

TRANSFORMATIONS OF PLATO'S ETHICS:  
PLATONIST INTERPRETATIONS OF PLATO'S ETHICS  
FROM ANTIOCHUS TO PORPHYRY<sup>1</sup>

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I. Plato's legacy

Questions of ethics, as with all other philosophical questions discussed in Plato's dialogues, present severe difficulties for the interpreter who wants to summarize and systematize the thought of a philosopher whose own views are never expressed directly. Many of his dialogues, especially the early ones which investigate questions such as 'what is x' (for instance, justice or virtue), often end up in *aporia*, in puzzlement, despite the presence of arguments in defense of a certain position. If we move to the so-called 'middle' and 'late' dialogues, we do find prevailing arguments for specific positions presented by Socrates or other interlocutors, and we may be tempted to consider them as reflecting Plato's own opinion on the issue in question. Yet one problem is that Socrates, often considered to be Plato's spokesman by both ancient and modern Platonists,<sup>2</sup> does not directly argue for any specific position. Rather, he argues against alternative views held by his interlocutors, aiming to refute or modify them and also to show the complexity of the subject. This suggests that Socrates' arguments do not aim to settle the matter but rather to question certain ways of settling it, which leaves open the possibility that his arguments in turn may also be vulnerable to various objections. However, modern scholarship often considers them as attempts to resolve a question and also as reflecting Plato's mind on it.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws on material from my DPhil thesis *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle's philosophy from Antiochus to Porphyry*, Oxford 2001 (forthcoming from the OUP). It was presented in the Institute of Classical Studies, London in May 2003. I have benefited from the comments of the audience, especially those of the conveners, Bob Sharples and Anne Sheppard. I am also indebted to Riccardo Chiaradonna and the two anonymous reviewers for several valuable comments, and to Christopher Deliso for stylistic improvements.

<sup>2</sup> This assumption, often based on the testimony of Aristotle, is found in Diogenes Laertius III.52 (cf. Sextus Emp. *P.H.* I.222) and is also propounded by Irwin (1995), 8–11.

This is the point of the traditional distinction between the 'Socratic' early dialogues and the 'Platonic' middle and late dialogues, which supposedly contain Plato's mature views.<sup>3</sup> The distinction is ancient, and its author is Antiochus.<sup>4</sup> As I will explain below, Antiochus, like modern scholars, was motivated by the concern to identify Plato's doctrines. Other ancient Platonists did not make such a distinction in a systematic way. Implicitly, though, some of them accept it, while others not; Numenius and Atticus, for instance, belong to the first group, while the sceptical Academics and Plutarch to the second. There must be a reason why the above distinction did not become established in ancient Platonism. This presumably is that Platonists, despite their differences, considered Plato's work as a continuous and coherent whole. Arguably there is in many senses continuity between the early and the later dialogues, and indeed Plato can be perceived as revising his own positions rather than abandoning them (or abandoning those of Socrates). But even if we adopt the distinction between 'Socratic' and 'Platonic' dialogues, the problem of what Plato's ethical views are, remains, exactly because there are still several differences even between the so-called 'Platonic' dialogues, that is, in different dialogues different positions seem to prevail. This diversity naturally puzzles us as to what Plato's attitude to important ethical matters amounts to, such as what virtue is and how, given man's nature, can be achieved, or what man's final end should be.

Let me give a small sampling of such differences. In early dialogues like the *Protagoras*, the *Euthydemus*, or the *Meno*, Socrates talks as if the soul is identical with reason only; he considers virtue as being identical with knowledge and takes emotions to be merely mistakes of reason.<sup>5</sup> On this view, wickedness turns out to be a kind of ignorance which is involuntary, since the person is considered as acting against her own interest, which is the virtue, or the good. In the *Republic*, however, and in several later dialogues<sup>6</sup> we find the view that virtue is not identical with knowledge but rather the result of a

<sup>3</sup> See Irwin (1996), 11–15 who reviews the reasons for such a distinction.

<sup>4</sup> See Cicero *Academica* I.16–17 (Varro speaking). Annas (1999), 32 is wrong to argue that no ancient Platonist distinguished between 'Socratic' and 'Platonic' dialogues. As we will see, she entirely neglects the evidence about Antiochus. See below pp. 82–87.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. *Euthydemus* 282C–D, *Meno* 88C–89A. This is implied also in the *Euthyphro*, *Laches*, *Charmides*. On the view that virtue amounts to knowledge of the good, see Taylor (1998), 58–63.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. e.g. *Timaeus* 41C, 69C, 86E, *Politicus* 309C, *Laws* 653B, 904B–C.

certain psychological state. In the *Republic* IV, in particular, it is argued that the human soul is partite, consisting of an irrational and a rational part, and each of them has its own beliefs and desires, which motivate us in different ways. Emotions and non-rational desires, for instance bodily ones, are said to originate in the irrational part, which is said to consist of an appetitive and a spirited part. This means that one may know well what the good is at any specific moment, and can still be overcome by desires and dragged away from the right way of action. The would-be virtuous person, though, must internalize the structure of the ideal state, as the soul-state analogy suggests,<sup>7</sup> which practically means that one should be able to subordinate the desires of the irrational part to the command of the rational one. This dominance of the rational part over the irrational one is virtue.

The difference from the earlier position, according to which virtue amounted to knowledge, is considered as typical of Plato's shift from the 'Socratic' to the 'Platonic' phase.<sup>8</sup> However, in this case, as in several others, this distinction is not very neat; the monistic thesis of the soul found in the *Protagoras* is also developed in the *Phaedo* and can be detected even in the *Theaetetus*.<sup>9</sup> If we look further into Plato's mature dialogues, we will discover several conflicting aspects as regards moral psychology and the emotions, more specifically. The *Republic* posits various kinds of love as prime motivators of human action (581c), a view that includes the love of the rational part of the soul for certain activities. In the *Symposium* love is considered to consist of a rational and an irrational aspect (210c-211e), and is both praised and criticized. Further, in Socrates' first speech in the *Phaedrus* love is dismissed as irrational (238b-c), while in his second speech, love is treated as a kind of madness that pertains, however, also to the rational part (249c-e). The dialogue's main thesis about emotions and love, most especially, is that these are excessive and as such mistaken, as is illustrated by the famous image of the crooked horse that is disobedient to its master (253b-256e).<sup>10</sup> If we now consider Plato's discussions of pleasure, which is considered an emotion (*πάθος*), in dialogues like the *Protagoras*, the *Gorgias*, the *Republic*, the *Philebus*, and the *Laws*, we admittedly find different theories to prevail. Is pleasure our goal, as the *Protagoras* seems to suggest,

<sup>7</sup> See mainly *Republic* 592a-b. Cf. Annas (1999), ch. 4 for a useful but also partial discussion. See my criticism below pp. 81ff.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Annas (1999), 117-136.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, *Phaedo* 80a-e, *Theaetetus* 175c-e, 185c-186d.

<sup>10</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see Irwin (1995), 304-306.

or only a constituent of happy life along with virtue, as is suggested in the *Philebus* (20c–22B); or should we rather educate our drive for pleasure, as is recommended in the *Republic* and the *Laws*?<sup>11</sup>

Views on the emotions in turn have an important bearing on the question what virtue is and how it can be acquired. If emotions are not altogether mistaken but conducive to virtue if guided by reason, as the *Republic* IV and the *Philebus* suggest, to attain virtue, a certain amount of emotion is required, but if they are mistakes of reason, virtue cannot be attained unless emotions are completely eradicated, which is what the *Phaedrus* and the *Phaedo* suggest.

We also find a striking diversity of positions regarding the question of what happiness or good life (εὐδαιμονία) and also what man's final end is. In the *Euthydemus*, the *Meno*, and other early dialogues, Socrates argues against the popular view that external goods are genuine ones and claims that virtue is the only good.<sup>12</sup> Such a position is also implied in the *Gorgias* (470E, 474C–475B, 507B–C, 527C–D), the *Philebus* (20D, 26B), the *Timaeus* (87C–D), and the *Laws* (660E), and the implication is that virtue is sufficient for a good life. It is also held in several parts of the *Republic*. In *Republic* I, for instance, in his argument against Thrasymachus, Socrates is clearly defending the sufficiency thesis. *Republic* II and X also posit virtue as preferable to any other state and stress that the virtuous person is happy even amidst misfortunes.<sup>13</sup> However, some other parts of the *Republic* (e.g. 586E–587A) and also the *Philebus* (21D–E, 63E) suggest that a good life is primarily a life of virtue but, to some extent at least, also a life of health, wealth and pleasure. The *Philebus* in particular suggests that the good life requires both knowledge and pleasure (63E–64A) but measure is needed (64D).<sup>14</sup> In the *Laws* we find a compromising view, according to which goods other than virtue are beneficial only if they advance virtue (663B–D).<sup>15</sup> This seems to be in accord also with *Republic* IX (591C–D).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. especially *Laws* 643D, 644D–645C. See also the discussion in Annas (1999), 137–61. Plato's diverse treatment of pleasure was noticed already in antiquity. Aulus Gellius says 'Plato ... variae et multiformiter de voluptate disseruit' (*N.A.* IX.5.7) and traces back to him most of his contemporary theories on the matter.

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. *Euthydemus* 281A–E, *Meno* 87D–89A.

<sup>13</sup> Annas (1999), (2002) has argued that this thesis represents Plato's ethical doctrine. See my criticism below.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of this section of the *Philebus*, see recently Reeve (2003), 54–57. On the good life in *Philebus*, see also Canto-Sperber (2002).

<sup>15</sup> On this point as argued in the *Laws*, see Annas (1999), 46–49.

The above evidence can be taken as suggesting that, despite some variation, for Plato man's final end consists essentially in a life of virtue. Yet in the *Phaedo* (64B–65D, 82C–83B) and the *Theaetetus* (176A–B) a more demanding view on the final end is proposed, according to which man should aspire to become like God. Such a final end requires the purgation of the soul from emotions and bodily concerns including all bodily pleasures, because, it is argued, these prevent the soul from reaching virtue and truth (*Phaedo* 64A–67E, 81B–C). This view of the final end applies especially to philosophers and is found also in *Republic X* (612C–614E). Such a view seems to be at odds with the one presented in the central books of the *Republic* and in the *Philebus*, where emotions and bodily desires are not ruled out but rather subordinated to reason, and happiness is not separated from pleasure. There is also another difficulty. The passages of the *Phaedo* and the *Theaetetus* seem to imply that becoming like God amounts to fleeing from this world, and, as will be seen, this is how they were often construed in late antiquity. *Republic X* on the other hand, speaking about philosophers again, suggests that this process is nothing else but a life of virtue and also contemplation (cf. *Timaeus* 90B–C). This is suggested also by the image of the Cave; those who get out of it and ascend to the intellectual understanding of the Forms are absorbed by this activity. Does this involve the contemplation of the notorious Form of the Good too (*Republic* 508E), which is said to be beyond substance? What is actually the ethical significance of this Form?<sup>16</sup> Is it supposed to be the objective standard of goodness, which philosophers at least must contemplate? And how this view of the final end is to be squared with the more otherworldly idea of becoming like God of the *Phaedo* or the *Theaetetus*, let alone with the view suggested in the *Philebus* that happiness can involve ordinary pleasures and emotions?

On the basis of this evidence, which can be further amplified, it becomes difficult for us to infer Plato's view about man's final end. Indeed, modern scholarship often confesses its puzzlement in view of such divergent strands in Plato, when it does not simply ignore some of the above evidence in order to argue for a unitarian position.<sup>17</sup> On what criterion should we

<sup>16</sup> On this issue, see Annas (1999), 96–116.

<sup>17</sup> This confusion may take different forms. Scholars often acknowledge the difficulty to obtain a clear account of Plato's ethical views, e.g. Taylor (1998), 75–76. Irwin (1995), 6–7 speaks of diverging elements from what he takes to be Plato's main ethical theory, while Annas (1999), 62, 70–71 considers the position taken in the *Phaedo* and the *Theaetetus* as a digression from what she takes to be Plato's more general conception of virtue.

prefer the view of the *Phaedo* and the *Theaetetus* over those of the *Philebus*, or the *Republic*? Or how are we supposed to reconcile them? Similarly, we face difficulties in inferring Plato's view about the extent to which external goods contribute to good life. Does he assume a comprehensive picture of good life, according to which such life includes all goods, or believe that happiness consists solely in virtue? Also, we have difficulties understanding whether Plato's view on virtue involves subordinating emotions to reason or eliminating them entirely. And as I said above, this difficulty in assigning any particular doctrine to Plato is not resolved by assuming that he expressed his views through Socrates, because even on this assumption differences remain.

## II. Facing the problem of interpreting Plato

Ancient Platonists were confronted with this puzzling picture of Plato's moral philosophy and tried various ways to come to terms with it. The sceptical Academics presumably considered the conflicting elements in Plato's work as evidence of Plato's aporetic attitude. In their view, Plato had refrained from taking position in ethical matters, as he had done quite generally with all philosophical questions. They held that Plato, being motivated by an aporetic spirit, rather continued thinking about the subjects he had been discussing and eventually had remained genuinely puzzled. Yet, to their minds, Plato's aporetic attitude did not at all lessen the importance of his ethical thought. Academic sceptics argued against the Stoic claim that knowledge is constitutive of virtue and maintained that one can live a good life without commitment to a firm position on any of the above issues.<sup>18</sup>

Antiochus and most later Platonists resisted this aporetic approach to Plato. They maintained that Plato had held specific doctrines about all philosophical questions and especially about ethical ones, and actually tried to turn Plato's philosophy into a system with three distinct parts, that is, logic, physics, and ethics.<sup>19</sup> They seem to believe that Plato has many voices but only one

<sup>18</sup> Sextus Empiricus *Adv. Math.* VII.158, 166–184, (Long-Sedley 69B, D–E). Arcesilaus argued against the Stoic claim that secure knowledge is obtainable and necessary for virtuous action. On Carneades see also *De fin* V.16. See the discussion of the ethics of the Academics in Long-Sedley (1987), II 455–58, Hankinson (1995), 86–91, 97–100.

<sup>19</sup> See Atticus fr. 1 Des Places, Apuleius *De Platone* 1.3, Diogenes Laertius III.56; cf. Aristocles fr. 2 Heiland (in Eusebius *Praeparatio Evangelica* 11.3).

doctrine for each matter.<sup>20</sup> Yet in view of the evidence presented above, one may justifiably wonder how these Platonists had come to believe this.

Crucial for the formation of this view was their assumption that a philosopher of some value must have specific tenets about all philosophical questions of importance, and especially about the question of how humans should live their lives. Philosophy, it was thought, is an important business only if it can guide us towards a better life, and this, they argued, cannot be achieved unless philosophers have clear views about human nature, about what is right and wrong, good and bad, and how one should distinguish between them. If one is not able to distinguish between right and wrong with certainty, at least in some cases, then, they argued, one cannot systematically do the good, which means that one cannot be really virtuous, an idea they regarded as unacceptable.<sup>21</sup>

Versions of this rationale are found in the two dogmatic schools of Hellenistic philosophy, Stoicism and Epicureanism. Both schools maintained that the principal use of knowledge is to guide us in practical life and they also argued that secure knowledge is possible. For the Stoics and the Epicureans, philosophy has a strong practical dimension; it is essentially an art of living, which means that ethics is the most crucial part of philosophy to which all the others were subordinate, in the sense that all philosophical considerations must eventually bear on the question of how we should live.<sup>22</sup> As an art of living, philosophy must have its own doctrines like all theoretical or practical arts, such as geometry, astronomy, and medicine.<sup>23</sup> For the Stoics, this view has also metaphysical underpinnings. They maintained that God, being reason, had established universal laws, which are rational and inevitably concern humans who are part of the universe. Since humans are rational beings, they must use their reason first to discover these laws and secondly to comply with them in their lives.<sup>24</sup> This was even more so expected by the philosopher.

<sup>20</sup> This is explicitly argued by Arius Didymus apud Stobaeum *Eclogae* II.49.25, II.55.5–7 and is implied by Antiochus in Cicero's *Academica* I.17.

<sup>21</sup> This is the argument of Antiochus in *Acad.* II.31–33.

<sup>22</sup> See Cicero *De Natura Deorum* I.7.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Cicero *Tusc. Disp.* V.5, 12, *De fin.* III.4, V.16, *Acad.* II.23, Seneca *Epist.* 95.10.

<sup>24</sup> It must be noted that the Latin term *decretum* has a strong legal connotation. See OLD, s.v. meaning 3.

The Stoic conception of philosophy as a doctrinal system focused primarily on ethics exercised strong attraction on Platonists at the time of Antiochus and informed their approach to Plato. Already Philo of Larissa, Antiochus' teacher, seems to have been much influenced by the Stoic conception of philosophy as well as by several Stoic doctrines, presumably because he detected several Stoic tenets prefigured in Plato's work. The idea that there is a cosmic reason, for instance, can be detected in the *Philebus* (22c, 28E-31B).

The other reason that accounted for the belief of Platonists that Plato had held specific doctrines, and more especially ethical ones, was that they, like modern scholars (for instance Terence Irwin), relied on Aristotle's testimony about the philosophy of Plato. As is known, Aristotle often refers to Plato and credits him with specific views, sometimes approving of them and other times criticizing them. He approves, for instance, of Plato's view that pleasure is not a good in itself (*N.E.* 1072b28-30), but rejects the view that there is a Form of the Good (*N.E.* 1096a19-29, *E.E.* 1217b23-25, *Met.* 1031b4-14). What is more, Aristotle distinguishes within Plato's dialogues between the views of Socrates and what he takes to be Plato's views, and subjects them to his judgement. He criticizes Socrates, for instance, for identifying virtue with knowledge and defining virtues as instances of knowledge,<sup>25</sup> and also for denying the possibility of incontinence.<sup>26</sup> Such criticisms suggest that, according to Aristotle at least, Socrates rejected the existence of a non-rational part of the soul, which gives rise to desires capable of misguiding us if reason does not rule over them. The evidence of Aristotle can also be taken as suggesting that Plato put forward his views in the middle and late dialogues. In other words, Aristotle appears to assume a distinction between 'Socratic' and 'Platonic' dialogues. And it is widely believed that Aristotle in his own ethical writings sided with what he perceived as Plato's ethical views against those of Socrates. This is claimed by both ancient and modern interpreters of Plato's ethics, and has constituted the theoretical basis for a certain reconstruction of Plato's ethics. Terence Irwin, for instance, argues that 'it would not be a gross exaggeration to describe Aristotle's ethical theory as a systematic defense of the theory that Plato develops in opposition to Socrates.'<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *N.E.* 1144b17-30, *E.E.* 1246b32-37, especially about courage *N.E.* 1116b3-6, *E.E.* 1229a14-16, 1230a6-8. For a short discussion, see Irwin (1995), 8-10.

<sup>26</sup> *N.E.* 1145b22-31, 1147b13-17.

<sup>27</sup> Irwin (1995), 8.



This was clearly the view of ancient Platonists like Antiochus and Plutarch, who maintained that Plato's ethical views had been largely preserved by Aristotle and for this reason felt justified in using the *Nicomachean Ethics* in their attempt to reconstruct Plato's ethics.<sup>28</sup> Yet in order to claim that Aristotle represents Plato's views and rely on him for reconstructing them, one first has to know which these views are. As we would expect, however much Platonists in late antiquity agreed that Plato had held specific doctrines which formed a certain philosophical system, they strongly disagreed about the way this system should be reconstructed. Each Platonist claimed loyalty to Plato's doctrine, yet this eventually amounted to loyalty to their own idea of what Plato's doctrine was. Since Plato's text as such did not suffice to establish what his doctrine was, Platonists often invoked philosophical sense as a criterion. On the assumption that Plato had hit upon the truth, Platonists seem to believe that a convincing argument must represent Plato's opinion. This battle for orthodoxy can best be seen in the fragments of the polemical writings of Platonists like Numenius and Atticus, but also in the arguments of Antiochus and Taurus about what Plato's doctrine is.<sup>29</sup>

Now, one may wonder how Platonists in late antiquity managed to organize the diverse elements found in Plato's work into a coherent system of ethics and how they dealt with the tantalizing difficulties of such a project. Their basic method was to focus on some parts of Plato at the expense of others and read into them their assumption about what Plato's doctrine was. Modern scholars with unitarian aims follow a similar procedure; they try to explain away the differences in Plato's work.

Recently Julia Annas has enriched the unitarian arsenal by invoking in support of her unitarian thesis the testimony of the Platonists in late antiquity. She has claimed that ancient dogmatic Platonists, with the exception of Plutarch and Taurus, were unanimous in representing Plato's ethical position as the view that virtue is sufficient for happiness.<sup>30</sup> This is a view which

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<sup>28</sup> See below pp. 83–90.

<sup>29</sup> I refer to Antiochus' lost treatise *Sosus* (of which Cicero speaks in his *Academica*; see Barnes (1989), 70–76), Numenius *On the revolt of the Academy from Plato* (frs. 25–29 Des Places), Atticus' treatise against those who profess to teach Plato's doctrines through those of Aristotle (frs. 1–9 Des Places). The fragments of the last two works are presented in Eusebius' *Preparatio Evangelica*.

<sup>30</sup> Annas (1999), esp. 32, 94, 163; cf. also Annas (2002). See also the critical review of Long (2000) of Annas (1999).

she finds throughout the *Republic* and also in Plato's later dialogues. As she argues, 'in the ancient world the main argument of the *Republic* was seen as being essentially the same as that of the Platonic dialogues, not as marking a major change...'<sup>31</sup>. For her thesis, Annas relies mainly on the testimony of Alcinous' *Didascalicos* ch. 27, where Alcinous advances the sufficiency thesis with explicit reference to the *Republic*.

However, Annas' argument is seriously faulted in a number of ways. First, as I will try to show in the following, ancient Platonists are far from being unanimous in interpreting Plato's ethics in general and the *Republic* in particular. Second, Annas implies a distinction between what she considers to be canonic interpretation of Plato and exceptions to the rule. But thus one begs the question. On what basis can Alcinous be considered as orthodox or canonic, and Plutarch or Taurus as exceptions, as Annas implies? And why should the view of the majority be right? Annas also does not consider Antiochus, who takes a similar position with Plutarch and Taurus. How credible is then to say that the interpretation of Plato's ethics of three of the most important Platonists of the late antiquity is exceptional? Rather than exceptions, they arguably form a stream, as they strongly dispute with very similar arguments what Annas takes to be Plato's ethical doctrine, that is, that according to Plato virtue is sufficient for happiness. At least Plutarch relies clearly on the *Republic* in his relevant argument in the *De virtute morali*. One may want to argue that Plutarch is wrong in his interpretation. But then things become more complicated, because one appears to assume that some ancient Platonists were right and others wrong. If this is so, which may well be, then ancient Platonists should not be treated as authorities in the interpretation of Plato, and their interpretations should not be considered as offering support to this or that interpretation of Plato more than the interpretation of any modern scholar. Modern partial interpretations do not become less so through the use of ancient ones.

The following outline will show, I hope, that within the diversity of ancient Platonist interpretations can be detected certain interpretative tendencies. It may also show that ancient Platonists should not be treated as authorities, as their interpretations are often based on assumptions about which they do not argue. Let me start my survey with Antiochus, whom Annas completely neglects.

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<sup>31</sup> Annas (1999), 94.

### III. Antiochus

As I have already said, Antiochus reacted against the sceptical Platonists and especially against his teacher and head of the Academy, Philo of Larissa, arguing that Plato had held doctrines. Antiochus relied much on the testimony of Aristotle for the reconstruction of Plato's alleged doctrinal philosophy, especially for the reconstruction of Plato's ethical doctrines.<sup>32</sup> He maintained that Plato's ethics was best represented by Aristotle and Polemo (Cicero *De finibus* V.14), and Piso in his speech (ibid. V.7-74), which is meant to reflect Antiochus' position in ethics (cf. ibid. V.8.75), openly acknowledges his debt to the *Nicomachean Ethics* (ibid. V.12). Yet, while Antiochus follows Aristotle's ethical theory closely, in the belief that it represents Plato's moral doctrine, he also subscribes to the Stoic view that nature is the ultimate criterion for determining good life, that is, he holds the Stoic theory of *οικείωσις*, according to which a human being should live in harmony with his or her nature (ibid. V.24-33). This, however, does not necessarily mean that Antiochus imports a piece of Stoic theory in his ethics, as has often been suggested,<sup>33</sup> because much depends on how one understands human nature, and Antiochus, as we will see, differs from the Stoics in this. Neither should it mean that Antiochus reconciles Platonic and Peripatetic ethics with Stoic moral theory, as he has often been criticized.<sup>34</sup> This is not because Antiochus' argument according to which the Stoic theory originated with Polemo deserves much credit, although this, of course, may be true to a certain extent. The reason rather is that Antiochus uses the Stoic theory merely in order to recast what he takes to be Plato's position in modern philosophical terms and hardly compromises his Platonism, at least as he perceives of it. Let us see how this is so.

The evidence of Piso's speech shows that Antiochus considered as Plato's doctrine of what good life consists of, the view of the central books of the *Republic*, the *Philebus* and also Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, according to which good life essentially is a life of virtue, while some other advantages such as health, beauty, and wealth may well contribute to it. The question is how these advantages contribute to a good life. Antiochus had specific views

<sup>32</sup> On Antiochus' philosophy, see Luck (1953), Dillon (1977), 52-106, Glucker (1978), 15-120, Barnes (1989). Antiochus' ethics has been recently reconsidered by Prost (2001).

<sup>33</sup> Dillon (1977), 74, 77.

<sup>34</sup> Annas (1993), 180-183; Annas (2002), 13.

about this. He appears to have argued that a life solely of virtue is merely a good life (*vita beata*), but he holds that such a life can become best (*vita beatissima*) if some other desirable things are also present.<sup>35</sup> At the root of this view lies Antiochus' conviction that the ultimate good (*summum bonum*) must be the perfection of our entire nature, which comprises both soul and body, according to their relative importance (*De finibus* V.35). For this reason he strongly criticizes the Stoics, who denied that anything other than virtue can contribute to a good life. For Antiochus, the Stoics contradict themselves, because on the one hand they suggest that man's final end is conformity with nature, they agree that we are naturally inclined towards striving for health, beauty, and having friends, but deny that such advantages contribute to a good life (*ibid.* IV.42, V.72). In Antiochus' view, the Stoics betray their own conception of good life as conformity with nature and their ethical ideal amounts to opposing nature (*natura discedere*), as it neglects an essential part of human nature (*ibid.* IV.41, V.89).

Antiochus finds this ideal much better outlined in Aristotle,<sup>36</sup> but the question is first, to what extent Antiochus' position does justice to Aristotle's view, as presented in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and ultimately, to what extent this can be claimed to be Platonic. Antiochus' view that some goods other than virtue contribute to a good life is inspired by Aristotle, who, as we know, admits that misfortunes may seriously affect one's life of virtue (*N.E.* 1100b22–30); such a person, he argues, may be εὐδαίμων but not blissful (μακάριος; *N.E.* 1100a5–8). The context of Aristotle's discussion suggests that the lack of some advantages, such as health, for instance, may seriously prevent virtuous action. This means that such advantages are instrumental for living a virtuous life, and it is in this sense that they qualify as goods. They seem to fall into two categories, that is, in John Cooper's formulation, (a) 'external goods that provide the normal contexts for the exercise of virtues [i.e. health] and those which are used instrumentally as means to the ends aimed at in virtuous activities [i.e. money].'<sup>37</sup>

Antiochus appears to share such a view about external goods, which he divides into external and bodily ones. In his view, external goods are, strictly speaking, only those external to the person, such as one's friends, parents,

<sup>35</sup> Cicero *De finibus* V.71, 81, *Acad.* I.22, II.134, *Tusc. Disp.* V.22, Augustine *Civ. Dei* 19.3.

<sup>36</sup> On Antiochus' criticism of the Stoic τέλος, see Prost (2001), 262–67.

<sup>37</sup> Cooper (1985), 300.

country (*De finibus* V.68.81; cf. *N.E.* 1098b12–14). The Antiochean Piso argues that not all external goods are included in the ultimate good, but some of them are and can lead us to it, by enabling us to perform virtue (*De fin.* V.68–69). Having children, for instance, or friends gives us the opportunity to practice virtuous life. However, Piso implies that some of these advantages qualify as goods also independently of their connection with virtue.

This is also the case with the bodily goods. Piso argues that they are of slight importance for a good life (*vita beata*) but their role is to complete a good life so that it becomes best (*beatissimam vitam*), and calls them *accessiones bonorum*. (ibid. V.71). The formulation suggests that these advantages may count as goods because they enable or advance a life of virtue, but does not exclude that they may count as goods also independently from such a connection with virtue. The idea that some bodily advantages are good because they constitute conditions for practicing good life is argued out by Cicero himself. Virtue, he argues, cannot be realized, unless it first obtains the primary wants of nature which are strongly relevant to the ultimate good (*De fin.* IV.41). A similar view is voiced by Antiochus' spokesman, Varro; he argues that the 'good life is placed solely in virtue' and holds this to be the view of the ancients (*Acad.* I.33). The formulation here is cautious. Good life is placed solely in virtue, but does not depend only on it. Piso's speech makes Antiochus' doctrine clearer. At the beginning of his speech, Piso criticizes Theophrastus' view according to which goods of fortune play an important role, arguing that such a view diminishes the significance of virtue and thus undermining the doctrine of the 'ancients' (*De fin.* V.12). But later on, he comes to agree with Theophrastus and maintains a similar view (ibid. V.86, 90–91).

The upshot of this is that for Antiochus something counts as good not only in relation to virtue. Piso actually makes a distinction between the good, which he considered to be virtue, and other goods (ibid. V.90–91). These goods apparently can improve one's life and render it blissful (*vita beatissima*) in two ways, a) by offering better opportunities to exercise virtue, or b) by rendering life more enjoyable or comfortable.

Antiochus has been criticized of making a point of common sense here,<sup>38</sup> but however commonsensical this may be, it is arguably close to the position of Aristotle. There is still an ongoing scholarly discussion on the question of the improvability of εὐδαιμονία in Aristotle, yet in my view several passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics* show that for Aristotle εὐδαιμονία was subject

<sup>38</sup> See Annas (1993), 183, 420.

to increase or decrease. Aristotle's text suggests that εὐδαιμονία can be improved in two main ways.<sup>39</sup> First, the form of good life which consists in virtuous actions can be improved if we have more opportunities to engage in such actions. Second, εὐδαιμονία can be improved independently of virtuous activity (*N.E.* 1100b22–30), when some goods, especially some important ones, such as children or friends are obtained.

Antiochus appears to have held that happiness can be improved in this very sense. He is also likely to have thought that happiness can be improved if a virtuous life leads on to contemplation. This is suggested by Cicero's report according to which Antiochus appreciated intellectual contemplation as man's sublime activity (*De finibus* V.49, 57).<sup>40</sup> Such a view would occur to Antiochus if he considered Aristotle's remarks in the final book of *Nicomachean Ethics* X as reflecting Plato's position, as is expressed in the *Phaedo* (64c–67b), for instance. In conclusion, we can say that his perception of Aristotle is close to that of scholars who argue for the improvability of εὐδαιμονία in Aristotle. Yet we must remember that for Antiochus this was not a position of Aristotle but rather of Plato, which, in his view, was simply recasted by Aristotle. Antiochus could have had in mind the *Philebus*, *Republic* IV, but also the *Laws* (e.g. 661a–d and 631c).

If we are right to believe that Antiochus' conception of virtue and good life rests on the doctrine outlined in the central books of the *Republic* and adopted by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, he must have assumed that human soul consists of a rational and irrational aspect and that virtue is achieved when our desires are guided by reason. Yet Cicero accuses Antiochus of abandoning the view of the Academic/Peripatetic tradition, according to which virtue involves a certain amount of emotion, for the view found in Plato's early dialogues like the *Protagoras* and endorsed by the Stoics, according to which in order to attain virtue one has to eliminate all emotions (*Acad.* II.135–36). Cicero's criticism has been taken as suggesting that Antiochus held the Stoic view of the soul as being reason only. But this is unlikely. Piso talks about 'the dominant part of the mind' (*De fin.* V.36) and his formulations suggest that this is not the entire soul.<sup>41</sup> Most notably, Varro explicitly criticizes Zeno for departing from the view of the 'ancients'

<sup>39</sup> See Heinaman (2002), 99–145.

<sup>40</sup> Theiler (1964), 52–53 argued that Antiochus was inspired by Aristotle's *Protrepticus* in this regard (frs. 6, 10c, 19 Ross). But he may also have been inspired by *Nicomachean Ethics* X.

<sup>41</sup> ...*summa omnis animi et in animo rationis*; *De fin.* V.38. Cf. *ibid.* V.87.

by placing all virtue in reason (*Acad.* I.38). We must also remember that at Antiochus' time Posidonius himself accepted the view of a partite soul, and this was considered to be a concession to the view of Plato and Aristotle,<sup>42</sup> so it would be strange if Antiochus ascribed to Plato the view of the ancient Stoics. Cicero must be wrong to ascribe to Antiochus the view that virtue is achieved by eliminating emotions. Antiochus rather considered emotions as natural (*De fin.* V.62–64), and may have suggested that their moderation was the doctrine of the 'ancients', that is, of Plato and Aristotle.

We wonder, then, how Cicero came to make such a claim. Apparently Antiochus took a position which could be mistaken for the Stoic one. He probably thought that we fail to achieve virtue when we assent to an emotion (*Acad.* II.39, *Tusc. Disp.* V.39). This could be the case if Antiochus considered as an emotion only what is powerful and intense, as is suggested in the *Phaedrus*, a view we also find in Boethus (in Aspasius *In Nic. Eth.* 44.24–25). For Antiochus and Boethus an emotion is an irrational force not in the sense of being opposite to reason but only in the sense that it is generated in the non-rational part of the soul. The difference from the Stoic position is that for Antiochus emotions can be put into the service of reason, that is, can be moderated. It is actually possible that Antiochus was the author of the term *μετριοπάθεια*, which we find in later authors.<sup>43</sup> By coining such a term, he would capture the Aristotelian term *μεσότης* and would make the difference between Plato's ethical ideal and the Stoic *ἀπάθεια* more striking. This is likely in view of the fact that Antiochus opposed Stoic ethics and considered as Plato's view the position Aristotle defends in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This remains speculative, but from the above we can conclude that Antiochus considered Plato as expressing his ethical doctrine in parts of his work like *Republic* IV, which Aristotle had followed on in his ethical works.

#### IV. Plutarch and Taurus

An attitude similar to that of Antiochus we find in Plutarch and a little later in Taurus (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD). Both Plutarch and Taurus maintain that according to Plato virtue consists in guiding our emotions to moderation through reason, and both criticize the Stoic position that virtue lies in the extirpation of all emotions as both counterintuitive but also ethically

<sup>42</sup> Galen *De Plac. Hipp. et Plat.* 280.19–290.22 (De Lacy; fr. 165 E-K); cf. frs. 160, 163, 166 E-K.

<sup>43</sup> The term is found in Alcinous and Porphyry; see below pp. 97, 102.

unacceptable. Both appear to think that a person without emotions cannot really be called virtuous. Plutarch in particular criticizes the Stoic sage as someone who is not motivated by anything, a pilot in a ship where no winds strike (*De virtute morali* 452D).

Plutarch sets out to show that emotions are essential for attaining virtue. This he does in his *De virtute morali*, which aims to refute Stoic ethics by contrasting it with Plato's ethical doctrine.<sup>44</sup> Plutarch's main thesis is that virtue is a state in which emotion is present as matter and reason as form (ibid. 440D). Virtue, he argues, amounts to the formation of emotion by reason, so that emotion is channeled in the right direction (443C, 444B-C, 451C), while vice arises from a mismatch between emotion and reason (443D). Given his view, Plutarch is concerned first to defend the model of the partite soul, which comprises an irrational element, the source of emotions.

To do this Plutarch relies quite heavily on Aristotle. First, however, he justifies himself in doing this by arguing that Aristotle made use of Plato's ethical principles. This, as it turns out, means that Aristotle shared Plato's view of the partite soul with the only difference that Aristotle in his later works assigned the spirited part to the appetitive one on the grounds that anger is a kind of appetite (*De virt. mor.* 442B-C). The passage far from containing any criticism of Aristotle, as has sometimes been thought,<sup>45</sup> rather emphasizes that Aristotle throughout his career was inspired by what Plutarch takes to be Plato's principles in ethics, as presented especially in the *Republic*, since the oscillation between a bipartite and a tripartite soul occurs not only in Aristotle but also in Plato. Once he justified his reliance on Aristotle's ethics, Plutarch follows Aristotle closely; he defines moral virtue as the state of absolute excellence (*ἀκρότης*; *De virt. mor.* 444D; cf. *N.E.* 1107a6-8) and argues that virtue lies in the mean, that is, in having emotions balanced by reason (*μεσότης*; 444D-E, 451F; *N.E.* 1106b5-1107a8). Plutarch argues that virtue presupposes some emotion, and the question is to choose the right one among several different emotions. Courage, for instance, in his view is the virtue in which the person, though fearful, subordinates fear to a more exalted purpose, such as fighting for his country and his family. Without some amount of fear, Plutarch argues, there can be no courage in the first

<sup>44</sup> On Plutarch's ethics see Dillon (1977), 192-198, especially pp. 58, 72-76, 151-55 on Plutarch's use of the *Republic*. On his *De virtute morali* more specifically, see the commentary of Babut (1969).

<sup>45</sup> E.g. by Jaeger (1948), 36.



place (ibid. 451E–452A). Similarly anger does not have to be altogether eradicated, as it can be conducive to bravery in war, if it is moderated.<sup>46</sup>

Plutarch's argument that Aristotle shares the same moral psychology with Plato, which aims to justify his reliance on Aristotle as a source of Plato's views, is of little value, because instead of explaining why he believes that Aristotle follows Plato's ethical views, it rather is part of this belief. Plutarch simply assumes Aristotle's accord with Plato in this regard, because he has a certain idea of what Plato's view on virtue amounts to, for which, however, he does not argue. The crucial point for us, though, is that Plutarch finds Plato's ethical doctrine outlined in the *Republic* and in later dialogues, which he interprets as suggesting that moral virtue arises from the agreement between emotion and reason (cf. *De virt. mor.* 442A, 444F, 450D–F). Like Antiochus, Plutarch also maintained that virtue, though essential, is not sufficient for a good life and he criticized the Stoics arguing that their view contradicts common conceptions.<sup>47</sup> In his view, human nature attracts us (οἰκειοῦσα; *De comm. not.* 1060D) also to some other things, which may also contribute to a good life and thus may qualify as goods (cf. *Non posse suav. viv.* 1091D with reference to *Republic* 548B–586D). Plutarch apparently derived this view also from the *Republic*, as he did with his conception of virtue in the *De virtute morali*. If this is so, Plutarch's interpretation contradicts that of Annas according to which ancient Platonists considered the argument of the *Republic* as supporting the sufficiency thesis like the earlier dialogues.

However, things are more complicated. It seems that the polemical scope of the *De virtute morali* did not allow Plutarch to give a comprehensive account of Plato's ethical doctrine. He is aware that Plato's ethics is not exhausted in the *Republic* and is sensitive to the fact that some parts of Plato's work suggest an idea close to the doctrine of ἀπάθεια which he attacks in the *De virtute morali*. Yet Plutarch integrates this doctrine in the Platonist framework in which in his view it should be understood. He maintains that the life of ἀπάθεια pertains specifically to the divine state. Being inspired by the *Phaedo* (82C–83B) and the *Theaetetus* (176B–C), Plutarch defines man's end as assimilation to God (*De sera* 550D–E) and considers this to be the mark of a blissful life (μακάριον; *De def. or.* 470E, *De facie* 944E).<sup>48</sup> In the *De Sera* 550D–E and also in the *De Iside et Osiride*, Plutarch appears to consider also as Plato's tenet the life

<sup>46</sup> *On anger* fr. 148 Sandbach; cf. *Republic* 440C–D. See also *De virtute mor.* 449F with reference to *Republic* 411B.

<sup>47</sup> *De comm. not.* 1060B–1062E, *De Stoic. rep.* 1038C–E, 1042A–E.

<sup>48</sup> On this see Becchi (1997), 321–336.

of intellectual contemplation, which presupposes the elimination of emotions. We must note that, like Antiochus, Plutarch appears to have found Plato's doctrine of assimilation to the divine to be expressed at least to some degree by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* X; in the *De Iside* (382D–E) he argues that for both Plato and Aristotle contemplation is so crucial to philosophy as to be its end. It seems then that Plutarch implicitly distinguished two levels of ethical life, a distinction that later Platonists, like Plotinus and Porphyry, will make explicit, and considered ἀπάθεια as pertaining to the more exalted one, which he identified with the life of contemplation. In conclusion, Plutarch reconstructed Plato's ethics in a way similar to that of Antiochus relying much on the evidence of Aristotle, but presumably he tried to integrate more aspects of Plato's ethics than Antiochus.

Taurus appears to have a conception of Plato's ethics very close to that of Plutarch, but the existing evidence preserves only few of his arguments. Like Antiochus and Plutarch, he also criticized the Stoic doctrine of ἀπάθεια maintaining that for Plato moral virtue consists in the mean of an emotion (Gellius *Noctes Atticae* I.26, XII.5.5–10). Taurus follows Plutarch in arguing that the lack of emotions not only cannot be an ethical ideal but rather is a sign of insensibility (ἀναληγησία; *N.A.* I.26.10–11, XII.5.10).<sup>49</sup> Taurus' argument regarding the human nature (*N.A.* XII.5.7–9) shows so much similarity with that of Antiochus (*De finibus* V.24–40) and Plutarch (*De comm. not.* 1060C–E, 1069E f.) that it is reasonable to infer that, like them, he maintained that Plato's view on moral psychology, on what virtue consists in, and on what a good life amounts to, was preserved by and large in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>50</sup> But the lack of evidence prevents us from drawing firm conclusions on this.

### V. Eudorus, Numenius, Atticus

The conception of Plato's ethics maintained by Antiochus, Plutarch, and Taurus was strongly resisted by Platonists like Eudorus, Numenius, and Atticus. In fact, Eudorus seems to be reacting to Antiochus' interpretation of Plato, while Numenius and Atticus to that of Plutarch and Taurus. They appear to maintain that Plato's ethical doctrines are expressed in the

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Plutarch *De virtute morali* 452D. On the controversy among ancient Platonists whether Plato's position is the moderation or the elimination of emotions, see Dillon (1983a).

<sup>50</sup> On Taurus' ethics, see Gioè (2002), 323–48.

*Protagoras*, in *Republic* I–II, VII, X in the *Phaedo*, and the *Theaetetus*, which suggest that good life consists solely in virtue and in the elimination of emotions and that man's end is intellectual contemplation, which amounts to becoming like God. Given their focus on such parts of Plato's work, they rejected the testimony of Aristotle as a source for the reconstruction of Plato's ethics. Instead, they probably maintained that the Stoics were closer to Plato's views, and to some extent they may have relied on them for reconstructing Plato's ethical doctrines.

This line of interpretation can be detected already in Eudorus.<sup>51</sup> The testimony of Stobaeus (II.42.7–45.6) suggests that Eudorus endorsed a view of ethics close to that of the Stoics. He probably meant his position in contrast to that of Antiochus and he may have criticized Aristotle's ethics, as he did with the Aristotelian doctrine of the categories. He presumably argued that only virtue is the good (ibid. II.55.22–25). Given Eudorus' philosophical profile, this is quite plausible, but, like other doctrines attributed to him, it remains uncertain, as it is unclear how much of Stobaeus' testimony concerns Eudorus. Also uncertain is whether Eudorus maintained that the end of human life according to Plato is assimilation to God, as has been suggested.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately the state of the evidence does not allow firm conclusions about Eudorus' ethics.

For Numenius and especially for Atticus we are much better informed. Both appear to have held that for Plato the soul is reason only. Numenius in particular made a sharp distinction between the human soul and that of all other animals.<sup>53</sup> For him the former is essentially rational, that is an intellect, while the latter essentially non-rational. Numenius' view about the human soul is illustrated in several ancient testimonies.<sup>54</sup> Conspicuous among them is that of Macrobius, which describes the descent of the soul from the sky to the earth (*In Somnium Scipionis* I.12). During this journey the soul acquires various rational and non-rational abilities but it remains what it was originally,

<sup>51</sup> On Eudorus, see Dillon (1977), 115–135. His fragments have been collected by Mazzealli (1985).

<sup>52</sup> For instance, by Dillon (1977), 122–123. Mazzealli (1985), 537 rightly prints it among Eudorus' uncertain testimonies (fr. 25).

<sup>53</sup> I use the edition of É. Des Places, *Numenius Fragments*, Paris 1973. For a masterly outline of Numenius' philosophy, see Frede (1987).

<sup>54</sup> Porphyry *On the faculties of the soul* in Stobaeus I.350.25–351.4; fr. 44, Iamblichus *De anima* in Stobaeus I.374.21–375.1; fr. 43, Philoponus *In De anima* 9.35–38; fr. 47 Des Places.

an intellect whose essential function is thinking. Since for Numenius the soul is essentially rational, it has only rational desires, which may be good or bad. The crucial point, though, is that for Numenius all conscious action stems from what he, like the Stoics, calls our 'assenting faculty' (συγκαταθετική δύναμις; fr. 45.1 Des Places), that is, all actions we perform result from a certain decision, which is a rational activity. This suggests that for Numenius virtue is identical with knowledge (φρόνησις), as is in the early Platonic dialogues but also in parts of the *Republic* (e.g. book X) or in the *Phaedo* (69A-D). We lack more concrete evidence about Numenius' views in ethics, but given his view that the human soul is essentially rational, we can infer that for him good life amounted to the life of virtue and intellectual contemplation purified from pleasures, fears, and bodily desires, as is suggested in *Republic* VII or in the *Phaedo* (64A-67E). This view will be fully developed by Plotinus, who agrees with Numenius' position that the human soul is essentially rational, and this must determine what good life is and man's final end. Numenius then appears to hold the view that according to Plato virtue is sufficient for happiness, as Annas does.

This is also the line of Atticus.<sup>55</sup> His central claim is that, according to Plato, virtue is the sole intrinsic good and as such is sufficient for achieving a good life (fr. 2.68-72), a doctrine which, he argues, Aristotle abandoned for the view that good life can be reached when virtue is supplemented by other goods, such as health and beauty (fr. 2.12-17, 74-77). We should remember, though, that as Eusebius' testimony about Atticus' target suggests (n. 29), Atticus is arguing not only against Aristotle's doctrine but against considering it as Plato's own doctrine, as Antiochus and Plutarch did. Atticus differs from them both in his conception of Plato's moral psychology and also in his understanding of Plato's doctrine of the goodness of life. As regards the former, he takes a view very similar to that of Numenius, namely that the soul is reason. This is suggested by the fact that he identified the soul with its deliberating aspect (fr. 7.60-64). From this we can infer that Atticus presumably considered virtue to be lying in the elimination of emotions (ἀπάθεια), and this, as we will see, is quite probable. We lack an outline of Atticus' ethics and of εὐδαιμονία, most specifically, but much can be inferred from his criticism of Aristotle's ethical doctrine.

In Atticus' view, for one to reach εὐδαιμονία it is necessary to participate in the Form of the Good (fr. 9.20-24).<sup>56</sup> Atticus gives us some clue as to

<sup>55</sup> I use the edition of É. Des Places, *Atticus. Fragments*, Paris 1977.

<sup>56</sup> On the ethical significance of the Form of the Good, see Irwin (1995), 272-273, Annas (1999), 96-116, Canto-Sperber (2002), 85-89.

what this amounts to, when he claims that it is through knowledge that man becomes εὐδαίμων (fr. 9.50–53), as it is clearly to the knowledge of Forms that he refers. This claim shows that according to Atticus virtue or goodness can be grasped rationally, which presumably means that one must have some knowledge of the Good in order to recognize the circumstantial good, that is, the virtue a situation may require. It remains obscure how in Atticus' view one can achieve this knowledge of the good, given that the Form of the Good, according to *Republic* 508E, lies outside the realm of being. Yet, however this is, it becomes fairly clear that, according to Atticus, the Form of the Good represents an objective standard of goodness really existent. If we now recall that Atticus identified God with the Form of the Good of *Republic* VI and the demiurge of the *Timaeus*,<sup>57</sup> we understand that for him this standard also has a divine status. What is more, it is the cause of all that exists, the cause of the goodness of the world and everything good that is, and it is concerned to maintain and promote the goodness of the world.

Atticus' claim that the knowledge of the Form of the Good leads us to a good life suggests then two things. First, it suggests some strong connection between virtue, that is good, and the Form of the Good, such that virtue is derived from, or determined by the latter, and secondly it suggests that man's goodness amounts to a link with the divine. To begin with the connection between virtue and the Form of the Good, on this view specific virtues, such as justice and honesty, are part of virtue or goodness, such that one cannot really be virtuous, that is good, unless one has all virtues. Atticus turns out to have held the view of the mutual implication of virtues, which is defended by Socrates in the *Protagoras* (e.g. 349B–D) and rests on the assumption that virtue is knowledge. We thus gain some more insight as to what Atticus' claim that only virtue is intrinsically good means: in metaphysical terms it means that virtue is ontologically dependent on the Form of the Good, which entails that virtue qualifies as a good strictly speaking, in the sense that no other advantage qualifies, and in epistemological terms it means that virtue is grasped only through knowledge of the Good.

Atticus' view about the Form of the Good also suggests that the attainment of good life involves man's link with the divine. The existing evidence illustrates this. We have reasons to assume that for Atticus the highest good is assimilation to God, which must amount to both a virtuous life and also a life of intellectual contemplation. Although no explicit

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<sup>57</sup> Porphyry in Proclus *In Timaeum* I.305.6–16 (fr. 12); cf. *ibid.* *In Timaeum* I.359.22–27, I.393.31–394.12 (fr. 28), I.431.14–20 (fr. 34.4–5).

statement to such an effect survives on his part, this can be inferred first from Atticus' identification of God with the Form of the Good and his argument to the effect that εὐδαιμονία requires knowledge of the Good, and second from his claim that Plato's aim was to attract the souls towards the divine, that is, he explains, towards the virtue and the good (fr. 2.46–49).<sup>58</sup> Also crucial in this regard is then Atticus' interpretation of Plato's doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Atticus appears to have considered the human soul as being tightly connected with the world-soul, which exercises providence over the world. Being inspired by *Laws X*, he argues that human souls are fragments of the world-soul (frs. 7.16–19.8). This suggests that Atticus considered the human soul as constituting man's link with the divine. It is such a view that accounts for the importance he assigns to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Indeed, Atticus argues that this doctrine is the one on which all other Platonic doctrines depend, and in his view, whoever denies it, overturns the entire philosophy of Plato (fr. 7.10–16, 25–28), that is essentially his ethics, as in this context Atticus makes clear that Plato's ethics was based on this very doctrine.

Atticus does not explain what is the ethical significance of his view that man is linked with the divine or the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, but this must be along the following lines. First, by being virtuous one supports divine providence, as one contributes to the maintenance of the goodness of the world, a view very similar to the Stoic position. Second, Atticus holds that the soul, immortal as it is, is subject to rewards and penalties in afterlife, and this, in his view, is a strong motivation for man to become virtuous (frs. 3.33–38). Third, man has to do justice to his divine nature, which in his view means to live a life of virtue and intellectual contemplation without emotional disturbances, as is suggested in the *Phaedo*. That Atticus considered this as Plato's ethical ideal is supported by the fact that in his view the soul is reason (fr. 7.60–64) and that one cannot become good without contemplating the Forms. The above discussion has shown, I hope, that for Atticus contemplation and virtue are strongly connected, as in *Republic X* or the *Phaedo*, and it is in this sense that he conceived of man's end as assimilation to God.

We see, then, that Numenius and Atticus draw a picture of Plato's ethical doctrine substantially different from that of Antiochus and Plutarch, and appear to attribute to Plato the thesis that virtue is sufficient for a good life,

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. *Republic* 533D.

as Annas does. This is largely because they have a different view on human nature from that of Antiochus and Plutarch. For their view about human nature they rely on parts of Plato which suggest that man is basically an intellect,<sup>59</sup> and as such destined to contemplate the divine, a view which Plotinus will maintain later. It is difficult to speculate about the reasons why they appealed to the particular parts of Plato they did and not to the ones which Antiochus and Plutarch found more appealing. Whatever these reasons were, they reveal their diverse philosophical preferences. The interesting point for us is that all these philosophical preferences could be justified by reference to Plato's work and could be advocated as originally Platonic.

### VI. Alcinous, Apuleius

From what we have seen so far, Platonists from the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD make rather partial interpretations of Plato's ethics, that is, they focus on some parts of Plato's work at the expense of some others and specify one position as Plato's own. This may have happened because they resorted to Plato in order to justify their personal stand in ethics in the first place, instead of trying to do justice to Plato's work as such. As a result, they considered those parts of Plato which justified their personal view as more representative of Plato's moral doctrine. Whatever their reasons for this were, Platonists of this era are characterized by the tendency to reduce Plato's ethics to one specific position by focusing on specific Platonic dialogues or passages. At the same time, however, we notice a tendency of contemporary Platonists, like Apuleius, to reconcile and systematize the different aspects present in Plato's work. They may also want to present Plato as committed to one specific doctrine, but they are less partial in their approach to Plato. This is the case with Alcinous, who is traditionally grouped together with Apuleius and dated in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, although some indications seem to suggest a later date for his work (early 3<sup>rd</sup> century) – yet this issue should not distract us here. Both Alcinous and Apuleius write manuals of Plato's philosophy in which they set out to systematize Plato's tenets.<sup>60</sup> And in order to do this, they reconcile different aspects present in Plato's work.

<sup>59</sup> See, for instance, *Sophist* 248E–249A, *Philebus* 30C, *Timaeus* 30B, 46D.

<sup>60</sup> I use the editions of J. Beaujeu (ed.), *De Platone et eius dogmate, Apulée, Opuscules philosophiques (Du Dieu de Socrate, Platon et sa doctrine, Du monde) et fragments*, Paris 1973 and J. Whittaker (ed.), *Alcinoos, Enseignement des doctrines de Platon*, (transl. P. Louis) Paris 1990 (Les

Both Apuleius and Alcinous try to do justice to the apparently contradictory theories of virtue of the *Republic* and the *Phaedo* and make them support what they take to be the final end according to Plato, that is assimilation to God (*De Platone* II.23, *Didasc.* ch. 28, 181.20–36.). Alcinous' argument to that effect involves the citation of passages from the *Theaetetus*, the *Republic*, and the *Phaedo*.<sup>61</sup> His answer to the question as to how this moral end can be attained is particularly interesting. Alcinous lists three requirements, which contribute to the achievement of this end, natural ability (φύσις), education and training (ἄσκησις, ἀγωγή), and teaching (διδασκαλία; 182.4–5). Individually, all three elements can be found in Plato, but it is Aristotle who presents them combined as requirements for ethical success.<sup>62</sup> This suggests that Alcinous considered Aristotle (in *Nicomachean Ethics* X) as expressing Plato's view on how man can achieve the final end, in the same way that Antiochus and Plutarch had done before. This is confirmed by Alcinous' discussion of virtue. In accordance with the *Republic*, both Apuleius and Alcinous maintain that virtue is achieved when reason rules over the irrational part of the soul and brings it in harmony with rational desire (*De Platone* II.227, *Didasc.* 182.29–183.3). Neither Apuleius nor Alcinous see any difficulty in reconciling the theory of virtue as presented in the *Republic* with that of the *Protagoras*, and argue that virtues imply one another<sup>63</sup> and must be seen in unity (*De Platone* II.227, *Didasc.* 183.15–16). But as I said earlier on, in the *Protagoras* the soul is assumed to be reason only and virtue is considered as a particular epistemic state; and this picture is quite at odds with that of the *Republic*, because according to *Republic* IV, in particular, one may have one virtue, for instance wisdom, and nevertheless lack others, such as temperance or justice, if one does not always manage to subordinate all his desires to reason.

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Belles Lettres). An outline of the content of the works of Apuleius and Alcinous and their philosophies is given by Dillon (1977), 267–338. For Alcinous' work we also have Dillon's commentary (1993).

<sup>61</sup> *Didascalicos* ch. 28, 181.20–36; cf. *Theaetetus* 176A–B, *Republic* 613A, *Phaedo* 82A–B.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Aristotle *Eudemian Ethics* 1214a14–19, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1179b20–22. For the Platonic antecedents, see Whittaker (1990), 57, Dillon (1993), 174–75.

<sup>63</sup> *virtutem... secum et cum ceteris congruentem*, *De Platone* II, 227; ἀντακολουθεῖν τὰ ἀρετά, *Didasc.* 183.3.



Speaking about virtue itself, Alcinous, like Plutarch, follows Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* II) in defining virtue as an excellence, which lies in the mean between two extreme emotions, and his relevant examples of virtues derive from Aristotle's account in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*Didasc.* 184.14–36).<sup>64</sup> Accordingly, Alcinous maintains that virtue requires the moderation of emotions (τὸ μέτριον ἐν τοῖς πάθεσιν), and considers the extirpation of emotions, which some Platonists defended on the basis of the argument in the *Phaedo*, as mistaken (*ibid.* 184.20–36). This is also how Apuleius conceives of virtue (*De Platone* II.224). Certainly, one can justify such a definition as originally Platonic, if one takes passages like *Philebus* 32E–33A and 64D–E, or *Republic* 619A as foreshadowing Aristotle's definition (cf. *Didasc.* 186.33–35), and this may well be the case with Alcinous, who appears to rely heavily on the *Philebus* (esp. 44A–48A) in his chapter on emotions (ch. 32).<sup>65</sup> But if virtue consists in the moderation of emotions, then, we wonder, how the final end of assimilation to God would be achieved, given the thesis of the *Phaedo*, which Alcinous endorses. Alcinous himself acknowledges a little earlier on that man should distance oneself from human concerns and turn towards the intelligible realm (*ibid.* 182.6–8). Apparently Alcinous reconciles the two positions on the grounds that each of them concerns distinct levels of ethical life, that is, the practical or civic one (*Phaedo* 82A10; *Didasc.* 181.34), which requires moderation of emotions, and the contemplative, which requires the elimination of bodily concerns. His way of presentation clearly shows that he considered the latter as more exalted than the former, but it is significant that Alcinous does not despise the other, as Numenius and Atticus had done, but rather appreciates it appropriately, exactly because he seems to think that also this kind of ethical life was advocated within Plato's work.

Each of these two levels of ethical life is based on a different conception of man's nature; the ethics of everyday life rests on a conception of man as both mind and body, each requiring its relative goods, a picture we find in *Republic* IV and the *Philebus*, while the ethics of contemplation assumes that man is basically mind, and the only good is intellectual contemplation, which is what the *Phaedo* and the *Theaetetus* assume. Alcinous implies such a distinction but does not argue explicitly for a position, as does Apuleius, who takes a view similar to that of Antiochus, claiming that man should do justice to one's nature, which consists of mind and body (*De Platone* II.222). This

<sup>64</sup> See *N.E.* 1107a6–8; cf. Apuleius *De Platone* II.228.

<sup>65</sup> Also on *Republic* 588A–589E. See Dillon (1993), 193–98.

does not mean, as is sometimes assumed, that Alcinous altogether rejects Apuleius' view,<sup>66</sup> but rather that he finds the whole issue more complex.

This becomes evident in Alcinous' view about the sufficiency of virtue. He does hold that virtue is sufficient for happiness (*Didasc.* 180.38–41), and he finds this view especially in the *Republic* (181.5–9), a point which Annas capitalizes,<sup>67</sup> but he also maintains that health, wealth, or power can also be good if they serve virtue (180.9–13). This is not the Stoic position, as Annas claims,<sup>68</sup> because the Stoics deny that there are goods other than virtue, but rather a compromising position of several different strands in Plato's work, which is equally distant from the views of both Antiochus and Atticus. Yet it is a position existent in Plato, namely in the *Laws* 661A–D and 631C, as Annas herself has noticed. Alcinous also adopts the distinction suggested in the *Laws* 631C between human and divine goods (*ibid.* 180.15–16), which confirms his distance from the Stoic position, according to which only virtue is a good, but also strengthens us in the conviction mentioned above that Alcinous distinguishes two levels of ethical life, a practical and a more exalted one, which are characterized by different sets of goods. On the whole, we can conclude that Alcinous reconciles more systematically and also more effectively the divergent ethical views found in Plato's work and his position is somewhat more complex than the one that Annas ascribes to him.

## VII. Plotinus

The tendency of Alcinous and Apuleius to reconcile and systematize different aspects of Plato's thought culminates in the next century with Plotinus and Porphyry. Both of them, especially Porphyry, tried to integrate most aspects of Plato's ethics, which they appreciated according to their relative merit, so that a more or less consistent doctrinal system results. This ordered, hierarchical doctrinal system was assumed to represent Plato's own doctrine. The field of ethics is characteristic of this approach.

Like Alcinous, Plotinus tries to reconcile the conception of virtue as presented in the *Republic* with that of the *Phaedo* in the following two senses. First, he reconciles the ethical ideal meant for the philosophers in the two dialogues, and second he reconciles this ideal, which can be called theoretical or contemplative, with the more civic or practical ethical ideal

<sup>66</sup> Dillon (1977), 329.

<sup>67</sup> Annas (1999), 83–95, (2002).

<sup>68</sup> Annas (2002), 3, 15. See the apparatus fontium of Whittaker (1990), 53.

(*Phaedo* 82A10). Yet Plotinus' position turns out to be quite different from that of Alcinous.<sup>69</sup> Plotinus' view on virtue is rooted on his view on human nature, an issue which Alcinous, as has been seen, left unexamined. Plotinus distinguishes between the inner man, whom he identifies with the human intellect, and the outer man, who consists of all other living functions (*Enn.* I.1.10.5–15). Already this distinction constitutes an attempt to reconcile the passages of Plato which suggest that man is essentially an intellect (e.g. *Sophist* 248E–249A) with those which assume that man is essentially more complex (*Philebus* 21C–E). Plotinus maintains that the inner man, the intellect, is not affected, while man as a living body is (I.1.7–8), and identifies man's nature and true self with the intellect, which is destined to think and contemplate.<sup>70</sup> For Plotinus, the body is not an essential part of human nature, but simply attached to man (*προσηρτημένον*; I.4.4.27; cf. I.1.12.18–20). In his view, man's mind is quite independent from the body and even when we are absorbed with earthly business a part of us remains in the transcendent realm (IV.8.8).

Plotinus' view of human nature shapes his conception of the good. According to this, the good lies in the intelligible realm, as the *Phaedo* suggests. In his view, virtue is nothing else but a kind of thinking or reasoning. A higher level of thinking amounts to a higher virtue. In accordance with his distinction between outer and inner man (*Enn.* I.2.1.22–23), Plotinus first distinguishes between the political virtues and the theoretical ones. Theoretical virtues are higher than political ones, as in his view theoretical or philosophical understanding is higher than practical knowledge. Within each of the two levels Plotinus appears to distinguish further grades of virtue; at the level of political virtue, he distinguishes between the practical (I.2.1.17–21) and the cathartic (I.2.3.15–19), that is, the stage in which the soul is purified from bodily concerns, as is suggested in the *Phaedo* (69B–E), while within the theoretical level of virtue, he distinguishes between intellectual contemplation (I.2.6.12–27) and intellection (*νόησις*; I.2.7.3–6).

Before we go into how these levels of virtue relate, let us first make clear that, no matter the level of virtue, for Plotinus only virtue is of value, that is,

<sup>69</sup> On Plotinus' ethics, see Brehier (1940), 53–58, Dillon (1983), 92–105, id (1996), 315–335, Rist (1967), ch. 11, Schniewind (2000), 47–73, Smith (1999), 227–236.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Plato *Republic* 589A. As Plotinus puts it, 'the perfect life, the true, real life is found in the intelligible nature' (*Enn.* I.4.3.33–35).

only this is good and only this conduces us to happiness. He quite emphasizes that Plato's conception of happiness has nothing to do with the state which Aristotle described, that is a life of natural virtue and external advantages. In *Ennead* I. 4, one of his late treatises (nr. 46), Plotinus actually makes a distinction between εὐζωία, which is the state that Aristotle describes, from the actual εὐδαιμονία, which in his view is the state of virtue and intellectual contemplation.<sup>71</sup> Against Antiochus, Plotinus maintains that εὐδαιμονία is a state which is not subject to improvement (I.4.3.25–31, I.4.4.30–31, I.4.16.10–16). Living more or less does not increase happiness (I.5), neither do bodily or other advantages. These, he argues, are simply necessary for everyday life or make us feel more comfortable, but do not advance our happiness because they do not have anything to do with our true self, the intellect.<sup>72</sup>

One could object to this that Plotinus' distinction between lower and higher virtues should correspond to various degrees of happiness. Yet this is not quite so. Plotinus did consider civic virtue more base and also preparatory for developing higher ones, yet in his view this virtue is not sufficient for happiness. This is why Plotinus was little concerned with the nature of the more basic virtue and the way to achieve it. This does not mean that he was disinterested in such a virtue.<sup>73</sup> His personal example shows that for him commitment to intellectual level does not mean indifference to the ethics of everyday life.<sup>74</sup> However, Plotinus maintained that the lower virtues are automatically implied by the higher ones, because the life of the intellect, when achieved, informs our entire life. Plotinus seems to suggest that for a philosopher to say the truth, or to help an old lady across the road, to take Dillon's example, would not require special thinking but would follow immediately given his general understanding of the world and its values. It is this understanding that Plotinus considers as a higher kind of virtue and it is with this that he is basically concerned.

Plotinus argues that, according to Plato, the wise man's achievement amounts to assimilating, and living according to the good (I.2.3.19–21, I.2.6.2–3, I.4.16.10–13), that is, both a life of virtue and of intellectual contemplation, as is suggested in the *Republic* X, *Phaedo*, and *Theaetetus*.<sup>75</sup> The link between the life of virtue and of intellectual contemplations lies

<sup>71</sup> See *Enn.* I.4.4–14, I.4.16.11–15.

<sup>72</sup> See *Enn.* I.4.4.22–29, I.4.5, I.4.15.

<sup>73</sup> On Plotinus' view of practical virtue, see Smith (1999).

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *Vit. Plot.* 9.12–23, 11.12–16.

<sup>75</sup> *Republic* 613A–B, *Phaedo* 64B–65D, *Theaetetus* 176A–B.

in the identification of the good with the Form of the Good of the *Republic* 508E (*Enn.* I.7.19–22), in a way reminiscent of Atticus. Let us see how he talks about this kind of life in his treatise *On beauty*:

'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 the 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 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 oneself 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 the cause of life and mind and being' (*Enn.* I.6.7.1–12; transl. Armstrong)

According to Plotinus only such a life, a life of the intellect, is perfect, while all other kinds of life are simply likenesses of the perfect one (*ἰνδάλματα*; I.4.3.33–40). In his view, only this ultimate level of virtue amounts to happiness, which means that one cannot reach it, unless one first achieves an intellectual understanding of what the good is, which involves grasping the Form of the Good. This suggests that for Plotinus the levels of virtuous life below that of contemplation amount basically to failure. In this Plotinus is very much like Numenius or Atticus. Although he, unlike them, tries to accommodate apparently diverse strands in his account of what Plato's ethical doctrine is, he does this with a view to systematize all elements in Plato which in his view express Plato's principal ethical doctrine rather than to reconcile diverse Platonic doctrines. And as it turns out, he essentially agrees with Numenius and Atticus about what Plato's ethical doctrine was.

### VIII. Porphyry

Porphyry, my last candidate in this survey, follows Plotinus in his understanding of Plato's ethics, but also modifies his master's views. Porphyry distinguishes more sharply than Plotinus four levels of virtue, namely the political or civic, cathartic, theoretical, and paradigmatic (*Sententia* 32). All levels of virtue have their realm of application in human life and ideally should lead a man to ascend from the lower to the higher levels. Porphyry shares Plotinus' views about man's nature and the final end. He argues that intellectual contemplation involves the knowledge of our real self (frs. 274–275 Smith), and in order to achieve this, man has to release himself from bodily desires (*Sententiae* 8, 9; *Ad Marcellam* 34). It turns out

that this liberation from the bodily concerns amounts, in Porphyry's view, to the salvation of the soul (*Ad Marc.* 8, 24), and this is a state in which man comes close to the divine.<sup>76</sup> Like Alcinous and Plotinus, Porphyry is inspired mainly by the *Phaedo* (64B–67B) and *Theaetetus* (176A–B).

Yet Porphyry differs from Plotinus in his attitude to the lower level of ethical life, that of everyday life. Porphyry does not criticize Aristotle's conception of εὐδαιμονία as Plotinus did, but rather appears to think that Aristotle speaks of a level of happiness which must be experienced before one advances to more exalted levels of ethical life, and this can be identified with what he considers as Plato's doctrine of civic virtue. Let us see how this is so. Porphyry comes to maintain that Plato's view on practical ethics is like Aristotle's view, according to which virtue consists in μετριοπάθεια, that is, in the balance of emotions, and his advice to Chrysaorius, a beginner in philosophy, about living a virtuous life is that he should strive for the mean.<sup>77</sup> Scholars have noted that Plotinus never uses the term μετριοπάθεια.<sup>78</sup> Yet Porphyry's difference from his teacher is not merely terminological. Porphyry appears to suggest that Aristotle represents Plato's position regarding the ethics of everyday life, and this, as has been seen, is quite unlike Plotinus' own position. Such a position on the part of Porphyry is confirmed by the fact that he adopts the model of the partite soul like Plutarch and Alcinous, and like them he also maintains that Aristotle preserves Plato's doctrine in moral psychology (ap. Stobaeum I.49.25f.; fr. 253 Smith). Porphyry, surely, argues this because he believes that Aristotle preserves Plato's view about the nature of virtue, according to which virtue, that is civic virtue, comes about when emotion is guided by reason and desires are subordinated to it. This means that Porphyry probably considered Aristotle's view that virtue is the mean between two extreme emotions as Plato's own doctrine regarding civic virtue.

This seems to be indicative of an important difference between Plotinus and Porphyry. While Porphyry follows on Plotinus in holding that Plato advocates different levels of virtue in his work and also agrees with Plotinus about which is the most elevated one, he seems to distance himself from Plotinus in thinking that all levels of virtue not only have their realm of application, but also amount to different degrees of happiness. If this is so,

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Porphyry frs. 245.15–16, 274.18–22 Smith, *Ad Marcellam* 16, 24.

<sup>77</sup> ...διώκειν τὸ μέσον (in Stobaeus II.168.9; fr. 271 Smith).

<sup>78</sup> Schwyzer (1974), 225.

it means that Porphyry acknowledged the existence of diverse strands in Plato's ethics and tried to reconcile them, as scholars try to do nowadays. This is an interesting step towards a more scholastic study of Plato and a feature which recommends Porphyry more as a scholar rather than as a Platonist philosopher.

### IX. Conclusion

The above discussion has hopefully shown how differently various ancient Platonists tried to reconstruct a coherent ethical system out of Plato's writings. Their testimony, far from supporting a unified view of Plato's ethics, as Annas has argued, rather attests their diversity and disagreement in interpreting Plato's ethics. Thus they alert us to the various possible interpretations of Plato's ethics and help us realize that any personal reconstruction of Plato's ethical doctrine is bound to remain lacking and largely reflecting our personal preferences on the matter. This does not mean that we should abandon the task of determining what Plato had thought on ethical (or other) issues. It means only that we should be striving more towards discussing his arguments than drawing conclusions from them about what Plato's eventual thesis on a certain question was, as this remains as frustrating as ever. The controversies of the ancient Platonists do much to commend such a direction, and for this alone these figures deserve our attention.

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