

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-04059-5 - Plato and the Stoics
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 Excerpt
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Introduction

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The papers brought together in this collection explore the contribution of Plato's dialogues to the intellectual life of the Stoa. The strength of interest in the topic today is shown by other recent collections in which the reading of Plato by Stoics is a key object of study.¹ One cause of this interest has been the growth of scholarship on Stoicism. This scholarship has brought in its wake studies of the origins of Stoic doctrines, and in some well-known cases the doctrines – or, as often we should rather say, the experiments – in Plato's dialogues constitute the most important antecedent.² The sophistication of current work on Stoic philosophy has also spurred scholars to provide suitably measured, nuanced or otherwise cautious accounts of passages where Stoics seem to Platonize, a phenomenon that becomes particularly striking in the later history of the Stoa.³ (Here and elsewhere, 'Stoa' is used in a broad sense and refers not merely to the building in Athens but to the philosophical tradition from Zeno of Citium to Marcus Aurelius.) Some of the attention has come from the other direction – that is, from the study of Plato. Scholars are increasingly inclined to suppose that the interpretation and appropriation of a text by later generations fall within the purview of those who work on that text. This has coincided with a surge of interest in Plato's *Timaeus*. Given this coincidence, and given the extraordinary range of affinities between the Stoic cosmos and the world described

¹ Bonazzi and Helmig 2007; Harte, McCabe, Sharples and Sheppard 2010.

² See particularly Brunschwig 1994 (Stoic ontology); Schofield 1999a: 22–56 (Stoic political thought); Sedley 2002 (Stoic theology).

³ See pp. 7–9 below.

in Plato's *Timaeus*, in hindsight it was inevitable that Plato's cosmology would soon be read with an eye to its appropriation by Stoics.⁴

The scope of this collection is narrowly defined: we consider how Stoics responded to Plato, appropriated Platonic ideas or simply found Plato good to think with. We do not consider how Platonists for their part responded to Stoics;⁵ developments in the Academy and, more generally, in the Platonic tradition are considered only insofar as they help us understand Stoic perceptions of Plato's dialogues and the intentions with which Stoics engaged with Plato.⁶ And throughout the book it is *Stoic* engagement with Plato that we aim to understand; we do not consider in broader terms than that how Plato was interpreted or 'read' in antiquity.⁷

In introducing the chapters I shall refrain from the common editorial practice of providing abstracts on the contributors' behalf. Instead I shall outline the principal questions that belong to our shared area of inquiry, and say enough about what lies ahead to sketch how they are addressed during the course of the collection. My overview of the following chapters will accordingly be selective and focus on their contributions to these questions, as well as on connections between the chapters.

WHOSE SOCRATES?

According to Philodemus, Stoics (or at least some Stoics) wished to be known as 'Socratics',⁸ and the life of Zeno in Diogenes Laertius (7.2–3) credits Xenophon's account of Socrates with piquing Zeno's interest in philosophy. Pioneering philosophical scholarship⁹ in the twentieth century has established the connections between Stoic and Socratic thought. It is now widely agreed that Stoic moral philosophy was undertaken as a development of Socratic ethics, and Socrates' significance for the Stoics may have extended beyond ethics, for Stoic

⁴ See e.g. Reydams-Schils 1999 and 2003; Betegh 2003; Sedley 2007: 225–30; Mohr and Sattler 2010 (particularly the chapter by A.A. Long, 'Cosmic craftsmanship in Plato and Stoicism').

⁵ Contrast Sedley 1999a; Bonazzi and Helmig 2007.

⁶ See particularly Gretchen Reydams-Schils, Chapter 2, but also the last section ('Conclusion') of Chapter 6 by George Boys-Stones.

⁷ Contrast Tarrant 2000; Tarrant and Baltzly 2006; Harte, McCabe, Sharples and Sheppard 2010.

⁸ Philodemus *On the Stoics* XIII (Dorandi). ⁹ Long 1988; Striker 1996.

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cosmo-theology seems to have drawn on Socrates' statements in Xenophon (*Mem.* 1.4.5–18, 4.3.2–18) about the divine design of the world and its human inhabitants.¹⁰ Allegiance to Socrates, or identification with Socrates, does not require a similar attitude to his follower Plato, and, as the above references to Xenophon suggest, it was not to Plato alone that Stoics went when they sought a point of reference for their own versions of Socratic philosophy.¹¹ Whenever we consider the Stoics as the self-appointed heirs of Socrates, we need to consider *which* Socrates, or *which author's* Socrates, offered the theory, paradox or challenge that, at least as Stoics themselves saw the matter, received its fullest and clearest exposition inside the Stoa.

Malcolm Schofield's chapter ('Cardinal virtues: a contested Socratic inheritance') discusses the four-virtue theory in early Stoicism and argues that the competing versions of that theory reflect different answers to the question: 'Which author's Socrates should guide the Stoic reconstruction of Socratic theory?' The writings of Xenophon and Antisthenes were an important alternative to the Platonic portrait of Socrates and informed Cleanthes' thinking on the subject of the virtues. Zeno, on the other hand, had turned to the accounts of the virtues in Plato's *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *Protagoras*, and Chrysippus later took Stoic theory back to the Platonic interpretations of Socratic ethics. One feature of Schofield's analysis that is worth singling out now is his explanation of why Chrysippus returned to a more Platonic account. Chrysippus effected a change not out of deference to Plato but rather in order to revive Zeno's theory and to put appropriate emphasis on practical reasoning. As we shall see, other contributors in this volume bring into view the independence from Platonic authority with which Stoics made use of Plato's dialogues.

ACADEMIC MEDIATION?

The question 'which Socrates?' brings us to our next question, 'which Plato?', for Plato in his turn soon became the object of competing interpretations. A debate attested from an early date concerns the *Timaeus*. Aristotle mentions and then contradicts (*De Caelo*

¹⁰ DeFilippo and Mitsis 1994; Sedley 2007: 212–25. ¹¹ See also Panaetius fr. 126.

279b32–280a11, 280a27–34) an interpretation, ascribed in later texts¹² to Xenocrates and to the commentator Crantor (a contemporary of Zeno), according to which Plato did not believe the world to have been created in the distant past but described it as such ‘for the sake of instruction’, like a teacher drawing a diagram one line at a time. So far as we can tell from the surviving evidence, before Antipater (see ‘A later rapprochement?’ below) Stoics were happy to leave squabbles about the correct interpretation of Plato to Aristotelians¹³ and Platonists; Zeno, Chrysippus and their contemporaries in the Stoa had other priorities. But even at the times when Stoics were not interested in contributing to debates about Plato’s true meaning, they may nonetheless in their own reading and appropriation of Plato have been guided by the interpretations currently being defended, or taken for granted, by others. I have already mentioned the story in Diogenes Laertius about Zeno’s attraction to Xenophon’s Socrates; here too biography, despite the difficulty of separating ‘the historical truth from the aetiological historical myth’,¹⁴ has been a stimulus to inquiry, in this case the story that Zeno studied with the Academic Polemo and was accused by Polemo of stealing his doctrines (Diogenes Laertius 7.2, 25). An important article by David Sedley¹⁵ has examined the evidence concerning Academic physics and argued that Polemo promoted a version of Platonic cosmology that anticipated Stoic physics more closely than the *Timaeus* itself had done. We may wonder then whether some of the modifications to Platonic cosmology that are usually associated with Stoicism – including in particular the elimination of extra-cosmic causes and the replacement of Plato’s ‘receptacle’ with matter – were first undertaken not in the Stoa but in the Academy and then received by Stoics as parts of the ‘Platonic’ picture.

In this volume, Gretchen Reydam-Schils (‘The Academy, the Stoics, and Cicero on Plato’s *Timaeus*’) challenges the view that the Old Academy was a bridge between Plato’s writing and Stoicism. For

¹² See Simplicius’ commentary on the *De Caelo*, ad loc.; Plutarch *An. Procr.* 1013a–b. For Crantor’s commentary see Sedley 1997: 113–16; Tarrant 2000: 53–6; Dillon 2003b: 87–9.

¹³ For Theophrastus’ involvement in the debate about the *Timaeus* see John Philoponus *Aet.* 145 (Rabe).

¹⁴ Mansfeld 1986: 347 n. 108. Mansfeld suggests that attempts to associate Zeno with the Academy were undertaken in order to emphasize the Socratic provenance of Stoicism: ‘the Academics, after all, were Socratics’.

¹⁵ Sedley 2002.

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the most part, her chapter examines the evidence concerning members of the Academy, but her arguments point to a conclusion about Stoicism, namely that the Stoics read and developed Plato's cosmology independently of Academic interpretation. Her conclusion about direct Stoic reading of Plato has a broader importance for the other chapters in the collection, and in particular Jenny Bryan's discussion of the *Timaeus* (Chapter 3).

APPROPRIATION AND RESPONSE

Zeno and Chrysippus both wrote works in which they set themselves in opposition to Plato. But they also developed sympathetically suggestions put forward in Plato's dialogues, such as the hallmark of 'being' that is offered in the *Sophist*.¹⁶ It is noteworthy that in their use of Platonic material Stoics did not confine themselves to the suggestions that are still officially in play, and not refuted or abandoned, at the dialogues' conclusions; for example, the Stoic account of impressions seems to borrow from the comparison in the *Theaetetus* (191c–196c) of the soul (or rather of the part or aspect of soul by which we remember) to a block of wax, even though that view of the soul has been set aside by the end of Socrates' inquiry into false judgement. When Zeno and Chrysippus read a Platonic dialogue and found ideas that to their mind were (or, properly developed, could be made to be) plausible, they were not constrained by the dialogue's own verdict on the ideas contained within it.¹⁷ If Plato rejected a credible theory, then (the Stoics would say) that is Plato's loss, not theirs; Plato's decision need not debar a revival of the theory. On occasion, contributors in this volume will talk about Plato's 'influence', but that should not be taken to suggest uncritical or unreflective reception on the Stoics' part. Plato's theories were considered, selected and refashioned before some of them became a tributary of Stoicism.

Some Stoic discussions or doctrines, particularly those reminiscent of the *Timaeus*, are very obviously indebted to Plato. In such cases our

¹⁶ See 'Platonic connections' and, for opposition to Plato, 'Zeno contra Plato' and 'Subsequent polemic' in my Chapter 5.

¹⁷ 'If, as seems probable, Zeno knew the *Theaetetus*, he knew Plato's refutation of the model of knowledge as an imprint in the soul, but he could have thought he had overcome it because of his different conception of the soul' (Loppolo 1990: 438).

job is not to show the existence of a debt; it is rather to explain *why* Stoics found certain Platonic dialogues to be congenial or instructive companions for their own reflections, particularly in areas where they disagreed with Plato. On the other hand, once we accept that Stoics read Plato closely, we should become sensitive to evidence of broader reading and appropriation; given that the Stoics took over parts of Plato's *Timaeus*, they may have looked to other Platonic dialogues when developing their own cosmology, even though the *Timaeus* is Plato's most obviously cosmological dialogue. Here the connections between Plato and Stoicism may become more subtle and more open to dispute, and so we shall need to consider whether independent evidence concerning the Stoic reading of Plato makes it reasonable to postulate borrowing. Both the explanation of familiar debts and arguments for further debts, not yet acknowledged in the scholarship, are represented in this volume; together we aim both to provide a fresh perspective on the relationship between the *Timaeus* and Stoicism and to show further connections between Plato and Stoic physics. Jenny Bryan in Chapter 3 ('Chrysippus and Plato on the fragility of the head') discusses the theological side of Stoic cosmology and one of the clearest appropriations of Plato in Chrysippus' writing. She shows why Chrysippus, despite disagreeing with Plato about the location of the soul in the human body, in his theodicy borrowed from the *Timaeus*' explanation of the vulnerability of the human head. Her study uses careful interpretation of the original passage in the *Timaeus* in order to understand why Stoics were attracted to that passage. Paul Scade in Chapter 4 ('Plato and the Stoics on limits, parts and wholes') then turns to the physical constitution of the Stoic cosmos and argues that Stoic mereology borrows from Plato's *Parmenides*. On Scade's account, the Stoics distinguished between two kinds of limit and between two kinds of part, and their distinctions derive from the antinomies in the second part of the *Parmenides*.¹⁸ Much of Scade's chapter is devoted to showing why the Stoics needed a distinction between kinds of limit and between kinds of part. As we see in Malcolm Schofield's chapter, Stoic use of Plato shows not deference

¹⁸ As Paul Scade observes in Chapter 4, Sedley 1985 and Caston 1999 have already suggested that there are connections between Stoicism and the *first* part of the *Parmenides*.

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so much as Plato's ability to shed light on difficulties generated by contemporary Stoic thought or by the previous Stoic tradition.

Sometimes, when it is clear that Stoics are echoing Plato, it is much less clear whether or not they intend their readers to notice a *reference* or *response* to Plato, and whether the point of a reference is to highlight the deficiency or the strength of the Platonic referent. It is tempting to suppose that our uncertainty reflects the nature of the surviving evidence. The meagreness of the evidence of course plays its part, but even Zeno's or Chrysippus' original readers must sometimes have found themselves uncertain about the relationship between Plato and Stoic thought, at least in cases where Zeno or Chrysippus did not adopt the pose of admirer or adversary. In Chapter 5 ('Subtexts, connections and open opposition') I see how far the evidence for early Stoics permits us to distinguish between direct response (particularly direct polemical responses) and indirect allusion to Plato. I show that open polemic against Plato dwelt on Plato's political theory, with the exception of a short-lived episode in which Chrysippus included Platonic ethics as a further object of open attack. Here, once again, it is shown how Stoic thought motivated the particular use that was made of Platonic writing – in this case how Zeno's political thought gave rise to an anti-Platonic posture from which Stoics, even when contradicting Plato, sometimes refrained.

A LATER RAPPROCHEMENT?

On Plato's doctrine that only the morally admirable is good,¹⁹ composed by the scholarch Antipater in the second century BC, marks two shifts in the Stoic reading of Plato. Antipater's Stoic predecessors, such as Zeno and Chrysippus, took Plato to task for some of his 'errors', used certain passages in the dialogues as a launch-pad for their own philosophy, and probably were aware of debates going on in the Academy and Lyceum about Plato's true meaning. But in Antipater we find, first, a Stoic who wishes to *contribute* to debates about the interpretation of Plato and, secondly, a Stoic drawing attention to agreement between Platonic and Stoic teaching. Neither of these need indicate a rapprochement with the second-century Academy; on the

¹⁹ Clement *Strom.* 5.14.97.6 (SVF 3(Antipater).56).

contrary, Antipater may have seen writing in support of Plato as a way of writing against the Academy, for, by showing common ground with Plato, Antipater was showing that the Academy's founder had espoused the Stoic moral doctrines currently being attacked by Academics.²⁰ Antipater's writing nonetheless points to a more sympathetic attitude to Plato himself and to a more historical approach to Plato's writing, particularly when taken in conjunction with the work of his successor Panaetius and Panaetius' pupil Posidonius.²¹

Panaetius is said to have deemed the *Phaedo* inauthentic (frs. 127–9); if by that Panaetius meant that its author was not Plato,²² one of his motives may have been to bring Plato into line with his own views about the soul's mortality (for which see Cicero *TD* 1.79). Posidonius is said to have interpreted or expounded (ἐξηγουόμενος) Plato's *Timaeus* (fr. 85), to have interpreted the discussion of soul in Plato's *Phaedrus* (fr. 290) and, even more intriguingly, to have 'written a sort of summary' (γέγραπεν οἷον ἐπιτομὴν τινὰ) of what Plato said on the subject of educating and training children (fr. 31). But while there is good evidence for exegetical or exegetically aware interest in Plato's dialogues, it is less certain that this new kind of interest in Plato came at the cost of authentically Stoic doctrines. Both Panaetius and Posidonius have been regarded as Platonizing in their accounts of the human soul, on the ground that they renounced the Stoic unitary conception of soul in favour of a bipartite (Panaetius) or tripartite (Posidonius) conception, but that view of their psychology has recently been challenged.²³ The reluctance in contemporary

²⁰ So Sedley 2003: 20. At the end of Chapter 5, I suggest that Antipater was also responding to Chrysippus. For the development outlined here see the second volume (*Der hellenistische Rahmen des kaiserzeitlichen Platonismus*) of Dörrie and Baltes 1987 ff.; Sedley 1997; Bonazzi 2007: 120 n. 41; Gill 2006: 213 n. 20.

²¹ I had hoped to include in this collection a paper on Posidonius by the late Anna Ju. For her important contributions to Posidonian scholarship see Ju 2009 and Ju 2013.

²² Tarrant 2000: 56–7 (cf. 217 n. 13) suggests that Panaetius meant instead that the *Phaedo* does not accurately represent Socrates. This would indicate an effort on Panaetius' part to rescue Socrates, not Plato, from the erroneous immortality thesis. See, however, Gourinat 2008b, which sets out the evidence for an edition of Plato by Panaetius. Notice that, at least according to Plutarch (*Demosthenes* 13.4), Panaetius gave Demosthenes similar treatment to that given by Antipater to Plato: Panaetius said that in Demosthenes' works only the noble is treated as inherently worthy of choice.

²³ For the challenge see particularly the work of Teun Tieleman, such as Tieleman 2003, 2007a, 2007b: 136, but also Ju 2013 and Sedley 1993: 313 n. 4.

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scholarship to treat later Stoics as heterodox Platonizers has more than one origin. Unsurprisingly, the evidence for later Stoics has been scrutinized in order to show that their interest in Plato did not take them outside the Stoic tradition.²⁴ But a second factor has been the increasing awareness of the complexity and range of *early* Stoicism, and so of what the 'Stoic tradition' properly includes; what would otherwise look like an innovation in a later Stoic writer can now be viewed as taking up 'a strand that was present in Stoicism all along'.²⁵

Two chapters in this collection explore late Stoic authors whose texts have survived and where the question of a rapprochement can be addressed with more confidence. George Boys-Stones in Chapter 6 ('Seneca against Plato: *Letters* 58 and 65) considers Seneca's response to the Platonist revival; far from finding signs of a new consensus, Boys-Stones argues that Seneca's letters contain a polemical response to Platonism in which Plato himself (and in particular Plato's *Phaedo*) is implicated. Above I suggested that Panaetius' exclusion of the *Phaedo* may reflect his thinking about immortality, but Boys-Stones reminds us that the *Phaedo* was perceived in antiquity not merely as a discussion of the soul's immortality but as the classic account of Platonic Forms, and he argues that Seneca's attack on Plato's *Phaedo* was above all an attack on Forms. Thomas Bénatouïl in Chapter 7 ('*Theôria* and *scholê* in Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius: Platonic, Stoic or Socratic?') discusses the allusions in Epictetus and Marcus to Plato's discussions of contemplation, above all *Theaetetus* 172–7. Bénatouïl shows that, in the hands of these Stoics, Plato's conception of the significance and objects of contemplation is transformed, and that Marcus and Epictetus do not abandon the mainstream Stoic position on the place of contemplation in the good life. Like other contributors, Bénatouïl considers what attracted Stoics to the particular texts from which they borrowed, and suggests that one reason why the *Theaetetus* held a special appeal was that it was perceived to be an authentically *Socratic* dialogue. Epictetus and

²⁴ 'What Posidonius may have been doing was translating Platonic ideas into Stoic form' (Gill 2006: 214).

²⁵ I quote from Algra 2009: 230. Compare Inwood 2005: 64 and the following: 'this strand in Stoic thinking may seem to be somehow a foreign graft, since we see it so clearly in Plato and Aristotle. But not only is this attitude also reflected in other Stoic sources, it is in itself no less Stoic than Aristo's complete rejection of physics and logic' (Inwood 2009: 214).

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Marcus Aurelius turn out to be engaged in much the same activity as the Stoics discussed in Schofield's chapter: developing their own versions of Socratic ethics.

Previous drafts of some of the chapters were presented at two workshops in the School of Classics at the University of St Andrews. Grants and bursaries for the workshops were provided by the British Academy and the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies. I also wish to thank Mary Woodcock Kroble, who designed a webpage where contributors could view and draw comparisons with one another's chapters.