

Logos and noesis in Alcinous' Didaskalikòs, ch. 4¹

Abstract

This paper presents an analysis of some passages of Alcinous *Didaskalikos*, ch. 4. Its aim is to show, on the one hand, that Alcinous suggests a reading of the main points of Plato's epistemology focused on a hard dualistic interpretation of both the theory of Forms and recollection; and, on the other hand, that in the text there is no real acceptance of Stoic doctrines, but only an attempt to show that outside of the Platonic framework no suitable account for Stoic notions such as *logos* or *physikai ennoiai* can be provided.

Key words:

Alcinous

Plato

Stoicism

Opinion

Discourse

Reason

¹ I would like to thank the friends and colleagues (George-Boys Stones, Philip Horky, Mauro Bonazzi) with whom I have discussed this paper during the workshop held in Milan, Platonism and Hellenistic Philosophy: Epistemology, 24.10-2014. The final version of my text takes their very interesting remarks into account, as far as possible.

1.

Chapter 4 of Alcinous' *Didaskalikos* is a dense and complex text. Alcinous has set himself the difficult task of drawing in a few lines a thorough picture of Plato's epistemology, by collecting the most relevant passages on this subject from the dialogues, and attempting to bind them in a coherent and well-ordered way. Considering the well-known features of Plato's text, whose aim is certainly not to draw up a clear schematization of the subject matter, it is hardly surprising that Alcinous ultimately failed to fully meet his goal. However, I believe that Alcinous' summary is far from being as confused and obscure as it is often supposed to be. Rather, I would argue that Alcinous produced a plausible summary of Platonic epistemology which, on the one hand, seeks to take account of all the crucial data which may be inferred from the dialogues and, on the other, adopts the methodological, linguistic and conceptual foundations of Hellenistic epistemology, in order to assert the superiority of the theory it upholds against rival philosophies (starting from Stoicism).

Clearly, for Alcinous this operation implies a particular interpretation of Plato's epistemology (as well as metaphysics), which in my view finds its strong points in the following theses. While favouring a markedly dualistic view of Platonic metaphysics and epistemology, based on the notion of the separateness of the Forms, the doctrine of recollection and the ineffability of divine reason, Alcinous acknowledges the need to ensure and preserve technical-scientific knowledge of the world (particularly through the notion of *epistemonikòs logos*) as a genuinely Platonic requirement. Alcinous thus explicitly distances himself from Academic scepticism by framing his anti-Stoic polemic not in terms of an opposition between

scepticism and dogmatism, but in terms of an opposition between a correct way of defining the foundations of knowledge and an incorrect way of doing so.

In order to show the soundness of the picture just outlined, I shall take into consideration some passages of the chapter that are, in my opinion, of crucial importance for the problem at issue. Let us begin with the twin notions of *nous* and *logos*. According to Alcinous, while the *nous* is the subject of judgement, the *logos* is the instrument. The *logos*, however, is twofold: there is both a *logos* available to gods but not men (θεῶ δυνατός, ἀνθρώπῳ δὲ ἀδύνατος), that is παντελῶς ἄληπτός τε καὶ ἀτρεκής ("completely ungraspable and unerring"), and a *logos* available to men too (καὶ ἀνθρώπῳ δυνατός), ὁ δὲ κατὰ τὴν τῶν πραγμάτων γνῶσιν ἀδιάψευστος ("only free from error when it is engaged in the cognition of reality"²). But the human *logos* too is twofold: there is both an ἐπιστημονικὸς λόγος, whose objects are νοητὰ, and a δοξαστικὸς λόγος, whose objects are αἰσθητὰ.

The first problem that arises from this passage is whether a single meaning can be found for these uses of *logos*, as well as the other that appear in the chapter. The translation most commonly adopted is "reason"³. But one might reasonably ask: what is the meaning of the expression δοξαστικὸς λόγος (namely, according to Dillon, "reason based on opinion"; according to Schrenk, "opining reason"⁴)? The second

² For the Greek text I will refer to John Wittaker's Budé edition (Paris 1990). The English translation is John Dillon's (Alcinous, *The Handbook of Platonism*, Oxford 1993).

³ In English, and in Western languages more generally, this word has an ambiguous meaning that lies half way between the notion of explanatory factor and that of the human capacity to think in a certain manner. In my view, however, it is not really a matter of choosing one meaning over the other, as in Platonic terms both are incompatible with the epistemological degree of *doxa* (for what distinguishes human reason is precisely the capacity to identify the reasons of things).

⁴ L. P. Schrenk, *Faculties of Judgment in the Didaskalikos*, Mnemosyne, vol. XLIV, 1991,

and third definitions of *episteme* in the *Theaetetus*, namely "right opinion (δόξα)" and "right opinion (δόξα) plus an account (λόγος)", imply that *doxa, qua doxa*, is devoid of *logos*, since the *logos* is something that could only be added to it in order to expound the reasons why a *doxa* is supposed to be right. In other words, the standard Platonic notion of *doxa* shows a clear-cut separation between opinion and reason: and then between *doxa* and *logos*, as far as *logos* is translated as "reason". This means that, according to Plato, while it is well possible for a *doxa* to be true, it is never the case that a *doxa, qua doxa*, can show the reasons for its truthfulness. How, then, can such a thing as an "opining reason" exist?

This doubt is confirmed by *Timaeus* 28a, the famous passage which Middle-Platonist philosophers regarded as key evidence in favour of ontological and epistemological dualism, and which would appear to contradict what is stated by Alcinous⁵. According to this passage, the difference between what eternally is and what eternally becomes lies in the fact that whereas the former may be grasped by a thought resorting to *logos* (μετὰ λόγου), the latter may be grasped by a *doxa* resorting to sense-perception devoid of *logos* (μετ' αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου). Plato here would seem to be saying that only thought is rational, whereas *doxa* is not. This would confirm the idea that the notion of *logos doxastikòs* could hardly be a Platonic conception, if *logos* is here translated as "reason".

On the other hand, it seems necessary to translate "*logos*" as "reason" in Alcinous' passage on account of the fact that it also speaks of a divine *logos*. For what could the divine *logos* be if not divine "reason"? Taking this as a starting point, and always

p. 347-357.

⁵ Contrary to what is argued by Ch. Helmig, *Forms and Concepts: Concepts Formation in the Platonic Tradition*, Berlin-Boston 2012, p. 142.

assuming that a single meaning is to be found for all three uses of *logos* (as divine, *epistemonikòs* and *doxastikòs logos*), the argument must unfold as follows: since divine *logos* necessarily means divine reason, and since the *logos epistemonikòs* is perfectly compatible with the meaning of “reason”, we must find a kind of “reason” that may be qualified as “*doxastic*”.

Some scholars have indeed set themselves this task⁶. D. Sedley, for instance, writes that "*Logos* serves as a criterion of truth because it is a stock of fundamental concepts – empiric concepts in the case of *doxastic* reason, a priori concepts in the case of epistemonic reason"⁷. But from a Platonic point of view, expressions such as "empirical concepts" are completely meaningless. Hardly any better is the explanation Schrenk offers for "opining reason": "the collective name for what we might call acquired conceptions, which are derived from experience and used in judgement about perceptibles" (op. cit., p. 352). The unnecessary sophistication of this sentence is a telling clue that the attempt of translating here *logos* as reason is impossible: in Plato's philosophical vocabulary, "opining reason" is simply a non-sense.

This does not mean that reason cannot deal directly with the objects of *doxa* (as we will see shortly, this is precisely what happens, according to my interpretation of τῶν

⁶ A recent overview of the *status quaestionis*, accompanied by an original suggestion, is to be found in Helmig, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-154. I will be getting back to the chief problem addressed by Helmig shortly. What I wish to note here is that all the authors quoted so far (Sorabji, Baltes and Sedley) and even Helmig himself have no qualms in translating *logos* as “reason” (in the expression *logos doxastikòs*).

⁷ *Alcinous' Epistemology*, in K. Algra, P. van der Host, D. Runia, *Polyhistor. Studies in the History and Historiography of Ancient Philosophy*. Presented to Jaap Mansfeld on his Sixtieth Birthday, Leiden – New York – Köln 1996, pp. 300-312 (here p. 305). Schrenk too, *op. cit.*, simply identifies *logos* with reason, without taking account of the problems this might raise.

πραγμάτων). It is clear, for instance, that what Plato says in *Republic VII* about our unsuccessful attempts to understand the world of flux and matter is an account of a kind of reasoning. In this case, however, what we have is not an *opining* (δοξαστικός) reason, but a reason *dealing with the objects* of *doxa*, and it is obvious that the former cannot be confused with the latter.

If we wish to search for the reason why Alcinous coined the apparently awkward and non-Platonic notion of *doxastikòs logos*, and attributed it to Plato's epistemology, we must turn elsewhere. Considering that Alcinous seeks – as a matter of course, one might say – to elucidate the Platonic texts dealing with epistemological issues, or at any rate the most important of these texts, it seems to me that it is not too difficult to come up with an answer to the above question. In the well-known passage of the *Theaetetus* in which Socrates describes thought (*dianoia*) as a sort of inner dialogue of the soul, Plato states:

So, in my view, to judge (δοξάζειν) is to make a statement (λέγειν), and a judgement (δόξα) is a statement (λόγος) which is not addressed to another person or spoken aloud, but silently addressed to oneself (190a)

Leaving the “interpretative” choices of the English translators (Levetz and Burnyeat) aside for the moment, to Greek ears this passage means something quite clear, namely that for the Socrates speaking here there is one sense in which *doxa* is *logos*. Alcinous was familiar with this passage, since he alludes to it a little later on in ch. 4 (155, 17-20). Hence, Alcinous is forced to speak of a *logos doxastikòs* simply because Plato has spoken of it. But in order to make sense of this formula and understand the Platonic passage justifying its use, we can no longer translate *doxa* as

“opinion” (or, worse still, as an “intertwining of memory and sensation”, according to the definition provided a little earlier on by Alcinous himself – 154, 40), or *logos* as “reason”. Rather, with Levett and Burnyeat, we are to render *doxa* as “judgement” and *logos* as “assessment” (or other similar terms)⁸.

In particular, the fact that *logos* is here to be translated as “statement” or “discourse” is also suggested by a parallel passage in the *Sophist* (263 e) where the Stranger claims that *dianoia* is identical to *logos*, except that it is a purely interior *logos*, distinct from that which is actually uttered. Indeed, Alcinous quotes this passage almost word-by-word after the one from the *Theaetetus*. Alcinous here ostensibly admits that the basic meaning of *logos* amounts to a verbal expression consisting of words and sounds, without it being necessary to refer to its possible connections with things such reasoning and arguing. Certainly, Alcinous makes no mention here of the possible coincidence of *logos* and *doxa* affirmed in the passage from the *Theaetetus*. But while the philosopher acknowledges that according to one meaning *logos* simply describes the articulate sound that comes from a person's mouth, he can hardly deny the fact that in most cases what is uttered is nothing but *doxa*.

Certainly, if it were true that “*Logos* serves as a criterion” for Alcinous – to quote Sedley (cf. n. 7) – we would be essentially forced to translate the word as “reason”. But, in my view, Sedley's claim finds no support in the text. Alcinous is here speaking about the criterion in a non-technical way, without taking any particular position, but simply listing under this title all the elements that make up the cognitive

⁸ It may worth referring here to the recent article by Jessica Moss (*Right Reason in Plato and Aristotle: On the Meaning of Logos, “Phronesis”* 59, 2014/3, pp. 181-230) which shows (particularly with reference to Plato and Aristotle) that the standard translation of *logos* as “reason” must in many cases by rejected in favour of “explanatory account”.

process, be it intellectual or sensible: 1) judgement (κρίσιν) which is called criterion (κριτήριον) in the strictest sense (κυρίως); 2) the judging agent (κριτής, which in the case of intellectual knowledge coincides with the νοῦς of the philosopher); 3) the *logos*, which is also called κριτής, just like the philosopher, since it is the tool (ὄργανον) without which the latter cannot exercise his judgement. Indeed, the expressions "The philosopher says" and "The *logos*/discourse (of the philosopher) says" are largely equivalent⁹.

To sum up, what is it in Plato's writing which leads Alcinous to coin the expression *doxastikòs logos*? The answer is the existence in Plato of a meaning of *doxa* as a judgement which finds expression through a *logos*, understood as a statement or discourse. For example, if I claim that "justice is giving each his due", I am expressing a *doxa* (judgement) through a *logos* (discourse).

The fact that the *doxastikòs logos* is precisely a type of discourse which takes the form of a judgement is confirmed by 156, 8-14, where Alcinous states that in conjunction with sense-perception it enables one to judge sensible reality (according to the double formula – which we will later find also applied, by analogy, to *noesis* – of sense-perception operating "not without" the *logos doxastikòs* and of a *logos doxastikòs* operating "not without" sense-perception). What emerges, then, is a use of the term *logos* to express the fact that sensible reality is not only known, in an immediate and direct fashion, through the perceptions associated to it, but is also the object of a discourse which articulates and describes it in all its parts. In other words, the *logos doxastikòs* is developed whenever beings equipped with language exercise discursively/linguistically the capacity to process sense data which animals devoid of *logos* lack. This *logos*, therefore, stands halfway between sense-perception/opinion

⁹ Cf. Heraclitus, 22 B 50.

and rational cognition (the *logos epistemonikòs*): for, on the one hand, it amounts to neither sense-perception nor opinion, but to a discourse concerning these; on the other, it is not yet a rational discourse. The awkward conflation of two separate epistemic faculties, which seems inevitable if the word *logos* in *epistemonikòs logos* is translated as “reason”, thus no longer occurs.¹⁰

It is interesting to ask whether this position of Alcinous' finds any precedents, or at any rate any correspondence, in other Platonist authors. In the pages of his 1973 book discussing the *Didaskalikòs*¹¹, K. Wurm suggests a parallel between the intermediate nature of Alcinous' *logos doxastikòs* and that of the οὐσία δοξαστή – and the corresponding faculty of *doxa* – which is mentioned in a Xenocrates fragment preserved by Sextus¹². This does not seem like a very pertinent connection, however, both because in Xenocrates the intermediate reality that is the object of *doxa* is celestial bodies and because, in the fragment in question, the *logos* is only associated with *episteme* (through the expression *logos epistemonikòs*), and shows no connection to *doxa* whatsoever.

What proves more interesting is a comparison with a passage from Ps.-Archytas' treatise *On Intelligence and Perception*, which quite closely recalls the discussion on the criterion we find at the beginning of Alcinous' Ch. 4 (36. 19-25 Thesleff). First of

¹⁰ This also brings an end to the controversy between Baltes and Sedley which, as accurately reconstructed by Helmig (*op. cit.*, pp. 147-154), revolved around the issue of whether recollection is only active in the *logos epistemonikòs*, in which case the *logos doxastikòs* would be developed inductively, or whether it is at work in both: for if the *logos doxastikòs* is not some kind of reason, there is no longer any need to determine what its foundations may be.

¹¹ *Substanz und Qualität*, Berlin - New York 1973. I owe this reference to Riccardo Chiaradonna.

¹² F2 Isnardi2, fr. 5 Heintze (Sex. Emp., *Math.* VII, 147-149)

all, like Alcinous, Ps.-Archytas argues that what judges (τὸ κρῖνον) is the νόος. As regards the *logos*, which for Alcinous is an instrument (and hence a criterion), this is understood by Ps.-Archytas as the object judged by the intellect (ἐπικρίνει δὲ ὁ νόος τὸν λόγον). The author adds a significant remark:

[The intellect judges the *logos*] both when it turns towards the intelligible and when it turns towards the sensible. For when the *logos* is sought within the sphere of intelligible things, it turns towards the intelligible; when it is sought within the sphere of sensible things, it turns towards the sensible¹³.

In other words, according to Ps.-Archytas the intellect is what establishes whether the *logos* is true or false, regardless of whether it has intelligible things as its object or sensible ones. Clearly, what *logos* must mean in this case is not reason but “discourse”, which is to say an articulate verbal thought seeking to truthfully describe a given object, be it sensible or intelligible¹⁴.

¹³ δεῖ δὲ ταῦτα τρία νοᾶσαι, τό τε κρῖνον καὶ τὸ κρινόμενον καὶ ποθ' ὅπερ κρίνεται. καὶ τὸ μὲν κρῖνον εἴμεν τὸν νόον καὶ τὰν αἴσθησιν, τὸ δὲ κρινόμενον τὸν λόγον· ποθ' ὅπερ δὲ κρίνεται τὸ αὐτόθεν φαινόμενον· τούτου δὲ τὸ μὲν νοατὸν, τὸ δ' αἰσθατόν. ἐπικρίνει δὲ ὁ νόος τὸν λόγον, ὅκα μὲν ποτὶ τὸ νοατὸν ποτιβάλλων, ὅκα δὲ ποτὶ τὸ αἰσθατόν. ὅκα μὲν γὰρ περὶ νοατῶν μαστεύεται ὁ λόγος, ποτὶ τὸ νοατὸν ποτιβάλλει, ὅκα δὲ περὶ αἰσθατῶν, ποτὶ τὸ αἰσθατόν.

¹⁴ One possible parallel with Philo of Alexandria's classification of the various faculties in *Leg. All.* II, 23 was kindly brought to my attention by G. Boys-Stones. Philo distinguishes a διανοητικὴ δύναμις peculiar to the intellect – and in particular the human intellect – which he divides into two types: ἡ μὲν καθ' ἣν λογικοὶ ἐσμὲν νοῦ μετέχοντες and ἡ δὲ καθ' ἣν διαλεγόμεθα. Philo thus appears to have clearly grasped the distinction between the two aforementioned kinds of *logos*: the *logos* that makes us rational beings (λογικοί), i.e. reason, and the *logos* that simply makes us capable

But the most interesting – and in some ways decisive – comparison is the one that may be drawn with a passage from Proclus' *Commentary on the Timaeus* (I 246.19-25¹⁵). Here Proclus divides the *logos* into *doxastikòs*, *epistemonikòs* and *noeròs*. The *logos noeròs* is introduced to reflect the distinction between *dianoia* and *nous* at the highest section of Plato's line, and does not concern us here. What matters is rather to clarify what Proclus means by *logos doxastikòs*. The interesting thing is that although Proclus deems the faculty here at issue a kind of *logos*, when describing its features he only mentions *doxa*, adding that it is related to an irrational form of cognition (τῆ ἀλόγῳ γνώσει συνέζευκται; he is clearly following *Tim.* 28a). Proclus, therefore, believes that the *doxa* which expresses *alogos* cognition is still a *logos* (*doxastikòs*). Obviously, this is only possible if *alogos* means "irrational" and *logos* means "discourse" – not if *logos* means "reason" (for in this case we would have an "irrational reason").

Let us now return to Alcinous. What remains to be ascertained is what *logos* means in the third use that is made of the term, namely in relation to divine wisdom. It would be an unwarranted assumption to argue that divine *logos* too possesses a discursive quality (if for no other reason but the fact that according to Alcinous nothing is known of this *logos*). I would offer the following hypothesis. Man, as

of διαλέγεσθαι, which is to say of thinking and speaking in an articulate (but not necessarily rational) way.

¹⁵ λέγεται δὲ αὖ κατ' ἄλλον τρόπον ὁ μὲν δοξαστικός, ὁ δὲ ἐπιστημονικός, ὁ δὲ νοερός· ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν καὶ δόξα καὶ διάνοια καὶ νοῦς—λέγω δὲ νοῦν ἐν τούτοις τὸ τῆς διανοίας ἀκρότατον—πᾶσα δὲ ἡμῶν ἡ οὐσία λόγος ἐστίν, ἐν ἐκάστῳ τούτων ἄλλως τὸν λόγον θεατέον. ἀλλ' οὔτε ἡ δόξα πέφυκε τῆ νοήσει συνάπτεσθαι τοῦ κατ' ἐνέργειαν νοῦ· τούναντίον γὰρ τῆ ἀλόγῳ γνώσει συνέζευκται·

Aristotle's definition suggests, is distinguished, from animal by the possession of *logos* (*Pol.* I, 1253a9-10): understood – also by Aristotle – as both discourse and reason. At a lower level, this attribute enables man to express opinions by means of discourse (*logos* does mean, in this case, nothing but “discourse”): the *doxastikòs logos*. At a higher level, men can use *logos* to put forwards and rationally demonstrate their theses. This is the *epistemonikòs logos*, where *logos* means both discourse and reason. From a Platonic perspective, however, discursive reason is also a limit; hence, what emerges is the hypothesis (already found in Plato and later upheld by the whole Platonic tradition down to Neoplatonism) that divine reason has a intuitive and synchronic character rather than a discursive and diachronic one. Therefore, if *logos* also means reason, there is nothing to prevent us from employing the same term also to describe (non-discursive) divine reason: this is all the more the case, given that the qualitative rift between human and divine wisdom – adumbrated by Alcinous himself when he argues that the latter is unattainable by man (θεῶν δυνατός, ἀνθρώπῳ δὲ ἀδύνατος) and totally ungraspable (παντελῶς ἄληπτος) – rules out the need to assign a strictly identical meaning to the human *logos* and the divine one.

2.

The second set of remarks I would like to put forward concerns the definition of human *logos* as κατὰ τὴν τῶν πραγμάτων γνῶσιν ἀδιάψευστος. I believe that John Dillon is right in translating this sentence as a restricting clause. What Alcinous wishes to say is that the human *logos* is not as infallible as the divine one is, but only in a qualified way. Such qualification is expressed by the noun *pragmata*. Therefore, I can not agree, instead, with Dillon's translation, which renders *pragmata* with

"reality". It makes no sense to say that human *logos* admits the qualification of being infallible only as far as "reality" is concerned, since "reality" includes all things – and then there would be no qualification at all. The point Alcinous intends to make, I would argue, is that while divine wisdom should be considered infallible without any qualification, human wisdom can be infallible only in relation to sensible reality (in my view, this is the actual meaning of *pragmata*). This does not mean, of course, that the objects of ἐπιστημονικός λόγος are sense data or, as we shall see, individual entities (we have seen that they are the *noetà*); but only that the ἐπιστημονικός λόγος can ensure intellectual knowledge of the sensible world¹⁶.

Alcinous' reason for stressing this point, whose importance for the development of his exposition may appear far from evident for the moment, depends – as I will endeavour to show – on what I take to be his overall strategy in this chapter, namely defending Plato from the charge of scepticism. In order to do so, Alcinous needs to show that Plato does not question the truthfulness or even the infallibility of *logos* – as strongly affirmed, in particular, by the Stoics. The Stoics, however, are wrong to deny that there are two distinct kinds of reality, the intelligible and the sensible, and that the *logos* is infallible only as far as the latter is concerned, while with respect to the former neither the *logos* nor any other cognitive faculty is infallible. And if the Stoics were to object that in this way Platonists assigned a restricted meaning to *logos*, not taking into consideration the divine *logos* that permeates and pervades all things, the latter could simply answer that they too admit the existence of such a *logos* (which in this case coincides with reason), but no knowledge of it is available to men (for it is "completely ungraspable": 154, 22).

¹⁶ As is shown in *Theaetetus* 185b-e, the sensible world does not contain only sense data, but also some common notions (*koinà*), which are the object of the intellectual knowledge attained by the soul.

If all this is correct, we have already ascertained two important points concerning Alcinous' epistemology. First, rational human knowledge includes an unavoidable discursive component; second, the human *logos* is infallible only as far as sensible reality is concerned. But let us move on to the third point. We already know that there are two species of the genus "human *logos*": the first directed towards νοητὰ (ἐπιστημονικὸς λόγος), the second directed towards αἰσθητὰ (opining *logos*). But, as the infallibility is ascribed to the human *logos* in an unqualified way, one cannot avoid the conclusion that the opining knowledge of αἰσθητὰ too is infallible¹⁷. This conclusion, however, seems very un-Platonic indeed. As Alcinous himself claims a little further down in the text (155, 6-7), *doxa* for Plato can be either true or false. As is clearly stated in a passage from the *Sophist* (263e-264), this twofold possibility extends from the *doxa* to the *logos* describing it, which in turn can be either true or false. How, then, could the *logos doxastikòs* be infallible? One plausible solution would be to argue that Alcinous is here discussing the truth of the *logos doxastikòs* with reference not to the objects of the *doxa* it describes but to the subject's judgement concerning his own perceptions. In other words, the *logos* describing a *doxa* is infallible insofar as each person is unquestionably the judge of his own *doxai* – as only the individual himself can say what his *doxai* are, he is clearly infallible in this – but certainly not of their truth. For example, Joan's opinion that “the rose is the most beautiful flower” is not necessarily true; but the *logos* describing it (the *doxastikòs logos*), “the rose is the most beautiful flower for Joan”, most certainly is. I can see no other way of reconciling Alcinous' claim that the *logos doxastikòs* is infallible and the thesis according to which *doxa* may be either true or false.

¹⁷ Cf. Helmig, op. cit., p. 148.

3.

Let us leave Alcinous' discussion of *doxa*, *phantasia* and *dianoia* aside now, and take *noesis* into consideration. Alcinous first defines *noesis* in general as νοῦ ἐνέργεια θεωροῦντος τὰ πρῶτα νοητά ("activity of the intellect as it contemplates the primary objects of intellection", 155, 20-21). Then, he divides this genus into two species: "the one prior to the soul's coming to be in this body, when it is contemplating by itself the objects of intellection, the other after it has been installed in this body" (ἡ μὲν πρὸ τοῦ ἐν τῷδε τῷ σώματι γενέσθαι τὴν ψυχὴν, θεωρούσης αὐτῆς τὰ νοητά, ἡ δὲ μετὰ τὸ ἐμβιβασθῆναι εἰς τὸδε τὸ σῶμα). In this regard I cannot agree with Boys-Stones¹⁸, according to whom the disembodied and embodied intellections are species of the genus ἐπιστημονικὸς λόγος (scientific reason): first because the text here is speaking of *noesis*, and not of ἐπιστημονικὸς λόγος; and secondly because *noesis* and ἐπιστημονικὸς λόγος are not the same thing. Indeed, Alcinous seems to have the following framework in mind. Based on the analogy highlighted at the beginning of the chapter, both sensible and intelligible knowledge include, first of all, two elements: 1) the judging subject and 2) the faculty of judgement itself. In the case of sensible knowledge these two elements are the sense organs (or rather the sense organs plus the soul, if we take into consideration the passage of the *Theaetetus* in which the soul is said to be the real subject even of sensible knowledge¹⁹) and the δοξαστικός λόγος (opining *logos*); in the case of intelligible knowledge they are the intellect (*nous*) and the ἐπιστημονικὸς λόγος (scientific *logos*). But a careful reading

¹⁸ G.R. Boys-Stones, Alcinous, *Didaskalikos 4: In Defence of Dogmatism*. In M. Bonazzi, V. Celluprica (ed.), *L'eredità platonica. Studi sul platonismo da Arcesilao a Proclo*, Naples 2005, pp. 203-234 (here pp. 209-10).

¹⁹ 184b-185e.

of the whole chapter shows that a third element is at work in both sense-perception and intellection. In order for sense-perception and intellection to actually operate, what are required are not only the subject and the faculty of judgement, but also a source of primary knowledge, prior to the *logos*, and which can be made its object (ἐπιστημονικός or δοξαστικός λόγος). In the case of sense-perception this source is ensured by the contact between the sense organs and sensible things (*aisthesis*); in the case of intellection, by the contact between the intellect (*nous*) and intelligible objects. And it is precisely this contact that Alcinous calls *noesis*.

Moreover, the difference between *noesis* and ἐπιστημονικός λόγος is clearly stressed by Alcinous himself when, a few lines later (155, 28-29), he writes that *noesis* is "the first principle of scientific *logos*" (τὴν νόησιν ἀρχὴν εἶναι τοῦ ἐπιστημονικοῦ λόγου). In my opinion, this means that intellection provides evidence on the basis of which scientific arguments may be developed - namely, the set of true principles constituting the matter of every science. Indeed, I believe that when Alcinous speaks of the ἐπιστημονικός λόγος as infallible only as far as the knowledge of *ta pragmata* is concerned, what he has in mind is precisely the world of scientific enterprises, as expressed by the Greek word *technai*. An example of ἐπιστημονικός λόγος would be the medical science, in which an expert, based on his knowledge of certain principles (*archai*), is able to formulate true arguments about the sensible reality at issue.

This interpretation is confirmed, it seems to me, by the caveat expressed in the passage that begins with the sentence just quoted. Alcinous warns his reader that *noesis*, understood as the principle (*archè*) behind the ἐπιστημονικός λόγος, encompasses a form of knowledge which cannot be ascribed to the embodied soul, but only to the disembodied one. This observation has a connection, I believe, with

the Aristotelian criticism of Plato's Forms. As is well known, one of the arguments in support of the existence of the Forms which Aristotle ascribes to Plato – in order to refute it, of course – proceeds from the unquestionable existence of scientific expertise (Aristotle calls it "argument from the sciences", *Metaph.* A 990b12). It is also well known that Aristotle, on his part, is far from denying that the sciences are grounded on the direct knowledge of given principles, either general or particular. In other words, according to Aristotle the indirect and discursive knowledge provided by arguments – in Alcinous' terms, by ἐπιστημονικὸι λόγοι – depends upon the direct and non-discursive knowledge of principles (see *Apo* II, 19, 100b5-17). Finally, the heart of the Aristotelian criticism of Plato consists in remarking that the soundness of the sciences is sufficiently granted by the knowledge of principles available to us in our present experience, without any reason to go as far as saying that the soul, provided with a particular form of *noesis*, must have existed before its association with the body. So, it is perfectly understandable that, the very moment he seems to suggest that an infallible ἐπιστημονικὸς λόγος about the sensible realm (i. e. the sciences) is the highest attainment of human knowledge, Alcinous might fear that under these conditions the dualistic and metaphysical dimension of Plato's philosophy will become both groundless and useless. In other words, the focus on the ἐπιστημονικὸς λόγος brings Plato's epistemology dangerously close to that of Aristotle. That is why Alcinous thinks it is necessary to emphasize that the *noesis* of the embodied soul falls short of fully explaining scientific evidence. Alcinous does nothing but confirm, in a distinctly Platonic way, the idea that if in the sensible world something "necessary" or "infallible" is to be identified, the sufficient reason for such a presence cannot be found in the sensible world itself, as no sensible entity or event can possibly display the features in question. A metaphysical hypothesis (in this case,

the theory of *anamnesis*) is therefore required.

The reference to the theory of *anamnesis* is useful, too, for establishing the similarities and differences between Platonic and Stoic epistemology (whereas with regard to the Stoics, as has correctly been observed by Boys-Stone, Alcinous' intention seems to be to only report the Platonic position, without producing arguments in favour of it²⁰). Careful attention should be paid here to the choice of the words and the way in which Alcinous shapes his exposition. Firstly, using perfectly orthodox Platonic language, he states that the *noesis* "which existed before the soul came into the body" was formerly called (ἐκαλεῖτο) *noesis* (Dillon understandably adds "in the strict sense"), while, "once it (sc. the soul) has come to be in the body, what was then the called intellection (ἡ τότε λεγομένη νόησις), is now called "natural conceptions" (φυσικὴ ἔννοια), being, as it were, an intellection stored up in the soul" (155, 26-27). While the noun *noesis* is clearly Platonic, the clause "*physikè ennoia*" is evidently Stoic. A few lines later Alcinous adds that the *physikè ennoia* was called simple *episteme* (ἐπιστήμη ἀπλή), "the wings of the soul" (πτέρωμα ψυχῆς) and "memory" (μνήμη) by Plato, thereby combining the Stoic notion with some typically Platonic expressions, with an evident reference to the disembodied condition of the soul described in the myth of the *Phaedrus* (this also applies to the *episteme*: while it is true that the idea of *episteme haplè* cannot be found in the *Phaedrus*, it is equally true that in the myth Socrates tells us that the soul in her *hyperouranian* condition can see the pure form of *episteme*²¹).

All this suggest that Alcinous is here attempting to draw a link between the Platonic theory of *anamnesis* and the Stoic notion of *physikè ennoia*. Since the existence of

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, pp. 203-204.

²¹ 247d.

the *epistemonikòs logos* (a kind of discursive, and hence indirect, knowledge) is out of the question, there must be a *noesis* (a kind of intuitive, and hence direct, knowledge) prior to it, which serves as the basis for the development of the *epistemonikòs logos* (see 156, 19-20). This noetic foundation, as we have seen, is the knowledge of Forms, which is only available to the disembodied soul. But as the *epistemonikòs logos* is the freehold property of the embodied soul (for no *logos* can be ascribed to the disembodied one), then the *noesis* of the disembodied soul cannot be the immediate antecedent of the *epistemonikòs logos*. This antecedent is rather memory, namely the prenatal knowledge that the soul is able to retain after her embodiment. What the Platonists, according to the theory of recollection, call memories, become *physiké ennoiai* when translated into the language of the Stoics (who, of course, did not accept such a theory). But if we wish to find a common expression, with no distinctively Platonic or Stoic overtones, we might refer to them as "simple forms of knowledge" (ἅπλαι ἐπιστήμαι, probably meaning that they are simple notions, in opposition to the complexity of *logos*, which implies διέξοδος). The "simple forms of knowledge", in other words, are a prerequisite for the *epistemonikòs logos*²².

All this means that the Platonists agree with the Stoics insofar as they admit the existence in the human soul of a kind of natural knowledge, on the basis of which men are able to make correct judgements about reality (or even infallible ones – possibly an attempt to strike a compromise with Stoic dogmatism²³); and they can

²² See 155, 34-26: Ἐκ δὲ τούτων ἀπλῶν οὐσῶν ἐπιστημῶν ὁ φυσικὸς καὶ ἐπιστημονικὸς συνέστηκε λόγος, φύσει ἐνυπάρχων. The clause ἐκ δὲ τούτων does not mean that the "simple forms of knowledge" are the component of *epistemonikòs logos*, but rather that they are a prerequisite for it (the *epistemonikòs logos* develops from them).

²³ I do not mean by this that Stoic certainty and Platonic certainty necessarily refer to the same

also agree in referring to this knowledge, according to the Stoic expression, as "natural notions" – where the adjective "natural" indicates that such notions are essential features of human nature. At the end of the chapter Alcinous clarifies this point with a very effective example, taken from the field of ethics "For it is by virtue of possessing a natural concept (ἐννοιαν φυσικήν) of the fine and the good, by using our *logos* (χρώμενοι τῷ λόγῳ), and by referring to natural concepts as definite units of measurement (μέτρα τινὰ ὠρισμένα) that we judge (κρίνομεν) whether certain given actions are of one nature or another" (156, 19-23). We can find the criterion for truth, in other words, in the correct operations of the *logos*, grounded on the *physiké ennoia* (simple notions, simple kinds of knowledge) which the soul already possesses before the *logos* starts functioning and which the latter uses as a yardstick for judging (sensible) reality (*pragmata*).

Up to this point, we have found nothing that Stoics would have trouble accepting. However, the incorrect monistic framework of Stoic metaphysics lead them, when attempting to explain the epistemological theory just quoted, to make a set of interdependent mistakes. The Stoics believe that the world which the *epistemonikòs logos* refers to (i.e. *pragmata*) is the only existing one (without realizing that it is necessary to admit the existence of a second world, in which the gods and the disembodied souls live). They also believe that no kind of knowledge prior to *physiké ennoiai* exists, whereas according to Plato these *ennoiai* are in fact the knowledge which the embodied soul has been able to preserve from the *noesis* acquired by her when she was living in a disembodied form in the *hyperouranios*

kind of phenomena, but simply that, like the Stoics, the Platonists acknowledge the existence of certain knowledge – against the sceptical turn taken by the Academy.

realm²⁴. In sum, the idea implied by Alcinous' line of thought is that only a metaphysical point of reference can actually explain such a thing as "simple forms of knowledge", *physikè ennoiai* and ἐπιστημονικός λόγος.

4.

Up to this point in the text, then, it seems that Alcinous' aim has merely been to explain (in a Kantian way, one is tempted to say) how the ἐπιστημονικός λόγος is possible. It is possible, first of all, due to the fact that the soul has learned, before birth, the principles (*archai*) of all knowledge, which are the actual ground for the ἐπιστημονικός λόγος. Secondly, it is due to the fact that such principles somehow remain active in the soul even after her embodiment: through these principles – which may well be referred to using the Stoic expression *physikè ennoia* – the soul is able to find infallible *logoi* about *ta pragmata* (i.e. sensible reality). Nothing has yet been said, however, about the knowledge of the Forms in themselves: for up until now the knowledge of the Forms has only been discussed insofar as it is the precondition for the knowledge of something else, namely sensible reality. It is worth asking, then: what about the knowledge of the Forms in themselves? And what kind of knowledge of the Forms is required by their role as principles (*archai*) of the ἐπιστημονικός λόγος? It is here, I think, that Alcinous' inquiry achieves more subtle and interesting results.

Alcinous writes: "Since of intelligible objects some are primary, such as the Ideas, and others secondary, such as the Forms in matter, which are inseparable from matter,

²⁴ I cannot agree with Schrenk, therefore, that "Albinus' debt to the Stoic is obvious" (p. 353). In fact, I would say that he was not indebted to them at all. The Stoics, according to Alcinous in admitting the power of *logos* are not really doing any different from Plato; where they go wrong is in the explanation they provide for it.

so also intellection will be twofold, the one kind being of primary objects, the other kind of secondary objects" (καὶ ἐπεὶ τῶν νοητῶν τὰ μὲν πρῶτα ὑπάρχει, ὡς αἱ ἰδέαι, τὰ δὲ δεύτερα, ὡς τὰ εἶδη τὰ ἐπὶ τῇ ὕλῃ ἀχώριστα ὄντα τῆς ὕλης, καὶ νόησις ἔσται διττή, ἢ μὲν τῶν πρώτων, ἢ δὲ τῶν δευτέρων, 155, 39-42). Admitting the existence of the Ideas both in themselves and within us is a very common move among Middle-Platonist philosophers, as a way of reconciling the epistemologies of Plato and Aristotle (see also the use of the noun *idea* in the first case and of the noun *eidos* in the second). On the other hand it apparently finds support in some passages of Plato (in the *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*²⁵). As far as the double intellection (*noesis*) mentioned here is concerned, I doubt that what Alcinous has in mind is the previous distinction between pre and post-natal *noesis*. It seems to me, instead, that in both cases the philosopher is speaking of the *noesis* available to men in their embodied condition: in the former case with reference to the transcendent Ideas, in the latter with reference to the immanent Forms²⁶. This may be inferred from the curious

²⁵ Cfr. *Phaedo* 102d, *Tim.* 50c-51b.

²⁶ Thought I favour the inverse sequence (i.e. the idea that the division between the knowledge of the Forms in matter and the knowledge of the Forms in themselves is a sub-division of the knowledge of the embodied soul, as opposed to the idea that the division between the pre- and the postnatal knowledge is a sub-division of the knowledge of the forms in themselves), I side with Invernizzi against Schrenk, in maintaining that the two distinctions cannot be unified (p. 357). The reasons Schrenk offers for his choice, however, are worthy of careful attention. He rightly maintains that "The admission that the soul, when present in the body, could apprehend the Ideas would seem to render the theory of recollection unnecessary". So, "we can never have an apprehension of the Ideas when we are in the body", (p. 338), and "our only link with the Ideas during this period is through our 'memory' of them" (ibidem). The identification of the knowledge of the Forms in themselves with prenatal knowledge of them would respect these conditions, while the opposite interpretation, admitting the knowledge of the Forms in themselves by the embodied soul, makes recollection useless.

chiasm adopted by Alcinous in order to explain the difference between the two: "The primary intelligibles are judged by intellection not without the aid of scientific reason (ἐπιστημονικὸς λόγος), by means of a kind of comprehension, not discursive reason, while the secondary intelligibles are judged by scientific reason (ἐπιστημονικὸς λόγος) not without the aid of intellection" (Τὰ μὲν δὴ πρῶτα νοητὰ νόησις κρίνει οὐκ ἄνευ τοῦ ἐπιστημονικοῦ λόγου, περιλήψει τινὶ καὶ οὐ διεξόδῳ, τὰ δὲ δεύτερα ὁ ἐπιστημονικὸς λόγος οὐκ ἄνευ νοήσεως, 156, 5-8). That the embodied *noesis* is at issue in both cases is proven, in my view, by the fact that the intellection of the disembodied soul could hardly need the help of ἐπιστημονικὸς λόγος.

But even if Alcinous, in this passage, is referring to the embodied *noesis* only, his thesis still appears rather odd. When the knowledge of sensible reality is at issue, *noesis* – understood as the knowledge of the Ideas – is clearly distinguished from the ἐπιστημονικὸς λόγος, insofar as the former is the principle (*archè*) of the latter. We would then expect the *noesis* of the Ideas, taken in itself, to be a kind of insight completely free from the ἐπιστημονικὸς λόγος. According to Alcinous, instead, even the knowledge of the transcendent Ideas, although depicted as "a kind of comprehension, not discursive reason", is necessarily linked to the ἐπιστημονικὸς λόγος. Moreover, bearing in mind that the ἐπιστημονικὸς λόγος is infallible only in relation to sensible reality, the fact that the intellection of the primary objects requires its support shows that this kind of knowledge cannot be infallible. This point becomes clear if we ask what Alcinous may be referring to in the sentence "by means of a kind of comprehension, not discursive reason". Who is using them (i.e. "comprehension" or "not discursive reason"), the *noesis* or the *logos* (understood as

Indeed, Schrenk misinterprets the passage at issue, which, as we shall see shortly, does not at all suggest that the embodied soul can achieve a full knowledge of the Ideas.

reason)? If the latter, then the difference between *noesis* and *logos* collapses²⁷. The right interpretation, therefore, must be the opposite one: the function of *noesis* is to grasp the intelligibles, and it attempts to do so by means of non-discursive intellection. However, as far as the *noesis* of the embodied soul is concerned, which is not an act of apprehension in the present but a form of recollection, it is not self-sufficient, but requires the aid of the *logos* (ἐπιστημονικός, of course). Then, since the ἐπιστημονικός λόγος is infallible only as far as sensible reality is concerned, the intellection of the embodied soul is bound to be fallible, even when it is directed towards the Forms in themselves.

But in this case, if the knowledge of A (the *noesis* of Forms) is the condition for the knowledge of B (ἐπιστημονικός λόγος), how can fallible knowledge of A produce

²⁷ Sedley, op, cit, p. 311, glosses over all of this. Schrenk's analysis of this passage, on the other hand, is coherent with his overall interpretation. While he has no trouble understanding why the ἐπιστημονικός λόγος in judging Ideas in matter requires the support of intellection, he finds it much more difficult to understand why the support of the ἐπιστημονικός λόγος is required for the intellection of the Ideas in themselves. But this difficulty of Schrenk's is hardly a coincidence, since he maintains that the knowledge at issue here is that of the disembodied soul, which could hardly require the help of the ἐπιστημονικός λόγος (even if this expression is translated – as it is by Schrenk – as "knowing reason"). If instead, following my interpretation, the *logos* in question is the discursive faculty that can only be infallible insofar as sensible reality is concerned, then "intellection not without the support of the ἐπιστημονικός λόγος" become an appropriate description of the attempt made by the embodied soul to attain a full knowledge of the transcendent ideas: an attempt that can never be perfectly successful, because of the comparative weakness of both intellection (here reduced to *mneme*) and *logos* (for the reasons given above). And this is at the same time the necessary and sufficient condition for the effectiveness of recollection: while the hypothesis that the disembodied soul is completely ignorant of the transcendent Ideas would be as lethal to Plato's philosophy as its opposite.

infallible knowledge of B? And, moreover, how can the knowledge of A be weakened by the very same kind of faculty which is infallible in the case of B? To answer these questions, what is required is a deeper understanding of the doctrine of *anamnesis*, which in many ways lies at the core of Alcinous' epistemology. This theory implies that all human souls once knew the truth, i.e. the transcendent Forms. But now, after the trauma of birth and with the impediments caused by the body, such knowledge is no more as clear and precise as it was in the past. This means, according to Alcinous, that the lack of intuition, due to the fact that the embodied *noesis* consists of nothing but memories, must be assisted by discursive arguments (ἐπιστημονικός λόγος). Such arguments, however, cannot entirely fill the gap, as they are infallible only with respect to sensible reality. In other words, Alcinous is now employing an epistemological principle common to both Plato and Aristotle (albeit explicitly expounded only by the latter): there can be no scientific demonstration (ἐπιστημονικός λόγος) of the first principles (though we can make use of *logos* – broadly understood – to argue in favour of them), since scientific demonstration always presupposes principles prior to the *demonstrandum*. On the other hand, as may be gleaned from the *Analytics*, the only procedure which enables man to identify the principles of demonstrations is of an inductive sort (Apo. II, 99b-20100b5); and induction, in turn, is only certain if it is complete, which of course is impossible (Apr. I, cap. 23). Despite this, according to Aristotle it is not impossible to make true/infallible judgements about our present world by means of demonstration. The Platonic explanation for this is that while the embodied soul has lost her infallible knowledge of the Ideas (which, from a Platonic perspective, are the principles at the basis of scientific knowledge), she can still be led towards a sound knowledge of the sensible world through the residual knowledge of them ensured by

recollection.

5.

In this way Alcinous offers his own interpretation of an important Platonic problem²⁸. Let us consider, for instance, the beginning of the *Meno*. The real question at issue here is not, as is often supposed, how to find definitions of the Forms, as if without the fulfilment of this condition no knowledge could ever be attained. The real question, instead, is how to suitably account for the fact that while no definition of the Forms is available to men, they still perform actions which would seem to imply some knowledge of the Forms – from the lowest degree of being able to understand the word which designates them²⁹ to being able to pass true (or even infallible) judgements about them. For example, why is it possible to say that "pious men must also be just", without being able to find any definitions of piety and justice? The answer to this question, in both Alcinous and Plato, is recollection. The theory of recollection implies that the knowledge of the Forms available to human souls in their embodied condition contains an essential intuitive component. This component is present both in the knowledge of Forms in matter and in the knowledge of Forms in themselves, according to a framework which recalls the *anamnesis* section in the *Phaedo* (see esp. 74a ff.): an initial identification of Forms in the matter (gained through the ἐπιστημονικός λόγος with the support of *noesis*) awakens the knowledge

²⁸ While Schrenk is right in maintaining that "Albinus' opening concern with the criterion reflects the interests of the Hellenistic schools rather than the Platonic tradition" (pp. 348 and 363), I believe that this argument cannot be extended to the whole chapter, which rather seems to reflect the author's intention to support and strengthen Plato's thought.

²⁹ Cf. *Theaetetus* 147b2-3: "Do you believe that anyone can understand the name of a thing if he does not know what that thing is?" (ἢ οἶε τίς τι συνίεισιν τινος ὄνομα, ὃ μὴ οἶδεν τὶ ἐστίν;)

of pure Forms in the soul (obtained through *noesis* with the aid of the ἐπιστημονικός λόγος); in turn, the soul realizes that the knowledge she presently has is nothing but the memory (μνήμη) of a cognitive experience that she had before birth (and which indeed cannot be infallible).

To sum up, Alcinous interprets the main problems of Plato's epistemology in the light of the doctrine of *anamnesis*, with particular reference to the *Phaedrus* (which is in many ways a basic text for ch. 4 as a whole). While strongly asserting, against Scepticism, that men possess a genuine capacity to attain knowledge – and the reference here is especially to the sciences (*technai*) – Alcinous does not go so far as to assert that men also have infallible knowledge of the Forms. As we can read in ch. 10 (164, 16-17) "it is impossible for them [sc. "men"] to acquire any pure conception of the intelligible" (οὐ καθαρῶς τὰ νοητὰ νοοῦσι). The reason Alcinous offers for this is that "human beings are filled with sense-impressions, with the result that even when they set out to direct their minds to the intelligible, they still retain in their imagination sensible images, to the extent of conceiving along with it often a notion of size, or shape, or colour". This argument is at least partly reminiscent of the well-known passage from the *Seventh Letter* in which Plato states that men looking for the essence of things are bound to fall short of this goal and end up finding the quality of things (τὸ ποίον) instead of their essence (342e-343c). However, there is also a clear link here to the theory of recollection. If the embodied soul, in her quest for knowledge, can never move beyond the level of memories, and if memories are nothing more than images of what we are looking for, then the fact that "it is impossible [for men] to acquire any pure conception of the intelligible", far from being a rather problematic and hardly Platonic assertion, actually reveals an essential feature of Plato's metaphysics.

But the doctrine of anamnesis, especially in the form in which it is presented in the *Phaedrus*, certifies that a condition equal to that of gods is also available to the human soul before she enters the body. And it certifies, too, that it is indeed possible to attain scientific knowledge of our world. The interpretation of Alcinous' epistemology I have suggested reveals, thus, the particular method he adopted in order to reconcile some Aristotelian and Stoic right requirements with an overall Platonic framework. Through his interpretation of the theory of recollection Alcinous ultimately acknowledges that the scientific enterprise and the power of the *logos* deserve the importance and value correctly ascribed to them by Aristotle and the Stoics (and which are often underestimated by Platonists because of their inclination towards scepticism). At the same time, however, Alcinous does not forego the Platonic idea that the first principles of both being and knowledge are "metaphysical" in the strictest sense of the term, since they are transcendent and separate from sensible reality. I do not believe, therefore, that Alcinous' theory is a kind of Hellenistic translation of Plato's epistemology; or, worse still, that it is a mixture of Platonism and Stoicism. The opening mention of the criterion, on the one hand, is nothing more than a scarcely significant concession to the current way of dealing with the problem, with no real commitment to it on the author's part. Indeed, pace Sedley, it is almost impossible to infer from the chapter what Plato's criterion of truth is according to Alcinous (the *nous*, *logos epistemonikòs*, *philosopher* and *noesis* are all equally necessary). Alcinous' occasional adoption of Stoic jargon, on the other hand, far from revealing his acceptance of certain Stoic theories, is simply the way he chose to show that even with respect to those matters on which Platonists and Stoics agree – in this case, the existence of a scientific *logos* – only the former are capable of providing adequate explanations.

If the observations made so far are plausible, we may conclude that, in reaction to rival schools, Alcinous developed an interesting and rather original version of Platonism. The history of “Platonism” – even beyond Antiquity – is deeply shaped by three apparently incompatible lines of interpretation: 1) if stress is laid on the dualistic and metaphysical dimension of the doctrine, there is a risk of cutting the sensible world off from any kind of scientifically valid knowledge (the only truly knowable object being the separate Forms); 2) if, conversely, one believes that Platonism is interested in developing tools to ensure the scientific knowledge of the world, then what must be either denied or downplayed is its metaphysical dimension (the separation of the Forms, recollection, the immortality of the soul, etc.); 3) finally, if the metaphysical dimension is denied without maintaining that scientific knowledge of the world is possible according to Platonism, then the outcome is scepticism. Against these three hypotheses, Alcinous offers a version of Platonism in which the possibility of scientifically knowing the world is ensured and justified precisely by the genuine existence of a metaphysical dimension and of all the elements related to it: the actual existence of the Forms in a separate dimension, the doctrine of recollection, and the pure intuition of the Forms (*noesis*) as something only attainable by the disembodied soul.

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