In the case of a figure such as Plutarch of Chaeronea, it becomes a serious problem for exegesis to distinguish what is personal from what he may have inherited from his tradition, which is, of course, the Platonic tradition. Plutarch was, after all, in his own mind, a faithful Platonist, even though he is conscious of going against the grain of tradition in at least some respects. And yet he seems to us in many respects idiosyncratic, to the extent that some are hesitant to grant him the status of a Platonist at all — though this position is based on the illusory notion that there existed in his day some secure repository of Platonist 'orthodoxy' to which he could be opposed.

I would like to focus, on this occasion, on two aspects in particular of Plutarch’s theology, which between them seem to characterize it most distinctively, his dualism (under which rubric I would rank both his identification of an ‘evil’ or negative power in the universe, and his postulation of a secondary, ‘demiurgic’ divinity somehow contrasted with the highest god); and his conception of divine providence (with which is associated his belief in a temporal creation of the world).

Before, however, turning to his positive doctrine, it may not be out of place, in view of the overall theme of this symposium, to consider briefly Plutarch’s relationship with the major theological system of the Hellenistic era proper, that of the Stoics. There is in fact much in the Stoic position with which Plutarch would agree, such as the

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1 Notably, of course, on the question of the literal interpretation of the *Timaeus* account of the creation of the world in time, and the postulation of a pre-cosmic, disorderly, ‘evil’, soul which is attendant on that.

2 E.g. Dörrie 1971, 36-56. Dörrie assumes here a tradition of ‘Schulplatonismus’, to which Plutarch is somehow external, which seems to me an unjustified assumption.

3 This topic has been dealt with, thoroughly and well, by Daniel Babut, in ch. IV of his great work *Plutarque et le Stoïcisme*, Paris 1969, to which the interested reader is referred for details.
doctrine that God is 'a living being, immortal, rational, perfect or intelligent in happiness, admitting into himself nothing evil, taking providential care of the world and all that is in it, but not of human shape.'

All of this would be common ground between Stoics and Platonists; where Plutarch differs from the Stoics, and differs profoundly, is on the question of the divinity's materiality (despite the virtual immateriality of the πῦρ νεφόν of which it is composed), and on the periodic destructibility of all the gods, including, of course, the heavenly bodies, except Zeus himself (as representing the World-Soul), at the ἐκπύρωσις. His opposition to this aspect of Stoic theology comes out most clearly, perhaps, in the polemical context of his De Stoicorum Repugnantiiis (1051Eff.), but it surfaces at many points in his works. He is not here, of course, being quite fair to the Stoics, for whom the gods other than Zeus are really just aspects of one single divine power, 'which takes on different names according to the places in which it appears and the functions which it assumes'; thus what is essential survives the ekpyrosis, subsuming all other matter into itself. What Plutarch really objects to here is the concept of the ekpyrosis in general, since that goes against the Platonist assumption of the eternity of the heavenly realm. Polemics apart, however, Plutarch's view of the Supreme deity is rather more of a development of the Stoic one, in the direction of complete transcendence and immateriality, than a direct contradiction of it.

That said, let us look first, before turning to details, at a basic statement of Plutarch's view of the Supreme deity, from the dialogue On the E at Delphi. It is actually put in the mouth of his teacher, Ammonius, but there can be little doubt that it is a formulation that Plutarch himself would approve (De E 393AB):

But God is — if there be need to say so! — and he exists for no stretch of time (khronos), but for eternity (aiôn) which is immovable, timeless and undeviating, in which there is no earlier or later, no future nor past, no older nor younger; but he, being 'One', has with only one 'now' completely filled 'forever'; and only when Being is

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4 Diogenes Laertius VII 147 (= SVF II 1021): θεόν δ' εἶναι ζῷον ἀθάνατον, λογικόν, τέλειον ἴον ἑωδαίμονι, κακοῦ πλεῖστος ἀνεπιδεκτον, προνοητικὸν κόσμου τε καὶ τῶν ἐν κόσμῳ μὴ εἶναι μέντοι ἄνθρωπαμορφον.

5 SVF II 1021; 1027; 1070 — this last from Servius, ad Georg. I 5; with which, however, Plutarch would not entirely agree, as we shall see, since Servius states, among other equivalences, that the Stoics equate the Sun, Apollo, and Dionysus, something that Plutarch does not wish to do.

6 This passage, at least insofar as it concerns the supreme god, is well discussed, and its sources investigated, by Whittaker 1969.