

## CHAPTER I

*Introduction: A Historiographical Essay**Troels Engberg-Pedersen*

‘Stoic Platonism and Platonic Stoicism – we don’t want these.’

A. A. Long

‘It was in this way that the future came to belong to Platonism and then to Christianity.’ Thus Michael Frede ended his justly famous ‘Epilogue’ (Frede 1999b, 771–97, esp. 797) to the *Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (Algra et al. 1999). In spite of Frede’s confident claim (‘It was in this way . . . ’), and although his account not only of Hellenistic philosophy proper down to the first century BCE but also of the equally crucial period of ‘post-Hellenistic’ philosophy into the third century CE has proved immensely fertile, it has certainly not been the last word on the matter.<sup>1</sup> Precisely in what ways did it in fact come about *during* the period of post-Hellenistic philosophy that the future belonged to Platonism and then to Christianity? Another seminal contribution on this issue was David Sedley’s account of Stoicism between Zeno and Arius Didymus in the *Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (Sedley 2003a), which among other things identified what Sedley argued was a watershed in the development of ancient philosophy at the beginning of the first century BCE: a decentralization of philosophy with the closure of the schools in Athens, new types of ‘school’ identity focused on the writings of the school founders, the writing of commentaries and much more. Though Sedley’s discussion concerned Stoicism, it clearly had wider implications for the other schools, as he himself brought out in a fascinating companion piece from the same year concentrating on the Epicurean Philodemus (Sedley 2003b). A few years later, Richard Sorabji then addressed head-on the content of philosophy during the period 100 BCE–200 CE in his introduction to a two-volume collection of essays *Greek & Roman Philosophy*

<sup>1</sup> The term ‘post-Hellenistic philosophy’ was practically raised to the status of a term of art by George Boys-Stones in Boys-Stones 2001.

100 BC–200 AD (Sorabji and Sharples 2007). Sorabji described this as ‘the least accessible period of Western ancient philosophy’, but also one ‘rich in philosophical interest and importance’ (Sorabji 2007a, 1). Differently from Frede and Sedley, Sorabji focused on identifying a number of philosophical *innovations* within the individual schools (Stoicism, Epicureanism, Platonism and Scepticism, and finally Aristotelianism), thereby showing the importance of the period. He was less concerned with the interaction between the various schools, only mentioning as one feature of Platonism a certain degree of ‘harmonization’ with the other schools (Sorabji 2007a, 11).

Alongside these attempts from the British side to get a proper grip on post-Hellenistic philosophy before Neoplatonism, continental scholars based in Italy, France and Belgium launched a project of analyzing more closely the rise of Platonism during the same period, which – together with a concomitant strengthening of Aristotelianism – is one of the hallmarks of the period. Two volumes of essays examined Platonism (Bonazzi and Celluprica 2005) and Platonism and Pythagoreanism (Bonazzi, Lévy and Steel 2007). And the third volume addressed what is also the theme of the present volume: *Platonic Stoicism – Stoic Platonism. The Dialogue between Platonism and Stoicism in Antiquity* (Bonazzi and Helmig 2007a). That volume, however, was not meant to be the final word on the matter. In fact, the editors emphasize in their introduction that they were not ‘striving to provide the reader with a coherent and uniform interpretation of the Stoic-Platonic dialogue. On the contrary, here the *variety* of approaches one school has towards the other is of greatest interest’ (Bonazzi and Helmig 2007b, x, their italics). And indeed, the volume is truly interesting, ranging as it does from Chrysippus to Calcidius (4th century CE). More recently, a volume of essays on *Plato and the Stoics* (A. G. Long 2013a) shows that there is much more work to be done on clarifying the interaction between Platonism and Stoicism. Commendably, this volume narrows its focus to one side of the theme: ‘how Stoics responded to Plato, appropriated Platonic ideas or simply found Plato good to think with’ and not ‘how Platonists for their part responded to Stoics’ (A. G. Long 2013a, 2). But that in itself shows that there is a need for further work.

In this overview of previous scholarship mention should also be made of Gretchen Reydam-Schils’ discussion of Stoic and Platonist readings of Plato’s *Timaeus* (Reydam-Schils 1999), which covered the period from Plato himself to Calcidius. Published in the same year as Frede’s *Epilogue*, this book broke new ground by tracing the impact of the *Timaeus* on Stoicism and then again through Stoicism on later Platonism, which either

could or would not go directly back to Plato as if the Stoics had not already been there. In introducing such terms and notions as ‘merging’, ‘assimilation’, ‘rivaling philosophers’ and ‘foreign doctrine’ (1999, 15–16), Reydam-Schils sketched the ground (and analyzed it in detail in one of its corners) that is also covered in the present volume. Here, though, it happens within a much narrower period, but also much more broadly for that period.

The latest development in this concerted effort to bring out the characteristics of philosophy in the post-Hellenistic period up until Neoplatonism brings us back to Cambridge. As a result of a research project on philosophy in the first century BCE, David Sedley published a volume of essays on *The Philosophy of Antiochus* (Sedley 2012a). This volume brings together as much as can probably be known about that seminal figure in the transition from Hellenistic to post-Hellenistic philosophy. Based on the same research project, Malcolm Schofield brought out a year later a volume of essays that focuses on the other side of philosophy in that century: the *New Directions for Philosophy* that came about after Antiochus through the rise of Aristotelianism and dogmatic Platonism and the connection of the latter with Pythagoreanism (Schofield 2013).

All this work formed the background for a conference held in Copenhagen in August 2014 with the participation of a good number of scholars from the United Kingdom, continental Europe and the United States who had already been involved in the work of the previous decade. To these were added a number of experts from two fields – Hellenistic Judaism and early Christianity – that had not hitherto been brought directly into the conversation. In what follows, I will explain how the profile of the conference and the resulting volume fit into the development of scholarship sketched earlier and how the individual chapters in this volume either support or query the hypothesis on the interaction of Stoicism and Platonism between 100 BCE and 100 CE that this volume is intended to advance and interrogate. As part of this explanation I will address a number of fundamental concepts (‘eclecticism’, ‘harmonization’, ‘appropriation’ and more) that have been employed to describe that interaction. The overall line here will be the one Anthony Long memorably expressed during the conference: ‘Stoic Platonism and Platonic Stoicism – we don’t want these.’ But the question then is: what *do* we want?

### The Power of ‘Eclecticism’

The recent discussion of ‘eclecticism’ as an appropriate category for describing our period is signposted by two contributions. In 1988, John

Dillon and Anthony Long put the concept squarely on the scholarly map in *The Question of 'Eclecticism'* (Dillon and Long 1988). In that volume, Pierluigi Donini most helpfully went through the vicissitudes the concept has undergone in the history and historiography of philosophy (Donini 1988a). Beginning with Potamo of Alexandria (first century BCE), who, according to Diogenes Laertius (1.21), introduced 'an eclectic school (or sect: *eklektikē hairesis*)', having 'selected' (*eklex-amenos*) from the tenets of each of the different sects, and Clement of Alexandria and his contemporary Galen, who both employ the term *eklektikos* ('selective') for a similar approach, Donini shows how in early modernism (Jakob Brucker and Diderot) the term 'eclectic' had positive connotations only to achieve its distinctly negative form (as prepared for by Kant) in Eduard Zeller's famous account of the philosophy of our period (Donini 1988a, 18–26). Donini notes that Zeller did not attempt to define philosophical eclecticism in any precise manner (23), but the basic idea is clear enough. Eclecticism stands for the procedure of bringing together heterogeneous philosophical tenets without paying attention to the discrepancies in their meaning in the philosophies from which they derive and with little or no attempt to spell out how they do hang together in the new mix. It is, as Christopher Gill has said, 'a kind of individualistic "pick-and-mix" approach to philosophy' (Gill 2003, 44). In the light of these historical and historiographical developments, Donini distinguished between six different uses of the term and went on to advise 'great caution in using such an ambiguous term' (Donini 1988a, 32).

However, the concept has not gone completely out of use. For instance, Michael Frede noted that the 'regard for the classical philosophers as authoritative' which became a hallmark of the post-Hellenistic period began already with Panaetius and his pupil, Posidonius, in the late Hellenistic period, who while staying faithful to the Stoic *hairesis* also 'returned to Plato as a possible source for the truth' (Frede 1999b, 785 and 783, respectively). This led him to speak of a 'crossing of school boundaries, ... <a> willingness to let oneself be influenced by or even accept views characteristic of a different school. In this Panaetius and Posidonius foreshadow another characteristic of later philosophy, its eclecticism' (785). Frede, however, explicitly declined to discuss the concept of 'eclecticism' (786). Instead, he addressed one of its aspects, viz. 'the question how the different schools handled the problem of authority across school boundaries' (786). And here he in fact addresses 'eclecticism' in a manner that points decisively forward.

What he does in his account of ‘this eclectic exchange’ (786) is to set out the *attitudes* to one another of the various well-defined schools: Peripatetics and Stoics to Plato and Platonism (786–787), the Platonists to the Stoics (788–789) and the Peripatetics (789) and Peripatetics and Stoics to one another (790). This is a far cry from the insouciant ‘pick-and-mix’ character of eclecticism in its customary, pejorative sense. By way of example, let us briefly note what he says of our two schools. While the Stoics were – at least at the beginning of our period, with Panaetius and Posidonius – quite ready to let themselves be inspired by Plato where this was possible without changing their basic allegiance, the Platonists on their side ‘were less accommodating’ (787). ‘To begin with, the Platonist attitude towards Stoicism was positive, even if critical’ – Frede here has in mind Philo of Larissa, Antiochus and even Eudorus. ‘Later Platonists [all from the second century CE] ... noted critically the divergences ... or even focused on the differences’ (788). When Frede continues on the same page by saying that ‘Porphyry ... observed that Plotinus, though highly critical of Aristotle and the Stoa, had actually absorbed a great deal both of Stoicism and of Aristotelianism’ and a little later also uses the term ‘appropriated’ for the same process, he has taken a huge step forward from speaking of an indiscriminate ‘eclecticism’ to ascribing to these philosophers a far more self-conscious attitude. Now the idea is that the Platonists were both critical of and even polemical towards Stoicism and Aristotelianism and at the same time also ‘absorbed’ and ‘appropriated’ notions and doctrines from these two *haireseis* where such ideas could be seen to fit into and enrich the Platonist framework that was presupposed all through. Still, Frede had not dropped the notion of ‘eclecticism’ itself. Such was its power in the tradition.

That power continued. While wisely eschewing the term itself, Sedley in his 2003a essay famously spoke of a ‘pooling of philosophical resources’ brought about by Panaetius and Posidonius ‘among what could be seen as three branches of the Platonist tradition: early Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Stoicism. This “syncretism”, as it has come to be known, had a visible impact on ... Antiochus’. Sedley also spoke of ‘an impressive harmony of approach’ in Panaetius’ and Posidonius’ use of early Peripatetic and Platonist writings and suggested that ‘this reorientated Stoicism points forward to the school’s future character’ (Sedley 2003a, 22). Similarly, as we noted, Sorabji spoke of a ‘harmonization of different schools’, which he specifically connected with Platonism, and for which he too gave Antiochus as an early example (Sorabji 2007a, 11). There is no disagreement about the facts here: of some kind of return to Plato and Aristotle on

the part of both the two Stoics and the would-be ‘Old Academic’ Antiochus. What is at issue is how best to describe this return. Are ‘harmonization’, ‘syncretism’ and ‘pooling of resources’ – in short: ‘eclecticism’ – the best ways to describe it?

The second signpost in the modern reflection on ‘eclecticism’ in our period is the monograph by Myrto Hatzimichali on the aforementioned Potamo (*Potamo of Alexandria and the Emergence of Eclecticism in Late Hellenistic Philosophy*, 2011). Does this exploration of a *hairesis* which flagged the term ‘eclectic’ in its very name serve to rehabilitate the concept as a fruitful way of describing the practices of philosophers quite generally in our period?<sup>2</sup> Far from it. What Hatzimichali convincingly shows is that against a background in which philosophers would normally give their allegiance to one *hairesis* or the other, but might then also interact with ideas from competing *haireseis* in the ways to be investigated here, Potamo’s eclectic *hairesis* represents a strategy of simply not giving allegiance to any of the other available *haireseis*. He saw them all as being on an equal footing and then created a *hairesis* of his own by ‘selecting’ from them such ideas as seemed attractive and might be fitted together into a new system without incorporating anything else from the *haireseis* that provided the ideas (Hatzimichali 2011, 4 and *passim*). This type of ‘eclecticism’ thus has a very specific profile and is clearly distinct from those other *haireseis* for which the term has been used. It does not in the least contribute to a rehabilitation of the notion of ‘eclecticism’ as a general category for describing the philosophy of our period.

And yet, the fact that somebody might have the consciousness we find in Potamo of there being *different haireseis* and a question of how far they either were or were not in agreement with one another does point in the direction of a crucial feature of the period: that various types of *interaction* between the distinct philosophical *haireseis* played an important role in the philosophizing in which the philosophers engaged.<sup>3</sup> If we wish to query the usefulness of ‘eclecticism’ as a historiographical category, we must focus on the precise character of these types of interaction.

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘school’ is quite problematic in this context, partly because the schools in Athens were apparently closed during our period, partly because the modern connotations of a ‘school’ rarely fit anything in antiquity. I prefer the ancient term *hairesis*, on which see, for instance, Runia 1999. LSJ gives the relevant meaning of *hairesis* as follows: *system of philosophic principles*, or *those who profess such principles*, *sect*, *school*.

<sup>3</sup> I shall follow Riccardo Chiaradonna in using first and foremost the term ‘interaction’ as opposed to ‘influence’ and ‘terminological loan’ (Chiaradonna 2007, 239–41). ‘Interaction’ is the neutral, generic term that may (and should) then be further specified in the particular case.

## Types of Interaction and a Synoptic Picture

Before looking at the types of interaction between the schools, we may ask why this issue should be that important. Why not settle for doing what Sorabji in effect did apart from his comment on Platonist ‘harmonization’: describe the many philosophical innovations within each individual school? Why, furthermore, should it be necessary to try to obtain a ‘synoptic picture’ (in Sedley’s phrase: 2003a, 24) of the period as a whole focusing on these interactions and perhaps even to discover a ‘development’ in them? Traditional historiography on the period has been overwhelmingly after these things: the interaction, the synoptic picture and the development in the period between the end of Hellenistic philosophy and the beginning of Neoplatonism – the period of ‘Middle Platonism’, which I have myself previously attempted to baptize the ‘transitional period’ of ancient philosophy.<sup>4</sup> But if we set aside the periodization itself (and the question of nomenclature), has scholarship been on the right track here? This question is all the more relevant if one ends up with the following cautious statement by Bonazzi and Helmig (2007b, xiv–xv): ‘From Hellenism to Neoplatonism the dialogue between Platonists and Stoics betrays many nuances and cannot be reduced to a simple formula. It is necessary to distinguish between different layers of mutual influence or interaction.’ Initially, this sounds right. Why, then, do we need an overall picture at all? Would it not be wiser just to stay with the individual cases and describe their individual profiles, including their innovations and whatever ‘contacts’ with other schools they may reflect?

The answer to this question must be that analyzing the individual case is just not enough. We can see from the texts themselves that precisely during this period interaction with concepts and doctrines belonging to other schools forms an intrinsic part of the kind of philosophizing the philosophers themselves did. To some extent this is of course true of all philosophizing in antiquity, but it appears to be an especially characteristic feature of the present period. But in that case, in order fully to understand any particular case of philosophizing in the period it will be insufficient merely

<sup>4</sup> In his chapter in the present volume, George Boys-Stones inveighs in a spirited manner against the notion of our period being a ‘transitional’ one (see, e.g., Engberg-Pedersen 2010b). His criticism that all periods are in principle ‘transitional’ is taken up later in this chapter in connection with the phrase ‘from Stoicism to Platonism’. His claim that calling a period ‘transitional’ renders the period of merely secondary importance goes entirely against my own intuitions. I personally find this particular period to be of the highest importance: (i) a battle between immanentist Stoicism and transcendent Platonism is played out in it; (ii) and Greco-Roman philosophy is engaged with directly by Hellenistic and early imperial Judaism and Christianity. What more could one want?



to note any vestiges of interaction with other schools. Instead, one must do two things: try to grasp the relationship that a given philosopher himself sees – as it were from within – between his own school position and any ideas from other schools with which he may interact; and try to obtain an understanding of how such a view of that relationship compares with other similar views of the period. Describing the period synoptically as one of ‘eclecticism’, ‘harmonization’ and the like was in fact an attempt to go in this direction. The problem was that it did not focus sufficiently sharply on the different *types* of interaction and how *they* might be gathered into a synoptic view.

### Beyond Eclecticism

Here it is worth going back to Donini’s rejection of Zeller’s understanding of eclecticism as ‘the eclectic reconciliation of different positions: “both this and that”’ (Donini 1988a, 24). Donini criticizes Zeller for attempting to ‘trace the origins of eclecticism solely to the interaction among the three major Hellenistic philosophies’ (25), that is, Stoicism, Epicureanism and Academic Scepticism. This will not do:

Epicureanism remained almost completely free from external influences, and it did not influence in an eclectic manner any important thinker. . . . Moreover – and this is the most important point – we do not know of a single instance of a mixture only of Stoic, Epicurean, and Academic positions.

In fact, eclecticism as claimed for the period

is a completely different phenomenon from the one postulated in this theory. It is, rather, the contact and mutual interaction *between* Hellenistic philosophies, *particularly Stoicism*, and three *other* philosophies which went back to a previous age and indeed had undergone a considerable decline in the Hellenistic period: dogmatic Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Pythagoreanism. Zeller’s theory has no explanation to offer for this renewal of philosophies whose origin was earlier than the Hellenistic age, for the contact between them and their reaction to Stoicism – in short, for everything that actually happened between Panaetius and Alexander of Aphrodisias. (Donini 1988a, 25, my italics)

And Donini concludes:

The time has come to think again about the real problem: the sudden reappearance, almost at the same time, of dogmatic Platonism and Aristotelianism, as well as Pythagoreanism, and the interaction of these



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three philosophies *with* Hellenistic philosophy, *especially Stoicism*. (Donini 1988a, 26, my italics)

This is the point. The phenomenon Eduard Zeller attempted to identify in terms of ‘eclecticism’ consists much more narrowly in the interaction between the three (relative) newcomers on the philosophical scene – dogmatic Platonism, Aristotelianism and Pythagoreanism – and the one Hellenistic philosophy that was neither Epicureanism nor a form of scepticism: Stoicism. It fits with this that the three schools whose interaction Frede discussed under the heading of ‘eclecticism’ are precisely the three dogmatic schools who ‘all derived somehow from Socrates and Plato’ (Frede 1999b, 786), namely, Platonism, Aristotelianism and Stoicism. It also fits that the context in which Sorabji began to speak of ‘harmonization’ was that of Platonism. With this narrowing of the phenomenon under consideration – the precise character and types of the interaction between these three schools – we are ready to consider the next stage in the troublesome elucidation of what actually went into the phenomenon hitherto identified as one of eclecticism. That stage was well articulated by Bonazzi and Helmig (2007b), but Frede and others had anticipated it:<sup>5</sup>

[T]his period, by definition, seems to be the era of ‘eclecticism’. Consequently, it has often been said that Middle Platonists such as Philo of Alexandria or Plutarch of Chaeroneia combined different elements of philosophical schools (especially Stoic and Platonic) that are, in fact, not really compatible. . . . However, more recent approaches show that we should rather speak of an intelligent *appropriation* of Stoic material. Generally speaking, if we find Stoic material in Philo or Plutarch, it is *re-interpreted* and wholly *integrated* into a Platonic context. (Bonazzi and Helmig 2007b, ix, their italics)

This changed perspective evidently presupposes that philosophers had a distinct sense of belonging to one or other of the various *haireseis* available. Bonazzi and Helmig’s notion of ‘intelligent appropriation’ then places the interpreter, not with the ‘outside’ perspective of a historian of philosophy like Zeller who notes a mixture of concepts and doctrines from several schools in a given case, but with the ‘inside’ perspective of the philosopher himself who in philosophizing engages with concepts and doctrines from other schools and considers to what

<sup>5</sup> In connection with Epictetus, Robert Dobbin speaks (1998, xvii–xviii) of his ‘appropriating’, ‘absorbing’ and ‘co-opting rival theory when it threatened to subvert it’. The terminology is important, but one may doubt whether the combative attitude actually holds of Epictetus in relation to Plato. On Epictetus’ relationship with Socrates and Plato, see much more in A. A. Long 2002.

extent they may be incorporated and indeed intelligently fitted into his own brand of philosophy. This procedure may then be combined with a conciliatory attitude to the originator of the foreign material, as when Posidonius incorporated elements from Plato into his own brand of Stoicism. Or it may be combined with a highly critical attitude towards the foreign philosophy, as in the case of Plotinus (see Frede, as quoted earlier). In the former case, we may speak of appropriation as 'eirenic' and acknowledging the value of the foreign material. In the latter case, we may speak of appropriation as 'polemical' and 'subordinating', meaning that as part of a competitive battle in which a philosopher may *reject* a competing philosophy, he may also attempt to *subvert* it by incorporating material from it as it were without full acknowledgement, but as reinterpreted to fit into his own philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

### The Hypothesis of the Present Volume

At the conference on which this volume is based, the participants had been presented with a hypothesis about the precise character of the interaction between Stoicism and Platonism between 100 BCE and 100 CE, that is, roughly between Panaetius and Plutarch.<sup>7</sup> The reason for ending with Plutarch (and Epictetus) was twofold. First, it allowed us to focus on no more than two centuries without having to cover the second century CE, when imperial Platonism had gained the upper hand as we see already in Plutarch. The aim of focusing in that way was to try to cover – in principle, at least – all the most important figures and trends relative to Stoicism and Platonism in that seminal period. Had we moved the upper limit up until, say, 200 CE, a lot of second-century figures would also have had to be treated squarely and on their own, and this would have made the attempted overall coverage wholly impossible. At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that the development traced in this volume did not in fact come to an end until around 200 CE. This explains why a few chapters in the volume were allowed to move into the second century CE for evidence that is closely tied together with material from the earlier two

<sup>6</sup> For the notion of 'subordination', see in particular Bonazzi's ascription of 'this kind of combative stance (against Stoicism and other schools)' to a number of Platonists of our period, a stance that 'reveals a competitive attitude and constantly strives to effect the subordinate integration of rival school doctrines, thereby emphasizing the pivotal role of one's own philosophical tradition' (Bonazzi 2007a, 126–8, esp. 127 with n. 63). See also Bonazzi 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Francesca Alesse had been invited to speak about Panaetius, but was unfortunately prevented from participating.