Platonism and Early Stoicism seems to be paradoxical: on the one hand, Platonists such as Plutarch or the Anonymous *in Theatetum* harshly attack the Stoic doctrine for being self–contradictory and erroneous about quasi–every philosophical issue; on the other hand, though, they cannot but be heavily influenced by Stoic terminology and problems, sometimes even by the content of Stoic philosophy itself. It is in fact Hellenistic Stoicism, and its Imperial version, which, as many scholars have demonstrated, inherited a perfect system and therefore lost in part its originality, sometimes reducing itself to moral prescriptions and advice.¹²

¹⁰ Bonazzi (2017) 121.

¹¹ Even if in Aristotle, *telos* was not employed as a technical term.

¹² See Donini (1982) and Irwin (1985). There is not, however, a substantial difference in the formulation of the *telos* between Early Stoicism and later accounts, such as those of Seneca, Epictetus and even Clemens of Alexandria.

2. *The life 'in accordance with nature': from oikeiōsis to rational virtue*

As in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, according to the Stoics the *telos* corresponds to human happiness, *eudaimonia*, which in turn corresponds to “that for the sake of which everything is done”,¹³ or “the ultimate object of all desires”. Not surprisingly, in the Stoic view the two features of *eudaimonia* are *rationality* and *virtue*. In the Stoic system, *eudaimonia* is essentially “the state of the perfectly rational and virtuous wise person”.¹⁴

The beginning of the process that leads to this blessed condition is identified with what the Stoics call *oikeiōsis*, a Greek term that can be translated as “appropriation”.¹⁵ It is a natural impulse or tendency to self-love and self-preserve that characterizes every animal from the earliest stages of their life.¹⁶ This tendency drives every animal to “reject what is harmful and accept what is appropriate”.¹⁷ Against the Epicurean idea that every creature is impelled to pursue pleasure and to avoid pain from the moment of birth, the Stoics ascertain the animal’s first motivation as determined “by its innate awareness of its physical constituents and their functions”.¹⁸ We will deal with how this develops into human sociality later on; as for now, it would suffice to analyse the end of this process, i.e. when, according to Betegh’s efficacious expression, “the story takes a fairly counter-intuitive turn”.¹⁹ Although this impulse is natural, in fact, it does not mean that this is good *tout court*, as a naturalist would maintain. On the contrary, the Stoics hold that, on

¹³ Or “should be done”, according to the definition given by Stobaeus 2.46,5–10. Aristotle describes the *telos* more as what “is pursued” than what “should be pursued”, whereas, as we shall see, in the Stoic accounts there is an ambiguity between the two. Cf. Ar. *Eth. Nich.* 1.4 1095a14–20.

¹⁴ I borrow this expression from Betegh (2003) 283. The main sources for such claim are Diog. Laert. 7.87–9, Cic. *Tusc.* 5.40 ff; Epict. *Disc.* I.6.12 ff; Sen. *Ep.* 79.9–10.

¹⁵ Or: ‘appropriateness’. See Long–Sedley, 351, where they explain why ‘appropriateness’ would be a better translation than the much more common ‘appropriation’. However, the term ‘appropriateness’ does not render the active verbal nature of the Greek term. All the relevant testimonies to reconstruct the doctrine of *oikeiōsis* are collected in section 57 of Long–Sedley, pp. 346–354. See also Cic. *Fin.* 3.16–26 and Diog. Laert. 7.84–131, not included in Long–Sedley’s section on *oikeiōsis*. For a critical analysis of the theory and its individual steps, see Pembroke (1971) 114–49, White (1979), Engberg–Pedersen (1986), Striker (1983) 145–67, and Striker (1991).

¹⁶ ‘Impulse’ (ὁρμή) is the starting point of the Stoic ethical theory (See Diog. Laert. 7.84 [SVF 3.1]), also in Long–Sedley 56A.

¹⁷ Diog. Laert. 7.85–6 (SVF 3.178), Long–Sedley 57A, p. 346.

¹⁸ Long–Sedley vol. 1, 57, p. 350. On this see Sen. *Ep.* 121.6–15, Hier. I.34–9, 51–7, 2.1–9, who both base their claim on ‘empirical data’.

¹⁹ Betegh (2003) 284.

the path towards wisdom, the sage comes to comprehend, *cogitatione et ratione* (“through insight and reasoning”),²⁰ that the good of the single is not important at all; instead, the only good is the *rational good of the whole*. This is the meaning of the claim that Diogenes Laertius affirms to be taking from Zeno’s book *On the nature of man*: “nature leads us towards virtue”.²¹

Betegh thus describes this insight:

The only genuine good is the all-embracing rational, harmonious, and providential nature the workings of which are manifested also in the rational actions of humans, and all those things which he or she previously valued are at a completely different, lower order of value. This is the insight that makes one wise, because from this moment onwards one will consider cosmic nature, this rational and providential system recognized as the only genuine good in the strict Stoic sense, as *the ultimate reference point for one’s actions*. Only on the basis of this insight can one’s actions and considerations be in agreement with the rational nature governing the cosmos, and, according to the Stoics, this is what makes one life a rational, virtuous, and good life [emphasis mine].²²

This is how the Stoic ‘formula’ of the *telos* needs to be intended, as it is reported by Stobaeus: “living in accordance with virtue, living in agreement (τὸ ὁμολογουμένως ζῆν), or, what is the same, living in accordance with nature”.²³ It is not a sort of intuitive naturalism at all. The ‘ultimate reference point of one’s action’ is no longer one’s own self-preservation, one’s own good, as it would be ‘natural’, but the only genuine good, the good of the whole rational and providential universe.

There are quite a few testimonies and variations of this *formula*, but they differ very little from one another; it is therefore not worth discussing all the differences here, which would definitely not show any substantial diversion, rather different emphases on aspects of the doctrine.²⁴ Betegh’s explanation of the Stoic *formula* is particularly suitable

²⁰ Cic. *Fin.* 3.21.

²¹ Diog. Laert. 7.87 (Long–Sedley 63C).

²² Betegh (2003) 284.

²³ Stob. 2.77,16–27 (SVF 3.16; Long–Sedley 63A).

²⁴ Long–Sedley, vol. 1, p. 400. The testimonies about the formulation of the *telos* are collected in a specific section (63) of Long–Sedley, and the Academic criticism of it is collected in section 64. According to Stobaeus (2.75, 11–76,8), Zeno formulated the *telos* as “living in agreement” (τὸ ὁμολογουμένως ζῆν), where, at least according to Stobaeus or his source, the implicit would be “with one concordant reason” (καθ’ ἓνα λόγον καὶ σύμφωνον). Afterwards, according to Stobaeus’ rendering, Zeno’s successors (among

for Chrysippus' version of it, which, according to Stobaeus' rendering (2.75,1176,8), added a reference to the "experience of what happens by nature" (κατ' ἐμπειρίαν τῶν φύσει συμβαινόντων) to Zeno's and Cleanthes' expressions. This expression seems to stress on the anti-intuitive character of the *formula*, which may otherwise appear as a sort of naturalism, at first sight. The "experience of what happens by nature" is something one achieves *cogitatione et ratione* and coincides with the awareness of the rationality of the divine immanent in nature. Thus, life in accordance with nature comes to coincide with life "in accordance with reason", for there is this coincidence between nature and "the right reason pervading everything and identical to Zeus, who is director of the administration of existing things" (ὁ ὀρθὸς λόγος, διὰ πάντων ἐρχόμενος, ὁ αὐτὸς ὢν τῷ Δί, καθηγεμόνι τούτῳ τῆς τῶν ὄντων διοικήσεως ὄντι). There is no substantial change in Seneca's version, which identifies human end (*finis*) with having "perfected reason", (*ad finem naturae suae pervenit, homini autem suum bonum ratio est*) identical to the possession of virtue (*virtus*).²⁵

Perhaps one of the most clear and meaningful versions of the Stoic *telos* is that which Clement attributes to Posidonius:²⁶

τὸ ζῆν θεωροῦντα τὴν τῶν ὅλων ἀλήθειαν καὶ τάξιν καὶ συγκατασκευάζοντα αὐτὴν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν, κατὰ μηδὲν ἀγόμενον ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀλόγου μέρους τῆς ψυχῆς.

living as a student of the truth and order of the whole, and helping to promote this as far as possible, completely uninfluenced by the irrational part of the soul. (Clem. *Misc.* 2.21.129.4–5).²⁷

whom, Cleanthes) added "with nature" (τῇ φύσει) to such formulation, "since they took Zeno's statement to be an incomplete predicate". Chrysippus added to the picture "experience of what happens by nature" (κατ' ἐμπειρίαν τῶν φύσει συμβαινόντων). Even Dioegenes Laertius' account (7.87–9, in Long–Sedley 63C) confirms the agreement on the formulation of the *telos* between Zeno's book *On the nature of man*, which is believed to represent a milestone in the beginning of the doctrine, Cleanthes' *On pleasure* and Hecato's *On ends*, whereas the same slight change is attributed to Chrysippus. Testimonies by Cicero (*Tusc.* 5.81–2 = Long – Sedley 63M) and Epictetus (*Disc.* 1.6.12 – 22 = Long–Sedley 63E) too confirm the same formulation. Another slight difference can instead be found in Clement's account of Panetius' thought, which says: "living in accordance with the tendencies bestowed on us by nature" (Clem. *Misc.* 2.21.129.4–5 (Panetius fr. 96, Posidonius fr. 186, Long–Sedley 63J). For the general discussion and the underlying unity, see Striker (1991).

²⁵ Sen. *Ep.* 76.9–10 (SVF 3.200a, Long – Sedley 63D).

²⁶ We do not need to focus on the differences among the three different periods of Stoicism. There is no significant change with regards to the *telos* between the First Stoa (Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus), the Second Stoa (Panetius and Posidonius) and Imperial Stoicism (Seneca, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius...).

²⁷ On this fragment, which depends on Posidonius' rendering of the *telos* according to scholarship, see Reydam–Schils (1999) 111–15.

It might be observed that, despite the different formulation, the Stoic *telos* turns out to be not so different from the Platonist one: in Stobaeus' rendering, in Stoicism the right reason that permeates nature coincides with God. A passage from Epictetus' *Discourses* too is illuminating in this respect, in that it reports that God introduced man "as a student of himself and his works".²⁸

To all these considerations, one must add the Stoic ideal of 'tranquillity' (*ἀταραξία* or *tranquillitas*), imperturbability from passions, and the theory of sufficiency of virtue to happiness, both consequences respectively of a life according to the correct nature and of the *final* and *self-sufficient* character of the Stoic notion of virtue.²⁹

The Stoics made moral goodness the only constituent of a happy life, to the extent that they claimed that not even Priam's sufferings, whose family, city and vassals are respectively killed, burned, and made slaves, could alter the happiness of a virtuous man.³⁰ Happiness is always in our power (*sua potestate*), depending exclusively on virtue.³¹ Virtues are everything one needs to fulfill himself, to live well, to have his ultimate desire satisfied. For this reason, the *telos* conceived as happiness is an "all-or nothing affair",³² and cannot be an "intermittent satisfaction of momentary wants".³³

The moral life is therefore intrinsically desirable, being identical to the person's self-fulfillment (*telos*). In this sense, the desire for the good and virtuous life is a development of the first impulse for self-preservation, according to the doctrine of *oikeiōsis*: there is continuity between the very first tendency (present from the first stages of life and common to both human children and animals) and the highest rational desire for the virtuous life.

²⁸ Epict. *Discourses*, 1.6.12–22.

²⁹ For the ideal of tranquility, see Sen. *Ep.* 92.3 (Long–Sedley 63F) and Cic. *Tusc.* 5.40–1 (Long–Sedley 63L).

³⁰ SVF 3.385. Here, they reject the Aristotelian doctrine according to which happiness would require some good fortune in addition to virtue.

³¹ See Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 5.81–2.

³² In Plutarch's testimony (*Com. Conc.* 1061f = SVF 3.54 = Long–Sedley 63I), it is stated that for the Stoics not even continuity in time can influence in any way a good – hence happiness and virtue. On this point too, the Stoic doctrine differs from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, where happiness is instead said that in order to be real it needs to last a whole lifetime.

³³ Long–Sedley, vol. I, p. 399.

3. *Academic criticisms of the Stoic telos and the Stoic answer*

Indeed, this formulation has encountered many challenges throughout time, especially with regards to its attempts at more concrete explanations. The main criticism that has been moved against this formulation of the *telos* in Antiquity refers to a further specification of the *formula*, usually attributed to Chrysippus. For instance, in Cicero's *De finibus* we find a different explanation of the traditional *formula*: "a life in which one applies knowledge of those things that happen by nature, selecting those in accordance with nature and rejecting those contrary to nature" (*vivere scientiam adhibentem earum rerum, quae natura eveniant, seligentem quae secundum naturam et quae contra naturam sint reicientem*).³⁴ This appears to have been Chrysippus' position and the orthodox doctrine of the school,³⁵ as well as the basis for the formulations generally attributed to Chrysippus' immediate successors, namely Diogenes of Babylon and Antipater.³⁶

Long and Sedley see this other version not so much as a change of doctrine, rather as a further specification of how life in agreement with nature manifests itself, i.e. "in the right attitude and activity with respect to AN [things according to nature] and CN [things contrary to nature]".³⁷ As a matter of fact, according to the Stoic doctrine, things that are usually regarded as good or bad, such as health, are instead considered indifferent with regards to happiness. Virtue and vice are the only constituents of a happy and unhappy life respectively. However, the preference for health as opposed to its contrary is not utterly denied: though irrelevant for happiness, such 'indifferent' has value or disvalue "relative to being in accordance with nature, or to impulse and repulsion".³⁸ If we go back to Diogenes' and Antipater's version of the *telos*, we see that a life in accordance to nature is a life of constant selection of things according to nature. And the problem arises here: how can the *telos*, happiness, be defined in relation to things that are supposed to be indifferent to happiness? How can happiness correspond to the process or the habit of

³⁴ Cic. *Fin.* 3.31 (SVF 3.15 = Long–Sedley 64A).

³⁵ Long – Sedley, vol. I, p. 406.

³⁶ Stob. 2.76,9-15 (Long – Sedley 58K): "Diogenes represented the end as: reasoning well in selection and dissection of things in accordance with nature...and Antipater: to live continuously selecting things in accordance with nature and dissecting things contrary to nature". See also Cic. *Fin.* 3.17,20–2, where "selection which is absolutely consistent" coincides with man's possession and understanding of the *telos*.

³⁷ Long – Sedley, vol. I, p. 407.

³⁸ Stob. 2.79,18-80 (Long–Sedley 58C).

selection about things that are absolutely irrelevant for happiness itself? Furthermore, how can our selecting be carried out for its own sake?³⁹ In all likelihood, this criticism began with the Academic Carneades, Diogenes' younger contemporary.⁴⁰ In other words, if the end is put in terms of 'expertise in living' (the sense of the Latin word *prudencia* in Cicero's account in the *De finibus*),⁴¹ then, like any other expertise, it has to be goal-directed, for "it is undertaken to achieve something other than its own exercise".⁴² Therefore, it cannot be the *telos*, for it does not respect its definition as the end of the chain of goals.

The so-called second formula of Antipater answers to this criticism: the aim is to "do everything in one's power to obtain things according to nature". Thus, the goal would not be to 'get the thing' but to 'strive to get the thing,' which is not an external goal, rather the very action of 'well-selecting'. The answer is quite interesting and can be taken as an appeal to experience wherein the Stoics were probably not interested: often happiness resides more in doing everything in our power to succeed in getting hold of a thing, than in the thing itself once we have conquered it. On the other hand, this explanation does not adequately explain how it is possible that happiness depends upon aiming at objectives whose attainment is irrelevant to happiness – seemingly because such explanation is not possible at all.⁴³ That is perhaps the reason why Posidonius could reject Antipater's *formula* as an explanation of 'life in agreement with nature', preferring his own version: 'not being led by the irrational part of the soul.'⁴⁴

³⁹ This is the late polemic challenge thrown by Alexander: "No other expertise selects something merely for the sake of selecting it, but it is in reference to the end that everything is selected. For the end consists in the use of the things selected and not in the selecting of the materials. To put it generally, it is surely absurd [for the Stoics] to say that virtue applies only to selecting. For if getting the things selected is indifferent and does not contribute to the end, the selection would be utterly pointless". *Alex. An.* II 164,3–9 (Long–Sedley 64B)

⁴⁰ Long–Sedley, vol. I, p. 407.

⁴¹ We have evidence of Carneades' approval of representing the end in terms of expertise in *Cic. Fin.* 5.17–20 (Long–Sedley 64G).

⁴² *Ibidem.* See *Cic. Fin.* 5.16 (Long–Sedley 64E).

⁴³ Long – Sedley, vol.1, p. 410.

⁴⁴ *Clem. Strom.* 2, XXI,129,1–5 and *Gal. Plac. Hipp. et Plat.* 5,326.20–27.

4. *Joining the blessed life of the gods, convergence between Stoic and Platonist formulation of the telos*

Alongside the standard exposition of *eudaimonia*, we find an alternative account that is of paramount interest to our purpose. In Cicero's *De natura deorum* (On the Nature of the Gods), towards the end of the exposition of the Stoic arguments for teleology in nature, Balbus focuses on the great achievements of human reason (*ratio*), which "advanced to the skies", knows "the rising, settings, and courses of the stars, laid down the limits of the day, the month, the year", came to "recognize eclipses of the sun and moon, and have foretold the extent and the date of each occurrence of them for all days to come".

Quae contuens animus accedit ad cognitionem deorum, e qua oritur pietas, cui coniuncta iustitia est reliquaeque virtutes, e quibus vita beata existit par et similis deorum...

Such observation of the heavens allows the mind to attain *knowledge of the gods*, and this gives rise to religious devotion (*pietas*), with which justice (*iustitia*) and other virtues are closely linked. These virtues are the basis of the blessed life (*vita beata*) which is equivalent and analogous to that enjoined by the gods (*par et similis deorum*). (Cic. *Nat. deo.* 2.153, trans. Walsh)

This text clearly echoes the passage at the end of the *Timaeus* analyzed in the first chapter. Here too, the observation of heavens enables human beings to achieve knowledge of the gods (*cogitation deorum*), and this very knowledge arouses virtues, and in particular *pietas* and *iustitia*, which – interestingly – are the two quoted virtues that in the *locus classicus* of the *Theaetetus* are identified with the assimilation to God.⁴⁵ These very virtues are the basis of the *vita beata*, which amounts to saying of they are the basis of *eudaimonia*. Knowledge of the heavenly motions makes virtues awake, and these virtues are key to the blessed life of the gods.

⁴⁵ *Th.* 176d –e: ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι: "To become like God is to become just and holy, together with wisdom".

According to this account especially, it is easily notable how there seem to be significant points of contact between the Platonist and the Stoic accounts of the *telos*.⁴⁶ After all, the Stoic formulation remained the official Platonist goal until Antiochus of Ascalon, for it is based on Plato's *Timaeus* and *Theatetus*, as the *homoiōsis theōi* formula will be. Our main task will be to grasp the meaning of such change in the formulation, which seems to have risen in explicit polemic with the Stoic one, though not differentiating itself as radically as one might think.

The Stoic particular interest in the *Timaeus* is easily comprehensible if one recognizes, as Betegh does, that on the one hand the bastion of Stoicism is the claim for rationality and teleology of the world, and, on the other hand, “from the whole Platonic corpus, and indeed from the entire pre-Stoic literature, the *Timaeus* is the work that argues for the rationality and teleological organization of the cosmos in the most comprehensive and detailed way”.⁴⁷ This is supported by a long series of textual echoes of the *Timaeus* in Stoic fragments, along with the great exegetical effort that characterized the Stoics' work on this Platonic dialogue.⁴⁸

Life in accordance with nature in Stoic terms equals to the “full realization of the similarity between cosmic rationality and individual rationality”,⁴⁹ the same similarity that is premised in the *Timaeus* between the world and the individual soul, a similarity that contemplation of heavenly motions would help us recover.⁵⁰ Quoting Betegh once again:

The correspondence between individual nature and cosmic nature can manifest itself only if the individual actively studies the workings of cosmic nature, and thus becomes aware of its teleological organization, harmony and rationality. Henceforth, man can emulate and imitate the positive features of cosmic nature by observing it.⁵¹

⁴⁶ For a more detailed account on the difference between the two schools upon the interpretation of becoming like God, see Levy (1992) 325 ff.

⁴⁷ Betegh (2003) 289.

⁴⁸ Reydams-Schils (1999). See also the ‘eight notable points’ that Betegh (2003) makes on the interest of Stoics in the *Timaeus*, pp. 290–293. On the structural and maybe also historical connections between the Platonic world soul and the Stoic active principle see Sedley (2002) 41–83.

⁴⁹ Betegh (2003) 292.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*. On the individual mirroring cosmic rationality see Kerferd (1978) 132, and Inwood (1999) 682–3.

⁵¹ Betegh (2003) 292.

The study of cosmic order that nature generates represents the “experience of what happens by nature” of Chrysippus’ formulation of the *telos* in Diogenes Laertius’ authoritative account.⁵² How the study of cosmology leads to a good life in the *Timaeus* and in Stoicism is not of our interest here;⁵³ rather, it would suffice to say that the crucial factor of the Socratic legacy for Stoic ethics lies in the fact that virtue requires knowledge.⁵⁴ For the Stoics, the content of this knowledge is the awareness of the rationality, teleology and providentiality of cosmic nature, an awareness that leads the sage “to live in accordance with the experience of what happens by nature”.

⁵² Diog. Laert. 7.87. There are indeed some important differences between the *Timaeus* and the Chrysippean position, discussed and analyzed by Betegh (2003) 294–300. The most evident is the fact that “the *Timaeus* conceives rationality and teleology in terms of the mathematical organization of nature, whereas the main characteristic of cosmic rationality for the Stoics is the providential working of nature”.

⁵³ See Betegh (2003) 296–300.

⁵⁴ Betegh (2003) 299. On the role of epistemology in Stoic ethics, see also Frede (1999) 71–94.

Chapter Four

Antiochus of Ascalon, the rise of dogmatic Platonism and of an inclusive ethical ideal

1. The I century BC and Antiochus' position in the philosophical debate

The first century BC represents a watershed in the history of western philosophy,¹ especially from a geographical point of view. From this moment onwards, Athens will no longer be the epicentre of philosophy: Alexandria and Rome will become the two new cultural centres for philosophy.² As Sedley points out, this transition changed permanently “the character of philosophy as an intellectual activity”.³ And this, in all likelihood, happened for a very simple reason, that Sedley summaries as follows:

Cut adrift from the historic institutions which had linked them to their revered founders, the major philosophies shifted their efforts increasingly onto the study of their foundational texts.⁴

In other words, due to the lapsing of philosophers from authoritative schools, the practice itself becomes something completely different from what it was before: ‘free’ speculations on a given problem cede their place to huge exegetical efforts on some authors of the past, especially Plato and Aristotle, but also Socrates, Epicurus or Pythagoras. These philosophers of the past begin to be considered almost unquestionable, when not divinely inspired.⁵ In a sense, philosophy comes to coincide with the history of

¹ See, among others, the introduction to the recent volume dedicated to the philosophy of Antiochus of Ascalon, Sedley (2012). For another overview, see Barnes (1986).

² On this transformation, see Glucker (1978), Hadot (1987), and Sedley (2003).

³ Sedley (2012) 1.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ It is not unusual, for instance, to address Plato or Socrates as ‘divine’ in this period.

philosophy. This is why the philosophical activity of in this period is centred on the “newly burgeoning industry”⁶ of textual commentary, and on the works of Plato and Aristotle in particular, who are surprisingly perceived in ‘harmony’ with one another.⁷

According to many scholars, Antiochus of Ascalon (henceforth Antiochus) represents the first main thinker of this new era.⁸ Antiochus’ novelty, however, does not stand on this ground only. He can also be pointed at as a turning point in the history of Platonism, namely from the so-called New Academy to the so-called Middle Platonism. This is probably the most significant turn in the whole history of Platonism. Antiochus was trained in the Academy under the mastership of Philo of Larissa for many years, who was the head of the Academy from 110 BC. Thus, initially he must have endorsed the kind of dialectical scepticism that dominated the school in this phase, widely known as the ‘New Academy.’ However, he then came to believe that the Academic scepticism and the subsequent refusal of a fixed doctrine had betrayed Plato’s true legacy. Therefore, moved by this belief, he reconstructed the philosophy of the ‘Old Academy’, in a dogmatic fashion.

That this change of direction represented a rather meaningful event in late Hellenistic philosophy is attested by the fact that Cicero regarded Antiochus as one of the four philosophers to be included in his accounts of Greek philosophy thought for a wide Roman readership, alongside Stoics, Epicureans and the New Academy.⁹ As Sedley points out in the introduction to the Cambridge volume on the philosophy of Antiochus, such turn was not only about “reverting to the direct study of Plato’s dialogues”, for at least two other particular twists took place.¹⁰

The first twist is very important, for it represents a sort of hallmark of this age, and it has to do with how to deal with Aristotle’s philosophy. From Antiochus onwards, Aristotle is treated as an authentic representative of the ‘Old Academy’, with no concerns about him leaving to found his own school nor his dissent with some of the master’s main doctrine, such as the theory of Forms.

⁶ Sedley (2012) 2.

⁷ On the harmony between Plato and Aristotle for Late Platonists, see Karamanolis (2006).

⁸ On Antiochus, see Lueder (1940); Luck (1953); Hunt (1954) 16–40 and 89–98; Dillon (1977) 52–106, Glucker (1978) 15–120; Barnes (1989), Görler (1994) 938–80; Fladerer (1996) and, more recently, Karamanolis (2006) 44–84. Antiochus’ testimonies are collected in Luck (1953) 73–94.

⁹ Sedley (2012) 2.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

The second twist Sedley pins down concerns Stoicism, as we have anticipated in the previous chapter. More specifically, with regards to Antiochus, it must be added that not only did his contemporaries believe that much of his work resonated with Stoicism, also recent scholarship has identified him with Stoicism rather than with Platonism. For the debate between competing interpretations, I refer to the already quoted recent volume on Antiochus' philosophy, and in particular to two contributions by Bonazzi and Brittain.¹¹ According to the former, Antiochus appropriated Stoic material claiming for its Platonic provenance. In this picture, according to Antiochus, the Stoics were original only with reference to the terms used rather than to the substance of their doctrine. According to the latter, conversely, the Stoics corrected or improved elements of the philosophy of the 'ancients', and should therefore be considered in Antiochus' new philosophical system.

On his philosophical belonging, I take Sedley's stance.¹² Sedley does not focus on what is more Stoic and what is more Platonist in Antiochus' philosophy, which, albeit it seems the most reasonable to adopt, does not do justice to the particular historical context wherein Antiochus operated. As we saw, in the 1st century BC the Stoics had been the dominant philosophers of the previous two centuries, tracing their origins back to Socrates and providing "the conceptual and terminological framework in which philosophical issues were being discussed". It follows that Antiochus could not have ignored the Stoic 'way' to deal with philosophical problems. Furthermore, in his endeavour to re-create a dogmatic Platonism, hence offering a *criterion* to ground the very possibility of knowledge, Stoic epistemology was an unavoidable touchstone.

This said, as Sedley points out, it is evident that Antiochus "emphatically did not consider himself a Stoic".¹³ His explicit programme was a 'return to the ancients,' and Plato and Aristotle, together with the first heads of the Academy such as Speusippus and Xenocrates, were his own authoritative reference point. According to Sedley's efficacious image, borrowed by Bernard of Chartres, to Antiochus' eyes the Stoics were dwarfs on the shoulders of giants:

¹¹ Scholarship is divided with regards to Antiochus' concessions to Stoicism. For the two different interpretations on Antiochus' 'appropriation' of Stoic epistemology, see respectively Bonazzi (2012) for Antiochus' Platonism, and Brittain (2012) for Antiochus' Stoicism.

¹² Sedley (2012) 3.

¹³ Sedley (2012) 3.

From that privileged vantage point the Stoics were perhaps enabled to see a little further and a little more sharply than the giants could, and it was therefore appropriate for the moderns to talk in their idiom and borrow their insights.¹⁴

Nonetheless, much of the height from which their privileged point of view was generated had to do with the giants, namely the ancients.

Metaphors aside, Antiochus took over Stoic epistemology, and the extent to which his embracement of the Stoic doctrine goes is still under discussion in recent scholarship. However, as far as ethics is concerned for example, he was in disagreement with the ultimate Stoic principle, i.e. the goods that contribute to a happy life are exclusively moral. I understand Antiochus' Stoic epistemology more as an attempt to return to what must have been Plato's epistemology in Antiochus' view, in reaction to the New Academy's sceptical drift.

For our purpose here, it is his will to return to the ancients and in particular his attempt to combine Aristotle and Plato that needs to be underlined, along with the fact that he did not disdain to employ Stoic terminology nor elements of the Stoic doctrine. Together with the usage of these elements, his work as a historian of philosophy certainly makes him a precursor of Middle Platonism,¹⁵ if not its father and founder, as someone has claimed.¹⁶ We are not particularly interested in labelling Antiochus as one or the other: what is remarkable is his 'revolutionary' turn towards the ancients as authorities, and his claim for the dogmatic nature of Platonic philosophy.¹⁷ These will be retained as the main ingredients of the Middle Platonist authors we will be dealing with. For this very reason, apart from his philosophical affiliation, Antiochus' ethics must be briefly considered in my account of the Platonist moral goal.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ About Antiochus as an historian of philosophy, see Sedley (2012), chapter 4 of Sedley (2012) 80–104.

¹⁶ See, for example, Dillon (1977) and Donini (1982), and, to a lesser extent, Bonazzi (2012).

¹⁷ On Antiochus' way of looking at the ancients, see for example the considerations in Sedley (2012) 4. It is not clear who was the maximum authority, especially in cases of disagreement between Plato and Aristotle. In ethics, as we shall see, the massive presence of Aristotelian elements may bring us to think that he must have considered Plato only as the founder of the Academy, but not necessarily its ultimate authority. In this picture, Aristotle and the other members of the Old Academy would have to be considered as legitimate developments of the 'true' Platonic philosophy. On the massive presence of Aristotle in Antiochus' ethics, see Tsouni (2012) and Irwin (2012).

2. Antiochus on the *theōria* and the happy life

George Karamanolis has argued that for Antiochus ethics is the most essential part of Platonic philosophy.¹⁸ According to Karamanolis, Antiochus maintains that the most crucial Platonic doctrine is that concerned with how to achieve a good life. Furthermore, as already anticipated, Antiochus is fully convinced that Plato's ethics is a coherent and systematic doctrine. The assumption at the basis of Antiochus' ethical theory, as we can reconstruct it from Cicero's *De finibus*,¹⁹ is that Plato's ethical view had been articulated well by Aristotle and Polemo.²⁰ These two authorities of the past are presented as being essentially in agreement, and, more importantly, as representing Plato's doctrine most accurately.²¹ More specifically, Antiochus' approach to ethics has been efficaciously sketched by Karamanolis, who pinpoints three main aims in Antiochus' dealing with Platonic ethics:

- a) To show that the Stoics took over most of their ethics from the 'ancients'; b) to argue that to the extent the Stoic ethics diverges from that of the 'ancients' it contradicts itself; and c) to do justice to Aristotle's ethical doctrine, which he considered as representative of Plato.²²

As far as the *telos* is concerned, it is interesting that, though apparently in agreement with the Stoics on the formulation of the *telos* as "life in accordance with nature", on this very point he had a great controversy with the Stoics.²³ The source to reconstruct Antiochus' position on the *telos* (the *summum bonum*) is Piso's speech in Cicero's *De Finibus*.²⁴ The

¹⁸ Karamanolis (2006) 80.

¹⁹ The 'spokesmen' of Antiochus in *De finibus* and in the *Academica* are Piso and Varro. For Antiochus in the *De finibus*, see Giusta (1990) 29–49.

²⁰ *De fin.* 5.14: *Antiquorum...sententiam Antiochus noster mihi videtur persequi diligentissime, quam eandem Aristoteli fuisse et Polemonis docet* – 'Our master Antiochus seems to me to adhere most scrupulously to the doctrine of the ancients, which according to this teaching was common to Aristotle and to Polemo.' (tr. Rackham. On Antiochus ethics see Dillon (1977) 67–78; Annas (1993) 180–7, 419–25; Fladerer (1996) 137–83; Prost (2001), Karamanolis (2006) 72–80; Irwin (2012) 151–172; Schofield (2012) 173–187; Tsouni (2012) 131–150.

²¹ *De fin.* 2.34; *Tusc. Disp.* 5.30,39,87. See Karamanolis (2006) 72.

²² Karamanolis (2006) 74–75.

²³ Cic. *De fin.* 5.24–33. See, among others, Dillon (1977) 70 ff.

²⁴ Cic. *De fin.* 5.16–34. Giusta (1990) 34–6 argues against Glucker (1978) 52–62 that Piso's speech does not represent Antiochus' position, rather it reflects Peripatetic ethics as it is not attested that Antiochus

point of disagreement is the Stoic claim for the sufficiency of virtue for happiness, or, to put it in another way, the fact that virtue represents the only good. According to Antiochus, an ultimate good consisting only of the moral good would fail the test of representing the good of man in his entirety. According to Antiochus, Chrysippus classified man so as to make the mind his principal part, but he so defined man's end as to make it appear not that he is principally mind, but that he consists of nothing else.²⁵ As Karamanolis notices, Antiochus maintains that "one cannot determine what a good life is unless one first has a clear conception of man's nature".²⁶ Now, man's nature is twofold and consists of body and soul, hence the ultimate good (*summum bonum*) must be the perfection of the whole nature.²⁷ Indeed, the soul is more important than the body; consequently, its excellences are more important than those of the body, but this does not mean that we have to utterly neglect the goods of the body. Thus, our main concern should primarily be with moral virtue (*honestas*), although we also have to search for the primary objects of nature (*prima naturae*), which are what the Stoics called *preferred indifferents* (friendship, health, beauty, honour).²⁸ For Antiochus, the Stoic notion of final end stands against the same nature it appeals to (*natura discedere*), as it overlooks a part of human nature, namely the body.²⁹ For this reason, Antiochus maintains the Stoic *formula* of the *telos*, but criticises one of the hallmarks of the Stoic ethical theory, i.e. the fact that moral virtue is sufficient for a happy life. On the contrary, a life solely virtuous is a good life (*vita beata*), but is not the *best* life (*vita beatissima*).³⁰ The *vita beatissima* is the *summum bonum* and encloses both the moral virtue (*honestas*) and the natural goods such as health, wealth, and so on. As it has become clear from what we have just said, the discussion on the *summum bonum* ends up being a polemical attack against the

authored a treatise on the final end. This argument is not convincing, as Fladerer (1996) 139–41 has demonstrated. See also Karamanolis (2006) 72, n. 81.

²⁵ *Fin.* V 28. See Dillon (1977) 71.

²⁶ Karamanolis (2006) 72.

²⁷ *De fin.* 5.34.

²⁸ Cic. *De fin.* 5.21. See Karamanolis (2006) 73.

²⁹ Cic. *De fin.* 5.89. Cf. also 4.41. Karamanolis (2006) 74.

³⁰ Cf. Cic. *Academ.* 1.22: *Itaque omnis illa antiqua philosophia sensit in una virtute esse positam beatam vitam nec tamen beatissimam nisi adiungeretur et corporis et cetera quae supra dicta sunt ad virtutis usum idonea.* – "Thus whole the ancient philosophy held that good life lies in virtue alone and that life cannot become best without the addition of the goods of the body and also those mentioned above which are suitable for the employment of virtue"; cf. also Cic., *De fin.* 5.71 and 81, *Acad.* 2.134, *Tusc. Disp.* 5.22 and Aug. *De civ. Dei* 19.3. See Karamanolis (2006) 74.

Stoic doctrine for which virtue would suffice to reach happiness.³¹ We have no further hints at Antiochus' view on the *telos*.

Let us now focus on Antiochus' view on *eudaimonia*, and in particular on *theōria*, as it is reported in Cicero's *De finibus*.³² The Antiochean Piso argues that the life of contemplation represents the highest ideal, and he makes reference to descriptions of it found in Aristotle and Theophrastus.³³ Here, as Georgia Tsouni has shown in a recent article, there is a rather Peripatetic account of *theōria*, mainly described as the intellectual activity of knowing nature and its principle.³⁴ Our mind has an innate disposition for inquiry (*innatus in nobis cogitationis amor et scientiae*),³⁵ and an even more sublime desire for contemplation, which is carried out by the most divine element within us.³⁶ As in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, one of the main features of *theōria* is that it is valuable for its own sake (*propter se expetenda*),³⁷ and not in relation to the outcome it brings about (*nulla utilitate obiecta*).

The Antiochean Piso deploys the mythical example of the isles of the Blest (*beatorum insulae*), where the sages are depicted as free from troubles and necessities, who spend their time investigating and acquiring knowledge of the physical world.³⁸ As Tsouni notices, Piso "aims with the example of the Isles of the Blest at promoting *theōria* as an 'immortal' activity on earth and, accordingly, makes reference three times in his

³¹ For a detailed analysis on Antiochus' view on the goods see Karamanolis (2006) 72–80.

³² Cic., *De Fin.* V.

³³ Cic. *De fin.* 5.11–12. See Karamanolis (2006) 79.

³⁴ Tsouni (2012) 131 points out that Piso's account in *De fin.* 5 "is repeatedly advertised as a specifically Peripatetic account, conveying a Peripatetic theory of ethics with little emphasis on Platonic authority". This thesis is enhanced by the numerous references to Peripatetic authority and by the fact that Piso is chosen as the spokesman of Antiochus for he had a Peripatetic philosopher, Staseas of Naples, in his house for many years. On the contrary, Benatouil (2009) argues that Piso's account of *theōria* is based more on Plato than on Aristotle, moving from the arguments in *De fin.* 5.48–58. However, Tsouni (2012) 132 has noticed the absolute lack of references to Plato in the whole speech.

³⁵ Cic. *De fin.* 5.48. Cf also *De fin.* 4.18: *tantus est igitur innatus in nobis cogitationis amor et scientiae, ut nemo dubitare possit quin ad eas res hominum natura nullo emolumento invitata rapiatur*.

³⁶ Cic. *De fin.* 5.49 and 5.57. Cf. also 4.11–12. See Karamanolis (2006) 79. The innate disposition for inquiry echoes the very first words in the first book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. The whole discussion of *theōria* comes from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 10. Theiler (1964) 52–53 also underlines the influence exerted by Aristotle's *Protrepticus*.

³⁷ Cic. *De fin.* 5.50. In all likelihood, the expression renders the Greek δι' αὐτὸ αἰρετόν. See Tsouni (2012) 137, n. 31.

³⁸ Cic. *De fin.* 5.53.

account to the *god-like* character of human *nous*".³⁹ The life of pure *theōria* is defined as "the most similar (*simillima*) to the life of the gods" and "the most worthy (*dignissima*) of the wise man".⁴⁰

Alongside Aristotle and the Peripatos, Antiochus identifies the supreme happiness of a life with pure *theōria*; as Tsouni notices, however, he "does not present it as an ideal *separate* form of life for humans but restricts himself to the depiction of such life in the imaginary realm of the isles of the Blest".⁴¹ On the contrary, in the case of *human* life,⁴² Antiochus presents an inclusive ideal, which is centred on the notion of *actio*. Interestingly, Piso discloses that *theōria* is an *actio*, an activity.⁴³ If *actio* is a translation of the Aristotelian ἐνέργεια, Piso's speech is only an accurate account of the Aristotelian *Ethics*, according to which *eudaimonia* is ἐνέργεια and not ἔξις.⁴⁴ But if, as Tsouni claims with articulated arguments,⁴⁵ *actio* means also πρᾶξις, Antiochus' account would distance itself from the Aristotelian orthodoxy, in which the domains of *theōria* and *praxis* are separated, if not opposed. By contrast, Piso's account would include *theōria* within the realm of *praxis*, as one of the virtuous activities, the supreme one. The Antiochean Piso clearly states: "we are born *to act*", thus including also *theōria* as the highest of the activities.⁴⁶ There are indeed three kinds of virtuous activities, each of which are *parts* of the happy life: the theoretical, political, and virtuous *action*:

Ergo hoc quidem apparet, nos ad agendum esse natos. Actionum autem genera plura, ut obscurantur etiam maiora minoribus, maxime autem sunt primum, ut mihi quidem videtur et iis quorum nunc in ratione versamur, consideratione cognitioque rerum caelestium et earum quas a natura occultatas et latentes indagare ratio potest, deinde rerum publicarum administratio aut administrandi scientia, tum prudens, temperata, fortis,

³⁹ Tsouni (2012) 140. See *De fin.* 5.38: *quod ex ratione gignuntur, qua nihil est in homine divinius; 5.57: optimaque parte hominis, quae in nobis divina ducenda est, ingenii et mentis acie fruuntur.*

⁴⁰ Cic. *De fin.* 5.11. The reference is to Arist. *Eth. Nich.* 10.7, 1178a8.

⁴¹ Tsouni (2012) 140.

⁴² See the *nos autem* in *De fin.* 5.53, when the Antiochean Piso turns from the depiction of the Isles of the Blessed to the human domain.

⁴³ Tsouni (2012), especially 142–146.

⁴⁴ Like Aristotle in *Eth. Nich.* 10.6, 1176a33–6, the Antiochean Piso makes use of the example of sleep in *De Fin.* 5.54–55 to suggest the intrinsic value of activity as opposed to a mere possess or state. For the example of sleep in Piso's speech, see Tsouni (2012) 142–143.

⁴⁵ See Tsouni (2012) 143: 'The term *action* that Piso employs [...] encompasses both the notions of *energeia* and *praxis*, of activity and action, without differentiating clearly between them.'

⁴⁶ Cic. *De fin.* 5.58.

iusta ratio reliquaeque virtutes et actiones virtutibus congruentes, quae uno verbo complexi omnia honesta dicimus; ad quorum et cogitationem et usum iam corroborate natura ipsa paeunte deducimur.

It is evident then that *we are born to act*. There are many kinds of action, however, so that one might lose sight of the highest ones amidst the less important. As to the most important, it is my view and that of the thinkers whose system I am discussing that these are: the contemplation and knowledge of heavenly things, and of those which are by nature hidden and obscure and which our intellect can explore; then the administration of public affairs, or knowledge of its theory; and lastly prudent, temperate, brave and just reasoning, and the rest of the virtues and the actions that are in accordance with them. Those are called by the one word ‘morality’; when we are already mature, we are led to the knowledge and practice of those by nature’s own guidance. (Cic. *De fin.* 5.58, tr. Tsouni, 2012).

The passage is full of references to the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁴⁷ What is most interesting, though, is that, as Tsouni notes, “by presenting *theōria* as an *actio*, Antiochus bridges the gap between intellectual activity and other forms of action, a distinction drawn sharply by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethic* 6”.⁴⁸ In this picture, an engagement with *theōria* is one expression (indeed the highest one) of the human being’s natural disposition towards action (“we are born to act”). *Eudaimonia*, which, in Aristotelian terms, corresponds with *energeia* according to virtue, would not parallel with mere *theōria*, but with any virtuous *praxis*, *theōria* included. As Tsouni argues, in Antiochus’s Peripatetic account, “intellectual activity forms part of an inclusive conception of a happy life that combines both *theōria* and *praxis*”.⁴⁹ Thus, *theōria* is one component of *eudaimonia* and not the sole component, as it is affirmed in some passages from *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.⁵⁰

Although the *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi* does not explicitly appear, our analysis of Piso’s speech in *De finibus* 5 reveals two important factors: i) Antiochus’ polemical towards the Stoic *telos* (though he maintains the formulation, he accuses the Stoics to contradict themselves); ii) an inclusive ideal of *eudaimonia* which integrates *theōria* in the realm of *actio*, an ideal which encompasses both the components of *praxis* and

⁴⁷ For an accurate account of all the references, see Tsouni (2012) 145–146.

⁴⁸ Tsouni (2012) 146.

⁴⁹ Tsouni (2012) 133.

⁵⁰ Arist. *Eth. Nich.* 10.7.

theōria. Both these factors will return: a similar polemical attitude towards the Stoic *telos* will re-appear in one of the most important sources for the doctrine of *homoiōsis theōi*, i.e. the Anonymous Commentary on Plato's *Theaetetus*; as much as such an inclusive ideal will reoccur, albeit not always explicitly, in all the accounts of the *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi*.

Chapter Five

Eudorus of Alexandria: the first appearance of ὁμοίωσις θεῶν as the Platonist ethical ideal

1. *Who? Eudorus, a mysterious figure*¹

As mentioned in the introduction, the very first occurrence of the new Platonist *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi* appears in the Alexandrian philosopher Eudorus (I century B.C.). When dealing with this author, however, some important premises ought to be outlined.

First of all, none of the several works that the tradition has attributed to him have made their way to us.² As one can imagine, this fact has accounted for the tendency in the scholarly tradition to give him credit for a large number of anonymous works of the period in which he presumably operated. Only in the last century, for example, the Pseudopythagorean treatises, the Anonymous Commentary to Plato's *Theaetetus* (which I will tackle later on in this work), the entire second book of Stobaeus' *Anthologium*, and even Plato's *Letters* have been attributed to Eudorus. This proliferation of ascriptions, which Rist has effectively labelled as *paneudorism*,³ can be rooted in the prestige and authority that Eudorus had exercised in his lifetime, an authority that many sources attest to, sometimes even independently of one another. An example of his authority is Arius Didymus' 'consumer advice,' which esteems Eudorus' *Diairesis tou kata philosophian logou* ("Partition of philosophy") as "a book really worth buying".⁴ This is just one example that testifies Eudorus' crucial importance during his time, an importance that has drawn many scholars to attribute to him uncertain treatises belonging to his period. Although he truly must have been the towering figure of his time, scholars have often

¹ For a brief but complete introduction on Eudorus, see Dillon (1977) 114–135.

² All the testimonies that, to different degrees of certainty, can be attributed to him have been collected by Eugenio Mazzarelli in 1985. Mazzarelli (1985) is still the authoritative edition for all Eudorus' fragments and testimonies.

³ Rist (1985), review to Tarrant (1985). See also Bonazzi (2013) for a more recent discussion of *paneudorism*.

⁴ Ar. Did. ap. Stob. *Ecl.* II, 42, 7 ss. Wachs.

failed to provide sufficient philological reasons for some of the many works he had been thought of writing, sometimes basing their attribution on the not very accurate principle: ‘if not him, then who else?’.

The importance of Eudorus, however, as Bonazzi has shown,⁵ should not be questioned, for it can be fully grasped even if we confine our research to the testimonies where Eudorus is explicitly mentioned. As far as chronology is concerned, we can infer with certainty that Eudorus had lived before the geographer Strabo’s death, which sets the *terminus ante quem* before 23 AD. The geographer, in fact, explicitly refers to Eudorus as his contemporary.⁶ Hence, Eudorus was also a contemporary of Arius Didymus, identified by some scholars with the ‘Stoic Arius’ of Augustus’ court, and one of Maecenas’ friends.⁷ Yet, another crucial factor so as to establish Eudorus’ chronology is the total absence of Eudorus’ name in Cicero’s works. In all likelihood, this means that Eudorus’ philosophy came to be widely appreciated only after Cicero’s death, or at least in the very last years of his life.⁸ It would, in fact, be really unlikely that a man like Cicero, known for his intellectual curiosity as well as great interest in philosophy, never even mentioned such a prominent philosophical figure of his time.⁹

In addition to Eudorus’ Alexandrian provenance, about which we are certain, we can also fairly establish his philosophical affiliation. As Bonazzi points out, three of the six authors who refer to him – the already quoted geographer Strabo, the anonymous commentator of Aratus’ *Phainomena* and the Neoplatonist Simplicius¹⁰ – define him as an *Academic*,¹¹ and it would be philologically difficult to demonstrate that so different authors were relying on one another in saying so. Some of the testimonies – and in

⁵ Bonazzi (2013) 160 ff.

⁶ Strab., 17.790. Strabo (64 BC – 23 AD) affirms that Eudorus is his contemporary in 17.15. See also Bonazzi (2013) 161, note 4, for a more detailed chronology on Eudorus.

⁷ This identification has been questioned by Göransson (1995), as we shall see.

⁸ As Dillon points out, Cicero did not have contacts with the last developments of philosophy in Alexandria in the last years of his life (Dillon 1977, 154).

⁹ If we also think that Eudorus was in the closest circle of Antiochus, whom Cicero thought highly of amongst the philosophers he considered, the fact that Cicero would deliberately ignore him in his writings becomes even more suspicious (see Dillon 1977, 154).

¹⁰ Simpl., in *Phys.* 181.7–30.

¹¹ For the meaning of ‘Academic’ here see Bonazzi (2013) 160–164, who argues against the sceptically oriented interpretation of Eudorus, held for instance by Krämer (1971) 89–92, Tarrant (1985) 130–132, and, more recently, by Brochard (2002) 232–3. Not so Dillon (1977) and Donini (1982). If the testimony we are going to analyse is to be attributed to Eudorus, as we will argue, it would be a further proof of the implausibility for Eudorus’ scepticism, which has been already persuasively ruled out by Bonazzi (2013) anyway.

particular Plutarch and Simplicius – clearly outline how Eudorus had played a key role in the rebirth of dogmatic Platonism after the sceptical parenthesis, to the extent that John Dillon identifies Eudorus as the pioneer of the Middle Platonism, the initiator of a new ‘chapter’ in the history of Platonist tradition.¹² In short, according to Dillon, the originality of Eudorus was to have blended in traditional Platonist elements with Pythagorism.¹³ Donini, on the other hand, awards him a different, and, to some extent, minor importance, pointing at Antiochus of Ascalon as the key figure for the return to dogmatism in Platonist tradition.¹⁴ And it had been inferred that Eudorus was Antiochus’ pupil in Alexandria,¹⁵ before Strabo’s passage was brought to the attention, making unlikely that Eudorus could have been a pupil in the Academy before its closure in 86 B.C. Together with this passage, there is also Cicero’s aforementioned silence that attests to the impossibility for Eudorus to be Antiochus’ pupil.¹⁶ Furthermore, as Bonazzi argues, however similar Antiochus and Eudorus might seem (both promoters of a renewed dogmatic version of Platonism), their common interest “relies on different assumptions and leads to different conclusions,” as we shall shortly see.¹⁷

2. *Where? The second book of the Anthologium of Stobaeus, and the question of his sources*

The testimony regarding the study of the ideal of ‘godlikeness’ is one of the fragments that have been traditionally attributed to Eudorus, notwithstanding the lack of sufficient philological reasons for it, as Bonazzi has clarified in an article that deals with the

¹² Dillon (1977) 114, ff.

¹³ Cf. Bonazzi (2011) 161. Dillon specifies that Pythagorism was widespread already, albeit not as much in a philosophical and rational context. Donini synthesizes this idea: “si annuncia dunque in lui (scil. Eudorus) quell’intreccio di motivi platonici e pitagorici che accompagna tutta la storia del platonismo medio” (Donini, 1982, 101).

¹⁴ Donini (1982) 100. Antiochus of Ascalon was born around 130 BC.

¹⁵ Different positions on the topic have been briefly illustrated by Dörrie (1944) 298. See also Dillon (1977) 114 ff.

¹⁶ Cicero was very interested in the developments of the Academy, which makes his silence even more eloquent on this matter. I take these considerations from Bonazzi (2013) 160–161.

¹⁷ Bonazzi (2013) 184.

Anthology of Stobaeus.¹⁸

The second book of Stobaeus' *Anthologium*¹⁹ contains several interesting statements on Hellenistic and Post-Hellenistic Platonism. The main problems concerning this text relate to its structure, on the one hand, and its sources, on the other. In terms of sources, the tradition has always conferred great importance to the historian of philosophy Arius Didymus, who had been identified with the 'Stoic Arius' of Augustus' court, before Göransson persuasively questioned such association.²⁰ However, the main issue concerns Arius' source for his various accounts on Platonism. And here is when Eudorus comes into play. The great importance of Eudorus in the philosophical context of his time has led the vast majority of scholars to find in Eudorus Arius' main source for the reconstruction of Platonist philosophy, and in particular in Eudorus' 'overview' of the principal philosophical doctrines, a work that has been preserved in Stobaeus' *Anthologium*.²¹ After all, we do know that Eudorus lived in Alexandria in the I century B.C, presumably in the same place and at the same time of Arius. This coincidence has brought the majority of scholars to see Eudorus behind Arius' account of Platonist doctrine.²² Thus, the tendency in scholarship was generally to attribute to Eudorus all the testimonies in Stobaeus' *Anthologium* where the name of Plato appeared. More specifically, between the sixties and the eighties of the nineteenth century, Michelangelo Giusta has argued for the dependence of each and every part of the ethical section of Stobaeus' *Anthologium* on Eudorus.²³

According to Hellman's proposed classification, the ethical section of Stobaeus' *Anthologium* is divided in three parts, or *doxographies*.²⁴ The first is the most general in content as it tackles various philosophical problems, whereas the second one is specifically dedicated to Stoicism, while the third to Peripatetic ethics. Giusta's

¹⁸ Bonazzi (2011).

¹⁹ For a thorough study of Stobaeus' *Anthologium*, which undeniably represents one of the most important sources for the knowledge of Early Imperial Platonism, I refer to the volume Reydam-Schils (2011) that collects many contributions and covers the major features of this highly peculiar text.

²⁰ Göransson (1995).

²¹ We know that Arius Didymus spent some time in Alexandria in the I century BC, and for this reason scholars have deduced that Eudorus must be the source for his reconstruction of the Platonist doctrine.

²² Dillon (1977) 122–26, for example, takes it for granted.

²³ Giusta (1986) 97–132. For a more detailed account of the history of the studies on Stobaeus, Arius and Eudorus see Bonazzi (2011) 442–ff.

²⁴ For the division of the three doxographies see Halm (1990) 29–45.

hypothesis is based on the presence of the same subdivision of the ethical discourse in each of the doxographies, which would represent Eudorus' hallmark. Eudorus' division (*diairesis*) consists of an initial threefold subdivision of the ethical discourse in *theoretikon*, *hormetikon* and *praktikon*. Each of these parts is then subdivided in many other sections, which are sometimes difficult to reconstruct. In this picture, the three doxographies, commonly named A, B and C, would all depend upon Eudorus through the mediation of Arius Didymus.²⁵

In 1995 Göransson, and in 2011 Bonazzi have both questioned the dependence of all three doxographies upon Eudorus. In analysing the history of the studies on this text, it first needs to be clarified that the individuation of Eudorus as the source for the second book of the *Anthologium* was premised on the assumption that Arius Didymus had been the main source of Stobaeus. This assumption was in turn grounded on Meineke's and Diels's reconstruction, which, on the basis of a parallel between the doxography C and the fourth book of the *Anthologium*, established Arius Didymus as the source of the doxography C, and, because of alleged similarities amongst the three, of the other two as well.²⁶ In criticizing such reconstruction, Göransson doubted the identification of Arius Didymus with the Stoic Arius of the court of Augustus.²⁷ As Mansfeld and Runia point out,²⁸ however, Göransson's argument fails to completely disregard the economy of Meineke's and Diel's reconstruction, which therefore still stands, albeit more as a hypothesis than as an actual demonstration. What Göransson's criticism has positively brought about, though, is the realisation that the doxography A is in fact very different from the other two both in structure and methodology, a realisation that should perhaps

²⁵ Giusta finds hints on Eudorus' division also in the two handbooks of Platonism we will be dealing with later on in this work, i.e. Alcinous' *Didaskalikos* and Apuleius' *De Platone et eius dogmate*, which apparently do not have anything to do with the doxographies. Göransson (1995) 157–60 has contested Giusta's conclusions on this point: Alcinous and Apuleius are rather to follow a different scheme in their ethical sections; first the goods, then virtues and vices, friendship and love and finally politics. See also Bonazzi (2011) 442, who attributes these convergences to the similarity of the themes, and does not find them sufficient to postulate a dependence of the two later works on Eudorus.

²⁶ Meineke's and Diels' reconstruction was based on the evidence that a section of the doxography C on happiness is also present in the fourth book of Stobaeus' *Anthologium*, where it is introduced by the indication ἐκ τῆς Διδύμου Ἐπιτομῆς. After having identified the source of the doxography C with Arius, they claim that doxographies A and B too depend upon Arius on the basis of an alleged affinity with the doxography C.

²⁷ Göransson (1995), in particular 221–226.

²⁸ Mansfeld-Runia (1997), 242

suggest that the three doxographies might not be all dependent upon the same source.²⁹ The main reason to distrust a communal source amongst the three doxographies is merely the fact that the doxography A presents a structure based on general philosophical problems, whilst the other two deal with single philosophical schools. Scholars have often endeavoured to explain such dissimilarity between doxography A and doxographies B and C, but none of them seem to have proven with certainty that they all draw on the same source.³⁰ If the hypothesis of the common source were to be ruled out, then, there should be no reason to keep on postulating Eudorus behind the Platonist accounts of the doxographies B and C.³¹ His classification of the ethical discourse is not sufficiently visible in these two doxographies so as to establish a dependence upon Eudorus.³²

The piece of testimony we introduced at the beginning of this paragraph belongs to the doxography A, that which deals mainly with Plato, the Academic and Platonist tradition. Along with the names of the masters Plato, Socrates and Pythagoras, Eudorus is one of the two Platonists (or Academics) to be quoted in the doxography (the other one is the Academic Philo of Larissa).³³ In addition to these two, there is also Arius Didymus, whose interest in Platonism is very hard to detect.³⁴ As Mansfeld and Runia argue, in fact, there are many witnesses that attest to Arius Didymus' interest in the Stoics and the Aristotelians, but only one attesting to his interest in Plato.³⁵ Together with the negative judgement that is usually attached to the other Platonist Philo of Larissa in Stobaeus' *Anthologium*,³⁶ this very fact seemingly confers even more importance to Eudorus as the actual reference point of this doxography, as Bonazzi has noticed.³⁷ Bonazzi also adds that Eudorus' way of proceeding resembles the structure 'by problems' (τῶν

²⁹ Göransson (1995) 221–226, Mansfeld–Runia (1997) 242, Bonazzi (2011) 444.

³⁰ For a more complete account of Göransson's view and further developments in scholarship, I refer to Bonazzi (2011) 444–ff.

³¹ This is indeed the conclusion that Bonazzi reaches in Bonazzi (2011) 453–57.

³² Bonazzi (2011) 446.

³³ Bonazzi (2011) 447.

³⁴ One of the arguments of Meineke–Diels' hypothesis is the fact that the Stoic Arius would have been the founder of Imperial Platonism, and Alcinous would have depended upon him (Diels, 1879). This hypothesis has been persuasively confuted by Göransson (1985) 182–226. See also Bonazzi (2011) 447.

³⁵ Mansfeld–Runia (1997) 242.

³⁶ More correctly, Philo is an Academic rather than a Platonist. For the meaning of 'Academic' and 'Platonist' I refer to Glucker (1978) 206–225, Bonazzi (2003) 52–9, and, for Eudorus' case, Bonazzi (2013) 160–164. The main point here is to individuate which figures belonging to Plato's legacy in different ways stand behind the doxography.

³⁷ Bonazzi (2011) 447.

προβλημάτων) of the doxography A.³⁸ Yet, it is unlikely that Eudorus and Philo represent the only two sources for the doxography A.

There is a passage, in fact, which Bonazzi has analysed,³⁹ that occurs halfway through Stobaeus' exposition of Philo's division and that of Eudorus, where Stobaeus intervenes in first person and expresses his desire to consider also "the opinions of the others", (τὰ τῶν ἄλλων) and more specifically "of those who excelled in this field" (τῶν περὶ ταῦτα διενεγκάντων)⁴⁰ [or, according to another possible translation, "of those who diverged on this topics"].⁴¹ This τὰ τῶν ἄλλων indicates rather unequivocally that Stobaeus took into account other sources in addition to Philo and Eudorus.⁴²

The text represents the first occurrence of the ὁμοίωσις θεῶ formula as the Platonist *telos*; here, however, there is no mention of Eudorus, and therefore, we cannot be certain of his paternity. In this case, the only way to propose an attribution is by means of a comparative analysis between our text and the other testimonies containing Eudorus' name. As we shall demonstrate, there are quite a few hints that suggest a dependence of this fragment upon Eudorus.

Assuming Eudorus' paternity for this fragment, it is surprising to notice a radical change in the formulation of the *telos* even from Anthiocus, the other traditional protagonist of the 'turn to dogmatism'. As a matter of fact, in Anthiocus' works the *telos* was formulated with the traditional Stoic 'motto' of "living in accordance to a human nature which is in all of his part perfect and not lacking in anything". Here, the emphasis is on the mere human nature, which has to be brought to perfection to fulfil the *telos*. The establishment of Plato's *formula* ὁμοίωσις θεῶ as the human *telos* therefore represents an element of absolute originality in Eudorus, also suggesting a remarkable divergence from

³⁸ *Ibidem*. We read an explicit statement about this structure at page 45,8 (τῶν προβλημάτων). At page 42, 7–10 we are told that Eudorus' διαίρεσις was structured προβληματικῶς. Another possible similarity between Eudorus and doxography A has been suggested once again by Mansfeld–Runia (1997) 302, which stems from the comparison with Aratus of Achilles' commentary. From this comparison, it is plausible to infer that also Eudorus used to quote the works of the authors he mentioned. See also Bonazzi (2011) 448.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ Stob. *Anth.* 41,26–42,6.

⁴¹ The translation is by Moraux and Long.

⁴² There are further difficulties that point to the direction of a multiplicity of sources, or at least of the impossibility to settle the question with certainty. It is not necessary to go through all of them here, and for a thorough study on this issue, I refer once again to Bonazzi (2011) 449–453, and the relative bibliography.

the *Pseudopythagorika*, as we shall see in the next chapter.⁴³

This new *telos*, which would mark a significant change in the way to perceive the divine, was destined to enjoy a widespread appreciation in the history of Platonism, becoming a proper and distinctive Platonist doctrine embraced by every Platonist philosopher from that moment onwards.

3. *The text and the attribution to Eudorus*

The text that represents the first testimony of the new Platonist *telos* is preserved in the second book of Stobaeus' *Anthologium*. Given the extreme importance of this text for us, I am quoting it in its entirety and proposing a translation. I am also including the references that Eudorus makes to Plato's dialogues in the *apparatus*. The text is extracted from Mazzarelli's edition of the testimonies about Eudorus.⁴⁴

Σωκράτης, Πλάτων ταῦτα τῷ Πυθαγόρᾳ, τέλος ὁμοίωσιν θεῶ. Σαφέστερον δ' αὐτὸ διήρθρωσε Πλάτων προσθεὶς τὸ 'κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν',⁴⁵ φρονήσει δ' ἐστὶ μόνως δυνατόν, τοῦτο δ' ἦν τὸ κατ'ἀρετὴν <ζῆν>. Ἐν μὲν γὰρ θεῶ τὸ κοσμοποιὸν καὶ κοσμοδιοικητικόν· ἐν δὲ τῷ σοφῷ βίου κατάστασις καὶ ζωῆς διαγωγή· ὅπερ αἰνίξασθαι μὲν Ὅμηρον εἰπόντα κατ' ἴχνια βαίνει θεοῖο· Πυθαγόραν δὲ παρ' αὐτὸν εἰπεῖν· Ἔπου θεῶ δῆλον ὡς οὐχ ὄρατῶ καὶ προηγουμένῳ, νοητῶ δὲ καὶ τῆς κοσμικῆς εὐταξίας ἀρμονικῶ. Εἴρηται δὲ παρὰ Πλάτωνι κατὰ τὸ τῆς φιλοσοφίας τριμερές, ἐν Τιμαίῳ⁴⁶ μὲν φυσικῶς (προσθήσω δὲ καὶ Πυθαγορικῶς), σημαίνοντος ἀφθόνως τὴν ἐκείνου προεπίνοιαν· ἐν δὲ τῇ Πολιτείᾳ⁴⁷ ἠθικῶς· ἐν δὲ τῷ Θεαιτήτῳ⁴⁸ λογικῶς· περιπέφρασται δὲ κἀν τῷ τετάρτῳ περὶ Νόμων⁴⁹ ἐπὶ τῆς ἀκολουθίας τοῦ θεοῦ σαφῶς ἅμα καὶ πλουσίως. Τὸ δὲ γε πολύφωνον τοῦ Πλάτωνος.⁵⁰ Εἴρηται δὲ καὶ τὰ περὶ τοῦ τέλους αὐτῶ πολλαχῶς. Καὶ τὴν μὲν ποικιλίαν τῆς φράσεως ἔχει διὰ τὸ λόγιον καὶ μεγαλήγορον, εἰς δὲ ταῦτὸ καὶ σύμφωνον τοῦ δόγματος συντελεῖ. Τοῦτο δ'

⁴³ See *infra*, pp. 104–111.

⁴⁴ The testimony is number 25 in Mazzarelli (1985) 537.

⁴⁵ Plato, *Th.* 176 b.

⁴⁶ Plato, *Tm.* 90 a-d.

⁴⁷ Plato, *Rsp.* 585 b ss; 608 c ss.

⁴⁸ Plato, *Th.* 176 d-e.

⁴⁹ Plato, *Lg.* 716 a ss.

⁵⁰ Some editors add here <οὐ πολύδοξον>. I do not think this is necessary, for the denial of an alleged πολυδοξία is already implicit in Plato's πολυφωνία.

ἔστι τὸ κατ' ἀρετὴν ζῆν. Τοῦτο δ' αὖ κτῆσις ἅμα καὶ χρῆσις τῆς τελείας ἀρετῆς. Ὅτι δὲ τέλος αὐτὴν ἡγεῖται, τέταχεν ἐν Τιμαίῳ <εἰπὼν> καὶ τοῦνομα· φράσω δὲ καὶ τὰ κροτελεύτιον τῆς περιοχῆς· ἔχει δ' οὕτως· ὁμοιώσαντα δὲ τέλος ἔχειν τοῦ προτεθέντος ἀνθρώποις ὑπὸ θεῶν ἀρίστου βίου πρὸς τε τὸν παρόντα καὶ τὸν μέλλοντα.⁵¹

Socrates and Plato agree with Pythagoras that the human goal is assimilation to God. Plato articulated it more clearly by adding “as far as it is possible”, and it is only possible by wisdom (*phronesis*), that is to say, by living in accordance with virtue. In God resides the capacity to create the *kosmos* and to administer it; in the wise person, the establishment of a way of life and the regulation of the existence are present.⁵² Homer hints at this when he says: “proceed in the footsteps of God” [*Odyssey* 5.193], while Pythagoras after him says: “follow God”. Clearly by God he means not a visible God who actually guides,⁵³ but the intelligible God who is the harmoniser of the good cosmic order. Plato states it according to the three parts of philosophy: physically (and in the Pythagorean manner I will add) in the *Timaeus*, pointing out without envy the previous observation of Pythagoras; ethically in the *Republic*, and logically in the *Theaetetus*. In the fourth book of the *Laws* he speaks clearly and at the same time

⁵¹ Plato, *Tm.* 90.

⁵² My attempt here has been to render a distinction that is very often neglected by translators, namely the difference between the Greek terms βίος and ζωή. They both can be translated with ‘life’, and therefore many translators report it just once, relating it to both the terms κατάστασις and διαγωγή, whereas the original Greek has them referred to βίος and ζωή, respectively. There is, in fact, an almost untranslatable difference between the two Greek terms that, however, is important to retain in the English translation. As mentioned at the very beginning of the *lemma* in the LSJ, the term βίος does not refer to animal life (cf. LSJ, 316: ‘βίος[ι], ὁ, life, i. e. not animal life (ζωή)), which is conversely expressed by ζωή. βίος is the *mode of life*, the *manner of living*, and as such is referred to the human beings’ *rational* life. One may think of the way in which the term is used in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, where notoriously the βίοι are indeed the ‘genres of life’. On the other hand, ζωή denotes the mere animal and biological existence. The text then states that the sage is linked with the κατάστασις (“rational establishment”) of the *way of live* and the διαγωγή (“regulation, management”) of his biological existence. I see here a possible allusion to the dualism between a rational part of the soul, which would concern the βίου κατάστασις, the establishment of a way of life, and the irrational part of it, which would regard the biological existence whose appetites need to be regulated (ζωῆς διαγωγή). Furthermore, these two elements, which are presented as some sort of intrinsic capacities of the *sophos*, are presented in parallel with the two capacities of God: the κοσμοποιὸν (the capacity to create the *kosmos*) and the κοσμοδιοικητικόν (the capacity to administer it). This mirrored parallel suggests that the βίου κατάστασις is in some way equalled to the creation of *kosmos*, i.e. of order, whereas the ζωῆς διαγωγή is referred to the action of maintaining the order. In other words, the choice of the ‘way of life’ represents the creation of order in one’s soul, while the ‘regulation’ of the biological existence a way to administer the created order. It would be interesting to investigate further this diptych as well as this parallel, which, to my knowledge, have not attracted much attention so far amongst scholars. I thank Jan Opsomer for having suggested me to think through such a terminological distinction.

⁵³ The προηγουμένῳ can be puzzling with reference to God, but the explanation is very simple. Since the Homeric line introduces the metaphor of the “hints of God” (ἵχνια θεοῦ), the author feels the need to clarify that this does not have to be taken literally. God is not visible and does not literally ‘guide’ or ‘go before’ us.

richly on the subject of following God too. There you see that Plato has many voices. The things about the ends too are said by him in many ways. And since he is learned and magniloquent, his style is varied, but this variety contributes to the same meaning, which is consonant with the doctrine.⁵⁴ This consists in living in accordance with virtue, that in turn means both the *acquiring* and *the exercising* of perfect virtue. That Plato considers the perfect virtue the goal is stated in the *Timaeus* as well, where he indicates also the name; I will quote the end of the passage, which runs: “by assimilating bring to its goal (*telos*) the best of life offered by the gods to mankind for present and future time”.

Notwithstanding the difficulties in establishing an attribution with absolute certainty, I believe there are at least three elements in the text that make the attribution to Eudorus very plausible.⁵⁵

i) *In primis*, the twice-mentioned reference to Pythagoras as the source of the doctrine deserves some attention. We know from the testimonies that can be attributed to Eudorus with absolute certainty, because of the appearance of his name, that “Eudorus’ greatest innovation is the introduction of Pythagoreanism as an essential part of the Platonist tradition”.⁵⁶ And this is exactly what happens at the outset of the text. The author attributes the doctrine to the three convergent authorities of Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato as if Socratic and Platonist tradition derived from Pythagoras’ school. Furthermore, it is said of Plato that “he explained without envy the previous observation of Pythagoras”. As Bonazzi remarks, none of the genealogies of the Hellenistic Academy list Pythagoras as an ancestor of Plato.⁵⁷ Among the few things about Eudorus we can be sure of, there is undoubtedly his goal “to support a doctrinal Platonism by linking it to a supposedly ancient Pythagoreanism”.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ One more reason to omit the insertion <οὐ πολὺδοξόν>.

⁵⁵ I do not believe it is necessary to restore Arius Didymus as the source of the doxography A. Eudorus is in some way related to this doxography even without holding that Arius Didymus was the main source for the whole second book of Stobaeus’ *Anthologium*.

⁵⁶ Bonazzi (2013) 184. The interest for the figure of Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism is one of the main traits of Eudorus’ way of philosophizing.

⁵⁷ Bonazzi (2013) 185 also quotes a letter that was attributed to Xenophon (but is from the I century BC according to its editor Herg), which “complains of some people who betrayed the teaching of Socrates because they were enchanted by Pythagoras’ miraculous wisdom”.

⁵⁸ Bonazzi (2013) 169. Even though “Eudorus claims as the original Pythagoreanism a doctrine which is deeply indebted to the early Academy” – Bonazzi (2013) 172, who shows the enormous differences between ancient Pythagorean doctrine of principles and Eudorus’ alleged genuine account of it. Moreover,

It is indeed true that Eudorus was not the only one to draw this link in his time,⁵⁹ and we always need to beware of the fact that we know the names of only those who survived the ‘shipwreck’ of the tradition.⁶⁰ Yet, if we combine this reference to Pythagoras with the very fact that Eudorus is the only name – apart from Philo of Larissa, who obviously cannot be the source of this testimony⁶¹ – that appears in this doxography, his presence behind this account becomes at least very likely.

ii) Secondly, we have a clear reference to the “threefold division” of philosophy, another hallmark of Eudorus’ way of operating, taken from Stoicism.

iii) Finally, the methodology that has been applied in the passage perfectly fits in with Eudorus’ way of doing philosophy. As Bonazzi has pointed out, a new way of doing philosophy makes its debut in the history of western thought with Eudorus, namely the practice of doing philosophy by means of doing a history of philosophy, i.e. through the exegesis of the doctrine of those ancient authors considered authoritative for some reasons.⁶² The doctrines of the ‘ancients’ (the Old Academy and Aristotle, but also the Stoics) represented the core of Antiochus’ philosophy too, but – as far as we know – he was not interested in detailed analyses of Plato’s text, which instead is at the heart of Eudorus’ interests.⁶³ One of our main sources for Eudorus is in fact a passage from Plutarch’s *On the generation of the Soul in the Timaeus*.⁶⁴ From this passage Eudorus unmistakably emerges as a reader and interpreter of Plato’s *Timaeus*.⁶⁵ If we go back to our passage, then, the exposition of the doctrine of the *telos* is presented as a comment to an authoritative doctrine of the past, deriving from Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato. Moreover, this method of doing philosophy is attributed to Plato too: Plato himself is said

Eudorus presents elements of absolute originality, especially his monism, as opposed to the traditional Pythagorean dualism of principles. On this point see also Centrone (1996) 159–163, who, through the analysis of the doctrine of the principles, comes to the conclusion that Eudorus was deeply interested in Pythagoreanism and in its reconciliation with Platonism.

⁵⁹ The Pseudopythagorean treatises share this same view of a Pythagorean Plato, or better, seem to be promoting the view that Plato was actually following the Pythagoras’ teaching.

⁶⁰ Bonazzi (2011) 453.

⁶¹ Philo of Larissa still belongs to the sceptic Academy.

⁶² Bonazzi (2013) 184 ff.

⁶³ Bonazzi (2013) 164.

⁶⁴ Plut. *de An. Procr.* 1012d–1013b, 1019e–f, 120c.

⁶⁵ Indeed, Antiochus read and knew the *Timaeus*, but we do not have any evidence for an exegetical practice on any of Plato’s dialogues. See Bonazzi (2013) 165 and Chiaradonna (2013) 30–33. On the other hand, it is true that this passage by Plutarch does not seem enough to prove that Eudorus commented the whole *Timaeus*. See Ferrari (2002) 14–15.

to “point out without envy the previous observation of Pythagoras”. And finally, the passage is full of literal quotations to Plato’s dialogues, and a particular emphasis is given to the *Timaeus* in particular, a dialogue that, as far as we can see from the testimonies, had been carefully read by Eudorus.⁶⁶

Although these three elements do not fully enable us to prove an actual dependence of the testimony on Eudorus, they certainly make it more likely. It is very plausible that the influence of Eudorus, with his keen interest in Pythagoreanism and in metaphysics and theology as a consequence, must have been in some way operating in the introduction of the divine in the formulation of the *telos*. Moreover, the fortune this formula will have later on in Platonism makes me postulate the presence of a very authoritative personality behind it, and Eudorus is one of the most relevant figure (if not the only one)⁶⁷ we know about who belonged to this not very productive age of philosophy. In the absence of an absolute certain proof of this, however, it will be enough to notice that every hint points to Eudorus of Alexandria, or at least, to someone very close to his way of doing philosophy.

3.1 Eudorus’ interpretation of *κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν*

As already noticed, the opening of the testimony is peremptory in making the whole doctrine of *homoiōsis theōi* derived from Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato. More specifically, according to this reconstruction, Pythagoras would be the inventor of the doctrine; Socrates would only agree with it, whilst Plato “articulates it more clearly” (*σαφέστερον δ’ αὐτὸ διήρθρωσε*). Based on the unquestioned assumption that Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato are, in effect, authorities, and that they belong to the same tradition, this exegetical method will consistently become *the* method within the new doctrinal Platonism, from now onwards.

As remarked, Plato is indicated as the one who articulated the Pythagorean doctrine more specifically. His contribution would be that of having added the

⁶⁶ Plut. *de An. Procr.* 1012d–1013b, 1019e–f, 120c.

⁶⁷ He would be the only one if Antiochus, whose profile does not fit in with the reference to Pythagoras, were to be ruled out of the picture. See Sedley (2012), Bonazzi (2013), Chiaradonna (2013).

specification “as far as it is possible” (κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν), a phrase that is indeed present in Plato’s dialogue alongside the ὁμοίωσις θεῶ formula, almost without exceptions. The interpretation that Eudorus offers of the Platonic κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν is the first element of originality, as Dillon has noticed.⁶⁸ In Plato, it is likely that the κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν means “as far as it is possible”, with an implicit reference to the *limits* of human capability.⁶⁹ Human beings have to aspire to become like God, but this assimilation can never be fully accomplished, and works as an *ideal*, never fully attained, but to which men always ought to tend. Conversely, Eudorus’ exegesis seems to imply something different. His immediate specification after the κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν – “and it is only possible by wisdom” (φρονήσει) – links the κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν to the φρονήσει of the *Theaetetus* passage in a very peculiar and perhaps original way. As we have seen in the first chapter, in Plato’s *Theaetetus* Socrates first declares the necessity of a *flight* from the world’s mixture of goods and evils, and after identifies this flight with the “assimilation to God κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν”. He then further identifies the “assimilation to God κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν” with “being just and pious together with (or through) *phronesis*” (μετὰ φρονήσει). Eudorus in the passage seems to be interpreting μετὰ φρονήσει as the elicitation of the κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν. In this picture, the latter would no longer represent the recognition of human limits, rather a specification aimed at displaying of how the assimilation is actually possible, with no damping. In other words, the κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν would here signify “in accordance with that part or faculty of us that is (fully) capable of such an assimilation, namely φρόνησις”. Therefore, in Eudorus’ version the role of φρόνησις is enhanced. What was a ‘modest’ acknowledgement of human limits in Eudorus’ “dogmatic mind”⁷⁰ becomes an indication towards the human faculty that allows the assimilation to the divine, this time with no damping. Assimilation to God would then no longer be impossible, but fully possible, only through the right faculty. Interestingly enough, where Plato appears to be cautious in the use of the *formula*, Eudorus is bolder. But what is φρόνησις?

⁶⁸ Dillon (1977) 161.

⁶⁹ On this exegesis in Plato, see our first chapter (*supra*, pp.9 – 31) and Van Riel (2013), 23–24 in particular.

⁷⁰ I borrow this effective expression from Dillon (1977) 161.

Usually, in Plato’s vocabulary φρόνησις can be used both to indicate the faculty of intelligence and thought, and its most specific virtue, namely wisdom. Things become even more complicated if we consider that the term has been used with two distinct meanings in Plato and Aristotle (the two philosophers whom, as far as we can see from the evidence, Eudorus mainly deals with).⁷¹ While on the one hand Plato more commonly employs it to mean the theoretical intelligence, Aristotle, on the other hand, makes use of this term to designate the practical wisdom, in opposition with σοφία, which instead is used to indicate the theoretical knowledge (sometimes – and effectively – translated with “understanding”).⁷² This Aristotelian’s twofold organization of the ethical vocabulary asserts itself and, even within Stoicism, φρόνησις continues to indicate a practical virtue more than just a theoretical faculty. In Eudorus’ exposition, the following sentence steers us in the direction of virtue. In the next statement, in fact, Eudorus identifies φρόνησις with “living in accordance with virtue” (τὸ κατ’ἀρετὴν ζῆν). This identification seems surprising: it resumes the Stoic formulation of the *telos* (adopted also by Antiochus)⁷³ as “living in accordance with perfect nature”. After all, ἀρετὴ in Greek means ‘excellence’ in a field,⁷⁴ and in this context, it cannot mean anything but the most perfect human excellence (since it has to correspond to the fulfilment of the human being). What is, then, the meaning of this change of wording?

3.2 *The powers of God*

In addition to representing a radical substantial shift for the new *telos*, at least as it is presented here, the novelty of the formulation also lies in the fact that it resembles that of the Stoics: to fully comprehend the difference, focus needs to be given to the centre of this new formulation. If in the Stoics’ and Antiochus’ *telos* the emphasis was all on *human* nature, in our text the entrance of God is presented as an ethical paradigm.

⁷¹ See Bonazzi (2013).

⁷² Like in Hughes (2013).

⁷³ See the previous chapter and Dillon (1977) 70–ff.

⁷⁴ On this, see, amongst others, Hughes (2013) 21.

Interestingly enough, focusing on the divine paradigm is exactly what Eudorus does here after having established the new formula for the *telos*.

Eudorus embarks in an interesting parallel between the God and the wise person. Two terms that Eudorus employs to designate God's powers are of particular interest. In God – Eudorus states – resides the *κοσμοποιόν*, namely “the power to create the *cosmos*” and the *κοσμοδιοικητικόν*, literally “the power to administrate the *cosmos*”. Indeed, Eudorus here refers to the Demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus*. Among the different ideas of the divine that can be found in Plato's dialogues, in fact, the one of the Demiurge is the most prominent in the Middle Platonists' account of the doctrine. The demiurgic God is first and foremost the creator of order in the world, the administrator of the universe.⁷⁵ This idea of the divine is much less theoretical than that of Aristotle –where God was completely self-absorbed –, and needs to be interpreted in the same way as the doctrine of the new *telos*. Here, God is described as “the intelligible cause of the good cosmic order” (νοητῶ δὲ καὶ τῆς κοσμικῆς εὐταξίας ἀρμονικῶ). This idea of the divine evidently stems from the *Timaeus*. However, the term *ἀρμονικός* – that I translated with “harmoniser”, albeit its principal meaning is ‘musician’ or ‘skilled in music’ – is at all absent in the *Timaeus* as well as in any other Platonic dialogue with reference to God.⁷⁶ Conversley, Aristotle employs it many times, although not in the reference to God either.⁷⁷ Interestingly, the term begins to be used so as to describe God from this testimony, soon followed by Philo of Alexandria and Plutarch.⁷⁸ Most importantly, however, as it is related to the musical sphere, this term represents a clear Pythagorean element. The metaphor of harmony is rather common in Pythagorean literature to

⁷⁵ As we shall see, in Early Imperial Platonism the Demiurge does not always represent the supreme God, or at least it is not always clear. It does not seem to be the case for Alcinous, but the issue is debated, as we shall see in chapter 8 (*infra*, pp.129–163). For Apuleius, it is conversely quite plain that the *summus deorum* is the Demiurge, like in this testimony (see *infra*, pp. 164–175). On the Demiurge in early Imperial Platonism, I refer to Opsomer (2005).

⁷⁶ It appears always in musical contexts in the *Phaedrus* (*Phdr.* 268d7, 268e4 and 268e6) and in the *Charmides* (*Charm* 170c2).

⁷⁷ In the *Analytics*, in the *Metaphysics*, in the *Physics*, in the *De anima*. Since they are not relevant passages for the sake of our purpose, we avoid to report the references.

⁷⁸ In the *Pseudopythagorica* as well as in Philo the image of harmony appears very often. See Plut. *De prim. frig.* 945f3, where God is called *ἀρμονικός*: καὶ ὅσα διακοσμῶν καὶ βραβεύων ὁ θεὸς ἀρμονικός καλεῖται καὶ μουσικός.

describe the *cosmos* set in order by God, and to describe virtue, which is indeed described as harmony *among* the parts of the souls, or even harmony *of* the passions in the soul.⁷⁹

On the other hand, the terminology draws also on Stoic concepts (especially the two powers, κοσμοποιὸν and κοσμοδιοικητικόν). Although in Stoicism the divine is always linked with the creation and the maintenance of order in the *cosmos*, as it is here, the parallel with Stoic terminology shall not be over interpreted. As Dillon notices, the terminology employed by Eudorus is fully Stoic, as much as that of Antiochus.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, while to our modern eye the usage of such terminology would strongly suggest that they derive it from Stoicism, it certainly did not to them. For this reason, Dillon argues that scholars usually attach too much importance to the research for Stoic terms in Platonist authors, as if the results of this search were proof for a Stoic influence, if not a proper dependence. At Eudorus' time, however, the technical language of philosophy was largely common. Thus, what is actually important is the meaning that a particular school confers to a term that is shared with the other schools. However trivial it might sound, for this period of the history of philosophy it is essential that every usage of a philosophical term be taken into account, for very often a different usage of the shared terminology corresponds to a different school. Moraux has drawn similar conclusions in his monumental work on imperial Aristotelism: the adoption of Stoic terms and conceptual categories does not necessarily imply an actual dependence upon Stoicism.⁸¹ Bonazzi is of the same opinion when, speaking about Philo, declares that:

... se di lui [*scil.* Philo] possedessimo soltanto la testimonianza di Stobeo, la presenza di numerosi termini del vocabolario tecnico stoico [as, in our case, for Eudorus, we can think for instance of κοσμοδιοικητικόν], potrebbe indurre alla legittima ipotesi di una dipendenza dallo stoicismo; ma siccome sappiamo che Filone polemizzò in modo veemente con gli stoici, è logico concludere che l'uso dei termini stoici dipendeva evidentemente o dal fatto che essi ormai circolavano come termini di impiego comune, o da un'intenzione manifestamente polemica (e tipica di tutte le polemiche

⁷⁹ See the chapter on the *Pseudopythagorica*, *infra* pp. 104–115, Centrone (1990) and Centrone (1996).

⁸⁰ Dillon (1977) 161.

⁸¹ Moraux (1973) 364–65, 22–43.

anti-soiche degli accademici, che partivano sempre dalle posizioni stoiche).⁸² (Bonazzi, 2013, 455.)

At any rate, the most striking element of our text is undoubtedly the parallel between the God and the sage. The main task of the sage would be to follow the path of this divinity, creator and keeper of the order of the world, and therefore to lead a life rationally regulated.

3.3 The two aspects of the Platonist God. Stoic, Pythagorean and Aristotelian influences?

The text continues with Eudorus quoting Homer, treated as a sort of precursor of the Pythagorean dictum Ἐπου θεῶ, which, in its turn, is the antecedent and equivalent of the Socratic and Platonic formula of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ.⁸³ The new *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi*, then, is not presented as a novelty at all; on the contrary, it derives from the most genuine Greek tradition, namely Homer, the very origin of Greek culture.⁸⁴ As already said, the reference to Pythagoras is one of the elements that most suggest Eudorus behind this testimony. In Eudorus' philosophical reflection, in fact, the mix of Platonist and Pythagorean features will soon become a common practice as well as a common heritage that will contribute to constituting that philosophical synthesis that has been labelled 'Middle Platonism'.⁸⁵

⁸² Bonazzi's study shows how the situation in Eudorus' case (in the doxography A) can be considered similar to that of Philo. For instance, the case of Eudorus' use of the Stoic term *hormé* is very interesting. Eudorus employs the term with a meaning that is not at all compatible with the Stoic doctrine. As a matter of fact, in Eudorus, *hormé* is used in the context of a dualistic psychology. For more details, I refer to Bonazzi (2013), 455 ff.

⁸³ See the chapter on the *Pseudopythagorean* ethical treatises (*infra* pp. 104–115) and Hippod. *De felic.* 95, 21-2 and Tim. *De univ. nat.* 224, 8-12. See also Centrone (1990) 23 and Centrone (1996) 159–63.

⁸⁴ It is a sort of literary *topos* for the Greeks to retrace the origin of everything to Homer. Moreover, if there is period *par excellence* in the history of ancient philosophy wherein original doctrines are presented as indebted to the past, this is certainly it. The more a doctrine was traced back to its 'ancient' source, the better in terms of appreciation and validation amongst scholars.

⁸⁵ Cf. Dillon (1977) 156 – 157 and Donini (1982) 100 – 101, Centrone (1990) 25 – 30, Chiaradonna (2013); Bonazzi (2013) 184 – 186 shows how the entrance of Pythagoreanism into Platonism, that has one of its expressions in the new formulation of the *telos*, represents a turning point in Middle Platonism, by means of differentiating itself from the Hellenistic Platonism. This is so because a Pythagorean approach opened problems that Plato had not faced, at least explicitly, in his *corpus* of dialogues.

The terms that the God is described with are also of special interest. As Eudorus puts it, he is not a visible god, but an intelligible, noetic one (νοητῶ). The last adjective in particular might point towards the Aristotelian Intellect of *Metaphysics* Λ, which is νόησις νοήσεως, a “self-contemplative thought”. God is also the τῆς κοσμικῆς εὐταξίας ἁρμονικός, the “harmonic cause of the good cosmic order”, and the reference to the musical image of harmony is a Pythagorean *topos*.⁸⁶ Even if they are compatible with the Aristotelian intellect, these other terms recall the Demiurge of Plato’s *Timaeus*, the Pythagorean God as well as the Stoic divinity. In this fragment, the two main traits of the Platonist divinity both make their meaningful appearance, namely the *noetic* aspect (God is an intellect) and the *relational* aspect (God is the good keeper of the cosmic order).

We know that one of the novelties that arises in Platonism with Eudorus is the renewal of interest in a transcendent God and, more in general, in metaphysics. We also know that the divine is somehow present in Plato, and – in a sense – pervasively.⁸⁷ The references to God or the gods or the daemons are multiple in Plato’s *corpus*. Nonetheless, the task of defining a coherent image of Plato’s divinity is not at all an easy one. A systematic description of how God looks like according to Plato or Socrates is absent altogether. We could indeed summon all the passages in which Plato speaks about God (something that has been done in chapter one, albeit partially);⁸⁸ yet, the image that would come out from all these passages would not be fully consistent. In the context of the systematizing efforts by Late and especially Middle Platonists, however, the interest in a systematic account of theology becomes indeed crucial. In the handbooks of Platonism written in this very period, for example, namely the *Didaskalikos* by Alcinous and the *De Platone et eius dogmate* by Apuleius, a large space is reserved only to theology. Thus, it is inevitable that the theological models that were at their disposal at the time have influenced the authors that meant to provide a coherent and systematic notion of the divine, which they would gather from Plato’s references to it. These were,

⁸⁶ I refer again to the chapter on the *Pseudopythagorean* (*infra* pp. 104–115) and to Centrone (1990) 18 – 41.

⁸⁷ On the concept of the divine in Plato see in particular Pradeau (2003), Lavecchia (2006), Van Riel (2013).

⁸⁸ On this, see the volumes Pradeau (2003) and Van Riel (2013), two systematic reconstructions of the Platonic God (or gods).

of course, the Aristotelian system and the Stoic one.⁸⁹ In addition to these, we also need to take into account the Pythagorean element when dealing with Eudorus, albeit his and his contemporaries' conception of Pythagoreanism is unclear.⁹⁰ In the passage quoted, we can see the *noetic* aspect of God as deriving from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and his function of imposing order and harmony as at least influenced by the Stoic and Pythagorean notion of the divine. I am not denying, however, that both these aspects were, to some extent, present in Plato's dialogues too. In many passages Plato identifies the νοῦς (intellect, or intelligence, or – as recently argued – mind) with the most divine part of us, and, in so saying, he suggests that the divine is itself something like an intellect. In the *Timaeus*, the description of the Demiurge and the minor gods hints at the idea of a providential divinity that imposes and maintains order in the universe with paternal love for the world and human beings.

For all these reasons, some scholars have looked for Stoic and Aristotelian sways in Platonism, whilst others discard the elements we just talked about as proves of such influence, arguing that they were already present in Plato. I think that such views are, in a sense, right and not completely incompatible, but there is a third way that takes into account both these stances, which I will adopt. In other words, if we look at the history of ideas as a common tradition, Aristotle's idea of God does stem and develop Plato's conception of God as a νοῦς;⁹¹ likewise, the Stoic providential divinity *is* indeed inspired by Plato's Demiurge of the *Timaeus*. Pythagoreanism is likely to have influenced Plato

⁸⁹ I exclude the Epicureans that were not at all considered, especially in theology. The main feature of the Epicurean gods is, in fact, their carelessness for human affairs, a concept that is indeed firmly rejected and criticized by the Stoics (and therefore by the Platonists), who firmly believed in divine providence. As an example, I quote Plutarch's dialogue *De sera numinis vindicta*, that we will analyze later. Here, the polemic is directed against the denial of God's providence performed by an anonymous Epicurean.

⁹⁰ On this, see Centrone (1990) 10–41. The very existence of the *Pseudopythagorean* treatises, a forgery attributed to some ancient Pythagorean philosophers, suggests the idea that in the Early Empire there was not a common and clear system of Pythagorean philosophy. In such a context, the creation of forgeries such as the *Pseudopythagorean* treatises could have found fertile ground. It is worth noting that the doctrine explained in the treatises is not based on the *akousmata* of Pythagoras but rather on the account of Pythagoreanism made by the Old Academy, which were aimed at collocating Pythagoreanism within the Platonic tradition. Thus, in all likelihood, Pythagoreanism was not perceived as an external system. See the chapter on the *Pseudopythagorica*, *infra* pp. 104–115.

⁹¹ We do not have to forget, alongside Gerson (2003), that Aristotle is, after all, a Platonist, i.e. Plato's disciple. He began doing philosophy in Plato's Academy and, even if he developed doctrines that are sometimes very incompatible with those of Plato, we cannot fail to notice that Plato always represented the starting point in his philosophy, as it is usually the case when we deal with the great disciples of great masters.

when developing his ‘theology’, but when, in the Early Empire, some philosophers re-proposed ancient Pythagoreanism, they massively referred back to Plato’s dialogues. Easy to imagine, the reason is because Plato represented a starting point, a touchstone for every new philosophical system. At the same time, however, one cannot fail to realize that dogmatic Platonism rose four centuries after the master’s death, and those four centuries had befriended many different interpretations and readings of Plato’s philosophy, even opposite to each other. In rethinking a Platonist system, Platonists acted when Aristotelian and Stoic philosophies had become, in turn, touchstones for all aspiring philosophers, even for those, like the Platonists, who wanted to be the orthodox readers of Plato’s philosophy. This is why the influence *is* present, but it chronologically spans from the most authoritative and prestigious authors or systems of the past to present ones, and so on and so forth; from Plato to Aristotle and Stoicism, and then from Aristotelians and Stoics again to Platonists. Therefore, a third way to look at the history of philosophy does recognize original Platonic elements in our authors, but does not overlook the fact that these original elements might as well come through other traditions, nurtured and developed by different and authoritative philosophical schools.

Moreover, it would indeed be naïve to think that all references that can be traced directly back to Plato have not been mediated through the different readings that these references underwent throughout the centuries. In other words, after the rising of Stoicism and Stoic readings of Plato’s dialogues, one could not read those dialogues independently of those readings anymore, in the same way as we cannot read or write about Oedipus without thinking of Freud.⁹² Especially in the case of authors such those we are dealing with, then, influences from different schools can be absorbed even unconsciously, which would also explain some inconsistencies, as in the already mentioned case of Plutarch, where an open polemical attitude towards the Stoics goes along with some positive usages of Stoic doctrines. The issue is even more complex with regards to Aristotelianism and Pythagoreanism, which, in the case of Eudorus in particular, are not perceived as different schools but as testimonies belonging to the same genuine tradition of a Pythagoreanised Platonism.

⁹² This hermeneutic reflection has been inspired by the work of Reydamas–Schils (1999) on ancient readings of Plato’s *Timaeus*.

In the light of what we have said, when I talk about Pythagorean, Stoic and Aristotelian influences, I do not necessarily mean that a certain element was not present in Plato. There are some cases of genuine novelties introduced by Aristotle and the Stoics, but most of the times they can be thought as a development of something already present in the previous tradition. This is one of the ways in which philosophy has proceeded throughout the centuries.

Going back to the Platonist God, his sort of ‘duplicity’ furnishes the very basis for a tension (already present in Plato’s dialogue) between the two ideals of life (which come from Aristotle): *theōria* and *praxis*. If, on the one hand, the noetic aspect of God sets the standard for human ideal of *theōria*, the providential one makes him a paradigm for *praxis*, namely an *action* directed towards the creation and the maintenance of the order in the world.⁹³

3.4 Plato ‘Hellenistic philosopher’: threefold application of the formula and the technical use of the word *τέλος*

If we turn back to the text, we find another interesting statement. As Eudorus claims, Plato discarded the doctrine of the *telos* in accordance with three different perspectives, which correspond to the three sections of the traditional threefold division of philosophy in physics, ethics and logic, a division that had been introduced by the Stoics in the Hellenistic age. These three parts of philosophy appear in the classical Stoic order (physics–ethics–logics) and not in the order that, according to our sources, Eudorus must have followed in his exposition (ethics–physics–logics, the same as in Antiochus).⁹⁴ At any rate, the application of the threefold division of philosophy to the doctrine can be taken as another proof of the presence of Eudorus behind the fragment.

The meaning of these three applications of the doctrine of the *telos* is not clear. If it is apparent in what sense the *Timaeus* passage can be taken as a *physical* (in the sense of cosmological) declination of the doctrine of the *telos*, and the ethical application that

⁹³ On this very topic, I found the various articles in the volume edited by Thomas Benatouil and Mauro Bonazzi (Benatouil–Bonazzi, 2007) very inspiring.

⁹⁴ Dillon (1977) 160, Bonazzi (2013).

Eudorus assigns to the *Republic* seems evident, it is not equally plain why the digression of the *Theatetus* would represent a *logical* application of the doctrine. Allegedly, Eudorus here is anachronistically attributing to Plato the threefold division of philosophy, which is instead a scheme adopted in Hellenistic philosophy. Perhaps, this operation has to be collocated within the Platonist tendency to trace all the Hellenistic philosophical *agenda* back to Plato. Indeed, the *Timaeus* was considered the physical dialogue *par excellence*, the *Republic* the ethical dialogue and the *Theatetus* the logical one (which – in Hellenistic terms – comes to mean ‘epistemological’). Thus, regardless of the actual context wherein the *formula* appears, which – as known – is not particularly related to epistemology, the fact that it appears in the *Theatetus* could have led to think of it as an example of Plato’s declination of the formula according to the traditional division of ethics.

We need to read another interesting element in the same passage, namely the fact that Eudorus argues that, in the *Timaeus*, Plato employs ‘also the name’ (καὶ τοῦνομα) of the doctrine he would be referring to according to Eudorus, by using the word τέλος. Eudorus ascribes the use of the word τέλος as a technical term to Plato, finding the proof of such an anachronistic use in this passage from the *Timaeus*. In other terms, Eudorus would be arguing for the actual presence of a doctrine of the τέλος in Plato’s dialogues, providing his readers with Plato’s use of the term in the *Timaeus* as the ultimate proof of this.

3.5 Plato’s Polyphonia

The observation regarding Plato’s *polyphonia* too (literally “plurality of voices”), which would not entail a hidden *polydoxia* (“multiplicity of opinions”), needs to be further explored. The author here would be specifying that, in spite of Plato’s variety of different explanations and declinations of the *formula*, the reader ought not to think that Plato held different views on the same topic. On the contrary, the Platonic doctrine is one and clear, albeit expressed in different ways because of the copious eloquence of the master.

This seemingly *excusatio non petita* appears polemically oriented towards possible supporters of a *polydoxos* Plato, who are likely to be identified with the Sceptics, or the New Academy. Eudorus firmly denies the possibility of a *polydoxia* in Plato: the

doctrine is one and – as Eudorus continues – it corresponds to “living according to virtue” (τὸ κατ’ἀρετὴν ζῆν); more specifically, it corresponds to both the acquisition (κτῆσις) and the use (χρῆσις) of the “perfect (or final) virtue” (τῆς τελείας ἀρετῆς).

3.6 *Acquisition (κτῆσις) and use (χρῆσις) of virtue*

We have found an explicit statement on the equivalence between the *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi* and the *acquisition* (κτῆσις) and *use* (χρῆσις) of virtue, especially in those Platonic passages from the *Republic* and from the *Laws*, and we will find it in many other passages in the Middle Platonist tradition. The diptych acquisition-use (κτῆσις- χρῆσις) is a *clichè* coming from Plato’s *Menexenus*. Interestingly, both terms are active nouns, denoting an *activity* rather than a *state*. Also, the very term ὁμοίωσις, as we remarked in the first chapter, is itself an active verbal noun.

This further identification of the *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi* with the acquisition and use of virtue points to the interpretation of this *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi* as an activity rather than a state. If assimilation to God corresponds to virtue, then virtue has to be taken in the Aristotelian sense of an “activity” (ἐνέργεια) rather than in the Platonic sense of a state of the soul. The Aristotelian conception of the *telos* as ἐνέργεια rather than mere ἔξις (“state”), therefore, seems to be implied in this account of the *telos* of assimilation to God.

Chapter Six

An interesting comparison: the Pseudopythagorean ethical treatises on the superiority of God's happiness and virtues and the ideal of a 'mixed' life

1. The superiority of divine happiness and virtue

The *Pseudopythagorica* are a group of treatises written in artificial Doric which present an altogether coherent doctrine. The authors of these treatises claim to be ancient Pythagorean philosophers, but in fact they seem to combine references to Pythagorean doctrine with Platonism and Aristotelianism. The treatises are usually dated to the period of Middle Platonism (between the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD).¹ Thus, both because of the traditional date in the Early Empire, and for their content, which mixes Aristotelian and Platonist elements together with some Pythagorean doctrine, these texts cannot be ignored in our present analysis. It is perhaps worth noting that in the past the texts have been attributed to Eudorus, but the main element, with regard to ethics, that pushed scholars in the direction of arguing that this attribution is wrong is the absence of the *telos* of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ.² However, as we shall see, and as Centrone notes, the idea of assimilation to God is in some way implied. Although the attribution to Eudorus has been shown to be implausible, it is true that these texts reveal striking similarities to what we know of many points of Eudorus; this is partly the reason we are including these texts in our inquiry, even though, as mentioned, our *formula* does not appear and it is not clear if

¹ In particular Zeller (1923⁵) 123 dated the *pseudopythagorica* in Alexandria between the first century BC and the first century AD. So did Praechter (1891) part 49 with respect to the ethical treatises (in which, for our purposes here, we are most interested). The history of the scholarship for the different parts of the treatises has proposed various dates, even very late ones. At least for the ethical treatises, however, the period between the first century BC and the first (or at the latest the second) century AD is generally accepted (see Moraux, 1984, 606–607). As for the location of their production, the main possibilities are Alexandria, (Zeller, 1923,⁵ 120–23), Rome (Burkert, 1961, 236–46, and 1971 41 ff.), southern Italy (Thesleff, 1961, 96–105 and 1972, 59), and possibly in multiple places (Centrone, 1990, 14). For a fully detailed *status quaestionis* I refer to Centrone (1990) 13–18. For the thesis of the unity and homogeneity of the *Pseudopythagorica* see Centrone (1990) 16–17, especially n. 9.

² Centrone (1990) 17–18, n. 10.

the texts can be considered to testify to the new doctrine of the *telos*.³ In any event, many scholars have argued that the treatises are a full-fledged part of Middle Platonism.⁴ This seems to be particularly true for the ethical treatises, which are characterized by that blend of Platonic and Aristotelian motifs which are the hallmark of Middle Platonism.⁵ And yet, suspiciously, as already mentioned, the ὁμοίωσις θεῷ *formula* does not appear as the *telos* in any of the treatises. All in all, we are not mainly interested in the *vexata quaestio* of orthodoxy, as we have stated several times beginning with the introduction.⁶

Within this *corpus*, there are several treatises dealing with ethics, concerning which a certain internal homogeneity is generally recognized, both from the viewpoint of the doctrinal content and the linguistic style.⁷ Most of the forgeries of these works were composed under the name of Archytas, who is certainly one of the most renowned personalities in the history of Pythagoreanism.⁸ His treatise *De viro bono et felici* was a sort of comprehensive *summa* of ethical theory. The main sources dealing with ethics seem to be Aristotle and the Old Academy.⁹ If considering what we are most interested in here, i.e. the *telos* and *eudaimonia*, we find that it is defined in a fully Aristotelian way as “what is desirable for the sake of itself” (δι’ αὐτὰντα αἰρετα).¹⁰

Nevertheless, not only does the *telos* of *homoiosis theōi* not appear in what has survived of these ethical treatises, but the Pseudo-Archytas makes reference to God by way of stressing the incommensurable difference between God’s virtue and human virtue. His testimony is striking in its harsh delineation of the boundaries between God and the human being:

³ For some remarkable parallels see Bonazzi (2013) 168 ff. For the *Pseudopythagorica* see Burkert (1961), Centrone (1990) 153–9, Trapp (2007) and, specifically for ethics in the Pseudopythagoreans, Centrone (1990).

⁴ Dörrie (1963) 271, Baltes (1972) 20–21, Slezák (1972) 17–8, Moraux (1984), and, to a lesser extent, Dillon (1977). On the relationship between the *Pseudopythagorica* and Middle Platonism see Centrone (1990) 25–34, to whose work I am indebted for this entire chapter.

⁵ Centrone (1990) 18.

⁶ On this point, I refer to Moraux (1984) XXI–XXVII, Dillon (1985) 31–50, Donini (1986), Centrone (1990) 18–ff, Bonazzi (2015).

⁷ For the homogeneity of the *Pseudopythagorica ethica* see Centrone (1990) 13–18. For a list of the ethical treatises (unnecessary to set forth here) see Centrone (1996) 15, n. 7. For a linguistic analysis see Centrone (1990) 45–58 and the relevant bibliography.

⁸ Centrone (1990) 15.

⁹ See Centrone (1990) 25–34.

¹⁰ Ps. Archytas, *De viro bono* ap. Stob. 3.1.110 p. 59 Hense.

Ἐν ταύτῳ διαφέρει δὲ θεὸς ἀνθρώπῳ ἀγαθῷ, ὅτι θεὸς μὲν οὐ μόνον εἰλικρινῆ καὶ διυλισμέναν ἔχει τὴν ἀρετὴν ἀπὸ παντὸς τῷ θνατῷ πάθεος, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν δύναμιν αὐτᾶς ἄτρυτον πέπαται καὶ ἀνυπεύθυνον, ὡς πρὸς αἰωνίων ἔργων σεμνότητά τε καὶ μεγαλοπρέπειαν. ἄνθρωπος δ' οὐ μόνον τῷ θνατῷ τῆς φύσεως καταστάματι μείονα ταύταν πέπαται, ἔστι δ' ὅκκα καὶ δι' ἀγαθῶν ἀμετρίαν καὶ διὰ συνήθειαν ἰσχυρὰν καὶ διὰ φύσιν μοχθηρὰν καὶ δι' ἄλλας αἰτίας πολλὰς ἀδυνατεῖ κατ' ἄκρας γεναθῆμεν παναλαθέως ἀγαθός.

God differs from the good man in that God not only possesses a perfect virtue, purified from all mortal affection, but enjoys a virtue whose power is faultless and not accountable, as suits the majesty and magnificence of his works. Man, on the contrary, not only possesses an inferior virtue, because of the mortal constitution of his nature, but even sometimes by the very abundance of his goods, now by the force of habit, by the vice of nature, or from other causes, he is incapable of attaining the perfection of the good. (Pseudo-Archytas, *De viro bono et felici*, ap. Stob. 3.1.108 p. 58 Hense (9, 7–15 Thesleff) tr. Guthrie 1987).¹¹

This passage is striking. Here the emphasis is not on the *likeness* between the good human being and God, but rather on the incommensurable *distance* between them. God *differs* (διαφέρει) from the good man, for only He possess the *perfect virtue*, a virtue “whose power (δύναμιν) is faultless (ἄτρυτον) and not accountable (ἀνυπεύθυνον)”. Human virtue is, on the other hand, *inferior* (μείονα), and for several reasons (including prosperity, bad habits and vices) he is “incapable of attaining the perfection of the good” (ἀδυνατεῖ κατ' ἄκρας γεναθῆμεν παναλαθέως ἀγαθός). The virtue of God is *impossible* for man, even for the *good* man (ἀνθρώπῳ ἀγαθῷ).

Also in Plato, as we have seen, the ὁμοίωσις θεῷ formula was always accompanied by the κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν, which appeared to restrict the actual possibility of the human being becoming *fully* like God. In Eudorus, on the other hand, the κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν, as Dillon reads it, was no longer perceived as a way to diminish the full potential of the ὁμοίωσις θεῷ formula.¹² However, such an explicit statement about God's *difference* from the good man might almost sound like a negation of the *telos* of

¹¹ This passage, from the Pseudo-Archytas, is preserved in *Stob.* 3.1.108 p. 58 Hense (9, 7–15 Thesleff). See Centrone (1990) 92.

¹² See *supra* pp.92–94.

assimilation to God. In this picture in fact, man can aspire only to *human* virtue, which is inevitably *inferior* to God's perfect virtue.

The theme of the superiority of divine virtue to human virtue is instead very much present in Aristotle and Aristotelianism.¹³ This position might remind us of Alcinous' *Didaskalikos*, in which it is stated that the *hyperouranios theos* is superior to all the virtues, as we shall see in the chapter dedicated to Alcinous.¹⁴ And yet, in Alcinous we find reference to another divine entity, which possesses the virtues to which man must aspire in order to achieve the *telos* of assimilation to God (the *epouranios theos*).¹⁵

Another interesting parallel is provided by Philo of Alexandria's *De mutatione linguarum*, in which divine virtue is described as ἀπονος ("indefatigable") and ἀταλαίπωρος, terms that very much sound like synonyms to Archytas's ἄτρυτον.¹⁶ In this passage, Philo also states that divine virtue does not need any "dominion" (ἐπιστάσια) over it, an idea which likely corresponds to the concept expressed by Archytas' ἀνυπεύθυνον.

In another passage from *De viro bono* we find another reference to God, and the superiority of his happiness to the human being's is reiterated:

Καὶ θεῶ μὲν εὐδαιμοσύνα καὶ βίος ἄριστος, τῷ δ' ἀνθρώπῳ ἐξ ἐπιστάμας καὶ ἀρετᾶς καὶ τρίτῳ εὐτυχίας σωματοῦμένα παραγίνεται. λέγω δὲ ἐπιστάμαν σοφίαν μὲν τῶν θεῶν καὶ δαιμονίων, φρόνασιν δὲ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων καὶ <τῶν> περὶ τὸν βίον

To God belongs happiness and the happy life; man cannot possess but a grouping of science, virtue and prosperity forming a single body. I call wisdom the science of the Gods and daemons, and term prudence the science of human things, the science of life. (Pseudo-Archytas, *De viro bono*, ap. Stob. 3.1.113, p. 63 Hense, tr. Guthrie 1987, slightly modified).

Happiness belongs exclusively to God, whereas only the sciences, virtues and prosperity are at the human being's disposal.

¹³ For an interesting discussion about the difference between divine and human happiness (*eudaimonia*) see Arist. *Pol.* 1323b 23-9. For the superiority of God to the virtues see *Eth. Nich.* 1145a25-7.

¹⁴ See *infra*, pp. 140 – 148.

¹⁵ Alc. *Did.* 181-2. See *infra*, 140–148.

¹⁶ Phil. Alex. *Mutat.* 258. On the several elements of similarity between the *Pseudopythagorica* and Philo of Alexandria, see Centrone (1990) 30–34.

A similar statement can also be found in Euryphamus' *De vita*, where it is also stated that the inferiority of human happiness results from the fact that perfect human life is not self-sufficient (αὐτοτελής).¹⁷ One of the distinctive traits of God's self-sufficiency with regards to happiness and virtue is prompted by the fact that He does not need *fortune* (*eutychia*) in order to be happy and virtuous, whereas man does. The theme of the necessity of *eutychia* for happiness is a refrain in the Pseudo-Archytas (and also in the other Pseudopythagorean ethical treatises), and it substantially depends on Aristotle's ethics.¹⁸ As is evident, Stoicism takes the opposite stance, and this is the reason why for the Stoics there is no qualitative difference between human and divine virtue.¹⁹ The other factors that determine the difference between human and divine happiness and virtue are those briefly listed in the first passage quoted above, and also those coming from Aristotle: passions and bad habits.²⁰ In the second passage above there is also reference to the traditional Aristotelian virtues of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and *sophia* (theoretical wisdom).²¹

2. *The telos (?): happiness in the combination of praxis and theoria*

A few lines below, we find the definition of happiness (*eudaimonia*) as “contemplation and practice of good things” (ἐν δὲ θεωρίαις καὶ πράξεσι τῶν καλῶν τὸ εὐδαιμονεῖν), of course together with *eutychia* (ἐν εὐτυχίᾳ). In another important passage ‘Archytas’ argues for the necessity of both components (*practical* and *theoretical*) in order to gain true wisdom.²² In the *De educatione ethica*, we have a passage which represents one of the most explicit statements in antiquity of the ideal of life as a combination of *praxis* and *theōria*. Despite its length, the passage is worthy of quoting in its entirety:

¹⁷ Euryphamus, *De vita*, ap. Stob 4.39.27 p. 914 Hense.

¹⁸ See in particular the passage from the *De viro bono* in Stob. 3.1.114 p. 64 Hense (12, 5-13, 11 Thesleff). Note that, according to Archytas's account, sometimes an excessive *eutychia* can also be the cause of vice, for it may divert its possessor from moderation (*metriopatheia*). See Arch. *De Vir. Bon.* Ap. Stob. 3.1.195 p. 148 Hense (13, 12-20 Thesleff) and Stob. 3.1.196 p. 149 Hense (13,21-9 Thesleff).

¹⁹ SVF III 14, 10-3. See Centrone (1996) 159.

²⁰ We find a discussion of these in Stob. 3.1.114 p. 64 Hense (12, 5-13, 11 Thesleff).

²¹ For a detailed analysis of the passage, I refer to Centrone (1996) 159–163.

²² Ps-Arch, *De Viro bono*, ap. Stob. 3.3.65 p. 217 Hense (13,30-14,16 Thesleff), where the absence of either of the two aspects is considered a full-fledged lack of wisdom.

Δύο μὲν ὄν ἔντι βίοι ἀντίπαλοι, τοῖ τῶν πρατῆων ἀντιποιεῦμενοι, πρακτικὸς τε καὶ φιλόσοφος· πολὺ δὲ κάρρων δοκέει εἶμεν ὁ ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων κεκραμένος ποτὶ καιρῶς τῶς ἀρμόσδοντας συντεταγμένος καθ' ἑκατέραν διέξοδον. Γεγόναμες γὰρ ποτ' ἐνέργειαν νοεράν, ἂν καλέομες πρᾶξιν· τᾶς δὲ διανοίας ἃ μὲν πρακτικὰ ἐπὶ τὰν πολιτικὰν φέρεται, ἃ δὲ ἐπισταμονικὰ ἐπὶ τὰν θεὰν τῶν συμπάντων, αὐτὸς δ' ὁ καθόλω νόος ταύτας τὰς δύο δυνάμιας ἀμπέχων ἐπὶ τὰν εὐδαιμονίαν, τὰν φαμὲς ἐνέργειαν ἀρετᾶς ἐν εὐτυχίᾳ εἶμεν, οὔτε πρακτικὰν ἔασαν μόνον ὥστε καὶ μὴ τὰν ἐπιστάμαν περιέχεν, οὔτε θεωρητικὰν ὡς ἄπρακτον εἶμεν· ἃ γὰρ τέλῃος διάνοια ποτὶ δύο ἀρχὰς ἐπικρατέας ῥέπει, ποθ' ἄς καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος πέφυκε, τὰν τε κοινωνικὰν καὶ τὰν εἰδημονικὰν· καὶ γὰρ αἱ κατὰ τοίᾳς ἀντιλήψιας δοκέοντι ἀντιθλίβεν ἀλλάλας ταὶ ἀγωγαί (ταὶ μὲν γὰρ πολιτικαὶ ἀφέλκοισαι τᾶς θεωρίας, ταὶ δὲ θεωρητικαὶ ἀπὸ τᾶς πολιτείας μετὰγοισαι ἐς ἀσυχίαν), ἀλλ' ὄν τὰ πέρατα συναγαμμένα ἃ φύσις ἀπέδειξεν ἐν τῷτῳ ἀνωμένα· οὐ γὰρ ἀντιπαθέες ἔντι ταὶ ἀρεταί, ἀλλ' ἀρμονίας ἀπάσας συμφωνότεραι. Αἱ δὲ κά τις ἐκ νέω ὄρμαθεις αὐτὸς ἀρμόσδῃται ἐς τὰς ἀρχὰς τῶν ἀρετῶν καὶ τὸν θεῖον νόμον τᾶς τῷ κόσμῳ ἀρμονίας, εὖροον βίον διεξάξει.

Two rival directions of life contend for mastery, these being practical and philosophical life. By far the most perfect life *unites them both*, and in each different path adapts itself to circumstances. We are born for rational activity, which we call practice. Practical reason leads us to politics; theoretical reason, to the contemplation of the universality of things. Intellect itself, which is universal, embraces these two powers oriented towards happiness, which we define as the activity of virtue in prosperity; it is not exclusively either a practical life which would exclude science, nor a speculative life which would exclude the practical. Perfect reason inclines towards these two mastering principles for which man is born, the principles of society and science. For if these opposite principles seem mutually to interfere in the other's development, the political principles turning us away from speculation, and the speculative principle turning us from politics, to persuade us to live at rest, nevertheless nature, uniting the ends of these two movements, shows them fused; for virtues are not contradictory and mutually antipathetic. Indeed, no harmony is more constant than the harmony of virtues. If from his youth man has subjected himself to the principles of virtue, and to the divine law of the world harmony, he will lead an easy life. (Pseudo-Archytas, *De educatione ethica*, ap. Stob. 2.31.120 p.229 Wachsmuth (41, 19-43, 23 Thesleff.) tr. Guthrie, 1987 slightly modified)

In describing an ethical ideal Archytas does not deny the tension that the two kinds of life might create. The two βίοι are indeed called ἀντίπαλοι, “*antagonists*”, “*rivals*”, and they

“seem mutually to interfere in their development”. But *nature* is said, using a curious expression, to be able to “reunite the ends of those two principles”, showing them fused together in a whole (ἀλλ’ ὅν τὰ πέρατα συναγαμένα ἡ φύσις ἀπέδειξεν ἐν τούτῳ ἄνωμένα). The *physis* in the *Pseudopythagorica* is the first principle, the principle of order in the cosmos and of the ethical good on axiological grounds.²³ What is most striking in the passage is the peremptoriness of the Pseudo-Archytas in affirming the superiority of the third life, defined as “by far the most perfect” (πολὺ δὲ κάρρων). Moreover, the expression “we are born for...” (γεγόναμες) warns us that it is the *telos* we are talking about, conceived, as in Aristotle, as the end, the function, the goal for which the human being *was born*. And, not surprisingly, according to the Pseudo-Archytas we are born for “rational activity” (ἐνέργειαν νοεράν), which is a rephrasing of Aristotle’s famous definition of *eudaimonia* as κατ’ἀρετῆς ἐνέργεια.²⁴ The intellect embraces these two powers (δυνάμιας), which are oriented towards happiness (αὐτὸς δ’ ὁ καθόλου νόος ταύτας τὰς δύο δυνάμιας ἀπέχων ἐπὶ τὰν εὐδαιμονίαν). Virtues, it is also stated, cannot be contradictory or antipathetic to each other (ἀντιπαθέες). And at the end of the passage we find the analogy with harmony, which, as we have anticipated in discussing Eudorus, is a *topos* in Pythagorean literature,²⁵ as well as a reference to the “divine law” (τὸν θεῖον). The harmony of the individual soul mirrors the harmony of the *cosmos* (τᾶς τῷ κόσμῳ ἁρμονίας).

As Centrone points out in his commentary to the above passage, and as we have also remarked on in the course of this work, the exigency to theorize about a ‘mixed’ kind of life, which comprehends both contemplative and active life, is not at all unique to Archytas.²⁶ In Plato, as we saw, a complex intertwining of *theōria* and *praxis*, philosophy and politics, is already present, and the two components sometimes seem to compete for precedence.²⁷ Aristotle, on the other hand, introduces a rigid separation of the two lives, in which, even if it is not always clear, *theōria* has a prominent role. The Stoics elaborated the ideal of the *bios logikos*, a life embracing *praxis* and *theōria*, as is attested

²³ This doctrine undoubtedly derives from the Old Academy. See Centrone (1990) 20–21.

²⁴ Although there is a difference, for here this “rational activity” is called πράξις, whereas in Aristotle πράξις is just *one* rational activity, or one constituent of *eudaimonia*. We are not interested in investigating this issue further here. I refer to Centrone (1990) 184.

²⁵ Centrone (1996) 151–159.

²⁶ Centrone (1990) 183–184.

²⁷ In particular, see the digression in the *Theatetus*.

to in particular by a testimony in Diogenes Laertius.²⁸ Antiochus, according to a testimony preserved in Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, holds that the ideal of a mixed life derives from the Old Academy.²⁹ Also, in the second book of Stobaeus' *Anthologium*, there is an analogous formulation of a "third life" consisting of a "synthesis of the other two (σύνθετον ἐξ ἀμφοῖν)".³⁰ We shall see also that in Alcinous' *Didaskalikos*, in which the contemplative life is explicitly said to be superior and preferable to the practical life, nonetheless *praxis* appears to have a role in the fulfillment of the ethical ideal.³¹ In Apuleius' *De Platone*, the *finis sapientiae* can be achieved only by reference to both contemplation and *praxis*.³² In Plutarch as well the ethical ideal comprehends both components,³³ and so also for Philo, where the ideal life is made up of alternating between practical and contemplative life.³⁴

3. 'Follow God'

Turning back to God, the superiority of God to human virtue and happiness does not imply in the *Pseudopythagorica* that God should not serve as a paradigm, a model for the human being. As a matter of fact, in the *Pseudopythagorica* we find the statement that the *end* for human beings is "to follow the God", who coincides with the *summum bonum*.

This ideal is described in the *Pseudopythagorica* primarily in an epistemological sense. In Metopus' *De virtute* we find the statement that "knowledge of divine things is principle, cause and canon of human happiness" (ἀρχὴ γὰρ καὶ αἰτία καὶ κανὼν ἐντι τῶς

²⁸ Diog. Laert. VII 130. For this Stoic ideal see also Cic. *Off.* I 43,153, *Rep.* III 3,5; Senec. *De otio* IV 2; V 8.

²⁹ August. *Civ. Dei* XIX 3: *quod ex utroque [scil. otioso and actiuoso] compositum est, hoc tertium sibi placere adservant. Haec sensisse atque docuisse Academicos veteres Varro adserit, auctore Antiocho, magistro Ciceronis et suo.*

³⁰ Stob. II 144, 17-9. It is not explicitly stated here if this kind of mixed life is considered to be superior than the other two. Moraux (1973) 407 argues in this direction. See also Centrone (1990) 184.

³¹ Alc. *Did.* 152,25–153,20.

³² Apul. *De Plat.* 253.

³³ See in particular Plut. *Lib educ.* 7f-8b, where it is stated that contemplative life is useless if it lacks a practical foundation, and *an seni* 796d–e.

³⁴ Phil. Alex. *Decal.* 101.

ἀνθρωπίνης εὐδαιμοσύνης ἅ τῶν θεῶν [...] ἐπίγνωσις).³⁵ Therefore knowledge, God and happiness are connected in such a way that cannot fail to remind us of Platonist accounts of the *telos*.

In this vein, maybe the most meaningful account of the Pythagorean *telos* of “following God” is, in my opinion, the one in Euryphamus’ *De vita*.³⁶ This treatise is quite short, but is exhaustive in presenting all the main *topoi* of Pseudopythagorean ethics: the superiority of God’s virtue to human virtue, virtue as perfection of nature for every being, *eutychia*, and virtue as the harmony of the parts of the soul.³⁷

Interestingly, right at the outset, Euryphamus draws a distinction between the practical sphere on the one hand, in the context of which the human being is capable by means of his own choice (*prohairesis*) to direct himself towards virtue or vice, and the intellectual sphere, for which he needs God’s ‘assistance.’ This distinction is not followed by further argumentation, in line with the extremely synthetic style of the treatise. In the following lines, the author embarks on a brief *excursus* of the principal moments of human history, which reminds us of Philo of Alexandria.³⁸ God introduced man into the *cosmos* as “a most exquisite being”, and as “the eye of the orderly systematization of everything”. He gave things names and invented letters. Specifically, man:

ἐμιμάσατο δὲ καὶ τὰν τῶ παντὸς διακόσμασιν, δίκαις τε καὶ νόμοις κοινωνίαν πολιῶν συναρμοξάμενος. οὐθὲν γὰρ οὕτω κοσμοπρεπὲς καὶ θεῶν ἄξιον ἔργον ἀνθρώποις πέπρακται, ὡς πόλιος εὐνομουμένης συναρμογᾶ καὶ νόμων καὶ πολιτείας διακόσμασις. εἷς γὰρ ἕκαστος ἄνθρωπος αὐτὸς καθ’ αὐτὸν οὐδεὶς ἐὼν οὔτε ποττὸ ζῆν ... ὁμοφροσύνα ξυνᾶ καὶ ξυναρμογᾶ πολιτείας καὶ αὐτὸς καθ’ αὐτὸν ἰκανὸς γέγονε καὶ ποττὸ ὅλον καὶ τὸ τέληρον σύστημα τᾶς κοινωνίας εὐσυνάρμοστος.

He imitated the established order of the universe, by laws and juridical proceedings, organizing the communion of cities. For no human work is more honorable in the eyes of the world, nor more worthy of notice by the gods, than proper constitution of a city governed by good laws, distributed in an orderly fashion throughout the state. For though

³⁵ Metopus, *De virtute* ap. Stob 3.1.115 p. 66 Hense (116,21-119,26 Thesleff).

³⁶ Stob. 4.39.27 p. 914 Hense (85,13-87, 19 Thesleff).

³⁷ As Centrone (1990) 231 notes. For a detailed comment on this treatise see Centrone (1990) 231–242.

³⁸ Phil. Akex. *Deus* 47-9. For the relationship between Philo and the Pseudopythagorean treatises see Centrone (1990) 30–34.

by himself no man amounts to anything, and by himself is not able to lead a life conforming to the common concord, and to the proper organization of a state; yet he is well adapted to the perfect system of society. (Euryphamus, *De vita* ap. Stob. 4.39.27 p. 914 Hense (85,13-87, 19 Thesleff), tr. Guthrie 1987, slightly modified).

The highest calling of human beings is the imitation of the order of the universe, which for them consists of creating political communities and laws. At the end of the passage, although the text is difficult to decipher, there is a statement that it is impossible for any single human being to live by himself. Society, being a harmonic whole, in the image and likeness of the harmonic cosmos, meets man's need for community; within the society, the single individual is *harmonized* (εὐσυνάρμοστος). The imitation of God translates here into a *social* and also *political* ideal. The “knowledge of divine things” is aimed at this political ideal.

Harmony (συναρμογὰ), according to the *Pseudopythagorica*, exists at all levels of reality, from the cosmos to the polis, and in turn in the family and in the individual soul, when the superior principle rules over the inferior one.³⁹ The two principles operate in the cosmos as well as in the polis and in the soul, and on this ground the analogy among these realities is drawn.⁴⁰ For our purposes it is not necessary to further develop the doctrine of the two principles and all of their triadic divisions.⁴¹ We are instead interested in the role played by God in the system. God is defined as the principle, middle and end of every thing,⁴² mover of the universe and ruler of the cosmos, with which He is in a relationship of φιλία. Even here, as with all of the Middle Platonists we will be addressing, God cares for the cosmos as the soul, the intellect, the *phronesis* of the whole world.⁴³

As we have seen in Euryphamus, if the choice to practice virtue or to devote himself to vice is up to man, on the contrary the faculty to elevate himself to contemplate

³⁹ For a short but accurate account of the doctrine see Centrone (1990) 20 ff.

⁴⁰ Ultimately this doctrine derives from Plato's *Republic*.

⁴¹ For which I refer to Centrone (1990) 21–ff.

⁴² The reference is to Plato's *Laws*, *Lg.* IV.715e.

⁴³ Relevant passages are Archit. *De sap.* 45, 3-4; Aristaeus *de Harm.* 52, 22-3; Arch. *De vir. Bon.* 11,16; Diotog. *De regn* 82, 1-3; Callicr. *De dom. Felic.* 105, 24-5; Sthenid. *De regn.* 188, 5-9; Onat. *De deo* 139, 5-7. See also Centrone (1990) 23.

the divine needs God's 'assistance' ἐπικούρησις.⁴⁴ In the scale of goods, God represents the ultimate good, the *summum bonum*, to whom everything is oriented.⁴⁵ Therefore, *eudaimonia* corresponds to "following God" (θεῷ ἔπεσθαι).⁴⁶ In Archytas' *De sapientia*, the contemplation of God is said to be the *end* for which the human being was born.⁴⁷ Thus, *sophia* is defined as the science of divine and daemonic things.⁴⁸

As has become clear, there are many elements in common between the Platonist view on the *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi* and the Pseudopythagorean ethical treatises. In particular, we can identify three main elements:

- i) The fact that God is the ultimate good;
- ii) The demiurgic function of God in relation to the cosmos;
- iii) The ideal of a *mixed life* in which *theōria*, and more specifically contemplation of the divine, is in some ways superior to, but incomplete without, *praxis*.

According to Centrone, these theses, in addition to the threefold division of the soul (with the assignment of the different virtues to the different parts of the soul), suffice to locate the treatises within the context of Middle Platonism.⁴⁹

On the other hand, it is undeniable that the *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi* does not appear as such in the treatises (even though the θεῷ ἔπεσθαι seems in some way equivalent to it), and it must not be forgotten that the theme of the superiority of divine virtue and happiness to their human equivalents runs as a refrain in all the Pseudopythagorean ethical treatises and seems to tilt in the opposite direction from that of the Platonist *telos*. However, I think that the frequent remarks in the treatises about the distance between the gods and human beings should not be overemphasized. We shall see how other Middle Platonists, such as Plutarch, show an awareness of this distance but do not tend towards any contradiction between this awareness and the ethical goal of assimilation to God. The most interesting fact is rather, in my view, that the similarities between these texts and the Middle Platonist texts are much more significant than the

⁴⁴ Euryph. *De vit.* 85, 20-86, 3 and Centrone (1990) 31-2.

⁴⁵ Archyt. *De vir. Bon.* 11, 12-9.

⁴⁶ We find this motto in Hippod. *De felic.* 95, 21-2 and Tim. *De univ. nat.* 224, 8-12. See also Centrone (1990) 23 and Centrone (1996) 159-63.

⁴⁷ Archyt. *De sap.* 44, 18-20. The same statement is contained in Perict. *De sap.* 146, 3-5.

⁴⁸ Archyt. *De vir. bon.* 11,25; *de sap.* 44,33-5. And Perict. *De sap.* 146, 17-22.

⁴⁹ Centrone (1990) 25-30. This approach is a highly questionable, but I will not address the problems here.

differences, and lead us towards the image of a *telos* that, despite the particular theological formulation, also has a strong *practical* component.

In the light of these considerations, the hypothesis of dating the treatises at around the first century BC, when, as we saw in the previous chapter, the new dogmatic and Pythagorean version of Platonism was arising, is intriguing. As we shall see, also in Philo of Alexandria the doctrine of the *telos* of assimilation to God was not explicitly stated.⁵⁰ Since the most meaningful parallels between the Pseudopythagoreans and the Middle Platonists are indeed detectable in Philo of Alexandria and Eudorus, it seems likely that the Pseudopythagorean texts were produced during a first phase of Middle Platonism, in which the *homoiōsis theōi* formula was developing but had not yet become a formal topical doctrine of every Platonist.⁵¹

⁵⁰ For the relationship with Philo, see Centrone (1996) 159–163. I refer also to the chapter of this work devoted to the two Alexandrian philosophers for further support.

⁵¹ I do not intend to further address this question. I refer to Centrone (1990) 41–44, who essentially advances the same hypothesis of a dating at the beginning of Middle Platonism, and in doing so, marshals additional arguments.

Chapter Seven

The Anonymous Commentary on Theaetetus: the polemic against Stoic oikeiōsis and the homoiōsis theōi as the foundation of justice

The papyrus scroll PBerol 9782, found amongst the ruins of a house at Hermopolis and bought by Borchardt at Cairo at the end of 1901, reports on the *recto* side an anonymous commentary to Plato's *Theaetetus*.¹ The script is a librarian informal majuscule of the round type, which can be dated to the first half of the II century A.D.² The date represents the *terminus ante quem* of the author of this commentary, whose identity remains unknown. The *terminus post quem* has been identified with 45 B.C., based on the familiarity of the author with Aenesidemus' scepticism.³ In the light of all these elements, it is likely to assume that the author of the Commentary belongs to the Middle Platonist era, as it is generally believed by scholars, with no particular exception.⁴ Tarrant, followed by Sedley, has suggested an ancient date, the I century BC, but this hypothesis has raised more problems than approval among scholars, as Bonazzi points out in his recent article on the Commentary.⁵ The elements at our disposal rather point towards the traditional datation between the end of the I century and the beginning of the II century

¹ The authoritative edition is Bastianini–Sedley in CFP (1995) III, 227–562 (from here CFP). For a fully detailed description of the state of the papyrus and of the text, and for an introduction to the themes of the Commentary and to the author, see CFP, pp. 235–260. The interest in this text and its author, who previously was widely considered as not philosophically stimulating, (Dillon, 1977, 270) increased after this new edition. The most recent works on the commentary have been made by Bonazzi (2003), (2008c), (2013b). See also the introduction by Vimercati (2015) 143–47, and, less recent but not less important the works on this text performed by Opsomer (1998) 34–36 and Sedley (1996), (1997a), (1997b).

² Diels–Schubart (1905) VII–ff. The dating depends more upon the similarity of this script to the one in Didymus' commentary to Demosthenes in PBerol 9780 *recto*, than to the *Elements of Ethics* by Hierocles, PBerol 9780 *verso*, that is instead dated to the second half of the II century A.D. The *editores principes* Diels and Schubert considered the Commentary as a product of the 'school of Gaius,' an historiographical myth created through the works by Freudenthal (1879) and Sinko (1905), and therefore they dated it across the I and the II century AD. Once Whittaker's researches have deconstructed the existence of such a school (see Whittaker 1990), there has been one main different hypothesis, elaborated by Harold Tarrant (1983), then persuasively criticized for instance by Opsomer (1998) 33–36 and Bonazzi (2003).

³ CFP 246–247.

⁴ See CFP, 246–247; Bonazzi (2013b) 310, n. 2.

⁵ *Ibidem*. See for example Opsomer (1998) 34–36; Brittain (2001) 249–254; Bonazzi (2003) 41–74.

AD.⁶

Although none of the already known Middle Platonists' profiles matches with this anonymous commentator,⁷ it is possible to draw some conclusions from elements present in the text itself. First, we can deduce that the author had written commentaries to Plato's *Timaeus*, *Symposium* and *Phaedo*.⁸ Secondly, if it is quite plain that the commentary belongs to the Middle Platonist era, his belonging to Platonism has been put into question. As a matter of fact, the Anonymous speaks about the 'Academics' as much as he does about the Stoics, i.e. without leaking any information that would make his adhesion to Plato's school conclusive. For this very reason, Barnes argues that it is not possible to establish with absolute certainty the author's philosophical affiliation, based on the mere commentary's text itself. This said, it also needs to be observed that the Anonymous seems to be openly defending Plato quite often and he demonstrates to be absolutely sympathetic with his doctrines, whereof he always praises the internal coherence. An attitude that he does not show with other philosophical schools, from which, on the contrary, he sometimes explicitly distances himself.

In sum, although there are no explicit declarations of belonging, there are enough hints to infer that he was substantially in agreement with Plato's philosophy.⁹ Moreover, his polemical attitude towards both the Stoics and Epicureans and, conversely, a sort of benevolence towards Aristotle all point towards the author's affinity with other Middle Platonists.¹⁰

From their reading of the commentary we can infer two important features that characterise the author, that have been pointed out by the scholars, especially after the renewed interest in the text occurred after Bastianini and Sedley translation and

⁶ For the discussion about the datation I refer to Bonazzi (2003) 41–59.

⁷ For the authorship, see the introduction in CFP, 246–254, which explains the reasons why it is not possible to identify the Commentator with any of the known authors from this period. See also Bonazzi (2003) 41–43.

⁸ The reference to a commentary to the *Timaeus* is at XXXV 10–12; for the *Symposium*, go to LXX 10–12; for the *Phaedo*, go to XLVIII 7–11.

⁹ Cf. II 52 – III 25. For further arguments about the Anonymous' Platonism, see the introduction to the text of the Commentary in CFP 247–ff.

¹⁰ As Bastianini and Sedley notice in their introduction in CFP, 249. As a matter of fact, as already mentioned in the introduction, Middle Platonists have the general tendency to consider the Stoics as enemies, whereas Aristotle is considered more as an ally. They tend to emphasize Aristotle's dependence on Plato's Academy more than the several elements of difference from the master's philosophy. The Anonymous seems to behave in a completely similar way in his text. On this see also Bonazzi (2008c).

commentary. First of all, his dogmatic vision of Plato's philosophy: the Anonymous is convinced that Plato held a series of clear *dogmata* that can be inferred by reading the dialogues. This is, as we started to see, a shared view from Antiochus onwards and it is the hallmark of Middle Platonism.¹¹

The second belief is more peculiar of him, and thus more interesting: the Anonymous alleges the unity of the Academy and its ultimate dogmatic character. Both of these beliefs are explicitly stated by the author in a passage of the commentary, which I report in the new draft translation by George Boys-Stones:¹²

Some people infer from these words¹³ that Plato was an Academic, in the sense of *not having doctrines* (οὐδὲν δογματίζοντα). My account will show that even other members of the Academy did, with very few exceptions, have doctrines, and that the Academy is *unified* (μίαν οὔσαν) by the fact that its members hold their most important doctrines in common with Plato. In any case, the fact that Plato held doctrines and declared them with conviction can be grasped from Plato himself. (LIV 37, LV,13)

As Bonazzi has noticed, this passage is a fully-fledged programmatic statement.¹⁴ The Anonymous does not only refuse any sceptical or even aporetic interpretation of Plato's philosophy, but he also denies that the Academics, apart from very few exceptions, had turned to scepticism. The Anonymous strongly embraces what has been defined as a 'rigorous unitarianism',¹⁵ according to which Plato, as well as the authentic Academic or Platonist tradition, holds 'doctrines' (δόγματα). This is the fundamental hermeneutic assumption that lies at the basis of the whole exegetical work performed by the Anonymous in the commentary. In the quoted passage the Anonymous is commenting the famous passage from the *Theatetus* in which Socrates is denying that he possesses

¹¹ Bonazzi (2013b) 310–313. *Pace* Tarrant (1985) 66–88, who argued that the Commentary holds an open vision of Plato's philosophy, resembling the Fourth Academy of Philo of Larissa. This hypothesis has turned out to be erroneous, as explained for example in Bonazzi (2003) 179–211 and (2013b) 311.

¹² Boys-Stones (2015) 19, emphasis mine.

¹³ "These words" are Socrates' words in *Tht.* 150c4–7, that the Anonymous has paraphrased as follows: "When I ask people, I don't assert anything, but I listen to them. This comes about because, as far as this kind of teaching is concerned, I have nothing wise to say" (LIV 23–30). For a discussion of the Anonymous' interpretation of Socrates' statement see CFP 539.

¹⁴ Bonazzi (2013b) 311. On this passage see also Praechter (1909) 535; Dörrie (1987) 394–395; Tarrant (1980) 115–116; Annas (1992); CFP 539.

¹⁵ Bonazzi (2013b) 311.

wisdom.¹⁶ The Anonymous immediately rules out the interpretation according to which Socrates is here assuming a sceptical stance, refusing to hold doctrines. On the contrary, three are the possible interpretations offered by the Anonymous. The first (i) is that Socrates' statement has a relative value, i.e. has to do with the positive exposition of doctrines as opposed to the maieutic method.¹⁷ The second (ii) is that Socrates' statement has in fact absolute value, but regarding a certain kind of wisdom, namely the divine one or the sophistic one. The third (iii) is rejected by the Anonymous and it corresponds to Anthiocus' thesis¹⁸ according to which Socrates would be using here irony.¹⁹

The state of conservation of the *volumen* is very much fragmentary. We can read approximately sixtyfive columns, which present an accurate exegesis of the first part of the dialogue, from the beginning up to the Stephanus page 153e. Unfortunately for us, the comment to the *locus classicus* for the *telos* of assimilation to God (176b) is wanting. However, at column VII, the author makes a cursory allusion to the passage in question, which, albeit very short, is of keen interest for it is meant to explain the very reason why Platonism had developed the doctrine of assimilation to God in the first place.

In the section, wherein this allusion appears, the author is engaged with one of his usual polemical criticisms against Stoicism,²⁰ this time in reference to the foundation of justice. His attack is especially directed towards the Stoic doctrine of οἰκείωσις, (“appropriateness”), which we mentioned and presented in the chapter on Stoicism.²¹ To better understand the target of this polemic, I hereby report a passage from Cicero's *De finibus*, where human sociality is explained as developing by nature. The speaker is the Stoic Cato:

[62] *Pertinere autem ad rem arbitrantur intellegi natura fieri ut liberi a parentibus amentur. A quo initio profectam communem humani generis societatem persequimur. [...] neque vero haec inter se congruere possent, ut natura et procreari vellet et diligi*

¹⁶ *Tht.* 150c4–7. See *supra*, n. 13.

¹⁷ On the maieutic method as the key for the Anonymous' interpretation of the *Theaetetus* see Bonazzi (2013b) 311–333.

¹⁸ *Cic. Ac.* II 15.

¹⁹ As Bastianini and Sedley notice (CFP 539) the Anonymous always refuses the ironic reading of Socrates' words, in all the occasions in which it emerges: cf. LVIII 39–LIX 2.

²⁰ For the polemical attitude of the Anonymous towards the Stoics see Bonazzi (2008c).

²¹ For the theory of οἰκείωσις see *supra*, chapter 3, pp.59–70. See also Praechter (1916) 520 ff; Giusta (1967) 499–500; Annas (1992); Annas (1993) 499–500 and Long–Sedley 57.

procreatos non curaret. atque etiam in bestiis vis naturae perspici potest; quarum in fetu et in educatione laborem cum cernimus, naturae ipsius vocem videmur audire. quare <ut> perspicuum est natura nos a dolore abhorrere, sic apparet a natura ipsa, ut eos, quos genuerimus, amemus, impelli. [63] ex hoc nascitur ut etiam communis hominum inter homines naturalis sit commendatio, ut oporteat hominem ab homine ob id ipsum, quod homo sit, non alienum videri. [...] itaque natura sumus apti ad coetus, concilia, civitates. [64] mundum autem censent regi numine deorum, eumque esse quasi communem urbem et civitatem hominum et deorum, et unum quemque nostrum eius mundi esse partem; ex quo illud natura consequi, ut communem utilitatem nostrae anteponamus. [...] ex quo fit, ut laudandus is sit, qui mortem oppetat pro re publica, quod deceat cariorem nobis esse patriam quam nosmet ipsos. [...] Inpellingur autem natura, ut prodesse velimus quam plurimis in primisque docendo rationibusque prudentiae tradendis. [66] itaque non facile est invenire qui quod sciat ipse non tradat alteri; ita non solum ad discendum propensi sumus, verum etiam ad docendum. [...] praeclare enim Chrysippus, cetera nata esse hominum causa et deorum, eos autem communitatis et societatis sua...

They think it is important to understand that nature engenders parents' love for their children. That is the starting point of the universal community of the human race which we seek to attain. [...] But it could not be consistent for nature both to desire the production of offspring and not to be concerned that offspring should be loved. Even among animals nature's power can be observed; when we see the effort, they spend on giving birth and on rearing, we seem to be listening to the actual voice of nature. As it is evident therefore that we naturally shrink from pain, so it is clear that nature itself drives us to love those we have engendered. (2) Hence it follows that mutual attraction between men is also something natural. Consequently, the mere fact that someone is a man makes it incumbent on another man not to regard him as alien. [...] We are therefore by nature suited to form unions, societies, and states. (3) The Stoics hold that the world is governed by divine will: it is as it were a city and state shared by men and gods, and each one of us is a part of this world. From this it is a natural consequence that we prefer the common advantage to our own [...] This explains the fact that someone who dies for the state is praiseworthy, because our country should be dearer to us than ourselves [...] (4) Furthermore we are driven by nature to desire to benefit as many people as possible, and especially by giving instruction and handing on the principles of prudence. Hence it is difficult to find anyone who would not pass on to another what he himself knows; such is our inclination not only to learn, but also to teach [...] For Chrysippus excellently remarked that everything else was created for the sake of men and gods, but these for the

sake of community and society; (Cic. *Fin.* 3.62–8, with some omissions, tr. Long–Sedley).

The Stoics were impressed by the fact that animals take care of the rearing of their offspring (1), and some of them also demonstrate to have forms of social organization. This fact led them to assume that animals are by their very nature not only self-sustaining, but also *other-related*.²² Community life is presented as a natural development of a man's instinctive love and care for his children.

Hierocles, one of the most important sources at our disposal for the study of Stoicism, explains the natural ranking of human objects of concern by means of an “arrangement of concentric circles”.²³ According to this interesting image, every human being is ideally encompassed by many circles and each of these circles encloses a group of people. The closer the circle is to the centre, the more important, or ‘appropriate’ to that man, the people inside become. It goes without saying that the first and closest circle of every man contains the man himself, or, better, his own intellect. This means that, according to Hierocles’ account of the Stoic doctrine, every man experiences himself as the closest object to his concern.²⁴ One’s own concern for other people progressively diminishes, circle after circle, as it does their kinship to him. One of the last circles encloses the whole mankind, and the last circle contains the whole universe, everything that exists. In this picture, our moral obligation would be to endeavour to reduce the distance of the relationship with each person. This moral effort is the gradual ‘appropriation’ of other people to ourselves.

Where the criticism to the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiōsis* appears, the Anonymous is commenting a passage from the *Theatetus* (*Tht.* 143d1–5), wherein Socrates simply claims to care more for his own fellow citizens rather than for the people from Cyrene. This passage leads the Commentator to notice how Socrates is concerned even with people from other cities, but to a lesser degree if compared with how much he does with the

²² See Long–Sedley, vol. 1, 57, p. 352.

²³ Hierocles in *Stob.* 4.671,7–673,11 (Long–Sedley 57G). See Inwood (1984) 168, who argues that the Anonymous’ exposition of the doctrine of *οικείωσις* is very close to Hierocles’ one, especially for the interest it shows for social *οικείωσις* rather than for the *οικείωσις* towards oneself.

²⁴ Long – Sedley, vol 1, p. 353.

Athenians.²⁵ As trivial as it might sound, this context furnishes the author of the commentary with a weapon against the Stoic *oikeiōsis*, which can be summarized as follows. Evidence tells us that we do not care as much about the others as we do about ourselves. One might notice that so far the Commentator’s criticism also fits with Hierocles’ model of the concentric circles. What the Anonymous is denying is rather the possibility of a natural ‘appropriation’ of the citizens of Cyrene to the circle of one’s own fellow citizens. I report the most significant passages of his polemics, with Long–Sedley’s translation slightly modified:

ὠκειώμεθα γὰρ τοῖς ὁμοειδέσι· μᾶλλον μέντοι ὠκειώται το[ῖς ἐα]υτοῦ· πολίται[ς· ἐπιτείνε-]ται γὰρ καὶ ἀ[νίετ]α[ι] ἢ | οἰκειώσις· ὅ[σοι το]ίνυν |___ ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκε[ι]ώσεως | εἰσάγουσι τὴν δι[κ]αι[ο-]σύνην, εἰ μὲν λέγου-> |σιν ἴσην αὐτοῦ τε πρὸς | αὐτὸν καὶ πρὸς [τὸν ἔ-]σ[χατον Μυσῶν, τεθέν]τος μὲν τούτου σώζε[ι]ται ἢ δικαιοσ[ύ]νη, οὐ συγχωρεῖται [δ]ὲ [εἶ-]ναι ἴσην· παρὰ γὰρ τὴν] ἐνάργειάν ἐστιν [κ]α[ι]> | τὴν συναίσθησιν. ἢ> | μὲν γὰρ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν | οἰκειώσις, φυσικὴ ἐστίν | καὶ ἄλογος, ἢ δὲ πρὸς | τοὺς πλησίον φυσικὴ μὲν καὶ αὐτῇ, οὐ μέντοι ἄνευ λόγου. ἐὰν γοῦν καταγῶμεν πονη[ρίαν τινῶν, οὐ μόνον | ψέγομεν αὐτούς, ἀλλὰ | καὶ ἀλλοτριούμεθα> | πρὸς αὐτούς, αὐτοὶ δὲ | ἀμαρτάνοντες οὐκ ἀποδέκονται μὲν | τὰ [μ]αχόμενα, οὐ δύναν[τ]αι δὲ μεισῆσαι αὐτούς. |___ οὐκ ἔστιν τοίνυν ἴση | ἢ ο[ἰ]κε[ι]ώσις πρὸς ἑαυτὸν [καὶ π]ρὸς ὄντιν|οῦν, ὅπου μηδὲ πρὸς | τὰ [ἐ]αυτῶν μέρη ἐπ’ ἴση[ς] ὠκε[ι]ώμεθα. οὐ γὰρ | ὁμοίως ἔχομεν πρὸς | ὀφ[θα]λμ[ὸ]ν κα[ι] δάκτυ|λον, ἴνα μὴ λέγω πρὸς | ὄνυχας [κ]αὶ τρίχας, ἐπεὶ | οὐδὲ πρὸς τὴν ἀποβολὴν αὐτῶν ὁμοίως>|ἠλλοτριώμ[εθ]α, ἀλλὰ | μᾶλλον κ[αὶ ἦ]τ[ον].>|___ εἰ δὲ καὶ ἀ[ὐ]τοὶ φήσου[σι ἐπιτεί]ν[ε]σθα[ι] τὴν | οἰκειώ[σιν, ἔσ]ται μὲν> | φιλανθρ[ωπί]α, ἐλέγξου[σι δὲ τ]ούτους ἀ[ἰ]περιστάσεις [.....]ν, ὅ->|που ἀνάγκη μό[νον]> |σώζεσθαι τὸν ἔτε|ρον αὐτῶν· κἂν μὴ γέ|νωνται δὲ περιστά|σεις, ἀλλ’ αὐτοὶ γε οὐ[τως] διάκ[εινται] ὥς ἐ|λεγχθησόμενοι. ὅθεν | καὶ ἐρω[τ]ῶσιν οἱ ἐξ Ἀ|καδημε[ίας] ο[ὐ]τ[ω]ς[.]·

We have an appropriate relationship to members of the same species. But a man’s relationship to his own citizens is more appropriate. For appropriation varies in intensification. So, those people [the Stoics] *who derive justice from appropriation*, if on the one hand they are saying that a man’s appropriation in relation to himself *is equal to his appropriation in relation to the most distant Mysian*, their assumption preserve justice; on the other hand, no one agrees with them that the appropriation is equal. That is contrary to plain fact and one’s self-awareness. For appropriation in relation to oneself is

²⁵ V 15–19.

natural and irrational, whereas appropriation in relation to one's neighbours, while also natural, is not independent of reason. If, at any rate, we charge people with misbehaviour, we not only criticize them but we are also alienated from them, whereas they themselves, having done wrong, although they do not welcome the criticisms, cannot hate themselves. So, appropriation in relation to oneself is not equal to appropriation to anyone else, given that our relationship to our own parts is not one of equal appropriation. For we are not disposed just in the same way relative to our eyes and our fingers, let alone to our nails and hair, seeing that we are not alienated from their loss equally either, but to a greater or lesser extent. If on the other hand they themselves should say that appropriation can be intensified, we may grant the existence of philanthropy, but the predicaments of shipwrecked sailors will refute them, where it is inevitable that only one of two survive. Even apart from circumstances, they themselves are in a position to be refuted. (An in *Th.* V 18–VI 31).

The Anonymous interprets Socrates' statement as an implicit objection against the Stoic doctrine of οἰκείωσις. As Bastianini and Sedley note, the core of this operation resides in the word κηδεσθαι ("to care for"), used by Socrates at V 4–5 and re-used immediately after by the Anonymous at line 14 (κηδεται). Now, one kind of οἰκείωσις was labelled as κηδεμονική by the Stoics, as it is also reported in the Commentary.²⁶

More specifically, the Commentator's attack is directed towards the practice of 'appropriation' as the foundation of *justice*. For this claim about οἰκείωσις being the foundation of justice, there is explicit and independent evidence that the Stoics would have claimed so.²⁷ Nevertheless, much of the effectiveness of the criticism depends on how one interprets this Stoic thesis. In the case of Anthiocus, for instance, the criticism would perfectly work, as we have evidence that he claimed that the natural *oikeiōsis* towards the others is enough to ground justice.²⁸ On the other hand, if we want to widen the picture, we also have to consider the fact that justice is a fully-fledged *science* in Stoicism: as such is proper of the sage, and does not represent a mere natural extension of the natural impulse of *oikeiōsis*.²⁹ We will soon come back to this, but first we shall analyse the Anonymous' reasoning.

As Bastianini and Sedley notice, the criticism is based on a certain interpretation of

²⁶ VII 26 ff.

²⁷ See SVF 1.197. and Long–Sedley, vol. 1, p. 353.

²⁸ Cic. *De fin.* V 65.

²⁹ SVF III 280.

the doctrine of *oikeiōsis* as the starting point for human justice.³⁰ The rationale of the Anonymous develops as follows: the Stoic attempt to found justice on the natural *oikeiōsis* would work *if, and only if*, we felt the same degree of *oikeiōsis* towards all human beings, with practically no distinction. However, as the Anonymous points out, the fact that “a man’s appropriation in relation to himself *is equal to his appropriation in relation to the most distant Mysian*” is “contrary to plain fact (παρὰ τὴν ἐνάργειάν) and one’s self-awareness” (συναίσθησιν).³¹ Conversely, evidence demonstrates that there are different degrees of *oikeiōsis* towards our fellow human beings. More specifically, every individual feels more *oikeiōsis* for himself than for any other individual, just in such a way as he feels more *oikeiōsis* for certain parts of himself than for others.³² The Anonymous better specifies the difference as follows: *oikeiōsis* in relation to oneself is *natural and irrational* (φυσική ἐστιν καὶ ἄλογος), whereas appropriation in relation to one’s neighbours, while also natural, is *not independent of reason* (οὐ ἄνευ λόγου). The following sentence is explicative: when we see people misbehaving, we *alienate* ourselves from them (ἀλλοτριούμεθα) (according to the doctrine of *oikeiōsis*). By contrast, they themselves, having done wrong, do not alienate from themselves, for they cannot hate themselves (οὐ δύνανται μισῆσαι αὐτούς).³³ The implicit conclusion would be that human nature is too egoistic to function as a foundation for impartiality and thus for justice.³⁴

However, it must be said, alongside Long and Sedley, that the Stoics probably “did not commit themselves to the claim that appropriation in relation to others is *equal* to that in relation to oneself”.³⁵ The Anonymous is not afraid of conceding even this alternative to the Stoics, i.e. that there might exist different degrees of *oikeiōsis*.³⁶ Nonetheless, even if

³⁰ CFP 492.

³¹ As Bastianini and Sedley note in their comment to the passage, the term συναίσθησις is borrowed from the vocabulary of Stoic οἰκειώσις (cf. Hierocl. *El. mor.* II 3,30 ff., III 46; SVF I 234; Stob. II 47,13), and then used against οἰκειώσις itself.

³² For the analogy with the parts of the body see Pembroke (1971) 145, n. 69, who draws a parallel with SVF I 236.

³³ VI 1–2. The idea of the impossibility of self-hatred, surprising as it may sound to us contemporaries, represents a not-questioned assumption that stands at the basis of the whole doctrine of οἰκειώσις, according to which self-love is a common feature of animal nature with no exceptions (Hierocl. *El. mor.* VI 59–VII 5; VII 19–24; Gel. *Noct. Att.* XII 5,7; Cic. *De fin.* V 37–31). See CFP 493.

³⁴ For this reconstruction, I refer to Bastianini–Sedley in CFP 492.

³⁵ *Ibidem*. However, Plutarch reports that “the much admired” Zeno’s *Republic* exhorted to “regard all men as our fellow-citizens”. Plut. *Fort. Alex.* 329a–b (SVF I.262, Long–Sedley 67A).

³⁶ As Bastianini and Sedley note, it seems likely that the Stoics maintained that the *oikeiōsis* can vary in degree, especially on the basis of Hierocles’ aforementioned passage, Hierocl. *ap. Stob* IV 671,7–673,11.

the appropriation is not the same in all the cases, this would still create other problems in terms of justice, particularly in relation to those cases where there is a conflict between self-interests and other people's rights (this is the case with the predicaments of the shipwrecked sailors quoted at the end of the passage). On this basis, the Anonymous argues that there certainly would be room for philanthropy, but not for justice. In other words, in a critical situation (περιστάσεις),³⁷ like in a shipwreck, when there is a very strong contrast between self-interest and other people's interest, self-appropriation would inevitably prevail, for it is stronger in degree.³⁸

Therefore, if the Stoics claim that concern for other people is "a natural development of concern for one's self",³⁹ as the quoted passage from Cicero's *De finibus* seems to suggest, it follows that the mere impulse to self-preservation would ultimately promote justice *by nature*. On the contrary, in the Anonymous' view, human nature, even in its most rational manifestation, cannot gain absolute impartiality, hence justice can be actuated not *through* nature, but rather *in spite of* it, i.e. by going against the egoistic natural tendency in cases of a contrast between self-interest and other people's interest.⁴⁰ As it becomes clear, this conception lays the foundations for a more pessimistic view of human nature than the Stoic one.⁴¹

In the next portion of text, which I did not report in my quotation, the Anonymous refers to an Academic reasoning, probably deriving it from Carneades,⁴² according to whom justice is not preserved in the Stoic system for the very same reason for which, according to the Stoics, it is not preserved in the Epicurean system. In this account, the Stoics charged the Epicurean for not preserving justice, because they did not admit οἰκειῶσις towards the others. Yet – the Anonymous argues – if, as in Stoicism, οἰκειῶσις varies in degree, justice would equally not be preserved, and for the very same reason:

³⁷ The term here, as Bastianini and Sedley notice, does not have the generic meaning of 'situations,' but the more specific one of 'critical situations,' as in Arr. *Epict.* II 6,17. Once again, in a way of proceeding that is typical of Platonists when dealing with the Stoics, the Anonymous blows back to the Stoics one of their own adage: δὸς περιστάσιν καὶ λαβὴ τὸν ἄνδρα: 'the character of a person manifests itself particularly in a critical situation' (SVF III 206). See CFP 493.

³⁸ The case of the shipwreck is derived from Carneades (in Lact. *Div. Inst.* V 16, 9–10, which in turn depends on Cic. *Rep.*). There is a Stoic answer to this argument, elaborated by Ecaton, in Cic. *Off.* III 89,90. See Inwood (1984) 182 e CFP 493–494.

³⁹ Long–Sedley, vol. 1, p. 353.

⁴⁰ See VII 14–20.

⁴¹ See CFP, 492.

⁴² For this, see CFP 494, comment on VI 25–41.

there will always be a situation in which self-appropriation will prevail on appropriation towards the others, i.e. situations in which, as in Epicureanism, *oikeiōsis* towards the others is not admitted.⁴³

In sum, the main criticism the Commentator deploys about *oikeiōsis* is the fact that human nature is too egoistic to develop justice by itself, for one will always give precedence to his or her own good when it comes to be in conflict with that of another person, especially if this other person is “the most distant Mysian”,⁴⁴ or if two people find themselves in a critical situation such as a shipwreck. It is therefore necessary to introduce something more than mere human nature in order to provide an adequate ground for justice. We read few lines below that:

εἰσάγει ὁ Πλάτων τὴν δικαιοσύνην, ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ τῆς πρ[ὸ]ς τὸν θεῖον ὁμοιότητος δεῖξομεν.

Therefore Plato did not introduce justice by deriving it from *appropriation* (οἰκειώσις), but from assimilation to God, as we will show.

According to Bastianini and Sedley, this brief reference to the *formula* of the *telos* represents the passage that sheds light on the *homoiōsis theōi* more than any others in Middle Platonism.⁴⁵ Unlike those, in fact, which mainly focus on the Platonic sources for the doctrine, this text displays the polemical context wherein the new formulation of the *telos* must have risen, in explicit opposition to the Stoic one.

Interestingly, here the assimilation to God is not addressed to as the *telos*, but rather as the *foundation of justice*, which could not be grounded on human nature only. From this passage, we can reconstruct the genesis of the new Platonist doctrine as follows: Stoicism claimed that justice was a natural development of the perfect human nature. Carneades (or other Academics)⁴⁶ criticised this thesis on the basis of the arguments that the Anonymous reports. After Carneades, his dogmatic ‘successors’ (in all

⁴³ This argument, which I do not need to focus on any longer, is VI 25–41. For a detailed analysis, I refer to CFP 494.

⁴⁴ This statement is a sort of adaptation of Socrates’ one in *Tht.* 209b7–8.

⁴⁵ CFP 495.

⁴⁶ For a sort of continuity between Carneades and the Middle Platonism, see Lévy (1990b).

likelihood, as we saw, Eudorus)⁴⁷ turned this criticism into a positive doctrine, by connecting it to the *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi*.⁴⁸

Justice is then possible only by means of assimilation to God. Given the egoism inherent to human nature that has been described earlier in the commentary, justice must lie in something else, in a superior or divine being. In opposition to the Stoic doctrine of appropriation, which considers justice as an intrinsic human attitude, justice is irreducible to a mere human feature.⁴⁹ This substitution of God with human nature as the foundation of justice parallels another substitution that Plato operates in the *Laws*: God as the measure of all things, in opposition of Protagoras' man-measure doctrine (πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄνθρωπος).⁵⁰

This position is quite original because, in the other passages, Middle Platonists seem to endorse the opposite stance — that for which one needs to be virtuous and just in order to be assimilated to God. Here, instead, assimilation to God is the *conditio sine qua non* in order to be just, the *condition of possibility* to being just, as much as the *kriterion* is the condition of possibility to knowledge. Accordingly, the insertion of a divine paradigm does not seem to lead to embracing an otherworldly ethics (as it might be the case in the *Theaetetus* digression). On the contrary, the divine model is the condition of possibility for human nature *to be just with regards to others*. This reveals the social character of the divine paradigm since it rests on the presence of others.

Furthermore, Tarrant, proposes the hypothesis that the commentary offers an *epistemological* interpretation of the doctrine of the assimilation to God, on the basis of the fact that the *Theaetetus* is a dialogue about knowledge.⁵¹ According to this perspective, such assimilation concerns a divinity that is, first and foremost, omniscient, and thus ought to obtain a proper knowledge of the divine. Knowledge of “divine things” is knowledge of the forms, which, according to the Middle Platonist doctrine, are God's own intellections. Amongst the forms, the supreme one is the form of Good. As a result, it is the knowledge of God's intellections that makes human beings virtuous. In a very

⁴⁷ See *supra*, chapter 5, pp. 81–103.

⁴⁸ For this reconstruction, see CFP 495

⁴⁹ An interesting parallel is Porphy. *Abst* III 26,9–13.

⁵⁰ *Leg.* 715 e–718 c: ὁ δὲ θεὸς ἡμῶν πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἂν εἴη μάλιστα, αἱ πολλὰ μᾶλλον ἢ ποῦ τις, ὡς φασιν, ἄνθρωπος.

⁵¹ Tarrant (1985), 78–79.

Platonic or even Socratic way, ethics is ultimately based on knowledge and, more specifically in the Middle Platonist tradition, on the knowledge of the forms. Only by knowing the “divine things”, the Forms, justice can be possible.

Chapter Eight

'Becoming like God' in Alcinous' Didaskalikos, between the Contemplative and the Practical Life

1. Chapters 27 and 28 of the *Didaskalikos*: the end of human life as 'assimilation to God.'

Οἷς πᾶσιν ἀκόλουθον τέλος ἐξέθετο ὁμοίωσιν θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν· ποικίλως δὲ τοῦτο χειρίζει.

Following from all this,⁵² he [*scil.* Plato] proposed as the end [of human striving] "assimilation to God in so far as is possible". This idea he presents in various forms. (Alcinous, *Didaskalikos*, 28,1, tr. J. Dillon, 1993 slightly modified)

With these words the Middle Platonist Alcinous opens the 28th chapter of his handbook of Platonism. In this work,⁵³ which is a fully-fledged handbook of Platonist doctrine⁵⁴ and probably the most important source for the study of Middle Platonism,⁵⁵ Alcinous sets out to expound all of Plato's doctrines, as he states at the very beginning.⁵⁶ The author devotes an entire chapter to explaining the *formula* ὁμοίωσις θεῷ. As we can see from the quoted *incipit* of the chapter, Alcinous, like Eudorus before him, attributes this formulation of the *telos* of human life to Plato.

⁵² In the previous chapter of the *Didaskalikos* Alcinous had dealt with a strictly related item, namely the highest good and happiness. That chapter marks the beginning of the ethical section of the work.

⁵³ See Alc. *Didaskalikos*, 152.1–2. On the identity of the author of the *Didaskalikos*, who was previously identified with his quasi-namesake Albinus (by Freudenthal, 1879, in this followed by Witt, 1937), the author of a *Prologus* to Plato's doctrine, I will refer to Witthaker's very rich introduction to his edition of the *Didaskalikos* published for *Les Belles Lettres* (Witthaker, 1990, VII - XIII). The introductions retrace all the steps of this conflation of Alcinous and Albinus and clearly explains all the arguments according to which it ought to be rejected. Nowadays, no scholar finds this identification convincing. See also Dillon (1993) ix–xiii. On Alcinous's identity, see Göransson (1995).

⁵⁴ This is how Dillon refers to Alcinous' work in the title of his translation (Dillon, 1993).

⁵⁵ Together with Apuleius' *De Platone et eius dogmate*. However, if we consider the influence exercised on later Platonists, we have to assign primacy to Alcinous' *Didaskalikos*.

⁵⁶ See the *incipit* of the work: Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 152.1: Τῶν κυριωτάτων Πλάτωνος δογμάτων τοιαύτη τις ἂν διδασκαλία γένοιτο. "The following is a presentation of the principal doctrines of Plato".

First of all, Alcinous introduces the doctrine as a consequence (ἀκόλουθον) of what he claimed before. In the previous chapter (179.34–181.18) he has been dealing with the highest good (τιμιώτατον καὶ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν) and happiness. Chapter 27 marks the beginning of the ethical section of the work.⁵⁷ Here, after having remarked how difficult it is to search for the “most valuable and greatest good” (τιμιώτατον καὶ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν) and to reveal it to everyone,⁵⁸ Alcinous claims that, once Plato’s works have been examined with care,⁵⁹ one cannot fail to see that Plato “placed the good for us in the knowledge and contemplation of the primal good (ἐν τῇ ἐπιστήμῃ καὶ θεωρίᾳ τοῦ πρώτου ἀγαθοῦ), which one may term God or the primal intellect”.⁶⁰ If the aim of Alcinous is to define the ultimate good for human beings, this statement is quite problematic, at least to modern eyes, for the definition itself contains the *definiendum*. According to Alcinous’ claim, Plato would place the ultimate *good* in knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and contemplation (θεωρία) of the primal *good*. However, the primal good is then identified with God or the primal intellect. More specifically, Alcinous identifies the good as it is described in the *Republic* (τιμιώτατον καὶ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν) with the Demiurge of the *Timaeus* (θεόν τε καὶ νοῦν τὸν πρῶτον). The greatest good is also God and the primal intellect, which is hard to find and not safe to reveal to others.⁶¹

Thus, leaving aside the logical fallacy, Alcinous is here stating both what the ultimate good consists in (i.e. God, or the primal intellect) and what we are to do with it,

⁵⁷ As the author himself announces at the outset of the chapter: Ἐξῆς δ’ ἐπὶ κεφαλαίων περὶ τῶν ἠθικῶς τῷ ἀνδρὶ εἰρημένων ῥητέον. “We must next deal summarily with the ethical doctrines of Plato” (179.34–35).

⁵⁸ As Dillon points out in his commentary (Dillon, 1993, 165–166), this is an altered quotation from the *Timaeus* (28c) where Plato talks of the Demiurge, “maker and father of this universe” who is neither easy to discover nor safe to reveal at all.

⁵⁹ According to both Whittaker and Dillon, Alcinous has especially books 6 and 7 of the *Republic* in mind here: see Whittaker (1990) 135 and Dillon (1993) 167.

⁶⁰ ἐτίθετο ἐν τῇ ἐπιστήμῃ καὶ θεωρίᾳ τοῦ πρώτου ἀγαθοῦ, ὅπερ θεόν τε καὶ νοῦν τὸν πρῶτον προσαγορεύσαι ἄν τις.

⁶¹ Interestingly, here Alcinous identifies the Demiurge with the Good of the *Republic*, “the most valuable and greatest good” (τιμιώτατον καὶ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν). We find the same identification in Aëtius (*Plac.* 1.7.31), who was writing before Alcinous, and in Atticus (Fr.12.1–2 *Des Places*), who instead must have been Alcinous’ rough contemporary (Dillon, 1993, 166). Dillon (1993) 166 also notes that Alcinous substitutes Plato’s ἀδύνατον λέγειν (“impossible to say”) with ἀσφαλὲς ἐκφέρειν (“not safe to reveal”). This might be a sign of the attitude of a dogmatic Platonist such as Alcinous, who has the tendency to tone down statements in which Plato, in a Socratic manner, affirms the impossibility of stating anything with certainty. This is also an allusion to Plato’s famous “conference on the good”, reported by Aristotle as a *fiasco* (See Whittaker, 1990 135). Apuleius too quotes the passage with the same modification, (Ap. *De Plat.* 1.5.191). Setting out from these parallels (also in Josephus’ *Contra Apionem*, 2.224), Dillon envisages the possibility that a previous handbook, maybe that of Arius, first introduced the rephrasing, “perhaps with the idea of introducing a mild ‘tightening-up’ of Plato’s language” (Dillon, 1993, 166).

so to speak, which is to say the *activities* related to it (i.e. knowledge and contemplation). Once again, in dealing with the account of happiness, we find the indication of an activity rather than state. But, as we shall see, Alcinous is not always consistent with the theoretical assumption of happiness being an activity.

All the other things which are commonly considered goods are such only insofar as they participate in this primal good, to some degree or other.⁶² This idea of participation is clearly inspired by Plato's *Phaedo*, where Plato claims that, "if anything else is beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no reason at all other than it participates (μετέχει) in that Beautiful".⁶³ For this very reason (i.e. the fact that being good is participating in the primal Good), most things regarded by the majority of men as being 'good' (such as health, wealth and physical beauty) are not really goods:⁶⁴

μόνα δὲ τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν ἐφικνεῖσθαι αὐτοῦ τῆς ὁμοιότητος νοῦν καὶ λόγον, διὸ καὶ τὸ ἡμέτερον ἀγαθὸν καλὸν εἶναι καὶ σεμνὸν καὶ θεῖον καὶ ἐράσμιον καὶ σύμμετρον καὶ δαιμόνιον πῶς καλοῦμενον.

The only elements in us, in his view [*scil.* in Plato's view], which can attain to likeness with it are intellect and reason, for which reason our good is fine, noble, divine, lovely, well proportioned, invoked in a marvellous way (?).⁶⁵ (Alc. *Did.* 180.5–9)

Likeness (ὁμοιότης) to the primal good (which is God) concerns just our intellect (νοῦς) and our reason (λόγος) and not all the other "mortal goods" (θνητὰ ἀγαθὰ),⁶⁶ which can at

⁶² *Did.* 179.39–ff.

⁶³ Pl. *Phd.* 100c. Alcinous then combines two Platonic thoughts, the doctrine of the participation of particulars in Forms, and the doctrine that some goods are unreal if they are not combined with virtue, shifting between the *Phaedo*, the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*. For further details on this, I refer to Whittaker (1990) 135–136 and Dillon (1993) 167.

⁶⁴ This idea is inspired by Plato's *Laws* (*Lg* 2.661a–b): 'For the things which most men call good are wrongly so described. Men say that the chief good is health, beauty the second, wealth the third; and they call countless other things 'goods'...but what you and I say is this: that all these things are very good as possessions for men who are just and holy, but for the unjust they are very bad.'

⁶⁵ Here there is a textual problem. The manuscripts read: δαιμονίως προσκαλούμενον on which Whittaker poses the *crux*. I accepted the emendation by Witt, who reads δαιμόνιον πῶς καλοῦμενον "called, in a manner of speaking, daemonic", supported, as Dillon points out, by *Tim* 90a2–8. Dillon (1993) 168.

⁶⁶ Plato draws a similar distinction between 'human' and 'divine' goods in *Lg* I.613b, but does not call the inferior goods "mortal" (θνητὰ), as Alcinous does here. Apuleius too in *De Platone* 2.1.220 draws a similar distinction between "primary" and "secondary" or divine and human goods, and he also makes the point that those goods may be good for the wise but bad for the foolish (*prima bona esse deum summum mentemque illam, quam noun idem vocat*). See also Phil. Alex. *Quod deus* 152. See Whittaker (1990) 135 and Dillon (1993) 168.

most be the “matter” (ὕλη) of good if they are linked to virtue (ἀρετῆς χρῆσις).⁶⁷ The combination of νοῦς and λόγος is very common in Middle Platonism, and we find it several times in Philo of Alexandria and Plutarch.⁶⁸ Here the dominant influence comes, not surprisingly, from the end section of the *Timaeus*, where Socrates explains the correct method for achieving assimilation to the divine and uses very similar expressions to define the good.⁶⁹

Alcinous goes on to state that *eudaimonia* is not to be found among the “human goods” (ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρωπίνους) but rather in “the divine and blessed ones” (ἐν τοῖς θείοις τε καὶ μακαριοί). Here Alcinous refers to Plato’s *Laws*,⁷⁰ but in the rest of the chapter he alludes to the myth of *Phaedrus* about the heavenly ride of the gods and pure souls.⁷¹ Then Alcinous gives an account of the Allegory of the Cave in *Republic 7*, to describe the difference between the wise and “those devoid of wisdom”.⁷² Alcinous concludes the chapter with two main statements, central to his ethical doctrine: that virtue is sufficient for happiness (αὐτάρκη πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν),⁷³ and that virtues are choiceworthy in themselves (δι’ αὐτὰς αἰρετάς).⁷⁴

Thus, following from all the points I have just outlined, Alcinous states that Plato proposed ὁμοίωσις θεῶν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν as the *telos*. In Chapter Five we have seen that the same formulation occurs, in connection to Pythagoras, in the passage from Stobaeus’ *Anthologium* that has tentatively been attributed to Eudorus of Alexandria.⁷⁵ Alcinous – like Eudorus before him,⁷⁶ – adds to his statement that Plato proposes this idea ποικίλως,

⁶⁷ As Whittaker points out (p.53, fn. 435), the expression ἀρετῆς χρῆσις does not appear in Plato’s *corpus* and it is taken from Arist. *Eth. Nic.* V.3,1129b31.

⁶⁸ Phil. Alex. *De opif.* 73 and 103; *Quod det.* 83; *De confus.* 21. Plut. *De Is.* 371a and 376c. For further parallels in later tradition see Whittaker (1990) 136, n. 432.

⁶⁹ Pl. *Tim.* 87c–d, 88b and 90a. At *Timaeus* 87c4–5 is stated that what is good is not devoid of proportion (οὐκ ἄμετρον) which clearly inspired Alcinous’ σύμμετρον; at 87d8 the good is described as ‘most lovely’ (ἐρασμιότατον, in Alcinous ἐράσιμον); At 88b2 the soul is described as ‘our most divine part.’ 90a2–8 regards the soul as our *daimon*, like in the passage by Alcinous.

⁷⁰ *Lg.* 613b–c.

⁷¹ *Phaedr.* 247a–248b. For an analysis of the rest of the chapter I refer to Whittaker (1990) 136 and Dillon (1993) 169–171. For the same idea Arist. *Eth. Nic.* I.12, 1101 and X.8,1178b8–32; Phil. Alex. *De Abr.* 202.

⁷² 180.28–ff.

⁷³ 180.40. We are not interested here in developing and analysing Alcinous’ reasoning on this point. I refer to Whittaker (1990) 136 and Dillon (1993) 169–71 for further details.

⁷⁴ 181.6. We are not interested in this right now. I refer to Whittaker (1990) 137 and Dillon (1993) 171.

⁷⁵ Stob. *Anth.* II.49.16 Wachsmuth.

⁷⁶ We have seen that in the testimony from Stobaeus’ *Anthologium*, Eudorus claims that Plato has ποικιλίαν τῆς φράσεως, an expression that might be translated as “variety of style”. Moreover, Eudorus divides

in various forms.⁷⁷ This notion of a variety of forms echoes Eudorus' rendering of the doctrine. Eudorus too claims that Plato has ποικιλία τῆς φράσεως (“variety of style”). While this parallel is not evidence of contact between the two authors, or of the dependence of Alcinous on Eudorus (a hypothesis that, as we have seen, was put forward but has been persuasively challenged),⁷⁸ it at least tells us about a sort of doctrinal continuity: the explanation of the Platonist *telos* comes with the specification that in Plato the doctrine is expressed in a variety of forms. This very fact can undoubtedly be taken as the sign of the Middle Platonists' awareness of the difficulty of arguing for an unequivocal presence of a doctrine of the *telos* in Plato's dialogues. The important inference, however, is that Alcinous is part of a tradition, starting – as far as we can tell from our sources – with Eudorus, which identifies Plato's formulation of the *telos* with the *homoiōsis theōi* formula.⁷⁹

As we have seen, in Eudorus' passage we have a sort of identification between *homoiōsis theōi* and the “life according to virtue”, and more specifically the “acquisition and use of virtue” (the κτῆσις-χρῆσις dyptich).⁸⁰ On the contrary in Alcinous the doctrine seems to take a more metaphysical direction, and the emphasis is more on the *flight* from the world of the *Theaetetus* passage, a flight that acquires the traits of Aristotle's *theōria*. Trying to understand whether this reading is really correct will be my main task in presenting Alcinous' rendering of the doctrine of the *telos*.

Plato's treatment of the topic into three sections, answering to the threefold division of philosophy (see also Dillon, 1993, 172). It seems to me that the adverb ποικίλως used here may echo this threefold division.

⁷⁷ The reverential attitude displayed by Alcinous with regard to Plato throughout the course of the work, together with the parallel evidence from Eudorus' testimony, leads me to exclude the possibility of translating this adverb as “ambiguously”. This adverb can simply indicate – as it undoubtedly does here – the idea of variety.

⁷⁸ Giusta (1986) finds hints of Eudorus' division also in the two handbooks of Platonism, Alcinous' *Didaskalikos* and Apuleius' *De Platone et eius dogmate*. However, Göransson (1995) 157–60 has refuted Giusta's conclusions on this point with absolute certainty: Alcinous and Apuleius rather follow a different scheme in their ethical sections: first the goods, then virtues and vices, friendship and love and finally politics. Dillon (1993) 165 points out that Alcinous and Apuleius follow a remarkably similar order in the arrangement of their topics, one that “has little in common with the elaborate division of topics” of Eudorus. See also Bonazzi (2011) 442, who attributes the convergences to the similarity of the themes, and does not find these sufficient to postulate a dependence of the two later works on Eudorus.

⁷⁹ Of course, we cannot be sure of the fact that Eudorus was actually the first to make this claim. It is likely though, not least in the light of the absence of the *formula* in Cicero's account of Antiochus' philosophy and in the *Pseudopythagorica*, that this formulation of the *telos* was developed between the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD, i.e. during Eudorus' lifetime. In the absence of other testimonies, it is reasonable to identify him as one of the first promoters of the new official goal of Platonism.

⁸⁰ Τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶ τὸ κατ' ἀρετὴν ζῆν. Τοῦτο δ' αὖ κτῆσις ἅμα καὶ χρῆσις ἧς τελείας ἀρετῆς.

The subsequent sentences and almost the entire chapter 28 are full of quotations from Plato’s dialogues in support of the attribution to Plato of the formulation of the *telos* as *homoiōsis theōi*. That is a good sample of the Middle Platonists way of arguing in defense of a doctrine, namely: by bringing up as many Platonic passages as possible in support of it. A very similar (if not identical) way of proceeding is found in Eudorus’ testimony. I report here the beginning of the chapter, together with Dillon’s translation, which I have felt the need to slightly modify in some points:⁸¹

(1.) Οἷς πᾶσιν ἀκόλουθον τέλος ἐξέθετο ὁμοίωσιν θεῶ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν· ποικίλως δὲ τοῦτο χειρίζει. Ποτὲ μὲν γὰρ ὁμοίωσιν θεῶ λέγει τὸ φρόνιμον καὶ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον εἶναι, ὡς ἐν Θεαιτήτῳ· διὸ καὶ πειρᾶσθαι χρῆναι ἐνθένδε ἐκεῖσε φεύγειν ὅτι τάχιστα· φωνὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῶ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν· ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι· ποτὲ δὲ τὸ μόνον δίκαιον εἶναι, ὡς ἐν τῷ τελευταίῳ τῆς Πολιτείας· οὐ γὰρ δὴ ὑπὸ θεῶν ποτὲ ἀμελεῖται, ὅς ἂν προθυμεῖσθαι θέλη δίκαιος γενέσθαι καὶ ἐπιτηδεύων ἀρετὴν εἰς ὅσον δυνατόν ἀνθρώπῳ ὁμοιοῦσθαι θεῶ.

(2.) Ἐν δὲ τῷ Φαίδωνι ὁμοίωσιν θεῶ λέγει τὸ σῶφρονα ἅμα καὶ δίκαιον γενέσθαι, οὕτω πως· οὐκοῦν εὐδαιμονέστατοι, ἔφη, καὶ μακάριοί εἰσι καὶ εἰς βέλτιστον τόπον ἰόντες οἱ τὴν δημοτικὴν τε καὶ πολιτικὴν ἀρετὴν ἐπιτετηδευκότες, ἦν δὴ καλοῦσι σωφροσύνην τε καὶ δικαιοσύνην.

(3.) Ποτὲ μὲν δὴ τὸ τέλος ὁμοιωθῆναι θεῶ λέγει, ποτὲ δ’ ἔπεσθαι, ὡς ὅπῃ εἶπη· ὁ μὲν δὴ θεός, ὡσπερ ὁ παλαιὸς λόγος, ἀρχὴν τε καὶ τελευτὴν καὶ τὰ τούτοις ἐξῆς· ποτὲ δὲ ἀμφοτέρω, ὡς ὅπῃ φη· τὴν δὲ θεῶ ἐπομένην τε καὶ εἰκασμένην ψυχὴν καὶ τὰ τούτοις ἐξῆς. Καὶ γὰρ τοῖς τῆς ὠφελείας ἀρχὴ τὸ ἀγαθόν, τοῦτο δὲ ἐκ θεοῦ εἴρηται· ἀκόλουθον οὖν τῇ ἀρχῇ τὸ τέλος εἶη ἂν τὸ ἐξομοιωθῆναι θεῶ...

(1.) Following from all this he proposed as the end (of human striving) “assimilation to God in so far as is possible”. The idea he presents in various forms. Sometimes he declares that assimilation to God consists in *being* intelligent, and just, and pious, as in the *Theaetetus* (176 a–b): “For this reason one should strive to escape from here to there as quickly as possible. Now the way to escape is assimilation to God so far as is possible; and assimilation to God is “*to become* just and pious, with the

⁸¹ Dillon (1993). In particular, Dillon translates ὁμοίωσις θεῶ as “likeness to God”. I think that this translation does not convey the active nature of the verbal noun ὁμοίωσις, which seems to indicate a process more than a state. The process leading to a likeness to God is better expressed by the English term “assimilation”.

accompaniment of intelligence”. Elsewhere he asserts that it consists only in *being*⁸² just, as in the last book of the *Republic* (613a): “For, by the gods, that man will never be neglected who is willing and eager to become just, and by the practice of virtue to be likened to God so far as that is possible for man”.

(2.) In the *Phaedo*, further, he declares that assimilation to God consists in becoming self-controlled and just, in more or less these words (82a–b): “So then, said he, the happiest and (truly) blessed, and those who go to the best place, are those who have practised the social and civic virtues, which they call self-control and justice”.

(3.) Sometimes he says that the end is to liken oneself to God, but sometimes that it consists in following Him, as when he says (*Lg.* 4.715e): “God who, as old tradition has it, holds the beginning and the end”, etc; and sometimes both, as when he says (*Phdr.* 248a): “The soul that follows and likens itself to God” and so on. For certainly the beginning of the advantage is the good, and this is dependent on God; so, following on from this beginning, the end would be likening oneself to God.... (*Alc. Did.* 181.19–43)

Alcinous starts with the famous passage from the *Theaetetus*. Here, he comments, “assimilation to God consists in being intelligent (φρόνιμον),⁸³ just (δίκαιον) and pious (ὄσιον)”, whereas in the *Republic* (613 a) it seems to consist only in being just (δίκαιον). Then he quotes an unusual passage from the *Phaedo* (82a10) – not taken into account by Eudorus – in which – he says – “assimilation to God consists in becoming self-controlled and just (σώφρονα ἅμα καὶ δίκαιον γενέσθαι)”. Actually, in this passage Plato does not speak explicitly about ὁμοίωσις θεῶ, and that is, probably, the reason why Eudorus does not focus on it. This is the passage, as we find it in Alcinous’s accurate rendering of Plato:

⁸² In my translation, I have sought to express the difference between the two Greek verbs εἶναι (‘to be’) and γενέσθαι (‘to become’), one indicating more of a state, the other more of an activity. However, I do not think it is possible to argue for an actual contrast between the two in the passage. As a matter of fact, Alcinous before reporting the quotation from the *Theaetetus*, in which Plato uses γενέσθαι (ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὄσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι) furnishes a brief summary in which he uses the verb εἶναι (ὁμοίωσιν θεῶ λέγει τὸ φρόνιμον καὶ δίκαιον καὶ ὄσιον εἶναι). He makes the same shift with the quotation from the *Republic* which occurs just below. So far one might think that Alcinous is turning into a state what was an activity in Plato, but in the third paragraph, in dealing with the *Phaedo*, Alcinous uses the verb γενέσθαι. The only possible conclusion is that Alcinous employs the two verbs as synonyms, and that the alternation is just a *variatio*.

⁸³ Some remarks have to be made on the concept of φρόνησις. While in Aristotle it represents practical wisdom – as opposed to the term σοφία, which is theoretical wisdom – in Plato, according to the insightful description provided by Franco Ferrari in his commentary on the *Theaetetus*, it represents the core of the process of acquisition of any virtue whatsoever. The most appropriate translation is therefore ‘knowledge’ or ‘intelligence.’ See Ferrari (2011) 564, n. 202.

οὐκοῦν εὐδαιμονέστατοι, ἔφη, καὶ μακάριοί εἰσι καὶ εἰς βέλτιστον τόπον ἰόντες οἱ τὴν δημοτικὴν τε καὶ πολιτικὴν ἀρετὴν ἐπιτετηδευκότες, ἦν δὴ καλοῦσι σωφροσύνην τε καὶ δικαιοσύνην.

The happiest and the truly blessed, and those who go to the best place [*scil.* after death], are those who have practised the social and civil virtues, which they call self-control and justice. (Alc. *Did.* 181.32–36).

According to Alcinous' rendering, Plato in the *Phaedo* claims that those who have practised self-control and justice (σωφροσύνην τε καὶ δικαιοσύνην) are the happiest (εὐδαιμονέστατοι) and – as Alcinous himself probably added, because he was quoting the passage from memory⁸⁴ – the most blessed. Alcinous quotes this passage as a proof of the Platonic doctrine of assimilation to God simply because he identifies the *telos* with human happiness (εὐδαιμονία), according to the Aristotelian and Stoic definition of the concept of the *telos*. It is possible to sketch out Alcinous' reasoning as follows:

- i) The *telos* corresponds to the assimilation to God;
- ii) The happiest are those who have practised the virtues of temperance and justice (as Plato states in the *Phaedo*).

From these two premises Alcinous draws the following consequence:

- iii) Assimilation to God consists in the practice of the virtues of temperance and justice.

However, in order for this consequence to be really drawn from the premises it is necessary to add another premise that Alcinous does not make explicit, namely the identification between the *telos* and human happiness. If i) the *telos* coincides with human happiness and ii) the happiest are those who practice the virtue of temperance and justice, then the *telos* will coincide with the practice of the virtue of temperance and justice. And, if the *telos* is assimilation to God, this divinisation will correspond to being (or becoming) just and wise, and this corresponds to what is said in the passages from the *Theaetetus* and the *Republic*. The circle is closed. Alcinous does not make explicit the

⁸⁴ As Dillon notes in his commentary, the word μακάριοι does not appear at all in Plato's passage, while it appears in some other passages. The common feature of those passages is the proximity of the word εὐδαιμονία, as in *Resp.* 354a1 and *Lg.* 660e3 and 730c2-3. So, it might reasonably be a matter of memory. See Dillon (1993) and Whittaker (1990) 138.

identification between the *telos* and human *eudaimonia* simply because it was not necessary at all: as we have seen, from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* onwards the *telos* coincides, by definition, with the end of human desires and human goods, and therefore also with human *eudaimonia*.

It is noteworthy that virtue in the *Phaedo* passage is called δημοτικήν τε καὶ πολιτικήν, literally “popular” (directed towards the good of the δῆμος)⁸⁵ and political. Plato refers here to the *civic* virtue, namely the one that is exercised towards the δῆμος. In other terms, the adjective suggests that this kind of virtue does not have to be taken here simply as a state of the soul, which would be attainable also in isolation, but as a virtue that has to be performed in a condition of sociality. That is why later Platonists usually interpret this very passage from the *Phaedo* as referring to an inferior level in the scale of virtues.

Alcinous himself deals with these inferior virtues in chapter 30, naming them εὐφύια (“good natural dispositions”) and, more relevantly for us, προκοπαί (i.e. virtues related to ‘moral progress’).⁸⁶ Here they are opposed to the τέλειαι ἀρεταί, namely the perfect (or *final*) virtues, which differ from the former, insofar as they are not subject to any variation in degree or intensity.⁸⁷ It is certainly rather surprising that Alcinous includes these imperfect (and, at least according to some readers of the *Phaedo*, negative) virtues in his account of the most perfect ideal of life, the *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi*. The role of the inferior virtues in pursuing the *telos* will be one of Plotinus’ main concerns in

⁸⁵ We find the adjective δημοτικήν with the meaning of “directed towards the good of the *demos*” for instance in the *Republic* (*Resp.* 572), and in general the word is commonly used this way by Attic orators like Isocrates (for instance *Isoc. Or.* 185.354) and Demosthenes (*Dem. Or.* 268). At other times the same adjective is used in Plato with the meaning of “democratic” and has a negative nuance. In this passage from the *Phaedo* it is hard to argue for a negative sense, for the context suggest almost unequivocally the positivity of such virtue.

⁸⁶ Προκοπή means “progress in a journey” (LSJ,1486). Whittaker (1990) 144 points out that, with regard to moral progress, these are Stoic terms (cf. SVF IV and the Latin parallel *Cic. Att.*15.16). On this see also Giusta (1967) 49–53. I said that the term προκοπαί is relevant for us because, even if they are at a lower level on the scale of virtues, they are still related to moral progress and, as such, are not *negative* virtues.

⁸⁷ *Alc. Did.* 183.17–25. The words used by Alcinous in chapter 30 unequivocally recalls the *Phaedo* passage quoted in chapter 28 (ἐξ ἔθους τε καὶ μελέτης γεγνονῖαν, *Phd.* 82b) and the verbal correspondence becomes even stronger and more persuasive a few lines below: ἐξ ἔθους ἐγγιγνόμεναι καὶ ἀσκήσεως, 184.1. I take the chance to thank the anonymous referee of the journal *Philologus* for having suggested to me a comparison with chapter 30 of the *Didaskalikos* as a means to overcome this exegetical problem. At least one other question can be raised on this point. The εὐφύια καὶ προκοπαί are described as innate virtues, which only depend on a good natural disposition. Would assimilation to God be therefore impossible without a certain natural disposition? We will deal with this question at the end of the chapter.

his account of the doctrine of *homoiōsis theōi*, and it is interesting for us as well. How can the inferior virtues have a role in the pursuit of the most perfect life? Alcinous in the *Didaskalikos* does not seem to deal directly with this kind of question. Nevertheless, once again in chapter 30, the author acknowledges these inferior virtues to stand in a relation of *likeness* (ὁμοιότης) to the τέλειαι ἀρεταί, the perfect virtues. In this picture, we could envisage the issue in the following terms: if a person A becomes similar to another person B and this person B is in its turn similar to the virtuous person C, it follows that the first person of this sequence (A) will be similar to the third (C), namely the virtuous one. To a relation such as that of likeness the transitive property does apply. If the relation between the inferior virtues and the perfect virtues has to be taken as a relation of likeness (ὁμοιότης), as Alcinous states in chapter 30, we may be led to think that the person who practices an inferior virtue would be similar to the person who practices the perfect one.

The relation of ὁμοιότης would therefore be applicable also to the subject of the virtues. If the virtuous man is, by definition, similar to God, the man who practices the inferior virtues, being similar to the virtuous man, will ultimately be similar to God as well, albeit to a lower degree. After all, it must be conceded that, if one makes progress towards ὁμοιότης to a virtuous individual, one is at the very same time making progress also towards the God to whom such individual assimilates himself. It follows that προκοπαί too may be seen to involve assimilation to God. What emerges from the very beginning of Alcinous' exposition is the tension between the need for the flight, drawn from described in Plato's *Theaetetus*, and the advice to practise civic virtue, drawn from the *Republic* and the *Phaedo*.

Next Alcinous adds two passages: the first is a passage from the *Laws* ("God who, as an old tradition has it, holds the beginning and the end..."),⁸⁸ where Plato does not literally use the expression "assimilation to God", but rather speaks of "*following* (ἔπεσθαι) Him", according to a formulation that was usually attributed to Pythagoras,⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Pl. *Leg.* 4.

⁸⁹ Alcinous is referring to *Leg.* 4.715e. The formula ἔπεσθαι θεόν is attributed to Pythagoras by Eudorus in the fragment Stob. 2.53.22 Wachsmuth–Hense, where it is described as identical in meaning to the ὁμοίωσις θεῷ. On Eudorus see *supra*, pp. 88–103.

and the second is a passage from the *Phaedrus*, in which both these expressions occur together (“The soul that *follows* and *likens* itself to God”).⁹⁰

Following these quotations, which on the whole suggest that the way to pursue assimilation to God is the practice of the virtues, Alcinous embarks on a reasoning that connects God to the good, and hence to the beneficial. The good, he says, is the first principle of the beneficial (τῆς ὠφελείας ἀρχὴ τὸ ἀγαθόν), according to Socrates’ pronouncement in the *Hippias Major* (296e). Since the good is *dependent* on God (ἐκ θεοῦ εἴρηται),⁹¹ it necessarily follows that the aim of human life, which should be the supreme good, is *becoming like God* (ἐξομοιωθῆναι θεῷ⁹²), i.e. becoming like that from whom every good depends. The implicit point here is, naturally, the definition of the *telos*: this ought to coincide with the supreme *good* and hence one’s ultimate benefit.

If we now leave aside the many quotations from Platonic dialogues for a moment and focus on Alcinous’ brief summaries of and comments on his doctrine, we may notice a detail, which I have already anticipated in a footnote to my translation, and which might be of interest, even though it has always been neglected by scholars. Alcinous claims that in the *Theatetus* assimilation to God consists in “being intelligent, and just, and pious” (τὸ φρόνιμον καὶ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον εἶναι). Then, after having reported the quotation from the *Theatetus* passage, he turns to the *Republic*, where – he claims – assimilation to God “consists only in being just” (τὸ μόνον δίκαιον εἶναι). The list of texts continues, after the second quotation, with the *Phaedo*, where – Alcinous claims – *homoiōsis* consists in “becoming self-controlled and just” (τὸ σώφρονα ἅμα καὶ δίκαιον γενέσθαι). As becomes clear through a comparison between the three paraphrases, in the third definition of the *formula*, the one related to the *Phaedo*, Alcinous changes the verb εἶναι (“to be”) with the verb γενέσθαι (“to become”). The result is that in the first two renderings assimilation to God is described as a virtuous state (“being just...”), whereas in the third we find the process aimed at bringing about a virtuous state (“becoming self-controlled and just”).

⁹⁰ Pl. *Phdr.* 248.

⁹¹ As we have seen, in the previous chapter Alcinous stated that God *is* the primal good. See *supra*, pp. 131–132.

⁹² The verb ἐξομοιωθῆναι is plainly borrowed from *Tim.* 90 d4, which – surprisingly – is not quoted among the proof passages at the beginning of the chapter. That is odd, given the importance of the *Timaeus* elsewhere in the text. See Dillon (1993), 173.

At any rate, before we give too much importance to this shift, it is important to note that it does not occur in the Platonic passages that Alcinous is quoting. Both in the *Theatetus* passage and in the one from the *Republic*, the verb that Plato employs is γενέσθαι. Plato is thus consistent with the active nature of the verbal noun ὁμοίωσις, and always describes it as an *activity*, namely the process that leads to the virtuous state.⁹³ Alcinous instead, in his account of Plato’s doctrine, seems sometimes to focus on the outcome of the process, identifying assimilation to God with the virtuous state. We will soon deal with a passage in which Alcinous explicitly defines ὁμοίωσις θεῶ as a “good condition (πάθημα) of the soul”.⁹⁴ One cannot fail to notice a difference from Eudorus’s version, which was instead way more in the direction of an activity, since assimilation to God corresponded there to “living in accordance to virtue” and, more specifically, “acquiring and using the perfect virtue”.⁹⁵

2. Which God? The First Unmoved Mover, the World Soul and the Demiurge

Immediately after having presented the argument I have just discussed, Alcinous adds a kind of afterthought, in order to explain a point he was taking for granted. This short clarification is, in my view, of paramount importance for a correct understanding of the doctrine:

θεῶ δηλονότι τῶ ἐπουρανίῳ, μὴ τῶ μὰ Δία ὑπερουρανίῳ, ὃς οὐκ ἀρετὴν ἔχει, ἀμείνων δ’ ἐστὶ ταύτης.

[one has to liken oneself to] God *upon* the heavens clearly, not – *by Jove!* – to the God *above* the heavens, who does not have virtue, being superior to this. (181.43–45)

⁹³ Also in the passage from the *Phaedo* Plato is clearly describing an activity or process, as is shown by the active nature of the verb ἐπιτηδεύω, which means “pursue, practice”.

⁹⁴ Alc. *Did.* 153.5–9

⁹⁵ Stob. *Ecl.* II, 42, 7 ss. Wachs: Τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶ τὸ κατ’ ἀρετὴν ζῆν. Τοῦτο δ’ αὖ κτήσις ἅμα καὶ χρῆσις τῆς τελείας ἀρετῆς.

This statement follows on from Alcinous' earlier claim. If the way to liken oneself to God is by being virtuous – as the philosopher asserted on the basis of the passages from Plato at the beginning of the chapter – the implicit (and obvious) implication is that God himself actually possesses virtue, and more specifically, according to the *Phaedo* passage, the *civic* virtues. And so, according to Alcinous, it is simply impossible that Plato had the first God in mind when enjoining us to become like God. This first God does not possess the virtues, being superior to all of them, and so Plato's statement would literally make no sense. For this statement about the superiority of God to the virtues Alcinous seems to follow the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle indicates that virtue and evil cannot be attributed to God, who is superior to both of them.⁹⁶ Not so the Stoics, who on the contrary believe that God possesses and even practices the virtues, and that it is in virtue that human "likeness to God" (*similitudo deo*) is grounded, as Cicero in the *De legibus* clearly attests.⁹⁷ It is interesting to note that, once again, Alcinous' specification leads us in the direction of a more 'Stoic' God, opposed to a more Aristotelian one.⁹⁸ What, then, is the meaning of Alcinous' clarification about the 'position' of the God involved in the assimilation, and how does this affect the meaning we should attribute to the doctrine?

Firstly, we should consider the two adjectives used here by Alcinous to distinguish the two different gods, namely ἐπουράνιος and ὑπερουράνιος. Let us focus on the nature of this distinction, which has been generally underestimated by translators. The term ἐπουράνιος has been translated in a very similar way in the most recent translations of the *Didaskalikos*, the English one by Dillon (1993) and the French one by Louis (in Whittaker, 1990). Dillon translates "in the heavens", stressing the preposition by using the italic, in opposition to "above the heavens" (ὑπερουράνιος). Whittaker translates "dans le ciel", in opposition to "supracéleste". These translation choices are more

⁹⁶ *Eth. Nic.* VII. 1, 1145 a 25-27, καὶ γὰρ ὡς περ οὐδὲ θηρίου ἐστὶ κακία οὐδ' ἀρετή, οὕτως οὐδὲ θεοῦ, ἀλλ' ἢ μὲν τιμώτερον ἀρετῆς, ἢ δ' ἕτερόν τι γένος κακίας. Note, however, that as in Stoicism, we are enjoined here to imitate a God who *does* possess the virtues.

⁹⁷ Cic. *De leg.* I.8.25: *virtus eadem in homine ac deo est...est igitur homini cum deo similitudo.*

⁹⁸ The choice of referring, to the Aristotelian notion of the divine on the one hand, and to the Stoic divinity on the other hand, when discussing Alcinous' idea of God – as I did with Eudorus – is not at all arbitrary. We just have to keep in mind Donini's statement about Middle Platonist ethics: "In generale l'etica medioplatonica appare poco unitaria e poco coerente: forse si può dire divisa da un contrasto di fondo fra la tendenza aristotelizzante e le influenze dello stoicism". I think that the notion of the divine and the account of the *telos* are two of the most explicit examples of this contrast. See Donini (1982) 375.

problematic than might seem at a first glimpse.⁹⁹ The term ἐπουράνιος can hardly mean “in the heavens”, for the preposition ἐπί more likely and more often suggests the idea of “upon”. This terminology clearly derives from a passage in the *Phaedrus* (247c), which describes how the souls arrive “upon the vault of heaven” (ἐπὶ τῷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ νότῳ) and then spread out upon it. The use of the preposition ἐπὶ and the reference to the destiny of the souls in the *Phaedrus* suggest that the difference between the two gods does not lie in the fact that one is *in* the heavens and the second *above*; rather, both are upon the heaven, but the first *in contiguity* with the heavens, like the souls in the *Phaedrus*, and, more relevantly, like the World Soul in the *Timaeus*, whereas the second is just *above, beyond* the celestial vault. Therefore, the adjective ἐπουράνιος points in the direction of an identification of this second God with the World Soul, which is located around the vault of heaven according to the account of the *Timaeus*. In this dialogue, the World Soul has been spread out by the Demiurge all around the body of the world so that the soul envelops the body of the world:

ψυχὴν δὲ εἰς τὸ μέσον αὐτοῦ θεὸς διὰ παντός τε ἔτεινεν καὶ ἔτι ἕξωθεν τὸ σῶμα αὐτῆς περιεκάλυπεν, καὶ κύκλῳ δὴ κύκλον στρεφόμενον οὐρανὸν ἓνα μόνον ἔρημον κατέστησεν...

And in the midst thereof he set soul, which he stretched throughout the whole of it, and therewith he enveloped also the exterior of its body; and as a circle revolving in a circle he established one sole and solitary heaven ... (Pl. *Ti.* 34b3–6).

This description, and especially the verb περικαλύπτω (“cover all round”), strongly suggests the image of the World Soul enveloping the whole shell of the world, which is indeed the heaven.

But there is more to say. In order to clarify this unique divine hierarchy, let us take a step back to chapter 10 of the *Didaskalikos*, which John Dillon has reasonably defined as “the most interesting and original chapter of the work”.¹⁰⁰ Here Alcinoüs examines the *third principle* (τῆς τρίτης ἀρχῆς), namely God, a subject that, according to

⁹⁹ I take the opportunity to thank one of my PhD supervisors, Jan Opsomer, who first pointed out to me this problematic nature of these translations.

¹⁰⁰ Dillon (1993), 100. The interest in this chapter is mostly due to its notorious obscureness. See Opsomer (2005) 79.

Plato himself – Alcinous tells us – is “almost beyond description” (μικροῦ δεῖν καὶ ἄρρητον).¹⁰¹ In this chapter, Alcinous actually speaks of a “primal God” (ὁ πρῶτος θεός), being “the cause of the eternal activity of the *intellect of the whole heaven*” (αἴτιος... τοῦ ἀεὶ ἐνεργεῖν τῷ νῷ τοῦ σύμπαντος οὐρανοῦ). Alcinous goes on to describe this first God as follows: he “acts while remaining himself unmoved (ἀκίνητος)”, he is “the finest of things (κάλλιστος)”, “everlastingly engaged in thinking of himself (τὰ ἑαυτοῦ νοήματα ἀεὶ νοοίη)”, “eternal (ἀίδιος)”, “ineffable (ἄρρητος)”, “self-perfect (αὐτοτελής)”, “always perfect (ἀειτελής)” and “perfect in all respects (παντελής)”. He is the good itself, as he is the cause of every good (παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ αἴτιος), the truth and the origin of all truth, the father, as he is the cause of all things, and so on and so forth. The entire chapter is about this “primal God” who has the features of absolute transcendence and perfection of Aristotle’s First Unmoved Mover.¹⁰²

The description of the first God better fits with a ὑπερουράνιος God rather than the ἐπουράνιος one, especially because of the continuous stress on God’s superiority to any attribute. Thus, it seems that a ‘second’ God “upon the heaven” has no room in Alcinous’ chapter on the divine. About this second God we can infer from the passage from chapter 28 that he is supposed to possess all the virtues, so that we can liken ourselves to him by practicing the virtues. And that actually seems to be the only certain thing we can know about this second God, who otherwise seems to be conflated with the first one in Alcinous’ *Didaskalikos*.

Although there are no other gods in the chapter, from chapter 10 it is possible to infer a divine hierarchy, as Opsomer has done.¹⁰³ The almost ineffable first God, who represents the good itself, is the cause of the active intellect, which occupies the ‘second place’ in the ontological hierarchy. In turn, the active intellect is the cause of thinking in

¹⁰¹ Plato’s observation provided one of the bases for the negative theology that was subsequently developed. The adjective ἄρρητον can be translated not just as “beyond description” but also as “not described”. But in my view these two possible translations are, absolutely equivalent here. In the eyes of a Platonist such as Alcinous, what is *not described* in Plato is so simply because it is “beyond description”. For a Platonist, it is never the case that Plato forgot to talk about something. An eloquent sign of this is the great effort that Alcinous makes to find examples of Aristotelian syllogisms in Plato’s dialogues, in order not to admit that Aristotle added something that Plato did not have in his system, such as a formalised logic.

¹⁰² Arist. *Metaph.* 12.1074b. It is likely that Alcinous was familiar with the description of Aristotle’s God, for it is unlikely that the verbal correspondences are due to chance. See Dillon’s commentary, in which he compares Alcinous’ first God to Aristotle’s one in *Metaphysics*.

¹⁰³ See Opsomer (2005) 79–83.

the potentially thinking intellect of the world.¹⁰⁴ Next comes the World Soul. Now, to what entity of this hierarchy does our ἐπουράνιος God correspond to?

Dillon, in his commentary on this passage, suggests that we interpret the heavenly God as the “heavenly Intellect of chapter 10”.¹⁰⁵ Tarrant goes even further and identifies the Platonic source of Alcinous’ second God with the Intellect of the world soul of Plato’s *Timaeus*. Alcinous – Tarrant argues – here has *Timaeus* 90d in mind, and the “ensouled mind responsible for the heavenly motions”.¹⁰⁶ Donini, like Loenen before him, claims that Alcinous is referring to this second God when he speaks of “the Intellect of the whole heaven” (164,20.24), that is “the Intellect of the World Soul” (165.2; 169.32).¹⁰⁷ Sedley identifies this celestial God just with the “benevolently governing World Soul”.¹⁰⁸ More specifically, according to Opsomer, the ἐπουράνιος God is “the potentially thinking intellect of the world”.¹⁰⁹ Göransson argues that this God is the intellect of the world soul.¹¹⁰

The identification between the ἐπουράνιος God and the world soul, or better with its rational part, its intellect, is probably the best possible solution, and it has also the big advantage of explaining the peculiar adjective ἐπουράνιος, as we have seen before. Nevertheless, one big question remains unsolved: in what sense does the heavenly intellect or the intellect of the world soul possess virtue? And what kind of virtue is this?

In his article about Alcinous’ theology Donini throws light on some passages from the *Didaskalikos* in which the presence of a second God, who does possess the virtues, seems to be somehow implied.¹¹¹ And this second God who according to Donini – and myself – must be considered distinct from the first God and instead equivalent to the intellect of the world soul, can further be identified with the Demiurge.¹¹² This

¹⁰⁴ The one at 164,22–23 164,27 (on this passage I take Opsomer’s view that Alcinous is referring to a cosmic intellect, rather than a human one, as in Dillon, 1993, 102), 164,40–165,3.

¹⁰⁵ Dillon (1993) 173.

¹⁰⁶ Tarrant (2007), 420.

¹⁰⁷ See Donini (1988) 118; Loenen (1956), 310 and (1957), 35–56.

¹⁰⁸ See Sedley (2012), 173.

¹⁰⁹ Opsomer (2005) 79, fn 153. See *Did.* 164.22–23, 164.27, 164.40–165.3.

¹¹⁰ Göransson (1995) 195–196.

¹¹¹ Donini (1988).

¹¹² The bibliography on the Demiurge of Plato’s *Timaeus*, as well as on its Platonist and Stoic interpretations, is huge. Particularly related to my own main interest in the present study are the volume by Reydams Schils (1999) and the article by Opsomer (2005) 51–99, both of which focus on the Demiurge in

identification might be of interest as a means to cast light on our matter: first of all, it provides an explanation of the statement about God's virtues (the demiurge of the *Timaeus* is described as *good*);¹¹³ secondly, and more relevantly for my own task in this study, it can affect the way to look at the whole doctrine of assimilation to God as the *telos*.

For this identification Donini sets out from a passage in chapter 12, the chapter about the generation of the world, where – as is only natural – Alcinous draws on Plato's *Timaeus*, even quoting it literally. At the outset (167.7) we read that the world has been fashioned by God “*looking at* a Form of the world” (πρὸς τινα ἰδέαν κόσμου ἀποβλέποντος). Donini sharply focuses on the verb ἀποβλέπω, which describes the action of looking at something *from the outside*, as the preposition ἀπο- suggests. So, he infers from this passage that Alcinous here is not referring to the first God (the ὑπερουράνιος God), because this primal God could not *look at an external Form of the world*. According to Alcinous' interpretation of Platonic doctrine, the Form of the world is an idea which stays inside the first God himself. According to the Middle Platonist doctrine of the Forms as the thoughts of God, which Alcinous endorses in his *Didaskalikos*, the Forms are the thoughts of this primal God and, as such, are by him contemplated internally. There is nothing *outside* the supreme God, but everything is *inside* him.¹¹⁴

On the contrary, elsewhere the very same action of ‘looking’ from the outside is attributed precisely to the world soul:

...ἀποβλέπουσα πρὸς τὰ νοητὰ αὐτοῦ δέχεται τὰ εἶδη καὶ τὰς μορφάς, ἐφιεμένη τῶν ἐκείνου νοημάτων.

...by looking towards the objects of intellection inherent in him [scil. the first God] it [scil. the world soul] may receive the Forms and shapes, through striving to attain to his thoughts. (169.39–41)

Imperial Platonism, whereas for the Demiurge in Plato's *Timaeus* and in other dialogues I will refer, among others, to Neschke–Hentschke (2000).

¹¹³ The goodness of the Demiurge in the *Timaeus* is first mentioned at 29a and then elaborated upon at 30a.

¹¹⁴ We will deal with the doctrine of the Forms as the thoughts of God later. For the moment, I will refer to Michalewski (2014) 91–93.

Alcinous' text provides further proofs to strengthen this argument. A few lines below (167.15) Alcinous specifies that God created the world because *he was good*,¹¹⁵ quoting a passage from Plato's *Timaeus* (29e1). Once again (if we interpret the passage literally) Alcinous cannot be referring here to the first God, who cannot be good, for this would imply he would possess some virtue. Instead, he is superior to all of the virtues and attributes, and so he is not good (which would mean that he can partake of the Form of Goodness);¹¹⁶ rather, he is himself the Good, the Form of Goodness, as Alcinous has made explicit above:

ἀλλ' οὐδὲ συμβέβηκέ τι αὐτῷ, οὔτε κακόν (οὐ γὰρ θέμις τοῦτο εἰπεῖν), οὔτε ἀγαθόν
 (κατὰ μετοχὴν γὰρ τινος ἔσται οὗτος καὶ μάλιστα ἀγαθότητος)
 nor does he possess any attributes, neither bad (for it is improper to utter such a
 thought), nor good (for he would be thus *by participation in something*, to wit,
 goodness). (*Didask.* 165.8–9)

The most appropriate translation of συμβέβηκέ in the passage would be “it is not anything just accidentally”, or “it does not possess any attribute as an accident”. In other words, it would be incorrect to call God good for the goodness in him is not an accident. This is the meaning of his being *the* Good in itself: in him goodness is substantial and not accidental as in any other good thing we may predicate as good. Indeed, when at 164.34 and 36, Alcinous calls God ‘good’, he also explains that this is so because God is the cause of all that is good (παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ αἴτιος ὢν, 164.37).¹¹⁷

Furthermore, in another passage Alcinous explicitly states that the first God delegates his powers over nature to the world soul. Again, in chapter 12 we read that: “it is this latter [the intellect of the world soul] that, set in order by the father, itself imposes order on all of nature in this world (167.8–11)”. Accordingly, the world soul is responsible for the generation of the world and the imposition of order on nature.¹¹⁸ The demiurgic power is the very power to “impose order on all of nature in this world”. These observations lead Donini to outline a second celestial (ἐπουράνιος) God who corresponds

¹¹⁵ 167.15: διότι ἀγαθὸς ἦν.

¹¹⁶ See Opsomer (2005) 83.

¹¹⁷ As Opsomer (2005) 67, fn. 79 points out.

¹¹⁸ Cf. *Didask.* chapters 12–17.

both to the intellect of the world soul and to the Demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus*. If the intellect of the world soul corresponds to the Demiurge, it becomes clearer in what sense we can say that it possesses and practices the *civic* and *demotic* virtues, namely: in relation to the world, which is shaped, set in order and ruled by his providence.¹¹⁹ The first God, on the other hand, would be a completely transcendent one, resembling the first unmoved mover of Aristotle, in its superiority to all attributes.

There is no consensus among modern interpreters on Donini's argument. First, Gretchen Reydamas Schils has shown that we surely cannot transfer to the world soul all of the divine attributes that Alcinoos assigns to the demiurge, attributes that better fit a God *above* the heavens.¹²⁰ Secondly, at the beginning of chapter 13, a demiurgic God is mentioned in relation to the whole construction of both the body of the universe and its soul. This passage seems to go in the opposite direction, towards an identification of the Demiurge with the first God "above the heavens". Moreover, as once again Reydamas-Schils points out, the demiurgic God in the passage quoted is in relation with the universe *taken as a whole*. By contrast, in the *Timaeus* as much as in the *Didaskalikos* the world soul is entrusted with the care of the world but *within the world*.

From all these considerations, it is clear that in the *Didaskalikos* there are some inconsistencies about the nature of these two (or three)¹²¹ 'gods' which can hardly be solved. More specifically, it is hard to establish which one of the two gods of chapter 28 Alcinoos has in mind when he refers to the Demiurge. Perhaps the only way to find a solution is to split the demiurgic functions between the first God and the world soul. Loenen too deals with this problem, showing how the apparent inconsistencies between some passages in Alcinoos' *Disaskalikos* can be clarified by bearing in mind that in this work Alcinoos is combining two kinds of approach to the *Timaeus*: a more literal

¹¹⁹ I will refer to Reydamas-Schils (1999), a study that connects the interpretation of the Demiurge as a providential divinity to the Stoic readings of Plato's *Timaeus*. The idea that the Demiurge was already a providential divinity in Plato's *Timaeus*, regardless of its later interpretations, is controversial. I think that the way in which the Demiurge is presented in the *Timaeus* undoubtedly encourages a reading of this figure in terms of a providential divinity. However, from a historical standpoint, this reading has been established through the exegesis of the dialogue made by the Stoics, as Reydamas-Schils clearly shows in her volume. On this point see also Powers (2013) 713–722, who analyses the Platonic Demiurge as a precursor of the Stoic providential God.

¹²⁰ Reydamas-Schils (1999), 198, note 90.

¹²¹ Opsomer (2005) 79.

rendering on the one hand, and an allegorical reading on the other.¹²² This observation is interesting. Our passage occurs in the context of a very literal rendering of Plato's dialogue and it is in this context that we find the verb ἀποβλέπω, which is, in fact, also present in the dialogue. Applying Loenen's distinction, we might be led to think that the use of ἀποβλέπω does not imply that Alcinoüs here has the action of "looking from the outside" in mind, but rather that he is just literally quoting the *Timaeus*. This verb would not offer any proof of the distinction between the first God and the Demiurge.

On the other hand, it is also evident to me that the Demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus* cannot be completely identified with the first God, as this is described in chapter 10 of the *Didaskalikos*: it would not make any sense to think of the Demiurge as an absolutely transcendent and noetic divinity, superior to all the virtues. The main feature of the Demiurge is indeed his demiurgic power, which he exercises in relation with the world. At the same time, however, the first God cannot be completely identified with the intellect of the world soul, for he sometimes seems to relate to the world from the outside.

From Alcinoüs' text it is really hard to draw a coherent theology. The boundaries between the divinities are not clear enough to give a precise account of the distinction between a ὑπερουράνιος God and a ἐπουράνιος one. And yet, Alcinoüs' elucidation in chapter 28 is clear: we have to assimilate ourselves to a God who possesses virtues and not to a God who is superior to virtue. The former is called ἐπουράνιος, which, as the reference to the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus* suggests, means that he is the soul of the world and, as such, gives life and order to it.

Mansfeld, followed by Opsomer, has argued that "many of the seeming inconsistencies of the chapter and of Alcinoüs' theology in general can be solved if one takes the active and the potential intellect to be really just one entity, the cosmic intellect, which is the intellect of the world soul".¹²³ Further developing Mansfeld's solution, Opsomer first discards the hypothesis that Alcinoüs holds that the primal God is a principle even above "the cause of active intellect", as based on an erroneous

¹²² Loenen (1956), 296-319.

¹²³ The quotation is taken from Opsomer (2005) 80. This solution was firstly proposed by Mansfeld (1972) 61-65. See also Donini (1982) 107.

interpretation of Alcinous' sentence at 164.18–23.¹²⁴ The highest divinity is thus “the cause of the activity of the intellect, but it is nonetheless itself an intellect”.¹²⁵ In this picture, the other ‘gods’ of the hierarchy (the active intellect and the potentially thinking intellect) have to be thought of as two aspects or better two states of one entity, which is the cosmic intellect (or the intellect of the world soul). The distinction between the active and the potential intellect is therefore “not one between two consecutively occurring or alternating states, but one between two logically distinguishable states or aspects of one single entity”.¹²⁶ Since the activity of this second intellect is not self-caused, it differs from the highest intellect, which instead “does not need to be actualised by any higher principle”.¹²⁷ Hence, the first intellect is the Unmoved Mover of *Metaphysics Lambda*, for it moves without being moved, “in the way the motionless beloved moves the lover”.¹²⁸ On the other hand, as always Opsomer points out, the second cosmic intellect stems from *De anima* III (4–5), where the passive intellect appears to be that of the soul.¹²⁹

3. *Thinking of God: the three viae*

After having clarified, as far as possible, Alcinous' complex divine hierarchy as it is exposed in the *Didaskalikos*, it might be of interest, for the sake of our purpose, to try to change our approach to the theme. In order to do so, let us begin with a very general observation. In chapter 10 of Alcinous' *Didaskalikos* (as well as in Plato's dialogues) God is at first sight described as *one* entity. Yet, sometimes we can identify different divine entities, as we have done in the previous paragraph, by separating the highest God from the active intellect and the potential intellect. When there are such distinctions, often they can be better understood if we take them as different *aspects* of this *one* divinity, rather than as proper different gods, as we did in the previous paragraph with

¹²⁴ See Opsomer (2005) 80, Dillon (1993) 102–103, Donini (1982) 152, n. 28, Mansfeld (1972) 63.

¹²⁵ Opsomer (2005) 80.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁷ *Ibidem*. See also Mansfeld (1972) 64.

¹²⁸ *Didask.* 164.23–27. See also Abbate (2002) 59–62 and Donini (1982) 152, n. 31.

¹²⁹ Opsomer (2005) 81, n. 161.

respect to the cosmic intellect, following the lead of Mansfeld and Opsomer. As we have seen, the divine being might have different aspects, different powers, and different states. Hence, it might be the case that the specification in chapter 28 too must be regarded as an indication of those powers and features that make God a moral paradigm. This kind of approach, though it might appear as incompatible with the more ‘analytic’ one applied so far, can better show what the meaning of a divine paradigm in ethics is. And since our primary object of inquiry is not Alcinous’ theology but rather Alcinous’ ethical goal, it might be interesting for us not to limit ourselves to the identification of the *epouranios theos* with the cosmic intellect (or the intellect of the world soul), but to further develop the description of such a God.

Secondly, as I have already mentioned several times in the course of this work, the introduction of God as an ethical paradigm has been widely interpreted by scholars as the sign of a turn towards an otherworldly ethics, one that is anti-social and exclusively focused on contemplation. Ada Neschke-Hentsche’s admirable work on the history of political Platonism is an example of this implicit inference.¹³⁰ In her volume, Neschke-Hentsche devotes a chapter to the analysis of the evolution of the *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi* from Platonic dialogues up to Plotinus. According to this reconstruction, it is precisely when the Platonic formula of assimilation to God becomes the specification of the *telos*, with Eudorus and Alcinous, that Platonist ethics abandons Plato’s original interest for politics and the practical sphere. The scholar defends her statement by referring to some passages of Alcinous’ *Didaskalikos* on the ideal of *theōria*, passages that I will soon be analysing. Now, it is widely held that the history of Platonism experienced this turn towards an otherworldly ethics,¹³¹ but the aspect that, in my view, cannot be taken for granted is whether this turn in some way coincides with the *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi*. In

¹³⁰ Neschke-Hentsche (1990).

¹³¹ This idea, however, has been rejected by another admirable study, O’Meara (2002). O’Meara argues for a *political* Neoplatonist ethics, mostly on the basis of the fact that all later Platonists too included political virtue in their pursuit of divinisation, and actually developed projects aimed at founding fully-fledged societies. But while it may be true that Neoplatonists gave more thought to worldly affairs than is commonly imagined, one might point out that these Neoplatonist political projects can in themselves be seen as designed to detach their members from the sphere of *praxis*, so that they may devote himself to pure *theōria*; as such, these projects can still be placed within the framework of an anti-political, otherworldly, ethical ideal. I am not interested here in further developing my view on this debate, for Neoplatonism is not the object of my study. See M.J. Edwards, Review on O’Meara (2002) BMCR.

other words, is the introduction of God as a paradigm what led to the emergence of this otherworldly ethics?

Alcinous' specification in chapter 28 suggests that the divine may have played a very different role in the development of Platonist ethics. The most crucial way to fully comprehend the significance of the doctrine of the *telos* would be to focus now on what purpose the introduction of God in ethics really served. And that is why in my exposition I wish to take into account another passage from chapter 10 of the *Didaskalikos*, in which Alcinous explains the ways in which it is possible to think (and talk) about God. This operation is meant to be an attempt to envisage God as Alcinous might have done, following Alcinous' suggestions, rather than our own ideas and preconceived view on the Platonist notion of the divine.

According to Alcinous there are three ways of talking and thinking about God (and these are analysed in a very useful contribution by Mansfeld).¹³² The three *viae* are:

- (i) the *via negationis*, which consists in talking or thinking about God by denying him any attribute;
- (ii) the *via analogiae*, which consists in thinking and talking about God through analogies, for instance the famous one with the sun in Plato's *Republic*;
- (iii) the *via eminentiae*, which consists in attributing to God all the virtues at the highest degree.

These three *viae* should be applied to the problems of the previous section. In other words, very often the contradictions and inconsistencies of Alcinous' theology can be solved if one is aware of the mere fact that Alcinous uses these three kinds of account in talking about God.¹³³

If we have three ways of thinking about God, in a sense we will end up having three different images of God, each one depending on the way we are thinking about the

¹³² Mansfeld (1988), 107–112.

¹³³ See Mansfeld (1988) 111. Opsomer (2005) 81 ff., solves these contradictions by applying Mansfeld's observation about the seeming inconsistency of the fact that Alcinous first describes the highest God as an unmoved mover, but later (*Didask.* 165.16) "deprives him even of an active motion": not only is the highest God not moved but neither does he move anything. According to Opsomer, in the first case Alcinous is using the *via negationis*, in the second one the *via eminentiae*.

divine. In other terms, each way will emphasise one of God's aspects or powers over all others.

Let us examine the three modes of thinking about God. The first mode (i), the so-called *via negationis*, leads us to imagine a God who is above and beyond all attributes (like the first God above the heavens of chapter 28, who is 'superior' to all virtues). Undoubtedly, this mode of thinking about God, while effective for acquiring an idea of the absolute superiority and transcendence of the divine, does not help us at all if our aim is to imitate God. How is it possible to imitate someone we do not have a description of? The first *via* does not lead us in the direction of the God we are looking for. The next mode (ii) is by analogy (*via analogiae*), and leads us to consider God's relational aspects and his relationships with the world. As a matter of fact, the analogies commonly used by Plato and Platonists to describe God have the common feature of describing the kind of relation that God establishes with the world. The analogy of the sun related to human vision in the *Republic* serves precisely this aim: to show what God is like, through the beneficial effects of his relation with the world. The third mode (iii) is the *via eminentiae*, according to which we attribute predicates to God, who is, for instance, the good *par excellence*.¹³⁴ The last two *viae* give us the idea of a divinity that can function well as an ethical model. What is intriguing, I would suggest, is that the two lower modes, which are the ones we have to use in order to imitate God, give us the idea of a God who is in relation with the world (ii) and of a God who possesses all virtues to the highest degree (iii). If we think of this kind of God, it becomes unlikely that, in order to assimilate ourselves to him, we shall not care for the world.

In short, what emerges from the complex theology of the *Didaskalikos* is the fact that Alcinous himself seems keen to feed this confusion between the different levels of the divinity, and we would be hard-pressed to find a completely satisfying solution. I believe that the best possible reconstruction is the one that I have just outlined, and which was first proposed by Mansfeld and then further developed by Opsomer.

Nevertheless, as far as our topic is concerned, the only thing we can assert for certain is that we have to imitate God's virtues, and this is clearly the one reason

¹³⁴For a detailed study of the three modes of thinking/talking about god see Mansfeld (1988)107-112 and Reydams-Schils (1999), 200-201.

Alcinous gives to explain his specification about which God we have to assimilate to in chapter 28. Moreover, we have seen how the adjective ἔπουραντιος suggests that this second God be identified with the world soul, and more specifically – as Donini, Mansfeld and Opsomer have shown – with its intellect. Although it is not clear whether the Demiurge can be identified with the intellect of the world soul (probably not completely), we can be sure that the Demiurge cannot be thought of as an absolutely transcendent divinity either, for this would stand in contradiction to his demiurgic ‘nature.’ The Platonic demiurge is ‘by definition’ a God who is in relation with the world, who is *good*, and who exercises his providential care for the world. Moreover, in Plato’s *Timaeus*, the dialogue that Alcinous mostly shows to have in mind, we read that the Demiurge “wanted everything – and by this Plato means all aspects of the universe and not just human beings – to be as much alike to himself as possible”.¹³⁵ It is likely that when Alcinous specifies to which God we shall liken ourselves, he also has the Demiurge in mind.

If this reasoning were correct, it would inevitably affect the meaning of the goal of assimilation to God. For in this picture, human beings would be required to imitate God in his *virtuous* and *relational* aspect rather than his *noetic* and *transcendent* one. Perhaps the rise of the moral goal of assimilation to God does not necessarily mark the turn towards an ‘otherworldly’ ethics, as has been widely assumed in the scholarship. For in the light of the texts we have examined so far, assimilation to God does not appear at all as an *ascetic* ideal to be equated with a detachment from the human world.

Let us go one step further. As should be clear from what has been argued so far, the ideal of assimilation to God always tends to be strictly related to the Aristotelian ‘ways of life’ of *praxis* and *theōria*. We might therefore conclude that the Demiurge stands as a model for the practical life as well rather than merely for the theoretical one. The distinguishing features of this Platonist divinity are his ordering virtue and his providential care of the world. The Demiurge, so to speak, is a *ruler* rather than a *philosopher*. Nonetheless, this does not at all mean that Alcinous prefers *praxis* to *theōria*. On the contrary, his emphasis is clearly on *theōria*, as he explicitly states in chapter 2 (we read: “the theoretical life is of primary value: the practical of secondary,

¹³⁵ Plato, *Ti*, 29e3.

and involved with necessity...”). Nevertheless, as David Sedley has pointed out in a recent article on Alcinous’ position on the practical and theoretical life, this preference for the theoretical life is not incompatible with the fact that “for him [Alcinous], Platonic *ὁμοίωσις θεῶν* is above all a moral goal, achieved in practical conduct”.¹³⁶ By contrast to what might appear to be the case at a first glance, we can state that in Alcinous’ *Didaskalikos* the doctrine of *homoioōsis theōi* seems to lead also in the direction of the practical life rather than of a purely contemplative one. But before we draw this conclusion, we have to deal with Alcinous’ discussion about the dialectic between *praxis* and *theōria*.

4. *The theoretikos bios: more than just contemplation*

There is at least one other passage in Alcinous’ handbook that deserves to be taken into account in relation to our topic. Right at the outset of the *Didaskalikos*, in chapter 2, Alcinous introduces the Aristotelian antithesis between the theoretical (or contemplative) life (ὁ θεωρητικὸς βίος) and the practical life (ὁ πρακτικὸς βίος). After having defined the two lives according to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, he concludes:

Ἡ ψυχὴ δὴ θεωροῦσα μὲν τὸ θεῖον καὶ τὰς νοήσεις τοῦ θεοῦ εὐπαθεῖν τε λέγεται, καὶ τοῦτο τὸ πάθημα αὐτῆς φρόνησις ὠνόμασται, ὅπερ οὐχ ἕτερον εἶποι ἂν τις εἶναι τῆς πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ὁμοιώσεως.

The soul, when contemplating the divine and the intellections of the divine, is said to be in a good condition, and this condition of it is called wisdom. And that, one could say, is nothing other than assimilation to the divine. (153.5–9)

The passage is unequivocal. Here, without any hesitation, assimilation to God is identified with the “good condition” (εὐπαθεῖν) that characterises the soul that is contemplating the divine (ψυχὴ δὴ θεωροῦσα μὲν τὸ θεῖον). Furthermore, this condition is in turn identified with φρόνησις, a term that always creates some problems with regard to the dialectic between *praxis* and *theōria* for it has a theoretical meaning in Plato,

¹³⁶ Sedley (2012), 171.

whereas in Aristotle it corresponds to human practical reason. Although the context here is strongly Aristotelian and rooted in the *Nicomachean Ethics* more than in any Platonic dialogue, φρόνησις is used with a very Platonic connotation. Thus, according to this passage, a soul is assimilated to God when it contemplates the divine, and, by virtue of that, is *wise*. Thus, φρόνησις corresponds to the “good state” (εὐπαθεῖν) of the soul while it contemplates the divine.

This clearly echoes the end of the *Timaeus*, where the contemplation of heavenly bodies is the way to acquire divine φρόνησις. Interestingly, for Alcinous, the object of contemplation is no longer, as in the *Timaeus*, the heavenly motions but rather the “divine” (τὸ θεῖον) and the “intellections of the divine” (τὰς νοήσεις τοῦ θεοῦ). The “intellections of the divine” are the Forms, as conceived by the Middle Platonic doctrine of the Forms as the thoughts of God.¹³⁷ More specifically, as Alexandra Michalewski notes in her recent volume, the supreme God, in thinking of himself, has two main purposes and effects. First he *actualises* the intellect of the world soul, which is otherwise only potential.¹³⁸ Secondly – and most interestingly for us – he produces the ideas, the Forms.¹³⁹ As Michalewski has shown, in Alcinous the Middle Platonist definition of the Forms as the thoughts of God for the first time is integrated into a theory of a God who is self-thinking.¹⁴⁰ The production of the Forms is the result of an act of self-knowledge performed by God.

In this framework, the *homoiōsis theōi* corresponds to the contemplation of the Forms, which is true divine wisdom (φρόνησις). It is through knowledge of the divine and its intellections that we become virtuous and just, and therefore *godlike*.

But there is more to say. The passage continues as follows:

ὄθεν καὶ προηγούμενον καὶ τίμιον ἂν εἴη τὸ τοιοῦτον καὶ εὐκταϊότατον καὶ οἰκειότατον ἀκόλυτόν τε καὶ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν κείμενον καὶ τοῦ προκειμένου τέλους ἡμῖν αἴτιον. Ἡ μέντοι πρᾶξις καὶ τὸ πρακτικὸν διὰ τοῦ σώματος περαινόμενα κωλυθῆναι

¹³⁷ Alcinous embraces the doctrine of the Forms as ‘thoughts of God’. See Dillon (1977), Donini (1982), Dillon (1988), Whittaker (1990).

¹³⁸ The relevant passages from the *Didaskalikos* are chapter 10 (164.7–166.14), which is devoted to the first God, chapter 12 (166.40 – 168.8), which discusses the ‘generation’ of the world, and chapter 14 (169.16 – 171.14), about the world soul. I cannot go into details here. For an explanation of the ‘mechanism’ of causality of the first God in the *Didaskalikos*, I will refer to Michalewski (2014) 87 – 91.

¹³⁹ See Michalewski (2014) 91–93.

¹⁴⁰ Michalewski (2014) 91.

τε δύναται καὶ πράττειτο ἂν ἀπαιτούντων τῶν πραγμάτων, ἃ κατὰ τὸν θεωρητικὸν βίον ὁράται, μελετῆσαι εἰς ἀνθρώπων ἥθη. Ἦξει γὰρ ὁ σπουδαῖος ἐπὶ τὰ κοινά, ὅπῃ εἰδῆ κακῶς διοικούμενα πρὸς τινῶν αὐτά, περιστατικὰ μὲν οὕτως ἡγούμενος τὸ στρατηγεῖν, τὸ δικάζειν, τὸ πρεσβεύειν, ἄριστα δ' ἐν πράξει καὶ ὡς ἐν ταύτῃ προηγούμενα τὸ περὶ νομοθεσίας καὶ πολιτείας κατάστασιν καὶ παιδείαν νέων.

[...] for that reason [i.e. because it could be equated with assimilation to the divine] something of this kind [i.e. contemplative] would be privileged, of high value, a supreme object of prayer, of the greatest affinity, both unpreventable and in our power, and the cause of bringing about the *goal* (τέλος) we set ourselves. Action and practical affairs, on the other hand, being performed through the body, can be hindered and would be enacted whenever states of affairs demand that one instill into people's characters the things that are seen in virtue of the contemplative life. For the good person will broach public affairs whenever he is aware that they are managed badly by some people. He will on this basis consider acting as general, judge, and ambassador *to be circumstantial duties*, but the business of legislation, drafting the constitution and educating the young to be the best things in the sphere of action and, as it were, privileged within it (153.9-21).

The conclusion Alcinous draws from all the above considerations is that the philosopher “should not leave off from *theōria* (τῆς θεωρίας ἀπολείπεσθαι) in any way, but always be nurturing and developing it, yet also, as something secondary (ἐπόμενον), to enter practical life” (153.21-24). The θεωρητικὸς βίος is qualitatively superior and therefore preferable to the πρακτικὸς βίος, which is instead described as a necessity that might emerge some times, imposed by circumstances. As in Plato's *Republic* – and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* – the ultimate ideal life is *theōria*, which, in Platonist terms, is *theōria* of the Forms. This is the passage of the *Didaskalikos* that furnishes the strongest argument for scholars to interpret the *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi* as an ethical goal basically equal to Aristotelian *theōria*. This conclusion is undoubtedly true, and my intention here is not at all to deny this fact, which would be to deny the evidence. What I would like to question here instead is a certain image of *theōria* and of its relationship to *praxis*, which is all too often taken for granted in the scholarship but which does not fully explain the ancient concept.

While, on the one hand, in the above passage Alcinous clearly sets up an opposition between the two lives, on the other hand some elements suggest a different view, according to which *theōria* does not merely constitute an *alternative* to *praxis*. We read that while a θεωρητικὸς βίος is “unpreventable” (ἀκόλυτον) and “up to us” (ἐφ’ ἡμῶν),¹⁴¹ and while it is appropriate for a philosopher never to leave off from *theōria*, a πρακτικὸς βίος becomes necessary whenever circumstances dictate it, in order to export into society those values that the philosopher contemplates, namely the Forms (which, in the Middle Platonist view, correspond to the thoughts of God).¹⁴²

If we look carefully at the two main statements made in this passage, we find a rather evident contradiction. Alcinous states that the philosopher must never leave off from *theōria*, and that *theōria* is fully *unpreventable* and *up to us*, which amounts to saying that the possibility of devoting oneself to *theōria* cannot be precluded by the circumstances, by anything external to us. However, at the same time the philosopher is supposed to devote himself to practical activities whenever circumstances dictate it. But if the philosopher, compelled by circumstances, can be forced to leave off from *theoria*, or indeed if he has to, this means on the one hand that it is impossible for him to never leave off from *theoria* and, on the other hand, that *theōria* cannot be described as being fully *up to us*, for it can be prevented by some external factors (like necessity of *praxis*). Alcinous is not contradicting himself if and only if the fact that the philosopher should sometimes be called to engage in practical matters does not necessarily represent in itself a hindrance for contemplation, or better an *interruption* of it. For, again, if this were not the case, *theōria* would not be entirely *up to us*, it would not be entirely *unpreventable*: on the contrary, it could sometimes be prevented by practical commitments. What does it mean to engage in *praxis* without leaving off from *theōria*?

¹⁴¹ On the notion of ἐφ’ ἡμῶν, I will refer to Eliasson (2008) and in particular to the chapter devoted to Middle Platonism, 110–167. The notion has to do with the philosophical problem of the relation between fate and free will, a problem for which – as Dillon (1977, 44–45) correctly notes – the Middle Platonists did not find much help in Plato or even Aristotle (although the notion of ἐφ’ ἡμῶν does occur in Aristotle: see Eliasson, 2008, 45–79). Judging from the testimonies attributed to Eudorus, his work contained no discussion of the notion of ἐφ’ ἡμῶν, which is instead present in Philo of Alexandria (*Mut.* 244.1; *Som.* 2.291,3; *Q. Gen.* 1.21.8) and in several passages from Plutarch. I will refer to Eliasson (2008) and Opsomer (2014) for further details.

¹⁴² For the explanation of the ‘mechanism’ of causality of the first God in the *Didaskalikos* I refer to Michalewski (2014) 87–91.

Setting out from this passage, David Sedley, in a recent contribution, has questioned the common image of *theōria*. Are we sure that *theōria* must be exclusively understood as a contemplative *activity* and, as such, as *one* activity among the others, opposed to *praxis*? Alcinous here does not seem to be using the Aristotelian terms *πρᾶξις* and *θεωρία* (and sometimes even *πρακτικὸς βίος* and *θεωρητικὸς βίος*) to describe two opposite choices of life, as is the case in Aristotle. For Alcinous, the *πρακτικὸς βίος* is just a necessary and inevitable component of the good life of the philosopher, whose philosophical activity (another possible though free translation of *θεωρία*) not only can but *must* not cease during his pursuit of the practical activities that existing circumstances dictate. In short, against the background of a constant *θεωρία*, that is philosophical activity, sometimes circumstances compel the philosopher to put into practice the things that are seen in virtue of the contemplative life (*ἄ κατὰ τὸν θεωρητικὸν βίον ὀρᾶται*),¹⁴³ like the philosophers-kings of the *Republic*.¹⁴⁴

If this is so, if neither the contemplative life nor the practical may be identified with life as a whole, since they only constitute its components (even though the contemplative life is still the primary component for Alcinous), it is no longer worth asking ourselves if assimilation to God in Alcinous corresponds to the embracing of one life or the other. The point, instead, might be that one can assimilate oneself to God through both these components of life. Based on these observations, Sedley reaches a conclusion that seems like a useful way to approach our topic and the tension that emerges from it: if the philosopher should never leave off from contemplation, and if at the same time the practical life is ‘necessary’ for him, we ought to assume that the philosopher in “taking time out to perform a political role” must not be *leaving off* from the contemplative life.¹⁴⁵

Moreover, if we look more closely – as Sedley does – at the language that Alcinous uses to express the relationship between the two lives, we can find the ultimate confirmation of the interpretation I am proposing here. As we have seen above, Alcinous states that practical actions “would be enacted whenever states of affairs demand that one

¹⁴³ “In virtue of” is one of the possible shades that the preposition *κατὰ* has in Greek, together with the more common temporal one.

¹⁴⁴ Pl. *Resp.* 347c.

¹⁴⁵ See Sedley (2012), 179–180.

instil into people's character the things that are seen *in virtue of* the contemplative life" (*ἃ κατὰ τὸν θεωρητικὸν βίον ὁρᾶται*, 153.13-15), and not – as he might have said – the things that *have been* seen *during* the contemplative life. The choice of tenses does not seem to suggest any temporal discontinuity between the two activities. On the contrary, the impression is that those activities occur at the same time and that one (*theōria*) is useful for the other (*praxis*). Sedley writes:

The language chosen permits, perhaps even encourages, a reading according to which the contemplative life and the practical life are two concurrent aspects of the philosopher's actual life. When he 'enters the practical life', he is at that very time continuing to live his contemplative life too, in so far as he is drawing on the direct grasp of the transcendent Forms that philosophers alone exercise.¹⁴⁶

In brief, Sedley's conclusion allows us to throw light on the apparently contradictory claim that the contemplative life is completely "in our power" whereas the practical one is sometimes "necessary". Indeed, if circumstances could sometimes interrupt contemplation, we could not say that the contemplative activity is completely in our power; but because even that indirectly depends on circumstances, the explanation must lie in the fact that political and practical activities are not necessarily an interruption of one's contemplative activity. If that is so, the philosopher is not supposed to choose one of the two lives. Or, rather, he never leaves off from the contemplation of the Forms (meaning the lofty state which corresponds to assimilation to the divine) even when he is involved with practical activities.

In the light of this picture, also the presence of a divine paradigm embodied by the Demiurge starts to make much more sense. The Demiurge is the divinity who shapes the universe while contemplating its Form. In acting this way, the Demiurge stands as the model for the human ethical goal, which consists in shaping one's own soul and that of others according to the Forms that one contemplates. Therefore, the fact that Alcinoüs in chapter 2 identifies assimilation to God with *theōria* will no longer be in contrast with the fact that, in chapter 28, assimilation to God is instead identified with the practice of virtues and with the imitation of a second God whose main feature is virtue exercised in

¹⁴⁶ Sedley (2012) 180.

relation with the cosmos. The philosopher is therefore sometimes compelled to engage in practical activities, but this does not imply that he must abandon or interrupt *theōria*, which is – to quote Alcinous – the “good state of the soul which corresponds to the assimilation to God”.

These conclusions might further be strengthened if we consider Alcinous’ distinction, at the end of the above–quoted passage, between two levels of activity within the sphere of *praxis*. “Acting as general, judge, and ambassador” are defined as “circumstantial duties”, (περιστατικὰ), activities that must only be accomplished if the circumstances dictate it, which amounts to saying when someone else is managing them badly. “The business of legislation, drafting the constitution and educating the young” are instead “the best things in the sphere of action”, and as such are “privileged” (προηγούμενα) in the sphere of *praxis*. Thus, Alcinous’ second kind of activity is not presented as a mere *negative necessity*, but rather as a fully–fledged component of the actual life of the philosopher. As a matter of fact, the activity of the legislator and the one of the educator are both intellectual activities.

Following all these considerations, we may draw some conclusions. In Alcinous’ *Didaskalikos*, *theōria* does not mean the contemplative activity, seen as the opposite of *praxis*. Rather it is a *state of the soul*, an εὐπαθεῖν, which the philosopher can and should not abandon while he is engaging with practical matters, and especially creating constitutions and educating young people. It is in practising *civic* and *demotic* virtues without abandoning the good state of *theōria* that the *telos* of each human being lies, his ultimate goal and perfect fulfilment. Somebody might be reminded here of the non–descended soul of Plotinus, and I would not exclude that Alcinous’ original treatment of *praxis* and *theōria* contributed to the development of this philosophical doctrine.¹⁴⁷ A part of the human soul is constantly engaged in *theōria*, not leaving it even when dealing with practical affairs.

¹⁴⁷ See also Porphyry in the *Vita Plotini*, 9.5.22, where he says that his master could engage in discussions without stopping his contemplation of the One. On the doctrine of the undescended soul see, among the others, Linguisti (2001) 213–236.

5. *Addendum: Φύσις, ἄσκησις (ο ἔθος), μάθησις (ο διδασχῆ)*

After having proposed an interpretation of the doctrine of the *telos* of assimilation to God, I will now get back to the end of chapter 28, where I interrupted my textual analysis. The last section of chapter 28 presents itself as a sort of booklet of instructions and consists in a brief exposition of how it is possible to achieve assimilation to God. Alcinous' indications go in the direction of an identification of assimilation to God with the practice of virtue, even though some diffidence is still shown towards “the majority of human activities”. The passage is not very original, especially for Plato's readers:

Ἐφικοίμεθα δ' ἂν τοῦ γενέσθαι ὅμοιοι θεῶ φύσει τε χρησάμενοι τῇ προσηκούσῃ, ἔθεσί τε καὶ ἀγωγῇ καὶ ἀσκήσει τῇ κατὰ νόμον, καὶ τὸ κυριώτατον λόγῳ καὶ διδασκαλίᾳ καὶ θεωρημάτων παραδόσει ὥστε ἐξίστασθαι μὲν τὰ πολλὰ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων, ἀεὶ δὲ εἶναι πρὸς τοῖς νοητοῖς.

We could achieve assimilation to God by living according to the appropriate *nature*, according to accepted habits, routines, and practices, and above all according to reason, instruction, and the communication of doctrines, so that we withdraw for the most part from human activities and are always in contact with the intelligibles. (*Did.* 28, 182.3-8)

Once again, Alcinous emphasises the need for the philosopher to be always in contact with intelligible reality (ἀεὶ δὲ εἶναι πρὸς τοῖς νοητοῖς). In order to do so, the philosopher must withdraw from most human activities (τὰ πολλὰ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων). This is another passage that could be adduced in defence of the otherworldly interpretation of Alcinous' ethics and, as a consequence, of Imperial Platonist ethics. However, in this regard I would not underestimate the fact that Alcinous refers here to “most human activities” (τὰ πολλὰ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων) and not all of them. The passage must not be over-interpreted as an exhortation towards a complete detachment from human affair, although it is certainly indicative of Alcinous' diffidence towards most human behaviours.¹⁴⁸ Again, as in the case of the digression in the *Theaetetus*, the human world is not a *bad* world or the world of evil. Rather, it is the world where good and evil are inevitably mixed up. This statement has a certain degree of veracity even according to

¹⁴⁸ That could also be motivated by the complex time in which, presumably, Alcinous was living, an age characterised by the inexorable decline of the Empire.

mere common sense, and yet it does not imply an otherworldly metaphysical ethics proposing a complete detachment from the human world. After all, Alcinous himself maintains that there are also a certain number of “good practices in accordance with the law and, more importantly, with reason” (ἀσκήσει τῆ κατὰ νόμον, καὶ τὸ κυριώτατον), that not only are not to be avoided, but even help us achieve the goal of assimilation to God.¹⁴⁹

Moreover, it is notable that the three proposed ways to achieve assimilation to God are nothing but the ways to gain virtue described in several Platonic dialogues. In this sense, the equivalence between assimilation to God and the practice of virtue is once again confirmed and could not be any clearer than this. Reading Alcinous’ passage someone might wonder whether those are three alternative ways of assimilating to God or rather three successive and complementary stages of the same process.¹⁵⁰ Harold Tarrant has dealt with this question, pointing out that these three factors correspond precisely to the three possible ways of acquiring virtue according to the *Meno*. In the *Meno* they are named “nature”, “practice” and “teaching”.¹⁵¹ We also find these three ways to gain virtue in the *Protagoras*.¹⁵²

Moreover, as Dillon points out in his commentary on the *Didaskalikos*, the triadic list of the sources of virtue is also present in Aristotle, right from the outset of the *Eudemian Ethics*, as well as in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.¹⁵³ More specifically, Aristotle in the *Eudemian Ethics* identifies the requirements for having success in philosophy, which is to say in *theōria*, and names them φύσις (nature), μάθησις (learning) and ἄσκησις (practice). We find another triadic list, a slightly different one that is nonetheless essentially equivalent in meaning, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

¹⁴⁹ My observation may find some confirmation if we consider Plutarch’s *De genio Socratis* (with which I will be dealing in chapter 11, see *supra*, pp. 192–209). As I will show, in *De genio Socratis* Epaminondas’ refusal to take part in the conspiracy cannot be read as a general rejection of *praxis*, but just of a violent action. Indeed, at the same time Epaminondas commits himself to contributing to the practical affairs of the *polis* once violence has come to an end. In this sense, even the case of Epaminondas could be considered as the rejection of *some* of human activities and not of all of them. In my view, neither in Alcinous nor in Plutarch do we find any complete rejection of the sphere of *praxis*. For Plutarch’s *De genio Socratis* I will refer to Babut (1984).

¹⁵⁰ See Tarrant (2007) 424.

¹⁵¹ Pl. *Men.* 71a.

¹⁵² Pl. *Prot.* 320-328. In the *Meno* they are presented as simple alternatives, whereas in the *Protagoras* they are all invoked in the theory concerning the origins of virtue.

¹⁵³ Arist., *Eth. Eud.* 1214.16; Arist. *Eth. Nich.* I.VII–VIII.

Here we have φύσις, ἔθος (“habit”) and διδασχῆ (“instruction”), which are presented as the three complementary components of a progressive education.¹⁵⁴ This triad, as Dillon demonstrates with a conspicuous number of references, came to be adopted by the Neopythagoreans and, later on, by the scholastic tradition.¹⁵⁵

Thus, what we have are the three Platonic ways to obtain virtue, which would appear to also coincide with Aristotle’s requirements for philosophy. Virtue and philosophy are not only related to each other, but, we might say, they are two expressions of a common state of the soul, which Alcinous calls θεωρία. Aristotelian πρᾶξις and θεωρία are ‘Platonised’ by Alcinous and become a single whole in his formulation of the ethical ideal of *homoiōsis theōi*. The τέλος ἀγαθῶν, which is human fulfilment and perfect happiness, is not just the contemplative life, but a *theoretical* life that has the Demiurge as its divine paradigm and might be described as follows: an activity performed for the benefit of the whole world via contemplation of the Forms.

¹⁵⁴ Arist., *Eth. Nic.* 10.1179.20.

¹⁵⁵ Dillon refers to the *Pseudopythagorean* writings and especially to Pseudo-Architas, *On Moral Education* 3.41.20 ff. Thesleff, where the three stages of education are φύσις, ἄσκησις and εἶδησις; in Philo of Alexandria’s *Vita Abrahami* 52–4 we find φύσις, μάθησις and ἄσκησις, each one allegorically identified with one of the three patriarchs. Arius Didymus (*ap.* Stob. 2.118.5) identifies the requirements for virtue in φύσις, ἔθος e λόγος.

Chapter Nine

Likeness to God in Apuleius' De Platone et eius dogmate: a just Demiurge as the model of both theōria and praxis

If we look at the very beginning of Apuleius' *De Platone et eius dogmate*¹ we find a celebrative statement about Plato. Plato, according to Apuleius, not only excelled in the practice of the virtues proper to the heroes, but he even “equalled the powers of the gods” (*aequiparavit divum potestatibus*). In other words, we might say, Plato accomplished the Platonist *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi* through his life. Thus, at the very beginning of this other handbook of Platonism that the tradition has delivered to us, we find a first clue of the presence, in Apuleius' Platonism, of the doctrine of *homoiōsis theōi* as the moral goal (the *telos*) of human life.

Lucius Apuleius of Madaura was a well-known Latin professional rhetorician who lived in the II century A.D. Apuleius was also an “amateur philosopher”, as John Dillon effectively defines him in presenting his life and works.² The *De Platone et eius dogmate* is a booklet of Platonist doctrine which happens to be very similar to Alcinous' *Didaskalikos* with regards to its structure, aims and contents.

In the same way as Alcinous in the *Didaskalikos*, Apuleius dedicates a chapter of his handbook, to be exact chapter 23, to the *telos* (in Latin *finis sapientiae*). The chapter is quite meaningful in its simplicity, especially in the light of the other Platonists' expositions of the doctrine we have been dealing with so far. Assimilation to God corresponds here to the *finis sapientiae*, an expression that literally could be translated into English as “the end of wisdom”, but this translation would not be fully correct. The

¹ For the discussion on the authorship of this work see J.F. Finamore (2006) 43, n. 1; Dillon (1977) 309-310; Hijmans, (1987) 407-8; Axelson (1952); the authenticity is now commonly accepted. For a study of Apuleius' *De Platone* as well as, more generally, Apuleius' Platonism I refer to Moreschini (1978). In particular, for the doctrine of the *homoiōsis theōi* see pages 124–129 and 144–149.

² Dillon (1977) 309.

Latin word *finis* is clearly a translation from the Greek τέλος, a translation that leads more in the direction of *finality* than in that of perfection. *Finis* is in fact in Latin the end more than the fulfilment of something. At any rate, as we have already mentioned, Cicero used the same term *finis* to translate τέλος in the *Academica priora*, where he translates more precisely τέλος ἀγαθῶν with *finis bonorum*, as well as, of course, in the *De finibus*.³ Here Apuleius calls the *telos* “*finis sapientiae*”, an expression that is in itself interesting. If *sapientia* is a translation for the Greek σοφία, it is surprising, at least from an Aristotelian point of view, that there can be an external aim for this activity, in general considered as the most perfect of all activities for its own *end-likeness*. That is why the translation ‘end of wisdom’ can be misleading. The genitive in Latin does not only denote a possession, like the English translation mainly suggests. In this case, we are in front of an *explicative* genitive, i.e. a genitive which has the function of better explaining the term it is attached to. The correct translation would thus be: “the end that consists in wisdom”. The *telos* is not the aim of wisdom but rather it coincides with wisdom. Therefore, the *finis sapientiae*, being the end, coincides with the noblest and highest activity open to human possibilities, wisdom.

In presenting the doctrine, Apuleius makes several clear references to the *locus classicus* of the *Theatetus*, where, as we have copiously seen, the assimilation to God corresponds to becoming just and pious together with *phronesis*. Apuleius translates *phronesis* in Latin as *prudentia*, giving in this way to the Greek original the more Aristotelian than Platonic meaning of “practical wisdom”.⁴

Apuleius briefly presents in the chapter the way in which such a goal can be achieved. Unsurprisingly, he remains faithful to the tradition: the *finis sapientiae* is attainable by the exercise of the virtues of *justice*, *piety* and *prudence*. But the most interesting statement in Apuleius’ account of the doctrine is allegedly the one that immediately follows: the sage has to pursue the *finis sapientiae* by combining the theoretical and the practical life. As an argument for such a statement, Apuleius adduces

³ Cic. *Ac. Pr.* 29, 41, 17. As it is widely held, Cicero is the first and most influent creator of a philosophical vocabulary in Latin.

⁴ *Prudentia* etymologically derives from *praevidentia* which literally means “to see (*video*) before (*prae-*)”, therefore to foresee, to forecast. It is the most common and crucial virtue one might need for his practical conduct, and therefore is undoubtedly a good translation for the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* as it appears in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Plato’s notion of *phronesis*, being a faculty more than a virtue, would be better restituted in Latin with the term *intelligentia*.

the fact that the supreme God (the *summus deorum*, which, according to Apuleius, corresponds to the Demiurge, as we shall see),⁵ does not simply meditate, but brings his desires to completion by the exercise of his providence. Interestingly, providence is here presented explicitly as the example of God's *praxis*. Just like in the *Didaskalikos*, the *active* God we should assimilate ourselves to, is the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*. However, as we shall see, in Alcinous the Demiurge does not represent the *summus deorum*.

The rendering of Apuleius completely confirms the tendency we could find in the other Middle Platonists: the doctrine of assimilation to God is not just a theoretical ideal, but in some way concerns and comprehends both the contemplative and the practical life. Even here, the two Aristotelian kinds of life are not conceived and presented as two opposite alternatives, but rather as two components of the sage's life. I report and translate the most relevant passages of chapter 23 of Apuleius' *De Platone*:

Sapientiae finis est, ut ad dei meritum sapiens provehatur hancque futuram eius operam, ut aemulatione vitae ad deorum actus accedat. Verum hoc ei poterit provenire, si virum perfecte iustum, pium, prudentem se praebeat. Unde non solum in perspectandi cognitione, verum etiam agendi opera sequi eum convenit, quae diis atque hominibus sint probata, quippe cum summus deorum cuncta haec non solum cogitationum ratione consideret, sed prima, media, ultima obeat conpertaque intime providae ordinationis universitate et constantia regat.

[...]

Sapientem quippe pedisequum et imitorem dei dicimus et sequi arbitramur deum; id est enim hepou theoi.

The aim of wisdom for the sage is to achieve the merit of God, and his task shall be to reach God's behaviour through emulation in his life. But he can achieve this task only if he offers himself as a completely just, pious and self-continent man. Hence it benefits him to follow this aim not only through contemplation, but even through practice, as has been proved both by gods and men, as is natural when the supreme God not only meditates everything with reason by thinking, but encloses the first principles, the middle and the last and governs them through the entirety of his ordering providence and proved constancy. (*Plat.* XXIII.252-253)

[...]

⁵ This is a quite remarkable difference from Alcinous' *Didaskalikos*, where conversely the author explicitly clarifies that our assimilation is not to be directed towards the highest God. See the previous chapter.

Hence we call the sage follower and a person who imitates God and we believe that he follows God. This is, in fact, the exhortation *hepou theo* (follow God) ...

Here are two remarkable observations that we can infer from Apuleius' exposition. First of all, as already anticipated, Apuleius is clearly referring to the *locus classicus* of the *Theaetetus* when he says that it is possible to achieve assimilation to God by being just (*iustum*), pious (*pium*) and self-continent (*prudentem*). The terms used, in fact, perfectly correspond to Plato's words in the *Theaetetus*. More specifically, *iustum* is the literal translation of δίκαιον, likewise *pium* means ὅσιον and *prudentem*, as we have seen, can be a translation of the Greek term φρόνησις.⁶

Secondly, it is also clear – from the vocabulary used in this passage – that Apuleius is here referring also to the *Timaeus*, and the consideration of the Demiurge as a divine ethical paradigm leads him to the idea that our aim and fulfilment does not correspond to a life of mere contemplation. Apuleius makes a meaningful connection between the divinity of the *Theaetetus*, who is set as the model for justice,⁷ and the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*.⁸ When he describes the activity of the “supreme God” (*summus deorum*), in fact, Apuleius mentions the fact that he governs everything with his providence, just like the Platonic Demiurge. Thus, the God of the *Theaetetus*, paradigm of justice, is here identified with the Demiurge, who shaped and still governs the whole world. Furthermore, this God is unequivocally considered as the first, supreme God (*summus deorum*). Differently from Alcinoüs, the *telos* of assimilation to God does not bring the author to distinguish two different divinities, one being superior to virtues and the other possessing them, but rather there is one *summus deorum* who sets the paradigm for both the activities of *praxis* and *theōria*.

To summarise: Apuleius first quotes the digression of the *Theaetetus* almost literally. As is well known, in this digression God is defined as the paradigm of justice. In the following sentence, Apuleius speaks about a different divinity, namely a God who

⁶ See, for example, Cicero in the fourth book of the *De Officiis*.

⁷ See *Th.* 176b–e, where God is defined as the *paradigm* of justice.

⁸ On this we have to keep in mind that Plato's Demiurge had become a whole with the Stoic divinity through the Stoic readings of the dialogue during Hellenistic Age. The Stoic idea of the divine is strongly characterized by the idea of providence. Platonists agree with the idea of a providential divinity, as also Apuleius testifies, though rejecting the immanence of God, another aspect of Stoic theology that is instead severely incompatible with Platonic dualism.

governs everything with his providence (*prima, media, ultima obeat conpertaque intime providae ordinationis universitate et constantia regat*).⁹ This God is unmistakably the Demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus*. The idea of God that Apuleius has in mind stems from two distinct sources and, accordingly, is the combination of two different, and not interchangeable, meanings of the divine: God as the paradigm of justice (taken from the *Theaetetus*) on the one hand, and the Demiurge as a providential divinity (taken from the *Timaeus*) on the other.

Hence, Apuleius links the two main components that define the idea of the divine paradigm in Middle Platonist ethics. Allegedly, these are the critical features of the 'mysterious' *epouranios theos* who possesses virtue, the God to which we should assimilate ourselves, as Alcinous states in the famous passage of chapter 28 of the *Didaskalikos*.¹⁰ The supreme God of the *Didaskalikos*, the *hyperouranios theos*, who corresponds to Aristotelian *nous* and therefore contemplates and does not act, being superior to virtue, is not accommodated in Apuleius theology.

The hierarchy of the gods in Apuleius is clearly described in his more strictly philosophical works, mostly in the *De Platone* and partly also in his translation of a work which was erroneously attributed to Aristotle, the *De Mundo*.¹¹ This hierarchical chain presents three levels:

- i) the highest God, named *summus deorum* or, elsewhere, *ultramundanus*, an adjective that really appears to be the Latin for Alcinous' ὑπερουράνιος;¹²
- ii) some visible gods, named *caelicolae*, "celestial", that correspond to the celestial bodies (stars and planets);
- iii) the daemons, named *medioximi*, literally "those who are in the middle", by which is implied: between heaven and earth, between the proper gods and

⁹ As Moreschini (1978) 125 notices Apuleius' word here reminds to Eudorus' account: Ἐν μὲν γὰρ θεῷ τὸ κοσμοποιὸν καὶ κοσμοδιοικητικόν: 'in God resides the power to create the cosmos and to administer it,' as well as Plato's *Laws* 715e.

¹⁰ Alcinous, *Didaskalikos*, 181, 43-45 θεῷ δηλονότι τῷ ἐπουρανίῳ, μὴ τῷ μὰ Δία ὑπερουρανίῳ, ὃς οὐκ ἀρετὴν ἔχει, ἀμείνων δ' ἐστὶ ταύτης ("one has to liken oneself to] the God in the heavens clearly, not, by Jove, to the God above the heavens, who does not have virtue, being superior to this").

¹¹ *Plat.* 204 e *Mund.* IV. For an introduction and an analysis of the *De mundo* see Moreschini (1978) 128–132. For Apuleius' theology see Moreschini (1978) 162–178.

¹² Although the chronological relation between Apuleius and Alcinous is not clear, it is evident that the two adjectives are identical terms.

the human beings, and therefore, in a sense, mediators between the two worlds.

As can be easily inferred, the Demiurge corresponds in Apuleius' theology to the *summus deorum*, as also John Finamore has argued.¹³ More specifically, Finamore analyses the fourteen epithets attributed to God in the fifth chapter of the *De Platone*.¹⁴ These are:¹⁵ incorporeal, one, *aperimetros* (with no boundaries), maker and fashioner of all things, happy and cause of happiness, best, lacking nothing, himself conferring all things, heavenly, unnamed, ineffable, *aoraton* (invisible), *asamaston*. Among them the oddest is undoubtedly "heavenly" (*celestis*), since this God is supposed to be, and elsewhere is called, *hyper-cosmic* (*ultramundanus*). Apuleius does not seem to embrace Alcinoüs' distinction between a God *on* and a God *beyond* the heavens, but, in some way which is unclear, the *summus deorum* is both celestial and beyond the world.¹⁶

Though not reproducing Platonic vocabulary *verbatim* (as is not at all unusual in Apuleius),¹⁷ Apuleius' description of the *summus deorum* completely fits with the Platonic account about the Demiurge. In addition, Apuleius' statement, at the end of this long description of God, about the difficulty of discovering God's nature, echoes, as Finamore points out, the similar statement that Plato makes in the *Timaeus* with regards to reference to the Demiurge.¹⁸

There is even more. When Apuleius speaks about the world soul¹⁹ he names the first God *deus fabricator*.²⁰ This particular appellative perfectly fits the Demiurge, who is first and foremost the maker of the whole universe. Likewise, in another passage, while

¹³ Finamore (2006).

¹⁴ DP V.190. See also Beaujeu (1973), 257 n.5; Dillon (1977), 312-13; Hijmans (1987) 438.

¹⁵ I translate the Latin ones and I leave in Greek those that Apuleius himself reports in Greek.

¹⁶ Arguing from this discrepancy, Loenen claims that Alcinoüs and Apuleius would not be reproducing the same doctrine (Loenen, 1957, 37). I do not think this can be the case, for the similarities are much more meaningful than this difference. In addition, as we saw, in both cases we can identify the God towards whom assimilation has to be directed with the Demiurge. The difference seems to lie in the fact that Alcinoüs holds that there is a superior God who is, as we saw, an unmoved mover, whereas in Apuleius there is no entity superior to the providential Demiurge. See also Moreschini (1978) 127.

¹⁷ See, among others, Finamore (2006) 33 and Dillon (1977) 312, both noticing the original and interpretative way in which Apuleius reads Plato. For an analysis of Apuleius' philosophical vocabulary see Moreschini (1978) 193-210.

¹⁸ See Finamore (2006) 34. See also Alcinoüs' *Didaskalikos*, chapter X, which was analysed in the previous chapter, *supra*, pp. 141-150

¹⁹ The passage is in I.IX,199.

²⁰ *Fontem animarum omnium, optimam et sapientissimam virtute genitricem, subservire etiam fabricatori deo et praesto esse ad omnia inventa eius pronuntiat.*

Apuleius is showing the three levels of divine hierarchy, the first God is called “father and architect of all the heavenly divine universe”.²¹(I.XI.204).

Turning back to the quoted passage, we have seen that Apuleius specifies that God not only contemplates (*cum summus deorum cuncta haec non solum cogitationum ratione consideret*) but also rules everything with his “ordering providence” (*providae ordinationis*). Here we have the most explicit passage in the Middle Platonist tradition stating that the Platonic *telos* is a combination of the two lives, or, to put it better, a *bios theōretikos* which does not exclude but includes *praxis* as one of its components.²² As we have seen, we should not think that Alcinous would have disagreed with this statement.

Let us now look more closely at the way in which Apuleius makes his statement about *praxis* and *theōria*. Apuleius’ inclusion of practical activities in the *telos* may indicate that he is tacitly responding to a different view of the doctrine. To put it differently, Apuleius might challenge the view – possibly advocated by some other thinkers – that argues for the disjunction between *theōria* and *praxis*. It is plausible and, in my opinion, quite intriguing to interpret this passage as follows: Apuleius does not simply affirm the mutual possibility between *theōria* and *praxis*, he aims at rejecting the idea that assimilation to God is attainable through a merely contemplative life, utterly devoid of any practical activity. I would argue that such an interpretation is encouraged by the way in which Apuleius states this exhortation. He could have simply said: “we should pursue assimilation to God both through *theōria* and through *practice*”; instead, he puts the emphasis on *praxis* by stating that we should not pursue assimilation to God *exclusively* through contemplation, but also through our actions (*non solum in perspectandi cognitione, verum etiam agendi opera sequi eum convenit,*)

To recapitulate: if the fulfilment of our *telos* requires us to become like God, and if the *summus deorum* is the Platonic Demiurge, then we must of course contemplate the eternal forms, but we have also to strive to shape the world according to the perfection of the those forms.²³

²¹ Ap. *Plat.* I.IX,199.

²² And in this the similarity with the *Pseudopythagorica* is striking. See *supra*, pp. 104–115.

²³ Interestingly, this is precisely what Alcinous says when he speaks about *praxis*: namely that it is something that “should be exercised whenever circumstances require that one practices in men’s characters the things that are seen in virtue of *theoria* (ἂ κατὰ τὸν θεωρητικὸν βίον ὁρᾶται)”. Cf. *supra*, pp. 155–161.

Thus, moving on from what we said, the *sapiens*, to assimilate himself to God, cannot stand just on the ground of *theōria*, but has to *act*, just like the Demiurge, who, after having fashioned and set in order the whole universe, does not retire himself in self-thinking, but keeps taking care of his ‘product’ and, as Apuleius says, “encloses the first principles, the middle and the last and governs them through the entirety of the ordering providence and proved constancy”. This highest God cannot be anything but a model for both contemplation and practice of virtues.

At the end of Apuleius’ passage we find the formula *hepou theōi* that Apuleius leaves in Greek in the text and, following a tradition that we have found in Eudorus, he considers this formula as equivalent in its meaning to the Platonist *telos*. We found it in Eudorus’ testimony as well as in the *Pseudopythagorica* and we are going to find it in Philo of Alexandria and Plutarch.²⁴ The formula is generally attributed to Pythagoras, but not here in Apuleius. At any rate, as Moreschini points out, Apuleius’ veneration for Pythagoras is well proved by his *Apologia* and Pythagoras is connected to Plato in the *Florida*.²⁵

1. *A small remark on ‘a new work by Apuleius’*

Very recently, Justin Stover has published a Latin text discovered in 1949 by Raymond Klibansky in a manuscript of the Vatican.²⁶ This text, dating from Antiquity, basically consists in a series of short Latin summaries (*summarium librorum Platonis*) of fourteen of Plato’s works. In his *editio princeps* of this new text, Stover claims that it would represent the lost third book of Apuleius’ *De Platone et eius dogmate*.²⁷ Based on his study of the single manuscript of this short text (BAV Reg. lat. 1572), Stover situates the philosophical, generic, doctrinal, and stylistic features of this work as characteristic of western Middle Platonism of the second century, by analysing particularly the selection

²⁴ See *infra*, pp 176–210. Phil. Alex. *Migr. Abr.* 31,173; *Decal.* 20,100. Plut. *De superst.* 169e; *de sera num. vind.* 550d. See also Moreschini (1978) 126.

²⁵ *Apul. Apol.* 27 and 56; *Flor.* 15, 23,10 Helm. See Moreschini (1978) 126.

²⁶ The single manuscript of this short text is the BAV Reg. lat. 1572. The author of this text is also known as the ‘Klibanski Platonist’. Klibansky from the date of this discovery in 1949 promised an edition which never appeared.

²⁷ Stover (2016). The volume is eloquently entitled “A new work by Apuleius”.

and arrangement of the fourteen dialogues it summarises. Stover also argues that this work must have been transmitted within the *corpus Apuleianum* from antiquity and provides arguments for its original placement in the *corpus*, based on a textual and codicological analysis of the manuscript that transmits it after the two books of the *De Platone*. Arguing from the layout of the earliest extant manuscript of Apuleius' *philosophica*,²⁸ Stover shows how this new text was transmitted in the archetype as the third book of the *De Platone*, heretofore assumed lost. Using traditional philological methods and computational stylometry, he examined the lexical and stylistic continuities between this text and Apuleius' *philosophica*, as well as the intertextual relationship between this new work and the rest of Apuleius' output.

I will not discuss here Stover's arguments for the attribution to Apuleius, but I will rather limit myself to a small remark, closely related to my main interest, which, I think, can also be of some interest for the decision about the attribution of the text to Apuleius. I approached Stover's text with the actual intention of looking for traces of the doctrine of the *telos* of assimilation to God, and I found quite striking the fact that none such are present. Unfortunately, the author's selection, as it came to us, does not include the summary of the *Theaetetus*, which would have been a quite definitive element in order to establish the actual presence of the Platonist *telos* in the text. Since the text is of a fragmentary fashion, the absence of this dialogue does not prove that it was voluntarily omitted. However, if we look at the order in which the author has organised his summaries of Plato's dialogues, we find that the ordering *criterion* does not appear to be arbitrary and it seems, in fact, quite intelligible. The general tendency of the author seems to be to locate dialogues which are similar in content close to each other. Thus, we find the *Apology* close to the *Crito* and the *Phaedo*, for they are the dialogues about the last days of Socrates' life, and we find the *Timaeus* close to the *Critias* for, as it is quite notorious, the two dialogues appear to be part of a whole. This way of grouping together the dialogues is very similar to what we can find in several modern collections of Plato's works. Likewise, the two dialogues about love, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, are both missing, and one could easily argue that the section including them might have got lost.

²⁸ Which is in Brussels, BR 10054-56.

Even without entering too much into the complex theme of the reasons and the parallels for this grouping criterion, we could likely have expected to find the summary of the *Theaetetus* right before (or at least close to) those of the *Sophist* and of the *Statesman*, dialogues whose summaries are, indeed, close to each other in the text.²⁹ But, strangely as it may seem, this is not the case, nor have we any sign of *lacuna* before or after the summaries of these two dialogues. Certainly, this argument cannot prove the actual absence from the original project of the summary of the *Theaetetus*, but it can at least suggest the likelihood of this absence. And it is not very plausible, I think, that Apuleius, in furnishing summaries of the main Platonic works, could have excluded the *Theaetetus*, which, especially for its digression, seems to be considered by Apuleius of paramount importance for the doctrines it delivers.

Secondly, the author of the text does not mention the doctrine of the *telos* when he summarises the other dialogues that explicitly are mentioned as the sources for the doctrine in Eudorus' and Alcinous' accounts, and that seem to be lying (even if they are not explicitly quoted) also behind Apuleius' chapter 23 of the *De Platone*. These dialogues are, of course, the *Republic*, the *Laws* and the *Timaeus*.

I find this fact quite meaningful, even if it is not definitive, in the direction of questioning the attribution of the text to Apuleius. It is indeed implausible that Apuleius could have neglected to mention one of the doctrines he is shown to consider crucial in the ethical section of the *De Platone*. It is hardly arguable, in fact, that Apuleius could have regarded the doctrine of the *telos* as something secondary, if we consider the importance conferred to the doctrine in the course of Apuleius' account of Platonic ethics in the second book of the *De Platone*.

Allegedly, within the summaries, there are some references to God in relation to virtue, but nothing that really could remind us of the discussion of the *telos* as it appears in chapter 23 of the *De Platone*. Perhaps, one of the most meaningful statements in this regard, is in the summary of the fifth book of the *Republic*, when the author paraphrases Plato by saying that "virtue is brought to fulfilment in a man, at the point when the will

²⁹ As it is notorious, the *Theaetetus* dialogue appears to take place the day before the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*.

of God has assisted his talent even before upright and decorous instructions”.³⁰ A similar statement is made in the summary of *Epinomis*, which is book 13 of the *Laws*, where he says that *ingenium* (talent) “is not sufficient to acquire virtue without the instruction and without the assent of the gods (*sine doctrina et deorum voluntate*)”.³¹ Here, the necessity for God’s assistance in order to bring virtue to fulfilment is recognised, but no reference to the *finis sapientiae* or the *imitatio dei* being the *telos* is made.³²

In the summary of the *Republic* we also find reported Plato’s statement that “good men are dear to the immortal gods (*homines praeterea bonos et caros esse dis immortalibus*)”,³³ and that “he who has justice is dear to the gods since he has made himself similar to them (*simile se eorum effecerit*)”.³⁴ This can be taken as the closest statement to the doctrine of the *telos* of assimilation to God in the text. And yet, even here, the author does not take the chance to emphasise the theme and to explicitly refer to the doctrine.

Certainly, this fact is also explicable as a sign of an alleged will of the author of the summaries to respect Plato’s *littera*, for in none of the quoted passages does Plato explicitly speak about the *telos* and so the author could for this reason have omitted to insert it. Nonetheless, in many other cases in the course of the summaries, the author shows a different attitude, and he does not seem to be afraid of attributing to Plato doctrines that are not really deductible from the dialogues he is summarising, and are instead quite explicit signs of Stoic or Aristotelian influences.³⁵ Even when he is summarising *Laws* 715–716, a central source also in Eudorus’ testimony and Alcinous’ *Didaskalikos*, he does not make a clear reference to the *finis*.³⁶ When then he comes to

³⁰ *Denique in homine virtutem consummari tunc cum ingenio ante institutionem quoque rectam et honestam voluntas adiutaverit deum* (*Resp.* VI 492a, Stover, 2016, 100).

³¹ The author is here summarizing *Laws* 974d–e.

³² Here there is the necessity of God’s *voluntas* to gain virtue. In the *Pseudopythagorica*, as we saw, God’s assistance was needed in the case of theoretical wisdom but not in the case of practical virtue. See *supra*, pp.104–115.

³³ *Resp.* VII 560b (Stover, 2016, 103).

³⁴ The passage in book ten of the *Republic* was analysed in the first chapter. (*Resp.* 608d, Stover, 2016, 104).

³⁵ It would be interesting to furnish a detailed account of such influences, but it would require more space than we have here at our disposal, and would bring us too far from our main object of study.

³⁶ The passage reads: *Mundi rectorem deum esse praesentem in omni parte eius et administrantem eum secundum legem naturae et iustitiam punientem malos, in honore habentem bonos, qui etiam beati sint. Deinde ait non esse inter stultos amicitiam sed inter solos sapientes; quos etiam amicos deorum esse.* “The ruler of the world is God and he is present in every part and administers it according to the law of nature

Laws 770d he uses the expression *similem dei* with regard to the *sapiens*, as it is present in Plato's *Laws*, but he does not take the chance to point out that this *similitudo dei* is not just a condition of the sage, but rather it represents the *finis sapientiae*.

Furthermore, in the case of the *Timaeus*, the argument of a possible will to respect Plato's *littera* could not stand at all. As we saw (and as Eudorus did not fail to underline) Plato does use the term *telos* in the final part of the *Timaeus*, and this very fact has been taken by the Middle Platonists as an ultimate proof of the effective presence in Plato's *corpus* of the doctrine of the *telos*.³⁷ Moreover, in Apuleius' rendering of the *telos* in the *De Platone*, the *Timaeus*, together with the *Theaetetus*, is the main source underlying his description of the *summus deorum*, as we have already shown. Surprisingly enough instead, the author of the text does not make any reference in his summary to the final passage of the *Timaeus*, where Plato connects *telos* and *eudaimonia* in such a way that paved the way for the later development of the doctrine. If we then consider the fact that the summary of the *Timaeus* is one of the longest, in proportion to the length of the dialogue, this omission starts to look quite suspicious. There is no conceivable reason, in fact, that would explain why Apuleius could have neglected in his summary the *telos* passage of the *Timaeus*, if he believed, as he shows in the *De Platone*, it was one of the main sources for a central ethical doctrine such as the doctrine of the *telos*.

In sum, Stover's text does not add further elements to our study of the Platonist *telos*, for it furnishes just few allusions to the theme of the sage's likeness to God. On the other hand, the very fact of the absence of an explicit reference to the doctrine of the *telos* in the summaries of Platonic dialogues, raises, in my view, some doubts about the plausibility of the effective presence of Apuleius behind this new interesting text.

and justice, punishing the wicked and honoring the good, who are also blessed. Then he says that friendship does not exist between fools but only between the wise. They indeed are friends of the gods". (tr. Stover 2016, 114–115. The correspondent passages in the *Laws* are 715e, and 716c–e.

³⁷ Especially, as we saw, in Eudorus' testimony. See *supra*, pp. 102–103.

Chapter Ten

Echoes of the doctrine of the assimilation to God: the case of Philo of Alexandria

1. Likeness and kinship to the Creator God and the intellect as a “god” within the human being

The term ὁμοίωσις with reference to the divine appears in only three of Philo’s works. Philo of Alexandria is an intriguing figure. He was a pious and wealthy Jew from Alexandria, in possession of a prodigious philosophical culture that he employed to embark on a systematic allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament, and, more specifically, of the Pentateuch.¹ It is not plain what kind of relevance should be attributed to him in the history of Platonism, due to the peculiarity of his being, in addition to a Platonist, an observant Jew. Major scholars disagree about his relevance for the history of Platonism, although his importance to the history of philosophy *tout court* is beyond dispute. Dillon’s volume on Middle Platonism assigns to Philo a crucial role in the history of Platonism, and together with Eudorus considers him the protagonist of the turn to dogmatism that occurred in Platonism in Alexandria. In Donini’s work, on the other hand, Philo is afforded much less space, and his case is brought up only as an example of the powerful attraction of scholastic Platonism in Alexandria.² Both Dillon and Donini agree in considering Philo’s philosophy not so much as an eclectic synthesis of Greek philosophy from the Pre-Socratics to Posidonius (as did Wolfson), but rather as a sort of adaptation of Alexandrian Platonism, influenced as it was by Stoicism and Pythagoreanism, to his own exegetical purposes.³

¹ For a comprehensive introduction to Philo of Alexandria, I refer to the recent volume by Calabi (2013). For a shorter but useful introduction see Donini (1982) 101 ff.

² See Dillon (1977) 139–183 and Donini (1982) 101–103 and 149, n. 7.

³ See in particular Dillon (1977) 180 – 181.

Apart from those considerations, it is enough to say that Philo is extremely important for my purpose of investigating the new Platonist *telos* of assimilation to God, for the many echoes of this doctrine within his massive *corpus*. In particular, in one of his works Philo quotes the *locus classicus* of the *Theatetus*, showing, by the fact of the quotation, that he was aware of the formula of the *telos*.⁴ We have to keep in mind that, unlike Alcinous and Apuleius, Philo does not present an exposition of Platonist doctrine, but rather a commentary on the Pentateuch. Philo often expressed opinions on particular subjects that had their root in the exegetical context. This is the peculiarity that makes reading this author particularly complicated as well as fascinating.

The *De opificio mundi* (“On the creation of the world”) is the first of Philo’s works and consists of a line-by-line exegesis of the first book of *Genesis*. *Genesis* I, as it is known, includes the narration of God’s creation of the world. As was to be expected for the matter here treated, Philo made in this work conspicuous references to the *Timaeus*, Philo’s ‘favourite’ Platonic dialogue, and to the *Phaedrus*, the most in terms of the number of quotations and references in the entire *corpus*.⁵ Here Philo employs the Platonic *formula* of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ to translate the well-known passage from *Genesis* about the likeness to God that characterizes human beings from the very moment of their creation. Philo’s quotes the passage from *Genesis* I that: “Man was made in the image and likeness (ὁμοίωσις) of God”.⁶ In its simplicity, this passage may actually be quite important: according to Philo, in light of his Jewish identity, man has been similar (ὅμοιος) to God since the very moment of his creation. From this perspective, the human being has already been created God-like. It might be said that it is God Himself who, in His creative action, performs the very first assimilation to God for man, by pointing to Himself as the model for the human being.

Philo goes on to explain what this likeness consists of. This resemblance between God and man – Philo says – cannot be visible from the “characters of the body”, because, naturally, God does not have a body, being absolutely immaterial. Thus, the resemblance cannot but reside in the soul, and more precisely, according to Platonic tripartition, in the

⁴ As we shall see, the literal quotation is in Philo’s *De fuga et inveniione* 63.

⁵ See Dillon (1977) 220–221. However, Philo very often uses passages from the *Phaedo*, and key sections of the *Theaetetus*, the *Symposium*, the *Republic* and the *Laws*.

⁶ Philo, *Op.* 69; *Gen.* 1,26. We are aware of the fact that Philo did not know the Hebrew and therefore worked from the Greek text of the Pentateuch, the so-called *Septuagint*.

rational part of the soul.⁷ The passage is as follows:

ἡ δὲ εἰκὼν λέλεκται κατὰ τὸν τῆς ψυχῆς ἡγεμόνα νοῦν· πρὸς γὰρ ἓνα τὸν τῶν ὅλων ἐκεῖνον ὡς ἂν ἀρχέτυπον ὃ ἐν ἐκάστῳ τῶν κατὰ μέρος ἀπεικονίσθη, τρόπον τινὰ θεὸς ὢν τοῦ φέροντος καὶ ἀγαλματοφοροῦντος αὐτόν.

But the resemblance is spoken of with reference to the guide of the soul, namely, the intellect: for the intellect, which exists in each individual, has been created after the likeness of that one intellect which is in the universe as its primitive *model*, being in some sort the God of that body which carries it about and bears its image within it.

Therefore, the *intellect* (νοῦς) represents that part of the human being in which his likeness to God resides. This passage, like the work in its entirety, betrays the influence of Plato's *Timaeus*.⁸ as in Plato's dialogue, it is stated that intellect should occupy in man the same rank that God occupies in the universal world. As God is the ruler (ἡγεμών) of the world, mind should be like a ruler and a god within the human being.⁹ Philo, just below the passage we quoted, speaks also of a "kinship" (συγγενής) between God and man.¹⁰ This resemblance or likeness, together with this kinship, represent for Philo the basis for the possibility of human assimilation to God, as Helleman highlights in a recent contribution where for the first time the theme of assimilation to God in Philo has been analysed:

He [*scil.* Philo] also shows that such assimilation is made possible because it is based on kinship [συγγενής, *Op.* 144] between the first, archetypal man and his creator and ruler.¹¹

Quite often Philo points out in his works that God cannot be known directly but only through His *dynameis* (powers), which are His own immediate and active manifestations.

⁷ It is noteworthy that Philo does not appear to be interested in the question of whether the soul has two or three parts, and neither does he care about its faculties. The main distinction that dominates his psychology is between a "superior" rational part and an "inferior", irrational one. See Dillon (1977) 181–182.

⁸ See in particular *Pl. Ti.* 90c.

⁹ God in Philo seems to correspond both to the Platonic Demiurge and to the world soul. God is indeed described as the creator and ruler of the world, father of everything, but also as the soul of the world. As we have seen, also in Alcinoüs the boundaries between these two divine beings were not always clear, and it was easier and more productive to think of these Platonic 'characters' as aspects, or powers, of the divine. As we shall see, this was likely the case also for Philo.

¹⁰ *Op.* 144.

¹¹ Helleman (1990) 56.

Accordingly, in Philo God is characterized by one of His powers, namely the power of creating and ruling the world, which might be called, in Platonic terms, the *demiurgic* power. As we shall see below, Philo's God appears to be first of all a ruler, and it is crucial to be aware of this concept in order to understand how, according to Philo, a human being can assimilate himself to God.

Some remarks about Philo's theology are appropriate at this point. The idea of God that Philo endorses is complex and arises from a multiplicity of different elements and influences. Philo's God is first and foremost the God of Jewish tradition, but He also has some characteristics which clearly derive from Platonism and Pythagoreanism. From Jewish tradition, as well as the 'Pythagoreanised' Platonism of Eudorus, he inherits an emphasis on the transcendence of God. Human beings are able to know of God's existence, but His essence is not graspable by human reason.¹² As I have mentioned, God's existence is graspable because of His *dynameis* (powers), and His two most important powers are the creative power and the ruling power. In other words, God manifests Himself through the very fact of creation as well as through His action of ruling the world and keeping order and justice in the world. However, in a passage from *Quaestiones et solutiones in Exodum* II, Philo enumerates five powers of God.¹³ What is of interest for us is that Philo states that within the human being the *νοῦς* partakes of one of these five powers, namely the ruling power. The mind is considered to be the God of the human being for it governs him as God governs the *cosmos*. In the 'microcosm' of the single human being, the *νοῦς* plays the role that God plays within the 'macrocosm'. There are several elements making up this simple statement, but it is enough for now to focus on two of them: i) God is described as *νοῦς*, a mind, an intellect of the entire cosmos; and ii) for this reason, the *νοῦς* of the single person must be his ruling power.

One could say, though, that it is actually not very original to consider intellect to be the most divine part of the human being and a 'god' for the individual. From Philo's background in Greek philosophy, he would have known that Plato in the *Timaeus* describes man's divine part as his *δαίμων*, whereas Aristotle in his *Protrepticus* alludes to

¹² On this see Festugière (1949) 574, Krämer (1964) 276, in particular note 316, and Donini (1982) 102.

¹³ *QE* II 68. See Dillon (1977) 162–165. Donini (1982) 102 notes that the theory of the divine *dynameis* separated from the transcendent *ousia* of the God appears in the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *De mundo*, in the sixth chapter (397b 16 and ff.).

a verse from Euripides that states: “ὁ νοῦς γὰρ ἐστὶν ἐν ἐκάστῳ θεός”, “intellect is in everyone god”.¹⁴ Philo identifies the νοῦς as an *image* (εἰκὼν) of God.¹⁵ Thus, it seems clear that Philo embraces the dualistic anthropology of Plato and the Platonists, and states that “it is only with regard to the latter [*scil.* mind] that man is in some way related to the divine”. So, what emerges here very clearly in Philo is a robust earth–heaven dualism. We will return to this point.

In the *De confusione linguarum* (“On confusion of the tongues”) the *homoiōsis* formula appears in a very similar context, and even within the very same quotation from *Genesis* I.¹⁶ In this passage, Philo shows that God, although He is one, has different powers (the already–mentioned *dynameis*), and that is the reason He uses the first-person plural: “Let us make...” in speaking of Himself in the narration of creation. The presence of divine creator agents refers once again to the cosmogonist myth of *Timaeus*, in which the Demiurge asks for help in shaping the world from other kinds of less exalted and younger gods. Philo certainly has Plato’s *Timaeus* in mind, with the divine *dynameis* appearing similar to the minor gods of the *Timaeus*. Perhaps this is precisely the reason why Philo feels the need to clarify here how those multiple powers do not detract from God’s uniqueness. Philo’s God creates the world with the help of his *dynameis*, which are His active manifestations, but this fact does not undermine His uniqueness and absolute transcendence.

Even from these brief references it is possible to conclude that Philo must have been very well acquainted with the *Timaeus*, the dialogue in which, as we saw in the first chapter, the formulation of the *telos* as assimilation to God is mostly set forth. But he is also aware of the *Theaetetus*, as a passage from *De fuga et inventione* indisputably shows. Scholars frequently refer to this passage as showing Philo’s ‘adhesion’ to the new Platonist *telos*. Here Philo is talking about homicide and he quotes the *Theaetetus*, not with reference to the *telos*, but rather as a proof of the impossibility of eliminating evil completely from the earth.¹⁷ What is first evident from this passage is that Philo endorses very clearly the Platonic dualism of heaven and earth: heaven is the place of the good and

¹⁴ Arist. *Protr.* Fr. 10c Ross, B 110 Düring. Also, Cicero quotes and translates this passage from Euripides: *ergo animus, ut ego dico, divinus est, ut Euripides dicere audit, deus.* Cic, *Tusc. Disp.* 165.

¹⁵ Philo, *Opif.* 25, *Leg.* 3, 95–96, *Her.* 230 ff.

¹⁶ *Conf.* 169.

¹⁷ *Fug.* 163.

earth is the place where good and evil are mixed together, where evil cannot be completely erased, as Socrates explains to Theodorus in the *Theatetus*. If, on the one hand, this passage clearly demonstrates that Philo knew the *locus classicus* of the doctrine, on the other hand the passage, as well as in the previous one we analysed, does not contain any particular clue that would force the conclusion that Philo endorsed the doctrine of assimilation to God as the *telos* of human life. In other words, in these passages, despite his use of the precise Platonic phrase, Philo does not really focus on the Platonist *telos* of *homoiosis theōi*. Instead, in both passages he uses the expression to mean merely that, according to the book of *Genesis*, human beings were created in the likeness of their divine Creator. And even when Philo quotes the *Theaetetus*, he does not discuss the topic of godlikeness, but rather the quotation functions to make another point, namely the dualism of heaven-earth. Shall we deduce from this that the *telos* of *homoiosis theōi* is completely absent from Philo's thought? Surely not. The research conducted on the occurrences of the literal expression ὁμοίωσις θεῷ is not enough, by itself, to conclude that Philo was a follower of the new *telos*; however, it is certain that Philo knew the *formula* and knew well the two most important dialogues that form the basis of the doctrine of the *telos*, the *Theaetetus* and the *Timaeus*. In order to reach the conclusion that Philo must have known the recent usage of the *formula* describing the *telos*, we need to broaden our field of research to expressions in other works of Philo's *corpus*.

2. *Moses: the "divine man"*

Now that we have shown that Philo knew the Platonic *formula* of *homoiosis theōi*, I will undertake the task of searching for clues to Philo's conception of the *telos* of life in his entire *corpus*. Is there in the Jewish Philo, who more than once in his works addresses the absolute transcendence and 'otherness' of God, some hints that he would have identified godlikeness as the supreme goal for human beings? To answer this question, it will be useful to look at Runia's recent study of the character of Moses in Philo's works. As Runia points out, Moses occupies a central place in Philo's understanding of Judaism,

deserving to be called θεός και βασιλεύς.¹⁸ Runia writes about Moses:

Entering into the darkness where God was, he [Moses] gained knowledge of paradigmatic Being, and so can offer his life as a *godlike masterpiece* and paradigm (παράδειγμα) for his followers to imitate.

Moses is in fact the person who has seen God, on Mount Sinai, and this very vision of God, the paradigmatic Being, turns Moses into a paradigm for the rest of mankind. God is the paradigmatic Being—by His own essence, He is a model for everything that partakes of being, for all creation. We encountered the notion of God as a paradigm in Plato’s *Laws*. Moses is the subject of a literal assimilation to God that happens through his mere contemplation of God. Contemplation leads to an assimilation between the subject and the object of contemplation, in the same way as was explained in Plato’s *Timaeus* and *Republic*, in the passages I analysed in the first chapter. The vision of God makes Moses into a divine man.

There is another sense in which Moses may be considered divine. Scripture accords him the ‘title’ of θεός in *Exod. 7*. Here God says to Moses: “Behold I send you as God to Pharaoh”.¹⁹ But it is clear that Moses is said to be a god merely in relation to another man, the Pharaoh. Moses receives, from God himself, the special status of representing God to the Pharaoh and precisely in this sense, he is *a* god for the Pharaoh. Runia substantiates this point of the ‘divinity’ of Moses with many references to Philo’s works. In *De mutatione nominum* for instance, Moses receives from God the name of “man of God” (ἄνθρωπος θεοῦ), an expression which seems to suggest that Moses is the chosen man of God, His prophet and the leader of His people.

Caution is in order, though. We have always to keep in mind that Philo makes extensive use of allegory in his exegetical works. Runia concentrates in particular on the different allegories Philo uses in describing the character of Moses.²⁰ In Philo, Moses is sometimes the protagonist of an *ethical allegory* representing the wise man (as opposed to the fool). In the case we analysed, as Runia points out, Philo employed a *psychological*

¹⁸ Philo, *Mos.* 158–159; Runia (1988) 48–75.

¹⁹ *Exod. 7*.

²⁰ Runia (1968) 408.

allegory referring to the parts of the soul and, according to this interpretation, Moses represents the rational *nous*, while Pharaoh stands for the irrational part of the soul, associated with the body and the various irrational desires and impulses. These references appear very significant if we look at them through the lens of the passage from *De opificio mundi* we quoted above: Moses is ‘god’ for his people as the *nous* is ‘god’ for an individual man. Moses, like the *nous*, is ‘god’ or ‘man of god’ in an allegorical sense. Runia concludes his overview by arguing that the passage from *De opificio mundi* quoted above is a “unique text in the *Corpus Philonicum*”, “the only occasion in which Philo calls an aspect of man *god* outside a strictly allegorical context”.²¹

One might object that the Platonic formula of *homoiōsis theōi* does not allow for the use of an allegory; rather, it represents a true possibility and aim for man. In Philo, unlike in the other Platonists we have seen so far, it is clear that there remains a gap between man and God that cannot be closed—a gap that cannot be bridged between the model and one of its copies.

3. *The imitation of God (and of His Powers) and God’s Providence*

To sum up what has so far emerged, we have seen that Philo was acquainted with the *Timaeus* and the *locus classicus* of the *Theatetus*.²² We have also been able to find in Philo the same traditional Platonic dualism between soul and body and earth and heaven. In the framework of this dualism, it is only regarding to the soul that man can be said to be similar to God. This resemblance, described also in terms of kinship, is grounded in the human intellect, which is a ‘copy’ of the intellect of God. Moreover, we encountered the figure of Moses, who received by means of his vision of God a kind of divine status in relation to the rest of mankind. This divinity of Moses remains, though, limited to allegorical contexts. Between God and man there is therefore a relation of *likeness*, but also an unbridgeable gap. Thus, complete assimilation is inconceivable in Philo’s thought.

²¹ Runia (1988) 48–75.

²² Runia (1986) collects and analyses every reference in Philo to the *Timaeus*.

Yet, as already mentioned, God constitutes in Himself a paradigm, the paradigm of being, and as such, is the model for human behaviour. In many passages, Philo speaks of the necessity for man to *imitate* God in order to be moral. In this sense, it is absolutely legitimate to attribute to Philo the new Platonist *telos*. As Helleman has pointed out, in the *Opificio mundi* we find the expressions *imitate* God (141), *follow* God (144) and likeness to God (69).

Also in his other works, Philo favours expressions related to the imitation (μίμησις) of God.²³ As we have seen, the term ὁμοίωσις appears in Philo with the meaning of “likeness” rather than assimilation. In general, the idea of ὁμοίωσις as “assimilation to God” is present in Philo more as an idea of imitation, μίμησις, of God. And we may imagine that for a Jew like Philo, it could have been much less disturbing to speak of an imitation of God rather than assimilation, since the latter expression might suggest the idea that human beings can become literally and fully almighty, as is God.

How, according to Philo, should we imitate God? In order to determine this, it might be useful to sketch out God’s features as they appear in Philo’s *corpus*, so that it will be clear what of the almighty and transcendent God of the Jewish tradition we can and therefore should imitate. I have already mentioned the fact that according to Philo the human being can reach a certainty about God’s *existence*, but cannot grasp His *essence*.²⁴ How is it possible to be certain about God’s existence without knowing His essence? According to Philo, the answer lies in the fact that God *acts*, and in doing so has some effect on the world. Though remaining essentially unknowable, He intervenes in the world so that we are able to infer from the effects of His intervention His existence as the *cause* of those effects. Therefore, investigating the question of what Philo’s God does could make understanding what man should do to assimilate himself to God a much easier task. One may discover that Philo’s God, though transcendent, is much more involved in the world than one might expect at first, and even much more than the Demiurge of Plato’s *Timaeus*, as Gretchen Reydam-Schils has pointed out.²⁵ We have already mentioned several times that God is knowable through His powers, and that His

²³ See also Helleman (1990) 55.

²⁴ In my opinion it is not necessary here to focus on the canonical distinction analysed by Helleman (1986) 60–61, between the first God and His creative Logos. It is clear enough that the only possibility for human beings to imitate God is by imitating His powers, i.e. the *effects* of God in the world.

²⁵ Reydam-Schils (2015) 312.

most important power is the creative power. God is first and foremost the creator and then, because of His act of creation, the king of the universe. However, once He has created the cosmos, his task is not over, as is plausible to think in the case of Plato's Demiurge.²⁶ As we read at the very end of *On the creation*:

God exerts his providence for the benefit of the world. For it follows of necessity that the Creator *must always care for that which he has created*, just as parents do also care for their children.

Here we find a sort of rational proof for the existence of providence. Just as a father who, after having given birth to children, continues to take care of them, so does God take care of the world. Thus, if God Himself is the first being who cares for the world, we would, to become like God, be required to care for the world. Our way to imitate God is to imitate His powers, including His creative and providential ones.

One way through which man can imitate the creative power of God is, as Helleman points out, marriage and the begetting of children. In *De Decalogo*, Philo explains that parents have a nature that borders on the immortal, precisely “because of the assimilation of their generative activity with that of the God who generates the universe”.²⁷ Here we might see an echo of the passage of Plato's *Symposium* we mentioned in the first chapter, in which Socrates identifies in the generation of children a first share in immortality for the human being.²⁸ In addition, God has a providential or beneficent power which should also be imitated, as we read in *De virtutibus*, in a very meaningful passage for our purposes:

ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν, φησίν, ἔλαβες ἰσχὺν παρὰ τοῦ δυνατωτάτου, μετάδος ἄλλοις ἰσχύος διαθείς ὁ ἔπαθες, ἵνα μιμήσῃ θεὸν τῷ παραπλήσια χαρίζεσθαι. κοινωφελεῖς γὰρ αἱ τοῦ πρώτου ἡγεμόνος δωρεαί, ἃς δίδωσιν ἐνίοις, οὐχ ἵν' ἐκεῖνοι λαβόντες ἀποκρύψωσιν ἢ καταχρήσωνται πρὸς ζημίαν ἐτέρων, ἀλλ' ἵν' εἰς μέσον προενεγκόντες ὥσπερ ἐν δημοθουσίᾳ πάντας ὅσους οἶόν τε καλέσωσιν ἐπὶ τὴν χρῆσιν καὶ ἀπόλαυσιν αὐτῶν.

²⁶ There is not absolute agreement among scholars about whether the Demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus* continues his fatherly care for the universe after his demiurgic activity. In other words, it is not plain whether the Demiurge is actually a *providential* divinity or has been over-interpreted in that direction by Hellenistic Stoicism. On this topic, I refer to Reydams-Schils (1999).

²⁷ *Decal.* 107.

²⁸ I refer to *Symp.* 207d1.

When then you have received strength from the most powerful, give of your strength to others and do to them as has been done to you, that you may *imitate* (μιμεῖσθαι) God by bestowing freely boons of the same kind. For the gifts of the Chief Ruler are of universal benefit, given to some, not to be hidden by them when received, nor misused to harm others, but thrown into the common stock as in a public banquet they may invite as many as they possibly can to use and enjoy them. (*Virt.* 168–169)

In my view this passage should be taken as the ‘manifesto’ of Philo’s interpretation of the *telos* of assimilation to God. Imitating God means, first and foremost, to imitate His beneficent attitude towards the world, and in particular towards other human beings. Imitating God means sharing His gifts, bestowing them freely as He does. Far from being an anti-social, otherworldly ethics, the imitation of God corresponds to a social ideal.

There is more. What are those “gifts” that the human being must share with his neighbours? As Halleman has noted, they are first and foremost the basic Platonic virtues: wisdom, temperance, courage and justice. Helleman writes: “Becoming ‘assimilated to God’, thus means using the gifts he has given, especially the virtues, as powers by which the wise man will benefit others”.²⁹ In other words, in order to assimilate himself to God, the sage must serve others and the entire world as does God through His creative and beneficent powers. As Reydam-Schils highlights, Philo’s God is the “God of widows and orphans” and is a true benefactor to all human beings.³⁰

We can take this line of reasoning even a step further. In *De Specialibus Legibus*, Philo describes the good ruler as a figure who can assimilate (the word used here by Philo is ἐξομοίωσις) himself to God. In this passage, it is clear that the way to “follow God” (ἔπεσθαι θεῷ, the formula traditionally attributed to Pythagoras) and to imitate (μίμησθαι) Him is by imitating His beneficent powers. Man does this by employing his most divine part, the *intellect* (νοῦς). Hence, the fact that the intellect is the most divine aspect of the human being does not at all mean that man should despise the body and the earth; rather, intellect becomes the faculty through which we can contemplate God in order to imitate Him in His beneficent powers. As Helleman rightly says, Philo “speaks of assimilation as a process which involves imitation, rather than participation or sharing

²⁹ Helleman (1990) 56.

³⁰ Reydam-Schils (2013) 8–9.

in the divine nature as such”.

4. *Contemplative life and practical life*

As we have previously noted several times, the *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi* is very often closely related to the theme of the kinds of life described by Aristotle. Following on the Platonic tension between flight from the world and the practice of virtue in the *locus classicus* of the *Theaetetus*, and Aristotle’s formalization of the two distinct kinds of life, it is impossible to deal with the *telos* without facing the conflict between *praxis* and *theōria*. Therefore, we shall now consider Philo’s view of this conflict, as we have done for the authors previously discussed. We have already seen how, according to Philo, the imitation of God implies a beneficent *activity* towards other human beings. This might lead us to the conclusion that the practical dimension of life is prominent in Philo’s ethics. However, *theōria* and contemplation also play a key role in Philo’s understanding of the *telos* of godlikeness.

As we know, Philo dedicated an entire work to the contemplative life. It is not my intention here to embark on a comprehensive study of this treatise—this would require much more space than is available here and, in addition, many important studies have already been done. My purpose is rather to insert the theme of contemplative life into the broader picture of Philo’s notion of the *telos*.

At the very beginning of this section I have shown how, according to Philo’s commentary on *Genesis*, likeness to God resides in one part of the human being, namely the soul, and more precisely in the rational part of the soul. This makes the intellect (νοῦς) our most divine part. Living according to the intellect, as we have seen, amounts to living according to the divine aspect in us. This body–mind dualism may suggest that, unlike what we have seen so far, a pure contemplative life should be considered superior to and more divine than a practical life. On the other hand, in reading Philo, we are left with the impression that contemplation has an aim, is directed at something, and, therefore, cannot be taken as a *final* goal in itself. What is the final goal of contemplation for Philo? And further, does choosing a contemplative life necessarily mean a total

rejection of everything earthly? Or, in other words, does life lived according to the intellect correspond to detaching oneself from the body and the earth?

Starting from the last of these questions, a passage from *On Flight and Finding* seems rather opposed to a life of detachment from the world, with Philo disapproving of excessive asceticism as well as describing people who despise all earthy goods as hypocrites:

ἐμψαιτ' ἂν οὖν δεόντως ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῖς ἀνεξετάστως ἀπολείπουσι τὰς ἐν τῷ πολιτικῷ βίῳ πραγματείας καὶ πορισμοὺς καὶ δόξης καὶ ἡδονῆς καταπεφρονηκέναι λέγουσιν. ἀλαζονεύονται γάρ, οὐ καταφρονοῦσι, τὸ ῥυπᾶν καὶ σκυθρωπάζειν αὐστηρῶς τε καὶ αὐχμηρῶς ἀποζῆν δελέατα προτιθέντες, ὡς δὴ κοσμιότητος καὶ σωφροσύνης καὶ καρτερίας ἐρασταί.

Truth would properly blame those who without examination abandon the transactions and business activity of civic life and profess to despise fame and pleasure. For they are pretending, and not really despising these things; they are only putting forward their filthiness, their gloominess, and their austere and squalid way of life as a bait, on the pretext that they are lovers of propriety and self-control and patient endurance. (*Fug.* 33)

In light of this passage, it can be supposed that Philo would not agree at all with the choice of the philosophical life as it is described in the *Theaetetus*. The philosopher of the *Theaetetus* is indeed completely unworldly, not caring for politics or business. On the other hand, Philo would not approve of choosing a politician's life either, as we can see in the strong attack he launches on the character of the politician allegorically represented by the biblical figure of Joseph.³¹ At the same time, Philo often states that the sage should not devote his entire life to mere contemplation, but rather that contemplation provides the proper foundation for an active life. This is the answer to the first question I asked above about the goal of contemplation. Contemplation is not for Philo an aim in itself; rather it is the basis for the active life, or at least a way of being in the world in relationship with others. In other words, contemplation of God is something like looking at a model we want to imitate in our own lives through our practical activities.

Either mode of life, if it excludes the other, is condemned by Philo as excessive. Philo work is alive with the same tension that permeates the whole of Middle Platonism,

³¹ See *Det.* 7 and *Somn.* 2.

the tension between a contemplative life, completely given over to the contemplation of God, and the need for the sage to be involved in society in order to make it more just. This is the same tension that we find in the philosopher from the *Theaetetus*, and in the philosopher-kings in the *Republic* (even though, we should say, the philosopher-kings are supposed to assume political responsibility only in the *kallipolis*).

For Philo, this tension is resolved by looking to the divine model. In *De decalogo*, God is suggested as the model for both the active and the contemplative life, with reference to the “sacred seventh day”, on which God Himself halted His work in order to contemplate “what had been so well created”.³² As Francesca Calabi highlights, Philo, rather than suggesting a pure practical or a pure contemplative life, seems to lean towards alternating between the theoretical and practical life.³³ And there is more. Reydam-Schils suggests that Philo was able to embrace the Stoic *bios logikos*, which incorporates contemplation of the divine, but, she points out, “needs to be sociable and to have an attitude of affection towards the *kosmos* and God”.³⁴

One might wonder at this point: how are the two modes of life bound to each other? This question is strictly related to the previous one about the aim of contemplation. As Reydam-Schils notes with reference to a passage from Philo’s *Quaestiones in Exodum*,³⁵ contemplation, once again, has the specific function of providing the proper foundation for practical activity. In other words, contemplation is the grounds for action. One of the most meaningful passages in Philo’s *corpus* where this is clearly addressed is the following, from the *De praemiis et poenis*:

ἐλπίς εὐδαιμονίας καὶ τοὺς ἀρετῆς ζηλωτὰς ἐπαίρει φιλοσοφεῖν, ὡς ταύτη δυνησομένους καὶ τὴν τῶν ὄντων φύσιν ἰδεῖν καὶ δρᾶσαι τὰ ἀκόλουθα πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἀρίστων βίωσιν θεωρητικοῦ τε καὶ πρακτικοῦ τελείωσιν, ὧν ὁ τυχὼν εὐθύς ἐστιν εὐδαίμων.

Hope of happiness exhorts even those who are devoted to virtue to philosophize, in the expectation that they will be able to discern the nature of everything that exists, will act in accordance with nature and will accomplish the two best forms of life, the theoretical and the practical, which make the man who possesses them necessarily happy. (*Praem* 11–3)

³² *Dec.* 96–98.

³³ Calabi (2008) focuses on Philo’s description of the Levites, whose activity was characterized as an alternation between days devoted to mere contemplation and days of activity.

³⁴ Reydam-Schils (2015) 310. See Philo *Deus* 16–19, *Her.* 27.

³⁵ Reydam-Schils (2015) 311. Cf. Philo, *QE* 2.31.

Both modes of life, the *theoretikos bios* and the *praktikos bios*, lived together, is the best choice of life (τῶν ἀρίστων βίῳ) and both together brings happiness to the human being. The *telos*, which corresponds to the most *perfect* and *final* happiness, cannot but embrace both lives.

5. *Addendum: Justice and Holiness*

As noted by Dillon, according to Philo, following traditional Platonism, the virtues we need to imitate in God are the Platonic “justice and holiness,” the same diptych we find in the *locus classicus* from the *Theaetetus*.³⁶

Therefore, it might be useful to briefly consider Philo’s praise of Justice, which occurs at the end of the fourth chapter of *Special Laws*. Justice is here described as a product of the Pythagorean concept of Equality, which is, in Pythagorean terms, the force that keeps the world in balance. Justice *par excellence* is that justice exercised by God over the whole world. It is thus related to the kingly function of God and plays a very specific and concrete role. As far as holiness is concerned, Philo presents it as the “queen of virtues”, for it is the virtue we must practice towards God himself.³⁷

Thus, we can integrate the Platonic formula “Just and holy” into Philo’s thought. For Philo, the sage who wants to assimilate himself to God must combine the contemplative and practical life through the most divine part of his soul, the intellect. From that perspective, contemplation does not make sense if it is taken as a final aim in itself. It is rather to be taken as the observation of a model that should then be imitated in practical activity, in relationship with other men and women. It is the way man can come to know God’s powers and qualities (for knowing God in Himself and in his essence is impossible) in order to be able to imitate these in practical life. Humans should imitate God’s creative power (through marriage and begetting offspring), kingly power (in governing themselves and others), and beneficent power (sharing benefits with their

³⁶ See *Abr.* 208. Dillon (1977) 182–183.

³⁷ *Spec. Leg.* 135.

neighbours). Justice is a virtue linked to the kingly and lawgiving powers of God, which we are called to practice towards others and therefore in our practical life; holiness, on the other hand, is piety towards God, and is therefore the guiding virtue of contemplation. Practicing both justice and holiness make a man virtuous and, we can say, similar to his creator, who is in Himself perfectly holy and just.

Chapter Eleven

God and assimilation to God in Plutarch: striving for knowledge, practice of virtue, creation of justice

1. The answer to a tricky argument: God as the paradigm of virtue (De sera numinis vindicta)

Right at the outset of the dialogue *De sera numinis vindicta* (“On delay of divine vengeance”), Plutarch responds to the argument hurled at him by an anonymous Epicurean philosopher immediately before leaving the scene. The Epicurean’s argument is tricky, for it threatens to shake the foundations of the existence of divine providence, a notion crucial to Plutarch.¹ Why – the Epicurean asks polemically – does God seem to linger so long before punishing a wicked person for his bad behaviour? Does this delay not undermine justice in the world? These are the questions to which Plutarch is supposed to give an answer, in dialogue with his interlocutors, his son-in-law Patrocleas, his brother Timon, and Olympichus, the latter of whom are both firm believers in the gods. After an opening composed in a perfect Socratic style, in which Plutarch rejects all kinds of dogmatism, Plutarch begins analysing the Epicurean’s argument.² What is interesting for our purposes is focusing on his first argument, for this is the most explicit testimony of the presence in Plutarch’s Platonism of the doctrine of assimilation to God as the *telos* of the human being. The passage reads as follows:

πάντων καλῶν ὁ θεὸς ἑαυτὸν ἐν μέσῳ παράδειγμα θέμενος τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην ἀρετὴν,
ἐξομοίωσιν οὐδ’ ἂν ἀμωσγέπως πρὸς αὐτόν, ἐνδίδωσι τοῖς ἔπεσθαι θεῷ δυναμένους.

¹ That Plutarch must have particularly cherished the idea of providence is shown by the fact that the author attributes to himself the main part of the answer to the anonymous Epicurean. Cf. on this Babut (1969).

² Plut. *Ser. num. vind.* 549a.

God offers himself to all as a pattern of every excellence and in doing that he renders human virtue (which is in some way or other *assimilation to him*) accessible to all who can follow God (*hepou theōi*). (*De ser. num. vind.* 550d)

God is a pattern of every excellence (πάντων καλῶν παράδειγμα) and so – Plutarch continues – God’s delay in punishing the wicked should be read from this perspective, as a way for God to serve as a paradigm for our action. He is slow to punish – Plutarch argues – in order to provide us an example, so that we can escape “all brutishness and violence in the infliction of punishment”.³

Leaving aside for a moment the context and the reason for which the aforementioned claim is made, let us focus on how Plutarch uses here the formula of *homoiōsis theōi*. First of all, we can notice that the source for the idea of God as a παράδειγμα for the human being is *Theaetetus* 176b, the *locus classicus* of the doctrine of assimilation to God.⁴ As for the use of the formula, the idea of assimilation to God is here simply used to describe the nature of human virtue (τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην ἀρετήν), in a sort of explanatory aside. It is interesting that human virtue is explained in terms of an assimilation to a paradigm, and therefore more as some sort of *activity* than as a state of the soul.

Since God is the model for every good for man, as Socrates claims in the *Theaetetus*, it follows that human virtue is assimilation to this paradigm of good, namely God. Plutarch takes up in the passage also the other formulation, the ἔπεσθαι θεῷ, that we find in the *Republic* and that Eudorus attributed to Pythagoras.⁵ Like Eudorus, Alcinous and Apuleius, Plutarch seems to be aware of both formulas and to link them, or better to identify one with the other. The result is easily understandable: human *virtue* consists of *following God* as a model in order to *become like him*.

But let us continue to analyse the passage. Plutarch continues with his explanation:

³ *Ser. num. vind.* 550f

⁴ Pl. *Th.* 176, where Socrates claims that the divine paradigm is the happiest: Παραδειγμάτων, ὃ φίλε, ἐν τῷ ὄντι ἐστώτων, τοῦ μὲν θείου εὐδαιμονεστάτου, τοῦ δὲ ἀθέου ἀθλιωτάτου.

⁵ Stob. *Anth.* II, 7,3 p. 49, 8 ss. Wachsmuth in Mazzarelli (1985).

καὶ γὰρ ἡ πάντων φύσις ἄτακτος οὕσα ταύτην ἔσχε τὴν ἀρχὴν τοῦ μεταβαλεῖν καὶ γενέσθαι κόσμος, ὁμοιότητι καὶ μεθέξει τινὶ τῆς περὶ τὸ θεῖον ιδέας καὶ ἀρετῆς.
Indeed, this was the origin of the change whereby universal nature, disordered before, became a ‘cosmos’: it came to resemble after a fashion and participate in the form and virtue of God (περὶ τὸ θεῖον ιδέας καὶ ἀρετῆς).

The source for this statement is undoubtedly the *Timaeus*. In this Platonic dialogue God is said to create order in the disordered world and to desire that everything would resemble him as much as possible.⁶ But here Plutarch does not limit himself to reporting what is stated in the *Timaeus*, but adds the term ἀρετή (virtue) with reference to God. The reference for God’s virtue is to other Platonic dialogues, such as the *Theatetus*, the *Republic* and the *Laws*. God for Plutarch possesses first of all virtue, and wants everything to become like his virtue. Virtue is the main feature of God that the human being is called to imitate, as is clear from the following passage:

καὶ τὴν ὄψιν αὐτὸς οὗτος ἀνὴρ ἀνάψαι φησὶ τὴν φύσιν ἐν ἡμῖν, ὅπως ὑπὸ θεᾶς τῶν ἐν οὐρανῷ φερομένων καὶ θαύματος ἀσπάζεσθαι καὶ ἀγαπᾶν ἐθιζομένη τὸ εὖσχημον ἢ ψυχῇ καὶ τεταγμένον ἀπεχθάνηται τοῖς ἀναρμόστοις καὶ πλανητοῖς πάθεσι καὶ φεύγει τὸ εἰκῆ καὶ ὡς ἔτυχεν, ὡς κακίας καὶ πλημμελείας ἀπάσης γένεσιν. οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ὅ τι μείζον ἄνθρωπος ἀπολαύειν θεοῦ πέφυκεν ἢ τὸ μιμήσει καὶ διώξει τῶν ἐν ἐκείνῳ καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν εἰς ἀρετὴν καθίστασθαι.

The same philosopher [Plato] says further that nature kindled vision in us so that the soul, beholding the heavenly motions and wondering at the sight, should grow to accept and cherish all that moves in stateliness and order, and thus come to hate discordant and errant passions and to shun the aimless and haphazard as source of all vice and jarring error; for man is fitted to derive from God no greater blessing than to become settled in virtue (ἀγαθῶν εἰς ἀρετὴν καθίστασθαι), through copying and aspiring to the beauty and the goodness that are his. (*De Ser. Num. Vind.* 550d6–e5)⁷

Plutarch clearly takes this idea of the ethical utility of the contemplation of heavenly bodies from the end of Plato’s *Timaeus* and from the *Republic*.⁸ In both dialogues the

⁶ See *Ti.* 29e–30a.

⁷ Dillon (1977) and Einarson (1959) have drawn attention to the fact that in the *Timaeus* the verb ἀνάψαι (to kindle) is not used in a similar context. This verb is instead employed by Timaeus Locrus in his *Peri physeōs*.

⁸ See especially Pl. *Tm.* 89e–90d.

study of the movements of the celestial bodies is said to produce an ordering and moral effect in the soul of the contemplator. However, Plutarch's emphasis here is on virtue. No greater blessing, he argues, can man derive from God than becoming settled in virtue (εἰς ἀρετὴν καθίστασθαι). Man is supposed to assimilate himself to God by "copying and aspiring (τὸ μιμήσει καὶ διώξει) to the beauty and the goodness that are his (τῶν ἐν ἐκείνῳ καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν)".

Let us take the analysis a step further. What kind of virtue does Plutarch have in mind? But, first of all, we go back to look at the context of the quoted passage. As already mentioned, it is part of an argument in defence of divine providence against an Epicurean's attack. This is certainly of interest in that it strongly suggests that the God who represents our model is a providential God. Moreover, in analysing this passage in a recent contribution, Mauro Bonazzi notes how, when in the dialogue Plutarch establishes the essence of God, he stresses in particular three elements: God's incorruptibility, God's power and, of course, God's virtue. Of those three elements, Bonazzi points out, only the third, virtue, is at man's disposal.⁹ Among the features of Plutarch's God, virtue is the one we can and therefore should imitate. Here, as in Philo, contemplation does not appear to be a goal in itself, but rather as aimed at gaining virtue, which is indeed the final goal, the equivalent of assimilation to God.

1.1 *The divinity of the ruler (Ad principem ineruditum)*

In the booklet that Plutarch dedicates to an "uneducated prince" (*ad principem ineruditum*), Plutarch comes back to the motif of the imitation of God as practice of virtue. In this work, God's virtue appears to assume a certain significant political connotation. One passage from this work is crucial for a correct understanding of Plutarch's view of the *telos* of assimilation to God, and thus, despite its length, deserves to be quoted in its entirety. I mark in italics the most significant passages:

⁹ Bonazzi writes: 'When setting forth the essence of God, Plutarch insists on three hallmarks: God's incorruptibility, power and virtue (De sera 549 E), hastening to add that of the three excellences only the third is available to man. And given that the highest and noblest virtue is justice, it is by being righteous that man edges closer to the god.' See Bonazzi (2012) 149, with reference to *Ser. Num. vind* 549 e.

δίκη μὲν οὖν νόμου τέλος ἐστί, νόμος δ' ἄρχοντος ἔργον, ἄρχων δ' εἰκὼν θεοῦ τοῦ πάντα κοσμοῦντος, οὐ Φειδίου δεόμενος πλάττοντος οὐδὲ Πολυκλείτου καὶ Μύρωνος, ἀλλ' αὐτὸς αὐτὸν εἰς ὁμοιότητα θεῶ δι' ἀρετῆς καθιστὰς καὶ δημιουργῶν ἀγαλμάτων τὸ ἥδιστον ὀφθῆναι καὶ θεοπρεπέστατον. οἷον δ' ἥλιον ἐν οὐρανῷ περικαλλὲς εἶδωλον ἑαυτοῦ καὶ σελήνην ὁ θεὸς ἐνίδρυσεν, τοιοῦτον ἐν πόλεσι μίμημα καὶ φέγγος ἄρχων

ὄστε θεουδῆς

εὐδικίας ἀνέχησι,

τουτέστι θεοῦ λόγον ἔχων, διάνοιαν, οὐ σκῆπτρον οὐδὲ κεραυνὸν οὐδὲ τρίαιναν, ὡς ἔνιοι πλάττουσιν ἑαυτοὺς καὶ γράφουσι τῷ ἀνεφίκτῳ ποιοῦντες ἐπίφθονον τὸ ἀνόητον· νεμεσᾷ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τοῖς ἀπομιμουμένοις βροντὰς καὶ κεραυνούς καὶ ἀκτινοβολίας, τοὺς δὲ τὴν ἀρετὴν ζηλοῦντας αὐτοῦ καὶ πρὸς τὸ καλὸν καὶ φιλόανθρωπον ἀφομοιοῦντας ἑαυτοὺς ἠδόμενος αὖξει καὶ μεταδίδωσι τῆς περὶ αὐτὸν εὐνομίας καὶ δίκης καὶ ἀληθείας καὶ πραότητος· ὧν θεϊότερον οὐ πῦρ ἐστὶν οὐ φῶς οὐχ ἡλίου δρόμος οὐκ ἀνατολαὶ καὶ δύσεις ἄστρον οὐ τὸ αἰδίων καὶ ἀθάνατον. οὐ γὰρ χρόνῳ ζωῆς ὁ θεὸς εὐδαίμων ἀλλὰ τῆς ἀρετῆς τῷ ἄρχοντι· τοῦτο γὰρ θεῖόν ἐστι, καλὸν δ' αὐτῆς καὶ τὸ ἀρχόμενον.

Now *justice is the aim and end of law*, but law is the work of the ruler, and *the ruler is the image of God who orders all things*. Such a ruler needs no Pheidias nor Polycleitus nor Myron to model him, but *by his virtue he forms himself in the likeness of God* and thus creates a statue most delightful of all to behold and most worthy of divinity. Now just as in the heavens God has established as a most beautiful image of himself the sun and the moon, so in states a ruler

who is in God's likeness

Righteous decisions uphold¹⁰

that is to say, one who, possessing God's wisdom, establishes, as his likeness and luminary, *intelligence* in place of sceptre or thunderbolt or trident, with which attributes some rulers represent themselves in sculpture and painting, thus causing their folly to arouse hostile feelings, because they claim what they cannot attain. For God visits his wrath upon those who imitate his thunders, lightnings, and sunbeams, but with *those who emulate his virtue and make themselves like unto his goodness and mercy* he is well pleased and therefore causes them to prosper and gives them a share of his own equity, *justice, truth and gentleness, than which nothing is more divine*, – nor fire, nor light, nor the course of the sun, nor the risings and settings of the stars, nor eternity and immortality. For God enjoys felicity, not through the length of his life, but through the

¹⁰ Hom. *Od.* XIX 109–111

ruling quality of his virtue; for this is divine; and excellent also is the part of virtue which submits to rule. (*Ad. princ. iner.* 780e5–781a9)

Let us analyse the passage. First of all, Plutarch claims that justice is the aim of law (νόμου τέλος) and law is the work of the ruler (ἄρχοντος ἔργον). The ruler (ἄρχων) is defined as an *image of God* (εἰκὼν θεοῦ), whereas God in turn is marked as “he who orders all things” (τοῦ πάντα κοσμοῦντος). Therefore, the ruler “forms himself in the likeness of God by his virtue” (αὐτὸν εἰς ὁμοιότητα θεῶ δι’ἀρετῆς καθιστὰς). Once again, then, likeness to God is ultimately identified with virtue, and virtue is the means through which the ruler can come to be like God, to be God’s image (εἰκὼν θεοῦ). The result of this process of assimilation through virtue is the “statue most delightful of all to behold and most worthy of divinity” (θεοπρεπέστατον). The just ruler is the most beautiful image of God on earth as much as the sun and the moon are the most beautiful images of God in the heavens. Plutarch then quotes Homer and states that the ruler is θεουδής, “similar to God”. To him the divine *logos* is also attributed, through which he “establishes, as his likeness and luminary, intelligence (διάνοια) in place of sceptre or thunderbolt or trident”. For imitating God, Plutarch warns, does not mean to imitate his thunders and lightnings, but, indeed, to imitate His virtue, in order to take a share of His “equity, justice, truth and gentleness”.

According to Plutarch, justice is the highest and noblest of the virtues.¹¹ God is in some passages even identified with justice, as in the case of Isis in the *De Iside et Osiride*, a dialogue on the nature of God which we will address later in the dissertation. The theme of the divinity of the ruler is a *fil rouge* in Plutarch’s *corpus*, as Van der Stockt has demonstrated in his analysis of the *Parallel Lives*.¹² The reason for that is the fact that, according to Plutarch, what it is possible to imitate in God is his virtue and, among the virtues, justice has a prominent role. Therefore, it is natural that the ruler, who is called to the task of administering justice, is, or at least should be, the image of God. In this regard, we might notice that it is not by chance that the common feature of all the characters that Plutarch sets as models of virtue (but also, sometimes, of vice) in the *Lives* is that they are somehow political figures.

¹¹ See for example Bonazzi (2012) 149.

¹² Van der Stockt (2004) 137–149.

The conclusion of the passage is efficaciously hyperbolic: nothing is more divine than virtue, not even immortality and eternity, which apparently represent the most divine features of God, and hence most distant from human nature. God’s happiness, Plutarch argues, does not lay in the infinite length of his eternal life, but rather “in the ruling quality of his virtue” (τῆς ἀρετῆς τῷ ἄρχοντι). For, as Plutarch specifies at the very end of the quoted passage, what is particularly good about virtue is what in it “submits to rule” (καλὸν δ’ αὐτῆς καὶ τὸ ἀρχόμενον). The “part of virtue which submits to rule” is justice, which at the outset of the chapter is said to be the “aim and end of the law” (νόμου τέλος). The law is in its turn “the work of the ruler”, and therefore the *telos* of the work of the ruler is justice, the most divine of the virtues.

Babut, in his analysis of the Stoic influence on Plutarch’s ideas of the divine, points out that, since the Stoic divinity “takes care of the world and of what the world contains”,¹³ the rulers are those who have the best chance and therefore the most responsibility to imitate God’s virtue and in particular God’s justice in the exercise of their ruling duty.¹⁴ We have therefore sufficient evidence to conclude that this idea of God is first and foremost just and providential, and derived from Plato’s *Timaeus* and *Theatetus* and from Stoic theology, and that it leads Plutarch to give an account of assimilation to God in the key of practical virtue, and – as Becchi has written – devoid of any theoretical or cathartic–eschatological characters.¹⁵

2. *God as a philosopher and a prophet (De E apud Delphi and De Iside et Osiride)*

In Plutarch’s huge *corpus* there is another aspect of the divine that can open a different perspective, from which it is possible to look at the *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi*. Plutarch’s theology develops itself mostly in the so-called ‘Delphic’ dialogues, in particular the *De E apud Delphi (On the E at Delphi)* and the *De Iside et Osiride (On Isis and Osiris)*.

¹³ According to the description given by Diogenes Laertius of the Stoic divinity (Diog. Laert. VII 147 = SVF II 102).

¹⁴ Babut (1969).

¹⁵ Becchi (1996) 321–336.

The former dialogue consists of a series of attempts, performed by the various characters, to explain the unknown meaning of the mysterious letter *E* that was sculpted on the shrine of Delphi. As is well-known, Delphi was the headquarters of the oracle of Apollo as well as the epicentre of traditional Greek religion. Plutarch himself was an expert and pious apologist of this cult, so much so that he achieved the highest rank of priesthood in the sanctuary in his old age.¹⁶ In this dialogue the character of Ammonius, Plutarch's master and as such an authoritative character, as much as Socrates was in Plato's dialogues, presents a highly detailed description of God.¹⁷ Ammonius describes God as having the usual Platonist qualities. He is one (Apollo is etymologized as ἄπολλοί, which means “not many”), eternal, unchanging, non-composite and uncontaminated by matter.

At 385 God is described as having two other qualities, more unusual and therefore more interesting. God is, in fact, characterised as a *philosopher* (φιλόσοφος) and a *prophet* (μάντις); Ammonius explains all the epithets traditionally applied to Apollo by means of their etymologies. Apollo is called Pythian (Πύθιος), which he translates as “inquirer”—he understands this name to derive from the Greek verb διαπυθάνεσθαι, “to inquire”.¹⁸ Phanean (Φαναῖος) is translated as “disclosing” (from the Greek verb φαίνω); Delian (Δήλιος) as “clarifying” (from the Greek verb δηλόω); Ismenian, which is linked to the Greek verb οἶδα, as “to have seen and therefore to know”; and finally “Leschenorian” (Λεσχηνόριος) can be literally translated as “conversationalist”. More interestingly, Ammonius refers each epithet to a certain category of people for whom the God is a model: he is Pythian “for those that are beginning to learn and inquire”;

¹⁶ On this topic, I refer to the useful introductory essay on Plutarch by Del Corno (1982), and especially, with regard to the Delphic cult, see p. 17.

¹⁷ In the dialogue, Ammonius actually speaks about Apollo. In the *On the E at Delphi*, Apollo is presented as the supreme God, identified with the good and being (393d–394a), while elsewhere Zeus is described as the supreme God, creator of the universe (*De facie* 927b). Plutarch appears to maintain that the first God can take different names, yet he is to be distinguished from the deities of the Greek *pantheon* (such as Asclepius in *Amatorius* 758a–b), who are to be identified with the lesser gods. Ultimately in Plutarch the traditional Greek gods, and also the Egyptian gods, are always taken to signify the Platonist God, or one aspect of it.

¹⁸ Plutarch connects here the Greek term Πύθιος with the Greek verb διαπυθάνεσθαι, which means “to search out by questioning”, “to find out” (cf. LSJ p. 409 διαπυθάνομαι). In turn, Δήλιος and Φαναῖος are connected respectively to the verbs δηλόω (“to be clear or plain” LSJ p. 385), and ὑποφαίνω (“show oneself”, LSJ, p. 1900); Ἰσμηνίος, according to Ammonius' paretymology, derives from the theme ἰδ- as the poly-thematic ὁράω, “to see”, which has a perfect οἶδα which means “to have seen and therefore to know”.

Phanean, “for those to whom some part of the truth is becoming clear and is being disclosed”; Ismenian “for those who have knowledge”; and Leschorian, “when people have active enjoyment of conversation and philosophic intercourse with one another”.¹⁹ In other words, each epithet relates to a person’s level of knowledge. The emphasis and the semantic range of the epithets of God are the main prerogatives of God in the realm of inquiry and knowledge. Apollo is, in fact, wise (σοφός) and a “lover of wisdom/knowledge” (φιλόσοφος), as is stated a few lines below.²⁰ At the same time Apollo, by raising riddles, seems to stimulate the search and desire for knowledge, as Bonazzi suggests.²¹

This method of describing God is also employed in *De Iside et Osiride*: God (Zeus) is omniscient and his authority (ἡγεμονία) is said to be “nobler (σεμνοτέρων) since it is elder in knowledge” (ἐπιστήμη καὶ σοφία πρεσβυτέρων).²² Moreover, even for the Egyptian divinity Isis, “the search for truth is a work more hallowed than any form of holy living or temple service”, for we are relating with “a goddess exceptionally wise and a lover of wisdom to whom knowledge and understanding are in highest degree appropriate”.²³ Even the name Isis, according to Plutarch, derives from the Greek verb οἶδα, which indeed means “to know”. That is why, right at the outset of the dialogue, Plutarch claims: “especially we do pray that from those mighty gods we may, in our quest, gain a knowledge of themselves, so far as such thing is attainable by men”.²⁴

Thus, if “God offers himself as a pattern of every excellence”, as is stated at the beginning of the *De sera*, and if God is described as a lover of truth, wisdom and knowledge, it follows that one of the necessary conditions to achieve assimilation to God is a striving for knowledge, as Bonazzi points out.²⁵ For Plutarch, the man who wishes to assimilate himself to God is characterized by this ‘divine’ willingness to gain knowledge. In other words, to follow God, to imitate him and assimilate ourselves to him, we must cultivate a love for knowledge. The *telos* of assimilation to God corresponds here to a

¹⁹ *E ap. Delph.* 385b10–c4.

²⁰ *E ap. Delph.* 385b6 and 386c4.

²¹ The reference is to the Apollo’s oracular activity, which is usually characterized as being enigmatic. See Bonazzi (2008) 205–211.

²² *Is. et Os.* 351d.

²³ *Is et Os.* 351d19–21.

²⁴ *Is et Os.* 351c–d.

²⁵ Bonazzi (2012) 139–161.

commitment to the search for truth, as is stated in *De Iside et Osiride*. Not only virtue but also knowledge plays a key role in the fulfilment of the *telos*. And, if we go back to the passage from *De sera*, we may notice that, even there, investigation and knowledge play a crucial role: contemplation and thus knowledge of the movements of the heavenly bodies incline, so to speak, the soul to virtue.

3. *Contemplative and practical life: a philosophy for justice and peace*
(*De genio Socratis and the Life of Pericles*)

The *De genio Socratis* is one of Plutarch's masterpieces.²⁶ This dialogue addresses a remarkable variety of topics and has an intriguing narrative development. What is of interest for us is Plutarch's reflection within the dialogue on the relationship between active and contemplative life. The main character of the dialogue is the famous Theban philosopher Epameinondas, many times described as a 'divine' man, like Socrates.²⁷ Epameinondas is divine according to Lisides and Theanor, who in their turn are presented as custodians of an ancient wisdom. What is divine about Epameinondas? To address this question, let us start from some contextual remarks.

In the dialogue, there seem to be two main thematic cores: on the one hand, the historical events related to the anti-Spartan conspiracy plotted by Thebes, and on the other, some of the characters' philosophical digressions conducted at various moments of the dialogue. Among those digressions, there is of course the one that provides the title of the work, concerning the so-called demon of Socrates. Babut has performed a study to understand the essence of the dialogue in light of the partial and unsatisfactory nature of the previous scholarship. Babut notes, contrary to some of the scholarship, that the two main sections of the dialogue do not seem to be complementary at all, but rather seem to be in strong and irreconcilable opposition.²⁸ In fact, the main architects and actors in the conspiracy are described as being completely unfamiliar with philosophy, so much so that

²⁶ For an introduction to the dialogue, see Del Corno (1982) 11–59.

²⁷ Cf. in particular *Gen. Socr.* 589b10, 593a8 and d4.

²⁸ Babut refers to Méautis (1950) 201 and Stoike (1975) 61–62. See Babut (1985) 53.

they do not take any part in the philosophical discussions contained in the dialogue.²⁹ On the other hand, the protagonists of those discussions do not play an active role in the conspiracy. Plutarch himself explains that philosophy was for the conspirators only a pretext to dissimulate the real, secret reason for their meeting.³⁰ Babut is forced to conclude that the philosophers and the conspirators in the dialogue represent two strongly separated groups. But he goes even further: starting from some verbal congruities at different moments in the dialogue, he infers that Plutarch, through the very structure of the dialogue, presents the man of action and the philosopher as belonging to two opposing categories. We would then be presented with the ‘practical man’—represented by the conspirators and in particular, because of his prominent role in the plot, by the character of Charon—and the ‘theoretical man,’ embodied by the discussants, and in particular by Epameinondas, a character represented as utterly pure and uncontaminated by political passions.³¹

Babut’s hypothesis succeeds in restoring unity and coherence to a dialogue that, at first glance, appears to be a series of mutually unrelated actions and digressions. The key passage for Babut’s inquiry is at 576d–e. Here Charon and Epameinondas are explicitly juxtaposed as the paradigms, respectively, of the man of action and the philosopher. The speaker is the diviner Theocritus, who sympathizes with Charon and says of him:

‘οὗτος, εἶπεν ὁ Καφισία, φιλόσοφος οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲ μετείληφε παιδείας διαφόρου καὶ περιττῆς ὡσπερ Ἐπαμεινώνδας ὁ σὸς ἀδελφός· ἀλλ’ ὁρᾷς, ὅτι φύσει πρὸς τὸ καλὸν ὑπὸ τῶν νόμων ἀγόμενος τὸν μέγιστον ὑποδύεται κίνδυνον ἔκουσίως ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος. Ἐπαμεινώνδας δὲ Βοιωτῶν ἀπάντων τῷ πεπαιδευθῆναι πρὸς ἀρετὴν ἀξίων διαφέρειν ἀμβλύς ἐστι καὶ ἀπρόθυμος [...] τοῦτον ἢ τινα βελτίονα καιρὸν αὐτῷ πεφυκότι καὶ παρεσκευασμένῳ καλῶς οὕτω χρῆσόμενος.’

This man, Caphisias, is no philosopher, nor has he, like your brother Epameinondas, had any schooling of a distinguished and exceptional kind; yet you observe that he is naturally guided to noble conduct by the laws, and willingly assumes the gravest risks for his country’s sake. Whereas Epameinondas, who feels that by reason of his schooling is superior in virtue to all

²⁹ Babut (1985) 53. At note 4, Babut persuasively criticises Hani’s position that “les héros de la conspiration sont des philosophes...”. One example is enough: Charon, one of the protagonists of the conspiracy, is explicitly said not to be a philosopher.

³⁰ *Gen. Socr.* 576b 6–12.

³¹ Epameinondas is also called “our Socrates” by Caphisias at 575e5. See Babut (1985) 54–55.

other Boeotians, is not keen or eager [...] ³² Yet what better occasion can he desire than this for putting himself to use, splendidly equipped as he is by nature and training? (*Gen. Socr.* 576d10–e7)

The point Theocritus wants to make is clear: Charon is willing to die for the sake of his country even though he is not a philosopher; whereas Epameinondas, superior to all the other Boethians for his education, does not take the opportunity of the conspiracy to show his virtue. After this accusation, Caphisias (Epameinondas' brother) answers Theocritus by putting forth some justifications for Epameinondas' refusal to take part in the conspiracy. Epameinondas' refusal to "die for his country", according to Caphisias, is the result of his decision to withdraw himself from the passions inevitably accompany any violent action, even those done for a just cause. ³³

Towards a contrary conclusion, the divine exhortation that in the course of the dialogue is said to have been discovered by the priest Conuphis behind the mysterious and indecipherable signs of an inscription written on Alcmena's tomb, affirms the superiority of the philosophical life over the active one:

ὕφηγεῖσθαι μέντοι καὶ παραινεῖν τοῖς Ἕλλησι διὰ τῶν γραμμάτων τὸν θεὸν ἄγειν σχολὴν καὶ εἰρήνην διὰ φιλοσοφίας ἀγωνιζομένους ἀεὶ, Μούσαις καὶ λόγῳ διακρινομένους περὶ τῶν δικαίων τὰ ὄπλα καταθέντας.

The God was using the inscription to instruct and urge the Greeks to live in the enjoyment of leisure and peace by always taking philosophy as their field of contention, laying their arms aside and settling their disputes about right and wrong by an appeal to the Muses and discussion. (*Gen. Socr.* 579a5–10)

The strange oracle given by the God of Delos, which promised the end of the Delians' troubles if they would build an altar twice as big as the existing one, should be read in a similar way. In asking for this, the oracle posed a geometrical problem that the Delians failed to solve and the geometer Plato, who was called for help, interpreted the oracle as a warning by the God, an exhortation for them to seriously attend to the study of

³² There is a long lacuna at this point in the text.

³³ *Gen. Socr.* 576f–577a. Cf. also 594b11–13 where Epameinondas himself states that he "would never put a countryman to death without trial unless driven to it by extreme necessity".

geometry.³⁴ Through the oracle, the God was ordering “the entire Greek nation to give up war and its miseries and cultivate the Muses, and by calming their passions through the practice of discussion and study of mathematics (διὰ λόγων καὶ μαθημάτων τὰ πάθη καταπραΰνοντας), so to live with one another that their intercourse should be not injurious, but profitable”.³⁵

At the end of his analysis, Babut argues that the thematic core of the dialogue is the distinction between two categories of man, the “divine and dear to God” men, who benefit from direct guidance by the divinity through their personal God, like Socrates did, and the ordinary men, who, in order to follow the God, must lean on the oracles, which are always subject to the risk of misunderstanding, as many passages in the dialogue are meant to attest to.³⁶

Let us focus on the ‘divine’ and ‘demonic’ men. At first glance we may assume, as Babut indicates, that the divine men are exclusively committed to contemplative life, despising the realm of *praxis*. This conclusion is not completely incorrect, but it is perhaps partial. It is important to remember that in the dialogue the case of Socrates is put forth as the ultimate example of divine man, but we cannot say that Socrates did not take part in the practical issues of his *polis*. Also, Epameinondas, although he refuses to play an active role in a violent conspiracy, is not indifferent to the outcome of the conspiracy and to the re-establishment of liberty in Thebes, and is not in any way detached from the difficult political situation of his *polis*. On the contrary, he promises future support for the cause of freedom, “at the appropriate time”, i.e. when violence is over. What Epameinondas detaches himself from are the violent passions of the conspiracy.

The oracle is an exhortation to lay down arms, but not an invitation to remain passive. In this regard, God’s invitation is directed towards two *actions*, namely the “search for justice” and “living with one another so that their intercourse should be not injurious, but profitable”. Justice, as well as pacific cohabitation, is somehow related to the realm of *praxis*. And moreover, the theoretical study of mathematics together with the practice of discussion are recommended as ways to live together in peace.

³⁴ *Gen. Socr.* 579c.

³⁵ 579d1–5.

³⁶ See for instance 589c–d. Cf. Babut (1985) 60–61.

Thus, Babut’s reading identifies the key to giving thematic unity to the dialogue in a bipartition, later becoming a three–fold division, of mankind: men who are completely submitted to passions (like the philo–Spartan governors of Thebes); political men (the conspirators, and in particular Charon), who may subject themselves to violent passions but for rational and just reasons, and who are in contact with the divinity, though by the imperfect mediation of the oracles; and divine men, the philosophers (represented in the dialogue by Socrates and Epameinondas), who detach themselves from any violent passion whatsoever and who are in direct contact with their inner gods.³⁷

However, in the light of the quoted passages, I think it is not necessary to push the issue to the extent of affirming, like Babut does, that Plutarch wants with the dialogue to “marquer la distance infranchissable qui sépare, dans son esprit, la vie et la conduite du politique ou de l’homme d’action de celles du philosophe contemplative”.³⁸ Of course, since the characters of the dialogues are meant to exhibit different ‘prototypes’, their features might end up being monolithic. Nevertheless, as mentioned, Epameinondas’ refusal to participate in the conspiracy does not mean his rejection of politics and practice *per se*, but rather of violence and passions.

Babut refers also to a passage from the *Life of Pericles* that is very interesting for our inquiry here. After having described Pericles’ attitude towards wealth, which is moderate and not completely indifferent, Plutarch raises, in opposition, the radical behaviour of the philosopher Anaxagoras, who “abandoned his house and left his land to lie fallow for sheep–grazing, owing to the lofty thoughts with which he was inspired”.³⁹ Plutarch comments as follows:

οὐ τὰυτόν δ’ ἐστὶν οἶμαι θεωρητικοῦ φιλοσόφου καὶ πολιτικοῦ βίος, ἀλλ’ ὁ μὲν ἀνόργανον καὶ ἀπροσδεῖ τῆς ἐκτὸς ὕλης ἐπὶ τοῖς καλοῖς κινεῖ τὴν διάνοιαν, τῷ δ’ εἰς ἀνθρωπείας χρείας ἀναμειγνύντι τὴν ἀρετὴν ἔστιν οὗ γένοιτ’ ἂν οὐ τῶν ἀναγκαίων μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν καλῶν ὁ πλοῦτος, ὥσπερ ἦν καὶ Περικλεῖ, βοηθοῦντι πολλοῖς τῶν πενήτων.

But the life of a speculative philosopher (θεωρητικοῦ) is not the same thing, I think, as that of a statesman (πολιτικοῦ). The one exercises his intellect without the aid of instruments and independent of external matters for noble ends; whereas the other, inasmuch as he

³⁷ Cf. Babut (1985) 69–72.

³⁸ Babut (1985) 72.

³⁹ Plut. *Per.* 16.5

brings his superior excellence into close to contact with the common needs of mankind, must sometimes find wealth not merely one of the necessities of life, but also one of its noble things, as was actually the case with Pericles, who gave aid to many poor men. (*Per.* 16.7)

Plutarch presents here the two kinds of life as two very different things, in a way that is quite similar to Plato's digression in the *Theaetetus*. However, in the *Theaetetus* as in *De genio Socratis*, we encounter two characters, Socrates and Epameinondas respectively, who are undoubtedly philosophers, but do not present themselves as completely unworldly and detached from the practical matters of their city, as other philosophers are (for example Thales in the *Theaetetus* and Anaxagoras in the *Life of Pericles*).

Which life corresponds to assimilation to God? As we have seen, since God is the model for human virtue and human knowledge, both kinds of life are likely included in the *telos* of assimilation to God. In this sense Epameinondas is shown to be a real 'divine' man because he is, to a certain extent, both a philosopher and a practical man. If Plutarch's notion of the divine, as we have seen, is a God who knows everything and is "elder in knowledge", we understand that man must devote himself to *theōria* to become like him. On the other hand, Plutarch's God is also the pattern of virtue and a providential divinity, and in this sense Plutarch cannot fail to consider Pericles – who in the context of the quoted passage ran in help of the starving Anaxagoras – at least as divine as Anaxagoras himself.⁴⁰ The perfect lives are two, as two are also the main features of Plutarch's God: *theōria* for knowledge and *praxis* for justice.

In the Catalogue of Lamprias there is the title of a work by Plutarch: *What is the telos according to Plato*. Unfortunately, this work has not survived and we have to be content with trying to infer Plutarch's position from the rest of his works. However, the analysis we have conducted gives us quite a broad picture of Plutarch's view of the *telos* of life. Plutarch does not speak about the flight of the *Theaetetus* in any of the passages in which he alludes to or mentions the *telos* of assimilation to God. For him assimilation to God means first and foremost imitation of God's virtue, and in particular the most divine virtue, "the part of virtue that in it submits to rule", justice; alongside virtue, the man who

⁴⁰ In *Per.* 16.7 Plutarch describes Pericles' reaction once he learns about Anaxagoras' poor condition. Even Anaxagoras' answer to Pericles in some way legitimates and ennoble Pericles' action: "Pericles, even those who need a lamp pour oil therein", he says, asking for food!

is willing to *follow God* is meant to be, like Apollo, a *philosophos*, a lover of knowledge, a searcher of truth. Thus, God is for Plutarch the ethical paradigm, the model for, to quote Dante's Ulysses, "virtute e canoscenza", virtue and knowledge.⁴¹

4. *Addendum: imitation of human virtue in the Lives*

As with the other authors we have dealt with in the course of the dissertation, for Plutarch the *telos* of assimilation to God is described as *imitation* (μίμησις) of God. In the preface to the *Life of Pericles*, in a very interesting passage, Plutarch embarks on a reflection about the "mechanism of imitation". In this context, Plutarch is speaking about the imitation of *human* virtue, not of the virtue of God, and for this reason I did not include this passage in the course of the analysis. And yet, the general reflection on *mimesis* and how it works is certainly of some interest as it is applied to the imitation of God.⁴² Furthermore, as we saw, in *De sera* Plutarch posits an identification between "human virtue" and "assimilation to God" (τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην ἀρετὴν, ἕξομοίωσιν οὐσαν).⁴³

In the preface to the *Life of Pericles* Plutarch feels the need to explain the whole project of his *Lives*, as he does in others of his prefaces—to clarify his chief purposes in presenting the lives of some famous men of the past. As he clearly states, his purpose is not to address events of great political and military significance, following the standard historiographical criterion of inclusion, but rather some incidents that might be easily neglected and may appear trivial, but which nevertheless have the power to reveal certain characters (ἥθους).⁴⁴ In other words, Plutarch's main purpose in the *Lives* is "to present to his readers models of virtue that they can choose to imitate and emulate".⁴⁵

⁴¹ Dante, *Commedia. Inferno*, XXVI, v. 120.

⁴² I found the analysis of the passage I am referring to in this section in a forthcoming article by Opsomer (*forthcoming*) 121–123, to which I am massively indebted. Here Opsomer claims that the ideal of the imitation of human virtue and that of the imitation of God "need not be in conflict, as the imitation of human virtue can be seen as a means to achieve the assimilation to god. Moreover, there is a common mechanism: mimetic assimilation". See Opsomer (*forthcoming*) 122, fn 62. Furthermore, I would add, in a passage of the *De sera* (550d), assimilation to God is said to be the same as "human virtue".

⁴³ *De ser. num. vind.* 550d

⁴⁴ Plut. *Dem.* 2.1, *Nic.* 1.5, *Galb.* 2.5. See Opsomer (*forthcoming*) 121 and Duff (1999) 26–27.

⁴⁵ Opsomer (*forthcoming*) 121.

But Plutarch makes a further point in the preface to the *Life of Pericles*. He claims that models of virtue have not only an informative effect on the readers, making them aware of what virtuous behaviour looks like, but they more importantly, “*motivate* [...] the reader to act likewise”.⁴⁶ This is so because virtuous actions, unlike other kinds of deeds or pleasing visions, have an extra effect on the soul of the person who contemplates them; they bring about in the contemplator a natural mimetic impulse to emulate the actions:

ταῦτα δ' ἔστιν ἐν τοῖς ἀπ' ἀρετῆς ἔργοις, ἃ καὶ ζῆλόν τινα καὶ προθυμίαν ἀγωγὸν εἰς μίμησιν ἐμποιεῖ τοῖς ἱστορήσασιν· ἐπεὶ τῶν γ' ἄλλων οὐ εὐθὺς ἀκολουθεῖ τῷ θαυμάσαι τὸ πραχθὲν ὀρμὴ πρὸς τὸ πράξειαι. [...] ἀλλ' ἢ γ' ἀρετὴ ταῖς πράξεσιν εὐθὺς οὕτω διατίθησιν, ὥσθ' ἅμα θαυμάζεσθαι τὰ ἔργα καὶ ζηλοῦσθαι τοὺς εἰργασμένους
Such objects [*scil.* human goods] are to be found in virtuous deeds; These implant in those who search them out a great and zealous eagerness which leads to *imitation*. In other cases, admiration of the deed is not immediately accompanied by an impulse to do it. [...] But virtuous action straightaway so disposes a man that he no sooner admires the works of virtue than he strives to emulate those who wrought them. (*Per.* 1–2)

A sort of attraction to virtue somehow characterizes human beings, so that when they see the actions of a virtuous individual, they want to become like him.⁴⁷ Interestingly, as Opsomer notes, “Plutarch regards this as a fact about what the moral good is: not something we wish just to receive and enjoy, but rather something to perform and use for the benefit of others”.⁴⁸

We can easily apply this concept to the imitation of God. Contemplation of heavenly motions is in *De sera* a way to contemplate God’s virtue and, by means of this contemplation, be motivated to become like God and to *act* like him. In this passage of *De sera*, the same mechanism seems to be implied: nature, Plutarch claims, kindled vision in us so that the soul, beholding the heavenly motions, should grow to accept and cherish all that moves in stateliness and order. This leads human beings “to become settled in virtue (ἀγαθῶν εἰς ἀρετὴν καθίστασθαι), through copying and aspiring (τὸ

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ Opsomer rightly adds “normally” here, to account for cases of utter depravity.

⁴⁸ Opsomer (*forthcoming*) 122.

μιμήσει καὶ διώξει) to the beauty and the goodness that are his”.⁴⁹ Even the lexical correspondence is striking. The preface of the *Life of Pericles* is dominated by the idea of μίμησις and Plutarch uses the same verb (διώξει) to claim that it is “mandatory to pursue what is best”, once a person has contemplated it.⁵⁰

In the same vein, knowledge of “the divine things” in the Delphic dialogues can lead us to feel the impulse to assimilate ourselves to the divine knowledge. Humans, Plutarch claims, have a “natural mimetic desire to emulate and to assimilate oneself to the good” (μιμητικὸς...ζῆλος...ἀνάδοσις κινουῖσα προθυμίαν καὶ ὄρμην ἐπὶ τὴν ἐξομοίωσιν).⁵¹ Provided that God is the “pattern of all excellence”,⁵² this mimetic desire is directed towards God as well, and to the greatest degree.

⁴⁹ Plut. *De Ser. Num. Vind.* 550d6–e5.

⁵⁰ Plut. *Per.* 1,3: χρή διώκειν τὸ βέλτιστον.

⁵¹ Plut. *Per.* 2.2. See Opsomer (*forthcoming*) 122.

⁵² *De ser. num. vind.* 550d.

Appendix

Plotinus' solution: virtues as purifications and assimilation to God as pure theōria

“Our concern, though, is not to be out of mistake, but to be God”.¹ This brief but rather peremptory statement Plotinus writes in his second treatise of the first *Ennead*, right at the outset of chapter six, and reveals how Plotinus too identifies the *telos* with the *homoiōsis theōi* formula. Unlike his ‘predecessors’ in Platonist tradition, however, and unlike Plato himself, Plotinus does not feel the need to tone down the statement. If Plato, Chiaradonna argues, always speaks of assimilation to God *as far as possible* (κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν), with a sort of ‘Socratic’ caution, Plotinus, on the other hand, recurrently alludes to the *formula*, glossing over such a Platonic proviso. As Chiaradonna explains:

Plotino non ha nessun dubbio sul fatto che ‘noi’ possiamo assimilarci a dio già in questa vita, raggiungendo la norma ideale alla quale tendiamo.²

In this second treatise of the first *Ennead*, known as *On virtues*, Plotinus explicitly addresses the issue of the assimilation to God and, in due proportion, we might even say that he deals with the theme in a manner that is not at all different from what we have tried to do in our own analysis.³ As a matter of fact, Plotinus starts from the exegesis of the *locus classicus* in the *Theaetetus*, and identifies the problems that arise from Plato’s definition of the *homoiōsis theōi* formula; then, he discusses these issues and solves them

¹ Plot. *Enn.* I.2, [6] 2–3. For this short appendix, I refer, among other several works on *Ennead* I.2, to the rich commentary by Catapano (2006) and his rich introduction. For a general, yet detailed introduction to the figure and thought of Plotinus, see Chiaradonna (2009), who devotes his last chapter (163–175) to Plotinus’ ethics.

² Chiaradonna (2009) 167.

³ We can reconstruct that Plotinus composed this second section of the first *Ennead* in Rome around 260 A.D. For details about the date of the treatises of the *Enneads*, I refer to O’Meara (1993) and Chiaradonna (2009).

not without philosophical originality. It is not surprising, then, to find many of the same questions that our reading of the various Platonic sources has raised in the course of our work.

It is therefore undoubtedly worthy, as way of conclusion, to retrace Plotinus' discussion of *homoiōsis theōi* in its main features, pinpointing, from time to time, how Plotinus succeeds in solving the problems that previous Platonists have left unsolved. Inevitably, my presentation might not appear as entirely exhaustive, since the issue would need much more space than that we have here. However, our scope here will be to expose the novelty of Plotinus' reading of the Platonist *telos*.

1. A flight towards the divine through the virtues?

The first element that stands out as immediately evident from the reading of the treatise is that Plotinus strongly stresses the *flight* from the world, mentioned in the already analysed digression in Plato's *Theaetetus*. Plotinus' starting point for his treatise is the observation that – first and foremost – our soul desires to escape from evils. And since, as Socrates states in the *Theaetetus*, “they [evils] must necessarily haunt this region”, our solution will necessarily be “the escape from here to there”.⁴

Right at the outset then, Plotinus quotes Plato and focuses on Platonic identification between assimilation to God and the escape from the world through *phronesis* and the other virtues. Plotinus then argues that assimilation to God is “in virtue” (ἐν ἀρετῇ), and, in so doing, he implicitly refers not just to the *Theaetetus*, but also to the last book of the *Republic* and to book IV of the *Laws*, the two Platonic passages in which the identification between assimilation to Good and virtue is most explicit.⁵

Now, once Plotinus has observed that assimilation to God, and thus the escape from the world, are possible through virtue, Plotinus cannot but raise the inevitably related question, the same question that we had to address especially in our chapter on

⁴ Pl. *Th.* 176b, quoted at the outset of Plot. *Enn.* I.2 [1] 1–3.

⁵ These are the passages we discussed in our first chapter, see *supra*, pp. 13–29. Cf. Pl. *Resp.* 613a–b and *Leg.* 716c–717a.

Alcinous, i.e. whether or not God possesses the virtues. We saw that according to all the other Platonists we have encountered, God does possess such virtues, and, in some cases, like in Alcinous, this conclusion was inferred by means of Plato’s clear identification between assimilation to God and the “possess and practice of virtue”. Eudorus attributed to God the “power of administering the cosmos”; Philo identified God’s virtues with His *dynameis*, the creative and providential ones in particular; Plutarch openly spoke of God’s virtue, and especially of His justice and wisdom; in his *Didaskalikos*, Alcinous alluded to the *hyperouranios theos*, the God “above the heavens”, as being superior to virtues, which, therefore, He does not actually possess. But for this very reason, the author of the *Didaskalikos* was brought to identify the God towards whom our assimilation has to be directed with the second God, the God *epouranios*.⁶ Plotinus’ first suggestion to address this question is to identify the God to whom our assimilation is directed with the world soul:

Εἰ οὖν ἀρετῇ ὁμοιοῦμεθα, ἄρα ἀρετὴν ἔχοντι; Καὶ δὴ καὶ τίτι θεῶ; Ἄρ’ οὖν τῷ μᾶλλον δοκοῦντι ταῦτα ἔχειν καὶ δὴ τῇ τοῦ κόσμου ψυχῇ καὶ τῷ ἐν ταύτῃ ἡγουμένῳ ᾧ φρόνησις θαυμαστὴ ὑπάρχει; Καὶ γὰρ εὐλογον ἐνταῦθα ὄντας τούτῳ ὁμοιοῦσθαι.

If then it is virtue which makes us like, it presumably makes us like a being possessing virtue. Then what god would that be? Would it be the one that appears to be particularly characterized by the possession of virtue, that is the soul of the universe and its ruling principle, in which there is a wonderful wisdom? It is reasonable to suppose that we should become like this principle, as we are here in its universe.⁷

However, Plotinus wonders, are we sure that we can attribute virtue to this principle? And, more importantly, does the fact that virtue represents the means for us to assimilate to God necessarily imply that God must possess the virtues?

To provide answers to these queries Plotinus refers to book X of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle notoriously rejects the hypothesis that God possesses the virtues.⁸ Aristotle argues that we cannot attribute to the divine neither

⁶ This God we identified with the intellect of the world soul. See *supra*, pp.141–149.

⁷ Plot. *Enn.* I.2 [1] 6–10.

⁸ Arist. *Eth. Nic.* X.8,1178b 8–18.

external goods nor ethical virtues, since His activity is exclusively *theoretic* (it is indeed pure *theōria*). Plotinus resumes Aristotle’s arguments: we cannot attribute courage to God, for he has nothing to fear about, nothing exists outside of Him. For the same reason, “nothing attractive can come to it which it has not already got, and produce a desire to have or get it”.⁹ It is therefore unlikely – Plotinus concludes – that God possesses “the virtues called *civic*” (πολιτικὰς λεγομένας ἀρετὰς), which are, as explicates, the four Platonic virtues: wisdom, courage, self-control and justice.¹⁰ The reason is very simple: those virtues have the function of controlling the passions that originate in the body or in the irrational part of the soul. It would literally make no sense to attribute those virtues to God, who, completely devoid of body and irrationality, is also necessarily immune from passions.

This conclusion leads Plotinus to formulate the hypothesis that the assimilation to God may ground not on those virtues, but rather on other virtues, “the greater virtues which have the same names” (τὰς μείζους τῶ αὐτῷ ὀνόματι χρωμένας).¹¹ However, this hypothesis does not overcome the difficulty posed by the fact that the likeness would be grounded on virtues that, although *greater* than the civic ones, would still be *virtues* and, as such, not attributable to God. Moreover, Plotinus adds, the hypothesis does not appear to be satisfying, for “tradition certainly calls men of civic virtue *godlike* and we must say that somehow or other they were made like by this kind of virtue”.¹² The solution is at first glance surprising: “there is nothing to prevent us being made like by our own virtues to that which does not possess virtue, even if we are not made like in regard to virtues” (μὴ πρὸς ἀρετὰς).¹³

To explain this fact, that might seem paradoxical at first, Plotinus employs the image of heat. If something can be heated by presence of fire, it does not follow that fire itself needs to be heated by presence of fire. In the same way, a human being can become like the divine by virtues without implying that God must possess such virtues.¹⁴ Moreover – Plotinus continues – it would be incorrect to argue that virtue is part of the

⁹ Plot. *Enn.* I.2 [1] 13–14. Cf. Arist. *Eth. Nic.* X.8 1178b8–18.

¹⁰ Those are the virtues in *Resp.* IV 427e–434d, which Plotinus too briefly presents and describes in *Enn.* I.2 [1] 17–21. The expression πολιτικὰς ἀρετὰς is from *Phaedo* (82a12–b1).

¹¹ *Enn.* I.2[1] 22 – 23.

¹² *Enn.* I.2 [1] 24–26.

¹³ *Enn.* I.2 [1] 28–31.

¹⁴ *Enn.* I.2 [1] 43–44.

nature of the divine, whilst for the soul it is just something extraneous, as in the example of heat, which is part of the nature of fire but is extraneous to whatever heated thing. However, this analogy cannot stand because the divine does not correspond to virtue, rather it is superior to virtue. The divine is not the same thing as virtue because “the perceptible house is not the same thing as the intelligible house, though it is made in its likeness”.¹⁵ In other words, for Plotinus the divine is still the pattern, the paradigm of virtue, as we read, for example, in Plutarch.¹⁶ Nevertheless, this does not mean that the divine possesses virtues or is the same thing as virtue. What sounded as a paradox is not in fact a paradox: “It is not necessary for virtue to exist *There* [the intelligible realm, the place where, according to the *Theaetetus* we must escape to] because we are made like the principles *There* by virtue”.¹⁷ In other words, Plotinus firmly denies the possibility of attributing virtue to God, though does not reject the Platonic identification of assimilation to God with virtue. The two things can and in fact do stand together.

At this point, in order to “make our argument persuasive”,¹⁸ Plotinus turns to considering “the virtues by which we assert that we are made like, in order that we may discover this one and the same reality which when we possess it as an imitation is virtue, but *There*, where it exists as an archetype, is not virtue” (ὁ παρ’ ἡμῶν μὲν μίμημα ὄν ἀρετὴ ἐστίν, ἐκεῖ δὲ οἷον ἀρχέτυπον ὄν οὐκ ἀρετὴ).¹⁹ In other terms, the virtues of our world have intelligible archetypes that, “there”, are *not* virtues. What Plotinus addresses here is the very meaning of the concept of *likeness*.

The concept of ὁμοίωσις, Plotinus argues, is *twofold* (διττή), that is that it has two meanings. On the one hand, the first kind of likeness would require a perfect identity between the things alike (ἢ μὲν τις ταῦτὸν ἐν τοῖς ὁμοίοις ἀπαιτεῖ). In this case then, the two things similar to each other derive their own likeness “equally from the same principle”.²⁰ On the other hand, the other kind of likeness – Plotinus continues – occurs when there is no reciprocity between the things alike, but one is primary and therefore – if it is possible to say that the other one is *like* the one which is primary –, it is not

¹⁵ *Enn.* I.2 [1] 43–44.

¹⁶ Plut. *De ser. num. vind* 550d.

¹⁷ *Enn.* I.2 [1] 44.

¹⁸ *Enn.* I.2 [1] 53–54.

¹⁹ *Enn.* I.2 [2] 1–4.

²⁰ *Enn.* I.2 [2] 7–8.

legitimate to make the same statement the other way around. When we speak of likeness through virtue between the human being and the divine, we speak of this second kind of likeness.²¹ How then can possess and practice of civic virtue make us like the divine? Plotinus explains this ‘mechanism’ at the end of chapter 2:

Αἱ μὲν τοίνυν πολιτικαὶ ἀρεταί, ἃς ἄνω που εἶπομεν, κατακοσμοῦσι μὲν ὄντως καὶ ἀμείνους ποιοῦσιν ὀρίζουσαι καὶ μετροῦσαι τὰς ἐπιθυμίας καὶ ὅλως τὰ πάθη μετροῦσαι καὶ ψευδεῖς δόξας ἀφαιροῦσαι τῷ ὅλως ἀμείνονι καὶ τῷ ὀρίσθαι καὶ τῶν ἀμέτρων καὶ ἀορίστων ἕξω εἶναι κατὰ τὸ μεμετρημένον· καὶ αὐταὶ ὀρισθεῖσαι, ἧ μέτρα γε ἐν ὕλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ, ὁμοίωται τῷ ἐκεῖ μέτρῳ καὶ ἔχουσιν ἴχνος τοῦ ἐκεῖ ἀρίστου. Τὸ μὲν γὰρ πάντῃ ἀμετρον ὕλη ὃν πάντῃ ἀνωμοίωται· καθ’ ὅσον δὲ μεταλαμβάνει εἶδους, κατὰ τοσοῦτον ὁμοιοῦται ἀνειδέφ ἐκείνῳ ὄντι. Μᾶλλον δὲ τὰ ἐγγύς μεταλαμβάνει· ψυχὴ δὲ ἐγγυτέρω σώματος καὶ συγγενέστερον· ταύτῃ καὶ πλέον μεταλαμβάνει, ὥστε καὶ ἐξαπατᾶν θεὸς φαντασθεῖσα, μὴ τὸ πᾶν θεοῦ τοῦτο ἦ. Οὕτω μὲν οὖν οὗτοι ὁμοιοῦνται.

The civic virtues, which we mentioned above, do genuinely set us in order and make us better by giving limit and measure to our desires, and putting measure into all our experience; and they abolish false opinions, by what is altogether better and by the fact of limitation, and by the exclusion of the unlimited and indefinite and the existence of the measured; and they are themselves limited and clearly defined. And so far as they are a measure which forms the matter of the soul, they are made like the measure There and have a trace in them of the Best There. That which is altogether unmeasured is matter, and so altogether unlike: but in so far as it participates in form it becomes like that Good, which is formless. Things which are near participate more. Soul is nearer and more akin to it than body; so it participates more, to the point of deceiving us into imagining that it is a god, and all divinity is comprised in this likeness. This is how those possessed of political virtue are made like. (*Enn.* I.2 [2] 13–26, tr. Armstrong, 1969).

Thus, civic virtues cooperate in making the human being like the divine by imposing order and measure on the soul, limiting desires of its emotional part and setting the soul free from irrational opinions through the best part of the soul, i.e. is the rational part, the intellect. It is such measure imposed by the virtues on the soul that makes us like the divine, which is in its turn characterised by absolute measure. Matter is what is most

²¹ The source for such a bipartition of the concept of likeness might be Plato’s *Parmenides*, and – more specifically – the passage where Plato discusses the plausibility of a relation of likeness between the sensible things and the forms of which the sensible things are copies. See Pl. *Parm.* 132d–133a.

distant from the divine, for it is indeed absolute absence of measure, and – for this reason – the soul is the most divine part within us: it partakes in measure more than the body does.

Here it is how Plotinus clarifies a difficulty that we have encountered since Plato’s first brush with the *formula*, that is the role of the virtues in the assimilation to the divine, which does not possess virtue: imposing order and measure that are *like* the ones There. In this way, the Platonic civic virtues represent the first step in a path aimed at gaining perfect assimilation to the divine.

2. *The superior virtues or “purifications” of the soul from the body*

So far, we have seen how Plotinus identifies the role of the civic virtues with imposing order and measure on the soul. This would represent a first step in the likeness to the divine. However, Plotinus clarifies that likeness to the divine belongs to the superior kind of virtues. At the beginning of chapter three of the treatise, Plotinus, referring to the *Phaedo*,²² introduces this other kind of virtues, the virtues that Plato calls “purifications” (καθάρσεις), which – according to Plotinus – are distinct as well as superior to the civic ones. In such virtues assimilation to God fully resides.

Why are they called “purifications”? The answer is once again very simple: they purify the soul from passions and affections of the body, from which the soul is inevitably affected, being “thoroughly mixed” (συμπεφυρμένη) with the body.²³ In other words, they make the soul not share the same passions (ὁμοπαθής) and the same opinions (συνδοξάζοι) of the body.²⁴

In sum, here Plotinus claims that the four Platonic civic virtues of *Republic IV* have many ‘purifying’ versions. Plotinus indeed explains each of the virtues with regards to their superior function of purification of the soul, by showing how the effect of each one of them consists in bringing about the liberation of the soul from the body:

²² See Pl. *Phd.* 66b5.

²³ The term is taken from Pl. *Phd.* 66b5.

²⁴ Even here Plotinus echoes *Phd.* 83d7.

εἴη ἂν ἀγαθὴ καὶ ἀρετὴν ἔχουσα, εἰ μῆτε συνδοξάζοι, ἀλλὰ μόνῃ ἐνεργοῖ—ὄπερ ἐστὶ νοεῖν τε καὶ φρονεῖν—μῆτε ὁμοπαθῆς εἶη—ὄπερ ἐστὶ σωφρονεῖν—μῆτε φοβοῖτο ἀφισταμένη τοῦ σώματος—ὄπερ ἐστὶν ἀνδρίζεσθαι—ἡγοῖτο δὲ λόγος καὶ νοῦς, τὰ δὲ μὴ ἀντιτείνουσι—δικαιοσύνη δ' ἂν εἴη τοῦτο. Τὴν δὲ τοιαύτην διάθεσιν τῆς ψυχῆς καθ' ἣν νοεῖ τε καὶ ἀπαθῆς οὕτως ἐστίν, εἴ τις ὁμοίωσιν λέγοι πρὸς θεόν, οὐκ ἂν ἁμαρτάνοι· καθαρὸν γὰρ καὶ τὸ θεῖον καὶ ἡ ἐνέργεια τοιαύτη, ὡς τὸ μιμούμενον ἔχει φρόνησιν.

[The soul] will be good and possess virtue when it no longer has the same opinions but acts alone – this is intelligence and wisdom – and does not share the body’s experiences – this is self-control – and is not afraid of departing from the body – this is courage – and is ruled by reason and intellect, without opposition – and this is justice. One would not be wrong in calling this *state of the soul* assimilation to God, in which its *activity is intellectual*, and it is free in this way from bodily affections. For the Divine too is pure, and its activity is of such a kind that that which imitates it has wisdom. (*Enn.* I.2 [3] 14–22, tr. Armstrong 1969, slightly modified).

Assimilation to God then consists in this *state of the soul* (διάθεσιν τῆς ψυχῆς), which is described as a sort of ‘immunity’ of the soul from the body and its affections. In such a state, the activity is purely intellectual. And yet, beware, Plotinus continues, because this does not mean that the divine is in the same state, for “states belong to the soul”.²⁵

In the following chapter, Plotinus keeps on rising further problems on whether purification is the same thing as this kind of purifying virtue, or purification comes first and virtue follows, or else whether virtue consists in the process of being purified or rather in the achieved state of purification. This process of purification of the soul through virtues – Plotinus explains – represents just a sort of preparatory moment, which is necessary to prepare the soul for the definitive *conversion* (ἐπιστραφεῖσα), a conversion that shall enable the soul to become one with the Intellect, which is its immediately superior hypostasis. The state of purification (τὸ κεκαθάρθαι) that the soul achieves at the end of this process is “already a sort of *telos*” (οἷον τέλος ἤδη), and as such, we can infer, it corresponds to assimilation to God.

The *telos*, which Plotinus names the *good* (τὸ ἀγαθόν), does not consist in the process of purification itself, rather in “what is left (τὸ καταλειπόμενον) after

²⁵ *Enn.* I.2 [3] 23–24.

purification”.²⁶ And what is *that which is left*? It shall not be the good, because in that case, it would not have been involved with evil and in need of purification. The greater virtue is the state of the soul after the action of the purifying virtues, which coincides with its conversion to the Intellect.²⁷ The greater virtue is therefore the *result* of this conversion (τὸ γινόμενον ἐκ τῆς ἐπιστροφῆς),²⁸ which in turn coincides with “bringing the impressions of what the souls sees [the intelligible realities] into accord with the true realities of which they are impressions”.²⁹ The soul, unlike the Intellect, does not have the intelligible realities themselves, but only impressions of them and – according to Plotinus – it is not even fully aware of possessing them. Only when the soul is purified and converted to contemplating the intelligible realities in the Intellect, the impressions can be brought into accord with the true realities, which amounts to say that they become *active*. In this state, the soul “collects itself in a sort of place of its own (συνάγουσαν πρὸς ἑαυτήν) away from the body, wholly unaffected (ἀπαθῶς) by it”.³⁰ It discards of pains, passions, or at least of its emotional excitement, as well as of fears and bad and unnatural desires. The ideal of *homoiōsis theōi* in Plotinus takes the shape of the ideal of a soul wholly freed from its irrational part and from the body, unaffected and untroubled by passions and irrational fears. For a soul in such a state it is clear that the Platonic virtues, which are necessary to arrive at such a state, become useless once this state has been gained, and – for the very same reason – they are useless to God himself.

Are virtues then useful only to the process of purification? What does virtue represent for a soul in this state? Plotinus thus answers:

Τίς οὖν ἐκάστη ἀρετὴ τῷ τοιούτῳ; Ἡ σοφία μὲν καὶ φρόνησις ἐν θεωρίᾳ ὧν νοῦς ἔχει· νοῦς δὲ τῇ ἐπαφῇ. Διττὴ δὲ ἑκατέρω, ἡ μὲν ἐν νῶ οὔσα, ἡ δὲ ἐν ψυχῇ. Κάκεῖ μὲν οὐκ ἀρετὴ, ἐν δὲ ψυχῇ ἀρετὴ.

²⁶ *Enn.* I.2 [4] 9.

²⁷ *Enn.* I.2 [4].

²⁸ *Enn.* I.2 [4] 19.

²⁹ *Enn.* I.2 [4] 24–25. See the comment by Armstrong (1969) 138: “What the soul sees, the realities which become consciously present to and active in it after its conversion, are the beings of the realm of Intellect, the Forms; they were continually present to it, but it was not conscious of them when it was unpurified and unconverted”.

³⁰ *Enn.* I.2 [5] 7–8.

What, then, is each particular virtue when a man is in this state [after the purification by the virtues]? Wisdom, theoretical and practical, consists in the contemplation of that which intellect contains; but intellect has it by immediate contact. There are two kinds of wisdom, one in intellect, one in soul. That which is in intellect is not virtue, that in the soul is virtue. (*Enn.* I.2 [6] 12–15, tr. Armstrong 1969)

Plotinus claims that σοφία and φρόνησις, which we translated as theoretical and practical wisdom, both consist in the contemplation (θεωρία) of the objects of the Intellect (ὅν νοῦς ἔχει). Virtues possess a very peculiar duplicity. We can rephrase Plotinus’ theory of virtues by saying that two ‘versions’ of each virtue exist: the one which is in the Intellect and the one which is in the soul, the former being the model for the latter. And yet, this rephrasing would not be fully correct, since, as Plotinus points out, the ‘version’ in the Intellect *is not* virtue, whilst the one in the soul *is* virtue. “What is it, then, There”?

Ἐκεῖ οὖν τί; Ἐνέργεια αὐτοῦ καὶ ὃ ἐστίν· ἐνταῦθα δὲ τὸ ἐν ἄλλῳ ἐκεῖθεν ἀρετή. Οὐδὲ γὰρ αὐτοδικαιοσύνη καὶ ἐκάστη ἀρετή, ἀλλ’ οἷον παράδειγμα· τὸ δὲ ἀπ’ αὐτῆς ἐν ψυχῇ ἀρετή. Τινὸς γὰρ ἢ ἀρετῆ· αὐτὸ δὲ ἕκαστον αὐτοῦ, οὐχὶ δὲ ἄλλου τινός.

What is it, then There? The act of the self, what it really is; virtue is what comes Thence and exists here in another. For neither absolute justice nor any other moral absolute is virtue, but a kind of paradigm; virtue is what is derived from it in the soul. Virtue is someone’s virtue; but the paradigm of each particular virtue in the intellect belongs to itself, not to someone else. (*Enn.* I.2 [6] 15–19, Tr. Armstrong 1969, slightly modified).

Every virtue has an intelligible paradigm that is virtue *in itself* and – for this very reason – is *not* virtue. Virtues in themselves, *per se*, are *not* virtues, because virtues are always virtues of someone or something.

After describing the intelligible paradigms of *sophia* and *phronesis* as *theōria* of the objects in the Intellect, Plotinus describes the paradigms of the other virtues:

ὥστε καὶ τῇ ψυχῇ δικαιοσύνη ἢ μείζων τὸ πρὸς νοῦν ἐνεργεῖν, τὸ δὲ σωφρονεῖν ἢ εἴσω πρὸς νοῦν στροφή, ἢ δὲ ἀνδρία ἀπάθεια καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν τοῦ πρὸς ὃ βλέπει ἀπαθὲς ὄν τὴν φύσιν, αὐτὴ δὲ ἐξ ἀρετῆς, ἵνα μὴ συμπαθῇ τῷ χείρονι συνοίκῳ.

So the higher justice in the soul is its activity towards intellect, its self-control is its inward turning to intellect, its courage is its freedom from affections, according to the likeness of that to which it looks which is free from affections by nature: this freedom from affections in the soul comes from virtue, to prevent its sharing in the affections of its inferior companion. (*Enn.* I.2 [6] 24 – 28)

All the greater virtues are in fact the result of the conversion of the soul towards the Intellect and they consist in the imperturbability for which the Intellect acts as a model. It is then clear why Plotinus claims that “these virtues in the soul, too, imply one another reciprocally, in the same way as the exemplars There in intellect which are prior to virtue”.³¹ Each virtue necessarily includes every other virtue, for otherwise none of them would be perfect.³² In Plotinus, we then find an original argument for the Stoic thesis of the ‘reciprocal correspondence’ (ἀντακολουθία) of virtue, a thesis that is present also in Alcinous’ *Didaskalikos*.³³

Thus, as Bréhier points out in his introduction, Plotinus reconciles, by means of his doctrine of higher and lower virtues, two doctrines that seem impossible to reconcile: on the one hand, the Stoic view for which virtue of the sage is identical to divine virtue, one and indivisible; on the other hand, Aristotle’s view for which virtues are specifically human excellences, not found in the divine, which is above virtue.³⁴ In this way, if it is true that there is a difference between human and divine virtues, as Plotinus claims at the outset of the treatise, there is however a correspondence between the civic virtues of the sage and the intelligible virtues of the divine. Theoretical wisdom (σοφία) as well as practical wisdom (φρόνησις) both consist in “sight directed towards intellect”.³⁵

The last section of the treatise is devoted to the question “whether the possessor of the greater virtues has the lesser ones in act or in some other way”.³⁶ The answer is that the sage shall possess the lesser virtues too, but not in act, and he “will act according to some of them as circumstances require”.³⁷ In general, though, the man ‘assimilated to

³¹ *Enn.* I.2 [7] 1–2.

³² As Plotinus explains a few lines below, in *Enn.* I.2 [7] 9–10.

³³ See SVF III 295 and 299; Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* XXIX 183,3.

³⁴ Cf. Arist. *Eth. Nic.* VII,1,1145a25–7.

³⁵ *Enn.* I.2 [7] 7–8.

³⁶ *Enn.* I.2 [7] 13–14.

³⁷ *Enn.* I.2 [7] 20–22. We found something very similar in Alcinous’ *Didaskalikos*, about the relationship of the philosopher with practical life. See *supra*, p. 157–161. However, in Plotinus there is a different nuance

God’ “will not live the life of the good man which civic virtue requires, he will *leave that behind and choose another, the life of the gods*”.³⁸ The life of the man who assimilated himself to God is then *another life* from the one lived by the virtuous man, for it is characterized by *another kind* of virtues, virtues that are intelligible model for the civic ones and result of a process of purification which the civic virtues acted out.

Plotinus, unlike his predecessors in Platonist tradition, makes a clear choice in favour of a theoretical life, utterly devoted to pure contemplation of the intelligible realities of the Intellect. Civic virtues, and with them the realm of *praxis*, represent an inferior stage in the path of the process of assimilation to the divine, a process that is brought to fulfilment at the higher stage of virtue, where we do no longer find the practice of civic virtue, for the virtuous soul is completely turned towards the Intellect, with no contact at all with its irrational desires and passions of the body. For Plotinus, the ethical ideal ends up being *beyond* traditional terms of ethics, on a superior level, where the ethical issue is no longer a matter of dominating irrational passions. At this level, virtue shall just be a state of the soul characterized by an absolute imperturbability and a pure intellectual activity.

3. Conclusion: the *homoiōsis theōi* as an ethical ideal ‘beyond’ ethics

If it is certainly true that – in terms of historical methodology – it is generally incorrect to look for the confirmation of the ethical theory of a philosopher in the analysis of his own behaviour, in the case of Plotinus this approach seems to be quite fruitful.³⁹ Plotinus’ choice for *theōria* is indeed confirmed by what we know from his (celebrative) biography provided by his devote disciple Porphyry. In his *Life of Plotinus*, Porphyry reports how, even in his own life, Plotinus aimed at an ideal of absolute asceticism. More specifically,

that can be grasped through the example that Dillon exploited so as to explain in which way the lesser virtues remain in a soul that developed the greater ones. Plotinus’ sage – Dillon argues – would have certainly helped the old lady cross the road, had he seen her (trivial example of a very traditional virtuous behavior), but, more probably, he did not notice her at all, being completely absorbed in the contemplation of the intelligible realities. Moreover – Dillon reiterates – in the unlucky event that the old lady was hit by a car, the Plotinian sage would not be perturbed by the terrible event! See Dillon (1996) 324.

³⁸ *Enn.* I.2 [7] 26–27.

³⁹ It is more or less what Dillon (1996) does, by moving from the study of Plotinus’ actual behavior as it appears in the biography composed by Porphyry so as to analyse Plotinus’ ethics.

we have a passage that provides us with the image of a Plotinus who was unable to abandon the theoretical activity even when engaged in conversations with others.⁴⁰ In chapter eight of Porphyry’s pamphlet, the author claims that Plotinus was able to converse with others and at the very same time “keep his mind fixed without a break on what he was considering”.⁴¹ Reading Plotinus’ biography, one is under the impression that Plotinus, as Dillon points out, “took the ideal of self–divinization seriously”.⁴² In this regard, Dillon writes:

He plainly saw himself (like Empedocles, long before him) as a denizen of a higher realm, exiled for a spece in the physical, sublunary sphere, whose proper business was not here, but there.⁴³

“Our country from which we came is There,” in the intelligible sphere, Plotinus claims in book six of the first *Ennead*.⁴⁴ Therefore, the ethical ideal cannot but be a return *there*, which is possible by means of a complete detachment of the soul from the body.

Furthermore, in another passage, Plotinus speaks about the ethical ideal of *homoiosis theōi* as an actual experience of his. I report the extraordinary description of this ‘experience’ as we find it at the outset of section eight of the fourth *Ennead*, the treatise devoted to the theme of the descent of the soul into the body:

Πολλάκις ἐγειρόμενος εἰς ἑμαυτὸν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος καὶ γινόμενος τῶν μὲν ἄλλων ἔξω, ἑμαυτοῦ δὲ εἶσω, θαυμαστὸν ἠλίκον ὀρῶν κάλλος, καὶ τῆς κρείττονος μοίρας πιστεύσας τότε μάλιστα εἶναι, ζοῆν τε ἀρίστην ἐνεργήσας καὶ τῷ θεῷ εἰς ταῦτον γεγεννημένος καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ ἰδρυθεὶς εἰς ἐνέργειαν ἔλθων ἐκείνην ὑπὲρ πᾶν τὸ ἄλλο νοητὸν ἑμαυτὸν ἰδρύσας.

Often I have woken up out of the body to my self and have entered into myself, going out from all other things; I have seen a beauty wonderfully great and felt assurance that then most of all I belonged to the better part; I have actually lived the best life and come to identity with the divine; and set firm in it I have come to that supreme actuality, setting myself above all else in the realm of Intellect. (*Enn.* IV.8 [1] 1–7, tr. Armstrong 1969).

⁴⁰ I refer, for a significant parallel with this situation, to the already quoted passage about the relation between *praxis* and *theōria* in Alcinous’ *Didaskalikos*. See *supra*, pp. 157–161.

⁴¹ Porph. *Vit. Plot.* VII.15–16.

⁴² Dillon (1996) 316.

⁴³ Dillon (1996) 317.

⁴⁴ The so–called treatise *On Beauty*. See *Enn.* I.6 [8] 22.

“Coming to identity with the divine” corresponds here to a total detachment from the body and a return into one self, into one’s “best part,” the intellect. It coincides with that activity that can set the human being above all else in the realm of the intelligible realities. This activity is *theōria*, pure contemplation.

Again, at the beginning of chapter VII of the sixth treatise of the first *Ennead* (*On Beauty*), Plotinus returns to the *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi*. This represents the only other occurrence of the formula in Plotinus’ *corpus*, and – for this reason – deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

Αναβατέον οὖν πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ ἀγαθόν, οὗ ὀρέγεται πᾶσα ψυχή. Εἴ τις οὖν εἶδεν αὐτό, οἶδεν ὃ λέγω, ὅπως καλόν. Ἐφετὸν μὲν γὰρ ὡς ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἡ ἔφεσις πρὸς τοῦτο, τεῦξις δὲ αὐτοῦ ἀναβαίνουσι πρὸς τὸ ἄνω καὶ ἐπιστραφεῖσι καὶ ἀποδυόμενοι ἅ καταβαίνοντες ἠμφιέσμεθα· οἷον ἐπὶ τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἱερῶν τοῖς ἀνιοῦσι καθάρσεις τε καὶ ἱματίων ἀποθέσεις τῶν πρὶν καὶ τὸ γυμνοῖς ἀνιέναι· ἕως ἂν τις παρελθὼν ἐν τῇ ἀναβάσει πᾶν ὅσον ἀλλότριον τοῦ θεοῦ αὐτῷ μόνῳ αὐτὸ μόνον ἴδη εἰλικρινές, ἀπλοῦν, καθαρὸν, ἀφ’ οὗ πάντα ἐξήρηται καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸ βλέπει καὶ ἔστι καὶ ζῆ καὶ νοεῖ· ζωῆς γὰρ αἴτιος καὶ νοῦ καὶ τοῦ εἶναι.

So we must ascend again to the good, which every soul desires. Anyone who has seen it knows what I mean when I say that it is beautiful. It is desired as good, and the desire for it is directed to good, and the attainment of it is for those who go up to the higher world and are converted and strip off what we put on in our descent; (just as for those who go up to the celebrations of sacred rites there are purifications, and strippings off of the clothes they wore before, and going up naked) until, passing in the ascent all that is alien to the God, one sees with one’s self alone That alone, simple, single and pure, from which all depends and to which all look and are and live and think: for it is cause of life and mind and being. (*Enn.* I.6 [7] 1–12, tr. Armstrong 1969).

The ethical ideal of assimilation to God is here described in the suggestive terms of an ascent towards a sanctuary, during which one is to be purified, to be stripped off of the clothes he wore before, during his descent. Stripped off of everything, it will be possible to contemplate what is simple, single and pure, and to “rejoice in being made like it”, as Plotinus claims a few lines below.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ *Enn.* I.6 [7] 27.

As Dillon argues, while reading Plotinus, one has the feeling that every single action has to be evaluated on the basis of its effectiveness in assimilating the subject of the action to the divine realm. Ethics for Plotinus is nothing but this ascent and this process of purification that culminates in an ethical ideal that stands *beyond* ethics itself, i.e. beyond the traditional terms in which philosophers have been spoken about ethical behaviour until then. His ethics is beyond virtue, beyond moral goodness. For this reason, O'Meara, introducing Plotinus' ethics, speaks of an "ethics of escape".⁴⁶ The flight of the *Theaetetus* is, so to speak, taken very seriously by Plotinus, so as to become the predominant aspect of the human *telos*. In this sense, Theiler is right in defining Plotinus as a "Plato without politics".⁴⁷

The aspect of tension towards the practical and political life, towards the creation of justice and order in the world 'where good and evil are inevitably mixed up', which we have found in all the other Middle Platonists, is no longer present in Plotinus' view. Civic virtues have become only a preparatory stage in the process of assimilation to the divine.

In developing an ethical ideal as such, Plotinus does nothing other than taking to the extreme the metaphysical and theological tension in ethics that started when Eudorus (or somebody close to him) formulated the *telos* no longer as a life in accordance with nature, but as *homoïōsis theōi*. For Eudorus, and for all Platonists after him, the human being is called to something more than a life according to human nature, needs to go beyond the traditional 'living in accordance with virtue', aspiring to reach the divine nature, "as far as possible". However, Plato's concern for the world, where good and evil are inevitably mingled together, remained alive in all Middle Platonists. After all, God is also the Demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus*, a divinity who exerts His providence for the benefit of this world.

⁴⁶ O'Meara (1993) 108–ff. O'Meara himself later developed a different and more practical reading of Plotinus' ethics, aimed at the political ideal of the *Platonopolis*, the ideal city coveted by the Platonic Socrates in the *Republic* (O'Meara, 2003). Along similar lines, there are two works by Schniewind (2003) and (2005). On political readings of Plotinus' and Neoplatonist ethics, which are now quite popular, especially in the United States, I take Chiaradonna's stance: "Simili ricerche hanno avuto il merito incontestabile di aver attirato l'attenzione su aspetti poco considerati della riflessione neoplatonica; resta però l'impressione che, almeno per quanto riguarda Plotino, sia piuttosto difficile isolare una riflessione etica rispetto alla sua posizione metafisica; inoltre, la sua metafisica e la sua antropologia pongono difficoltà molto gravi dal punto di vista etico–pratico". Chiaradonna (2009) 164–165. The passages I reported and commented undoubtedly reinforce the idea of an absolutely transcendentalistic and metaphysical ethics.

⁴⁷ Theiler (1960) 67.

Plotinus, on the other hand, is no longer characterized by this second, practical concern, and solves the tension that have kept previous Platonists anchored to a practical component. His ethical ideal consists in a complete detachment of the soul from the body and from all its ‘inconveniences’, virtues included. His ethical ideal is one that *transcends* ethics. *Eudaimonia*, according to Plotinus, does not have to do with the human being as a whole, with the human compound in its entirety, but solely with its best divine part, the intellect, as it is explained in the section of the first *Ennead* devoted to human happiness.⁴⁸ Happiness consists in living well, which can happen only in the soul and with regards to the soul.⁴⁹ For Plotinus, the flight of the *Theaetetus* comes to signify an actual escape, a total detachment from the world of “here” in order to return “there,” in the intelligible realm (which also corresponds to one’s own interiority). Also, the idea, taken from Plato’s *Phaedo*, that virtue is purification, Plotinus radicalises and translates into this gradual process of detachment of the soul from the body, which is possible even in our actual life (and Plotinus himself claims to have experienced it). In conclusion, for Plotinus the human being does not only have the *telos* to become *like* God, but to *become* God.

⁴⁸ On this, cf. also Linguisti (2001) 11–76.

⁴⁹ See *Enn.* I.4 14.

Final remarks

What is the *final end* of a human being? What is his supreme and ultimate good, his function in the world? In the history of Greek philosophy, all these questions have given birth to a doctrine that has been at the heart of this thesis: that of the τέλος. Such word was the starting point in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, then becoming in Hellenism, the technical term which all those who embarked on an ethical inquiry referred to. The problem of determining the τέλος of the human being is indeed the most crucial ethical question in ancient ethics after Aristotle: everything is consequent and subordinated to it.

We have investigated the origin of the notion of the τέλος in chapter 2.¹ Aristotle's opening of the *Nicomachean Ethics* identifies the supreme task of ethics with the determination of the "end of the goods" (τέλος ἀγαθῶν).² The τέλος is defined as "that for the sake of which everything is done, and that is not done for the sake of anything else", the final goal in the chain of goals, the purpose at which every other purpose is ultimately aimed.³ And while all our authors agreed in identifying this final end with εὐδαιμονία, "happiness", they were rather divergent in determining what εὐδαιμονία consisted of. This was the task of every ethical inquiry in Antiquity.

In our work, we presented one possible answer to this crucial question, namely the Platonist one, which arose within a tradition as old as the ideal master Plato, albeit was put into words only around the I century BC. The Platonists of the I century BC began to formulate the *telos* by means of a *formula* borrowed from Plato, i.e. the expression ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν ("assimilation to God as far as possible"), which occurs in many of Plato's dialogues and in different contexts. This formulation of the τέλος was destined to become a Platonist hallmark for all the centuries thereafter. But, what is the meaning of the *formula*? Where does it come from, and what implications does it have on

¹ See *supra*, pp. 32–58.

² Arist. *Et. Nic.* 1094a 18 – 24.

³ It is the standard Stoic definition SVF 3.16. The source of this fragment is Stobaeus, *Anth.* 2.77, 16 – 27. It is also included in Long–Sedley (1987): 63A.

ethics? These are the interrogatives that we have addressed in the course of the work, while dealing with the “many voices” of Plato and his tradition.⁴

The *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi* has indeed been considered by scholars in most recent times; what was still needed, however, was a systematic account of its first appearances in the Early Imperial Age. In order to achieve this goal, we first investigated the meaning of the *formula* in Plato’s dialogues. In Plato, the idea is not really developed as an actual doctrine, but appears quite often and in crucial passages in many dialogues.⁵ It is usually identified with “being just and pious”,⁶ or with the “possess and use of virtue”.⁷ In the *Timaeus*, it corresponds to the contemplation and study of celestial bodies, whilst in the *Theaetetus* is described as a *flight* (φύγη) from our world – where good and evil are irremediably mingled together – to the realm of the gods, where evil does not exist. The identification of *homoiōdid theōi* with flight and contemplation on the one hand, and with a virtuous behaviour on the other, paved the way for the rising of an underlying tension between two ethical ideals, exemplified by the philosopher and the politician, the two characters described by Socrates in the *Theaetetus*, and formalized in the two Aristotelian βίαι: the ideal of θεωρία, a life utterly devoted to knowledge and contemplation, and the ideal of πράξις, the practical life, devoted to the creation of justice in our world.⁸

Generally, in scholarship the appearance of the *formula* of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ as the *telos* of the human being has been interpreted as a turn, within Platonist ethics, into an otherworldly ethics, an ethics of detachment from the world.⁹ This assumption is based on the insertion of God as the ethical model, in opposition with the Stoic *telos*, embraced also by the Platonist Anthiocus,¹⁰ of “life in accordance to nature” (which we presented in chapter 3).¹¹ As I believe to have shown in the course of this work, such assumption is

⁴ See the fragment attributed to Eudorus of Alexandria that we discussed in chapter 5, *supra*, p. 102. (Stob. *Anth.* 41,26–42,6.), where Plato is efficaciously defined as πολύφωνον, ‘having many voices.’

⁵ The most relevant passages are *Phaed.* 80 a3–b7; *Th.* 176 b5–177 b7; *Phdr.* 252 c3–253 c5; *Rsp.* 613 a7–b1; *Tm.* 90 b6–e8; *Leg.* 716 c1–717 a.

⁶ *Th.* 176 b5–177 b7.

⁷ *Rsp.* 613 a7–b but also *Leg.* 716 c1–717 a.

⁸ See the so-called digression of the *Theaetetus* 175–176. For Aristotle’s βίαι see in particular *Eth. Nich.* book 1 and 10

⁹ See, among others, Dillon (1977) and Neschke–Hentschke (1995).

¹⁰ For Antiochus’ *telos* and for his Platonism see chapter four, *supra*, pp. 71–79.

¹¹ Stob. 2.77,16–27 (SVF 3.16; Long–Sedley 63A). For the other sources see *supra*, chapter 3, pp.59–70.

misleading. The divine paradigm does not possess this function in Platonists' accounts of the doctrine.

As we saw in Alcinous' handbook, the "God to whom our assimilation is directed" is a God who holds virtues, not a God *superior* to these.¹² By analysing the notoriously obscure chapter 10 of the *Didaskalikos*, that about God, we have come to the conclusion that this God (who is the intellect of the soul of the world) is the Demiurge. We found proofs for such a conclusion in many other accounts of the *telos*. The testimony in Stobaeus' *Anthology*, which probably represents the most ancient testimony of the *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi* and depends upon Eudorus of Alexandria, describes the divine paradigm through his two powers, namely "the capacity to create the cosmos" (τὸ κοσμοποιῶν) and "the capacity to administer it" (τὸ κοσμοδιοικητικόν), which are precisely the two actions of the Demiurge in the *Timaeus*.¹³ To these two powers correspond the two features of the sage, namely "the establishment of a way of life and the regulation of the existence" (βίου κατάστασις καὶ ζωῆς διαγωγή). God is the "intelligible God who is the harmoniser of the good cosmic order" (νοητῶ δὲ καὶ τῆς κοσμικῆς εὐταξίας ἁρμονικῶ). Likewise, in Apuleius' *De Platone*, we have to pursue the end (*finis sapientiae*) "not only through contemplation, but even through practice" (*non solum in perspectandi cognitione, verum etiam agendi opera sequi eum convenit*), for not only does the highest God (*summus deorum*) devote himself to contemplation, but *acts* too, through his "ordering providence" (*provida ordinatione*).¹⁴

This inclusive ethical ideal, consisting of both a theoretical and a practical component, finds two meaningful precedents¹⁵ in the *Pseudopythagorean* ethical treatises, which we analysed in chapter 6, as well as in Antiochus of Ascalon (chapter 4). They all present very meaningful similarities on this very point, albeit not adopting the same formulation of the *telos*. Also, as it has emerged from Alcinous' *Didaskalikos*, where *theōria* is undeniably superior to *praxis*, the *telos* of *homoiōsis theōi* does not exclude a practical component on the background of a constant theoretical activity,

¹² Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 181.43–45. See chapter Eight, *supra*, pp.140–148.

¹³ See chapter 5 for the attribution to Eudorus of the passage in Stobaeus' *Anthology* (Stob. *Anth.* 41,26–42,6).

¹⁴ Ap. *De Plat.* XXIII.252–253. See chapter 9, *supra*, pp.164–175.

¹⁵ If the *Pseudopythagoreans* were really composed in the I century BC. See chapter 6 for the relative debate, *supra*, pp. 104–115.

especially related to the highest activities of the legislator and the educator of the young people.¹⁶

In our analysis, we have also considered two rather important sources for Imperial Platonists, who have been treated separately for they did not write accounts of Platonist doctrines, but very different types of texts. In chapter 10, we dealt with the echoes of the doctrine of *homoiōsis theōi* in the enormous *corpus* of the Jewish Philo of Alexandria, where Platonist philosophy becomes a whole with the Jewish tradition. In Philo, the likeness to the creator God, grounded on the human being's most divine part, the νοῦς, is first and foremost a beneficial activity towards mankind, on the example of the 'God of widows and orphans', an activity that mirrors God's providence and is constantly nurtured in the contemplation of God, as the paradigmatic case of Moses shows.¹⁷

In Chapter Eleven, we considered the case of Plutarch. For Plutarch, God is the "pattern of all excellence".¹⁸ The two main divine features, which the human being is called at imitating, are virtue and knowledge.¹⁹ God is then the model for political and lawgiving activities (and here the topic of the divinity of the ruler comes into play)²⁰ as well as for those that are intellectual (exemplified by the contemplation of the heavenly bodies).²¹

In the Anonymous Commentary on Plato's *Theaetetus* (chapter 7), we found two other interesting insights on the doctrine: first, the polemical context towards the Stoic doctrine of *oikeōsis*, according to which justice would be a natural development of the impulse of appropriation; second, the idea of *homoiōsis theōi* as the foundation and the condition of possibility for justice and sociality. According to the Anonymous, Plato introduced the *homoiōsis theōi* to ground justice, and in so doing he rendered human sociality possible.²²

¹⁶ Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 153.9-21. I discussed this specific point in chapter eight, paragraph 4, pp.148–153.

¹⁷ See Chapter 10, pp. 170–184.

¹⁸ Plut. *De ser. num. vind* 550d.

¹⁹ See chapter eleven, paragraphs 1–2, pp.186–194.

²⁰ See chapter eleven, paragraph 1.1, pp. 189–191.

²¹ Plut. *De ser. Num. vind* 550d–e.

²² An in *Th.* 5.18–6.31. See chapter seven pp. 116–122.

In light of our analysis, I believe to have brought to attention important elements related to this doctrine. As some scholars already noticed,²³ the way in which Plato deals with the idea of becoming like God in the dialogues, together with the Aristotelian division of the two kinds of life, has led to an underlying tension between two ideals in the history of Platonism. We also observed how one of the hallmarks of the Platonists belonging to this historical period is the attempt to conciliate Plato with Aristotle. Now, Aristotle had presented the ideals of *praxis* and *theōria* as two irreconcilable alternatives, the latter being preferable and superior to the former. In Plato's dialogues, on the other hand, it is not always clear which should have the precedence, and this very fact is at the basis of the several images of Platonic ethics that have been sketched throughout the centuries. In the attempt at conciliating these two authorities of the past, the Platonists did not choose for *theōria*, as scholarship has always assumed, rather for a more inclusive ideal.

The insertion of a divine paradigm was not intended to create an otherworldly ethics, rather to furnish a model for this kind of inclusive ideal. The Demiurge of the *Timaeus* is not the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle, but an *active* God, whose action is primarily constituted by his providential care for the world. In every account of the *telos*, God is described unequivocally as the Demiurge, a providential and beneficial divinity. That his function was to render ethics active and social, rather than transforming it into an otherworldly one, is well attested in the Anonymous Commentary, which claims that Plato introduced the *formula* to ground justice. The polemical context against the Stoics strongly suggests the implausibility to understand justice as a mere state of the soul, pursuable also in isolation.²⁴ The polemical target of the Anonymous, indeed, is the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiōsis*, which explains the origin of human sociality as derived from a natural impulse of the human being. In this picture, *oikeiōsis* is substituted with *homoiōsis theōi* in providing the ground for human sociality.

Moreover, in authors such as Plutarch and Philo, we have noticed how *theōria* is often presented as an *activity* that furnishes the basis for *praxis*. By means of contemplating the divine things, one becomes “settled in virtue”: such virtue ought to be

²³ In particular Annas (1999) and Sedley (1999).

²⁴ As in Annas (1999).

applied to one's own practical life. In Greek, ὁμοίωσις is an active verbal name, and is consequently understood as an activity (ἐνέργεια) more than a state or a possession (ἔξις). *Theōria* is therefore reintegrated into the realm of *praxis* being *one* of the activities, and no longer the sole activity, which characterises the man who wants to assimilate himself to the divine. *Homoiōsis theōi* is more often equalled to “becoming virtuous” than to “being virtuous”. All these conclusions contribute to confer an original insight in Middle Platonist ethics, by depicting it not so much as anti-social, otherworldly as fully social and characterized by an important practical component.

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