A.G. Long (ed)


*Plato and the Stoics* is a collection of articles that explores “the contribution of Plato’s dialogues to the intellectual life of the Stoa” (p. 1). Some of the chapters of the book were initially presented at two workshops in the School of Classics at the University of St Andrews in 2008 and 2009. The book is part of a new, though now already well established, interest in the interaction between Platonism and Stoicism and is a welcome addition to Bonazzi and Helmig’s *Platonic Stoicism—Stoic Platonism* (2007) and to Harte, McCabe, Sharples and Sheppard’s *Aristotle and the Stoics Reading Plato* (2010). As will be made clear from the following, the overall quality of the book is very good and the collection contains some excellent studies.

The first chapter is by Malcolm Schofield: ‘Cardinal virtues: a contested Socratic inheritance’ (pp. 11-28). S. focuses on the history of the four cardinal virtues (*phronêsis, sôphrosunê, andreia* and *dikaiosunê*) in the Stoa, looking at it from the perspective of the Socratic inheritance of the Stoics. The Stoics (or some of them) thought of themselves as Socratics, but since there has been several Socrates, depending on the author who staged him, there were also several ways to be Socratic. Or, at any rate, two: the Platonist and the Xenophontian. Zeno’s claim that the virtues are forms of *phronêsis*, as reported by Plutarch, reminds us of Plato’s Socrates’ account in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, where the three virtues of moderation, courage and justice are all forms of knowledge. Cleanthes, Zeno’s successor, took seemingly a more Xenophontian approach, having *enkrateia* as the leading virtue of the four and defining all virtues as forces. As to Chrysippus, he apparently reverted to a more Platonist approach, saying that virtues are all *epistemei*. Finally, S. suggests that Hecaton of Rhodes, a Stoic of the 1IInd century BC, may have wanted to re-incorporate some of Cleanthes’ Xenophontian approach, saying that a non-epistemic virtue (like health or strength of the soul) follows upon and is co-extensive with the epistemic virtue.

The next chapter, by G. Reydams-Schils (‘The Academy, the Stoics and Cicero on Plato’s *Timaeus*, pp. 29-58) is one of the best in the volume. R.-S. offers us a meticulous and comprehensive revised account of the origin of Stoic physics and its alleged debt to the Old Academy. In his groundbreaking article ‘The origins of Stoic god’, published in 2002, D. Sedley had argued that Polemo, last head of the Academy before it turned sceptic (and also one of Zeno of Citium’s teachers), developed an interpretation of the *Timaeus* that anticipated Stoic physics. Other commentators, like J. Dillon, also aimed at demonstrating that the Old Academy had a similar approach to the first
principles as the Stoics. According to R.-S., however, “Dillon and Sedley (…) underestimate the complexities of the hermeneutics of rivalry and co-optation” (p. 29). There are, she says, “many features of the Old Academy’s metaphysics that have no counterpart in Stoicism” (idem). In particular, she points out that there are no indications that the successors of Plato at the Academy abandoned the transcendence of the first principles. As to Polemo’s physics, apart from Aetius’s report that he “declared god to be the kosmos”, our only source is to be found in Antiochus of Ascalon’s account (in Cicero’s Academica I 24-29). R-S.’s refreshing analysis of the latter shows (rather convincingly I must say) that the Stoic-like elements attributed there to the Old Academy are in all likelihood the results of retrojections on the part of Antiochus, and should therefore not be taken at face value.

Another very interesting study follows, by J. Bryan: ‘Chrysippus and Plato on the fragility of the head’ (pp. 59-79). B. is investigating how Chrysippus interpreted Plato’s teleological account of the head in Timaeus 74e1-75-c7. The case of the fragility of the head is part of Chrysippus’ account of providence and theodicy and B.’s study shows how he used this example as an illustration for his explanation of evils as ‘necessary concomitances’ of goods. Her analysis shows that the kind of necessity here involved has both an epistemic/ontological dimension (the idea that opposites like good and bad are interdependent) and a more physical or material one. Regarding the latter, she argues, following Sedley, and Johansen’s interpretations, that evils are not due to material necessity, but to ‘conditional necessity’: “It is not the case that matter qua matter resists intelligence, but rather that intelligence must work with the consequences of its own providential creative activities” (p. 74).

P. Scade’s ‘Plato and the Stoics on limits, parts and wholes’ (pp. 80-105) is concerned with the ontological status the Stoics granted to limits and argues that their account is reminiscent of Plato’s treatment in his Parmenides. I found Scade’s interpretation of Stoic limits very stimulating and his idea of distinguishing between two sorts of limits rather appealing. In short, he argues that while it is true that the Stoics, who saw matter as something continuous, could not grant the existence of limits in the atomistic sense, they nevertheless acknowledged the existence of limits at a less fundamental level, to account for the distinction between bodies. These, in Scade’s words, are objective and non-corporeal markers (p. 86). As to Scade’s evidences for the influence of the Parmenides, I must admit I found them too speculative and eventually unconvincing.

As the title of his article shows, ‘Subtexts, connections and open opposition’, A.G. Long is interested in mapping out the forms of the engagement of the Stoics with Plato. L’s approach is subtle and leads to clearly noteworthy results.
If we grant the relevance of a tripartite distinction between “subtextual” response, simple “connection” and “open oppositions”, then the attitude of the Stoics towards Plato appears all the sudden much more complex and revealing. In particular, it becomes apparent, according to L., that it is only in relation to Plato’s political theory that the Stoics (in fact, Zeno) showed open oppositions. Everything else, according to L., can be seen either as a matter of subtextual responses (like Chrysippus’ psychology in regard to Plato’s tripartition of the soul) or connections (like Zeno’s account of the virtues and its similarity with Plato’s).

The penultimate chapter, “Seneca against Plato: Letters 58 and 65”, is by G. Boys-Stones. Against the view that post-Hellenistic Stoicism “sought ‘rapprochement’, maybe even a marriage of some sorts; at least an open conversation” (p. 128) with Platonism, B.-S. is arguing that the Stoics of this period did indeed respond to “the challenge posed to Stoicism by the new Platonist movement.” (p. 129). He illustrates his thesis through the reading of two letters of Seneca to Lucilius (58 and 65) that have been taken, wrongfully in his view, as evidence for a dialogue between Stoicism and Platonism. B.-S.’s (very original) approach is to put in perspective the two letters by replacing them within the full set of letters, the order of which reflecting “the progress” (p. 131) of Lucilius in his journey towards philosophy. Once Letter 58 thus replaced, its apparent confusion between the analysis of being (by means of Platonic modes of existence) and the classification of being (by means of a Stoic classification of genus and species) can appear for what it is: a “trap” (p. 136) for the reader, who has been warned, in previous letters, not to fall into the “dialectical niceties” (p. 134) of Platonism. The purpose of this trap is, according to B.-S., to make the reader understand the dangers of “worrying [too long] about distinctions of meaning” at the expense of reflecting “on the difference between things” (p. 136). As to Letter 65, concerned with the issue of causality, B.-S. identifies structural and thematic parallels between it and the Phaedo and argues that its main theme is an attack against “forms as cause” (p. 141).

The last chapter is another very good article, by T. Bénatouïl: ‘Theòria and scholê in Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius: Platonic, Stoic or Socratic?’ (pp. 147-173). Although one can find many positive references in Epictetus and Marcus to the contemplative life, B.’s article warns us against “a Platonizing interpretation of Epictetus’ and Marcus’ notion of contemplation” (p. 156). We should not, however, ignore also some objective points of convergence. The main differences between the Stoic approach to contemplation lies in its object and purpose. First, contemplation is not about intelligible and transcendent forms but about “the world, its structure and its evolution as laid in Stoic physics” (p. 157). In the Meditations, the attention is directed especially towards
“the changing elements” of the world (p. 158), in stark contrast with Platonic contemplation (directed towards unchanging objects). As to its purpose, B. starts by recalling that “[i]n Plato as in the Stoics, theory and practice go hand in hand” and this explains why the Stoics “have appropriated important aspects of the ‘cosmological ethics’ of the *Timaeus*” (p. 162). For all that, however, the practical effects of contemplation according to Epictetus and Marcus are not so much, as in the *Timaeus* and the *Theaetetus*, the recovery of “our connection with god” (p. 163) as the “acceptance of the world as it is” (*idem*), a Stoic theme of its own. Finally, B. makes a convincing case for seeing the *Theaetetus* as a Socratic dialogue, helping us to understand why Stoics like Epictetus and Marcus were able to appropriate so much in it.

The volume ends with a bibliography and indexes of names, subjects and passages.

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