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AS ORIGENS DO PENSAMENTO OCIDENTAL  
THE ORIGINS OF WESTERN THOUGHT

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ARTIGO | ARTICLE

## ***The Anonymous' Commentary on Plato's Theatetus and a Middle-Platonic Theory of Knowledge***

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**Abstract:** In this paper, I defend that the historiographical category of eclecticism is a correct way to describe the epistemology and the exegetical activity of the Anonymous commentator on Plato's *Theatetus*. In addition, I show that the interpretation of the platonic philosophy presented in this text not only presupposes an eclectic philosophical attitude, but also offers a conscious defense of a

positive and philosophically relevant form of eclecticism. By eclecticism, I understand a method of inquiry based on the deliberate use of hypotheses and arguments from different philosophical traditions. My claim is that Anon. intends to lay ground of his way of doing philosophy by attributing it to Plato and the platonic tradition. In doing so, Anon. provides us with a positive understanding of eclecticism as a legitimate methodology of philosophical investigation.

**Keywords:** Eclecticism, Epistemology, Middle-Platonism, Anonymous in *Theaetetus*.

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The first year of the Twentieth Century brought to light a relatively well-preserved papyrus (*PBerol* 9782) containing parts of a commentary on Plato's *Theaetetus*. Large parts of the text have been preserved, but unfortunately not always in good state. The beginning of the papyrus text is missing. The part we have starts with the preliminary questions about the subject of the dialogue and runs until the commentary on *Theaetetus* 153d. In addition to this more or less continuous text, a few fragments have survived, but their place in the commentary is not always easy to determine.

The work received some initial attention, since it seemed to be one of the oldest commentaries on Plato's dialogues ever found. This impression was later corroborated, and, according to the most accepted hypothesis about its date of composition, the work is one of the two oldest pieces of Greek commentary that we have.<sup>1</sup> As for the content of the text, although not particularly ingenious, it has been the subject of a number of recent studies. One reason for that is the

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<sup>1</sup> On paleographical grounds the papyrus dates to the second century AD, and it was assumed by Diels, Schubart and Heinerg, the first editors, that it was composed on the same period. However, Tarrant (1983, p. 161-187), and Bastianini & Sedley (1995, p. 227-562), successfully argued for an earlier date of composition (first century BC).

information it provides about the philosophical debates of its time, presumably the last half of the first century B.C.

As is well known, historians of philosophy have been very critical of the thinkers of this period (sometimes called “Late Antiquity” or “Imperial Period”, because of the geo-political importance of the Roman Empire at the time). They usually describe the intellectual activity of this time as a mere compilation and popularization of the great philosophical systems of Classical and Hellenistic ages, stigmatizing these thinkers with the negative label of “eclectic philosophers”.

According to the historiographical category of “eclecticism” formulated by the German classicist E. Zeller, the philosophers of that period (roughly situated around 80 B.C. and 200 AD) lost their scientific rigor and creativity, limiting themselves to the election (*eklegein*) of different theories, hypotheses, and arguments from the philosophical schools of their past. This interpretation survived, and since Zeller it became a widespread assumption the idea that Imperial philosophers only presented inconsistent theories; their philosophy being the mere amalgam of different theses and ideas, theoretical chimeras born from distinct parts of conflicting philosophical systems.

The roots of that prejudice against Imperial philosopher are not easy to point out, and in order to consider Zeller's views with some justice we have to take into account the popularity the philosophy of Plotinus and the concept of “Neoplatonism” received in his time. The distinction between the Neoplatonic school and eclecticism seems to Zeller a correct way to differentiate the novelties of Plotinus's philosophical system from the philosophy of its predecessors. From the standing point of this differentiation, eclecticism in a looser sense became to be considered a general feature of philosophical thought from the end of the second century B.C. up to Plotinus. In Zeller's mind, Plotinus was no longer an eclectic philosopher, although somehow eclecticism had prepared the way for his philosophical system. In this way, Zeller uses the term “eclecticism” as a huge generalization, making no attempt to establish a precise connection

between this concept and the philosophical position of the individual thinkers within the historical period in question.

In fact, it is not even possible to find a clear definition of “eclecticism” in Zeller’s book. Nonetheless, anyone who reads Zeller’s account of the general features of eclecticism can have no doubts about his strongly unfavorable judgment. After all, Zeller characterizes philosophical eclecticism as “the dying out of a scientific outlook”, a “scientific decline”, a “merely exterior connection between different positions,” and “uncritical philosophizing” (Zeller, 1892, p. 547-564).

Instead of providing a definition of “eclecticism”, Zeller decides to give a historical explanation of its origin in a section with the significant title “Origin and Character of Eclecticism” (*Entstehungsgründe und Charakter des Eklekticismus*). In this section, Zeller relates the alleged scientific decline represented by the emergence of philosophical eclecticism to the pragmatical spirit of the Romans, too much occupied with down to earth problems, and therefore not well disposed to the metaphysical inquiry proper of the Greeks.<sup>2</sup>

With that background, it comes as no surprise that recent publications have lost their interest on the historiographical category of “eclecticism”. The term itself seems to have contributed a great deal to undermine the prestige of the philosophers of late antiquity. As a result, the recent revival of imperial age philosophy came with the progressive abandonment of the concept of “eclecticism”. The term stop to be a correct label to describe the philosophical activity of that time, to the point that it is now rare to find an expert using this concept to describe the philosophical landscape of late antiquity.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the history of the concept of eclecticism (cf. Donini, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> Just to quote some examples, Brisson on the philosophy of Imperial Age: “on ne gagne guère à parler de ‘éclectisme’ ou simplement de ‘syncrétisme’ pour qualifier cette culture philosophique commune” (Brisson, 2002, p. 20); Gottschalk on the aristotelian philosophy in the Roman Empire: “[Claudius Ptolemaeus the astronomer and the physician Galen] both are often described as ‘eclectic

In this paper, I will defend that the historiographical category of philosophical eclecticism is a correct way to describe the epistemology and the exegetical activity of the Anonymous commentator on Plato's *Theaetetus*. In addition, I intent to show that the interpretation of the platonic philosophy presented in this commentary not only presupposes an eclectic philosophical attitude, but also offers a conscious defense of a positive and philosophically relevant form of eclecticism. In other words, I believe that the anonymous author of the commentary (Anon.) assumes a method of inquiry based on the deliberate use of hypotheses and arguments from different philosophical schools. Furthermore, he intends to lay ground of his way of doing philosophy by attributing it to Plato and the platonic tradition. In doing so, Anon. provides us with a positive understanding of eclecticism as a legitimate methodology of philosophical investigation.

According to my reading of the text, the defense of philosophical eclecticism occurs in three different levels. In the first level, which we can call performative, Anon. makes use of stoic and skeptical theses, and adapts those theses to make them fit with his own interpretation of Platonism. In a second level, the *Commentary* identifies this form of eclecticism with the original platonic method, using it to argue for the unity of the Academy. Finally, the *Commentary* recognizes in the Platonic *corpus*, especially in the dialogues *Meno* and *Theaetetus*, the exposition of a theory of knowledge that provides the philosophical ground to the eclectic methodology, presenting it as the right way to obtain knowledge of the truth. In what follows, I will treat each one of these levels separately.

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Peripatetics', but the label is unhelpful." (Gottschalk, 1987, p. 1164); Dillon on the preface of his survey on the philosophy of middle-Platonism: "One key word employed very freely by casual surveyors of this period I have also striven to exclude – 'eclecticism'" (Dillon, 1996, p. xiv).

## **First level of eclecticism's defense: appropriation and adaptation of skeptical and stoic arguments and theses**

The portion of the papyrus that we have contains the discussion of many different stoic, and skeptical arguments. Given the polemical atmosphere among the philosophical schools at that time, it is no surprise that all of them present refutations, to some extent, of the stoic or skeptical position. I would like to stress “to some extent” because, as we are going to see, Anon. does not criticize stoic and skeptic arguments simply to prove them wrong. Rather, his critiques are much more complex. For, after the initial refutation of the theses in question, some of them are adapted and reformulated in order to be incorporated into the essentially platonic philosophical system of the commentator.

### **1.1 The case of Stoic *oikeiosis***

The first stoic thesis mentioned in the *Commentary* deals with the concept of *oikeiosis* (usually translated as *affinity* or *appropriation*). The opportunity for the exposition is provided by a statement on *Theaetetus*' paragraph 143d, in which Socrates says that he cares more about the young men of Athens than about those of Cyrene.<sup>4</sup> This simple sentence gives Anon. the occasion to start an investigation into the stoic concept of *oikeiosis* and its consequences to the stoic theory of justice.

Briefly, Anon.'s argument is the following: in order for the concept of *oikeiosis* to provide ground for a theory of justice<sup>5</sup>, it is necessary for each human being to have the same degree of affinity towards each other. However, people have different degrees of

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<sup>4</sup> “If I cared enough about people in Cyrene, Theodorus, I would ask you whether there are any rising geometricians or philosophers in that part of the world. But I am more interested in our own youth than theirs” (*Tht.* 143d1-5).

<sup>5</sup> There is independent evidence for the claim that the Stoics made *oikeiosis* the origin of justice (*SVF* 1.197).

affinity toward different individuals, as Socrates' speech testifies. Specially, we have more affinity to ourselves than to any other person:

He [Socrates] cares for the Cyrenaean, but to the same degree as any other humans. For we experience *affinity* towards those similar to us as he feels more affinity towards his own citizens. For affinity is more and less intense. If those who base justice on affinity say that one has an equal sense of affinity towards oneself and the farthest Mysian, their thesis preserves justice – but it is not agreed that affinity is equal, because that is something that is contrary to what is obvious and to co-perception. For affinity towards oneself is natural and non-rational while that towards one's neighbors is also natural, but not non-rational. If we discover wickedness in people, we do not only censure them, but have a sense of alienation towards them; but they themselves, when they are doing wrong, do not accept (4) the corollary, and are unable to hate themselves. In fact, the affinity one feels towards oneself is not equal to that felt towards anyone else, and we do not even have an equal sense of affinity towards all our own limbs. We do not feel the same way about an eye and a finger, let alone about finger-nails and hair, since we are not equally 'alienated' from the loss of them, but to some more and other less.<sup>6</sup> (5.13-6.16)

Εἰ μὲν τῶν ἐν Κυρήνηι μᾶλλον ἐκηδόμην, ὃ Θεόδωρε, τὰ ἐκεῖ ἄν σε καὶ περὶ ἐκείνων ἀνηρώτων, εἴ τινας αὐτόθι περὶ γεωμετρίαν ἢ τινα ἄλλην φιλοσοφίαν εἰσὶν τῶν νέων ἐπιμέλειαν ποιούμενοι, νῦν δέ (ἦττον γὰρ ἐκείνους ἢ τοῦσδε φιλῶ). Κήδεται 5.15 μὲν καὶ Κυρηναίων, <κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ λόγον καὶ ὄντινωνοῦν ἀνθρώπων· ὠκείωμεθα γὰρ τοῖς ὁμοειδέσι· 5.20 μᾶλλον μέντοι ὠκείωται τοῖς ἐαυτοῦ· πολίται[ς· ἐπιτείνε-]ται γὰρ καὶ ἀ[νίει]α[ι] ἢ οἰκείωσις· ὅ[σοι το]ί[γυν] 5.25 ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκε[ι]ώσεως εἰσάγουσι τὴν δι[κ]αι[ο-]σύνην, εἰ μὲν λέγουσιν ἴσην αὐτοῦ τε πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ πρὸς [τὸν ἔ-] [ς]χατον Μυσῶν, τεθέντος μὲν τούτου σώζεται ἡ δικαιο[ς]ύνη, οὐ συγχωρεῖται [δ]ὲ [εἶ-]να ἴσην· παρὰ γὰρ τὴν 5.35 ἐνάργειαν ἔστιν [κ]α[ι] < τὴν συναίσθησιν. ἢ μὲν γὰρ

<sup>6</sup> Translations from Boys-Stones (2018) with minor adaptations.

πρὸς ἑαυτὸν οἰκειώσις, φυσικὴ ἐστὶν καὶ ἄλογος, ἡ δὲ πρὸς 5.40 τοὺς πλησίον φυσικὴ μὲν καὶ αὐτὴ, οὐ μέντοι ἄνευ λόγου. ἐὰν γοῦν καταγνῶμεν πονηρίαν τινῶν, οὐ μόνον 5.45 ψέγομεν αὐτούς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀλλοτριούμεθα πρὸς αὐτούς, αὐτοὶ δὲ ἀμαρτάνοντες οὐκ ἀποδέκονται μὲν 6.1 τὰ [μ]αχόμενα, οὐ δύνανται δὲ μεισῆσαι αὐτούς. οὐκ ἔστιν τοίνυν ἴση ἡ ο[ί]κε[ί]ωσις πρὸς ἑαυτὸν [καὶ π]ρὸς ὄντινοῦν, ὅπου μηδὲ πρὸς τὰ [ἐ]αυτῶν μέρη ἐπ' ἴση[σ] ὠκε[ί]ώμεθα. οὐ γὰρ ὁμοίως ἔχομεν πρὸς 6.10 ὀφ[θα]λμ[ὸ]ν, κα[ί] δάκτυλον, ἵνα μὴ λέγω πρὸς ὄνυχας [κ]αὶ τρίχας, ἐπεὶ οὐδὲ πρὸς τὴν ἀποβολὴν αὐτῶν ὁμοίως 6.15 ἠλλοτριώμ[ε]θα, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον κ[αὶ ἦ]τον

Based on the evidence that “*oikeiosis* is more and less intense”, the *Commentary* concludes that the stoics are wrong in trying to explain the concept of justice by means of affinity.<sup>7</sup> The idea seems to be that if even a model of rationality and virtuous life like Socrates displays different degrees of affinity towards different people, then his justice towards others is not based on this disposition. According to Anon. the true foundation for the concept of justice will not be found within the egoistic human character, naturally disposed to feel more affinity towards himself than towards anyone else, but in transcendence. He even finds in the text of the *Theaetetus* a suitable exhortation to that transcendental ethical theory: the “assimilation to God” (*homoiosis toi theoi*), an emblematic expression that represents one of the most widespread assumptions of middle-Platonism:

In the case of virtue as in the case of an expertise, if one thing surpasses another by a single unit it is enough for the other to be obliterated. This is why Plato did not base justice on affinity, but on ‘coming to be like god’, as we shall show.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> There is the possibility that the Stoics did not commit themselves to the position that affinity is equal regardless of its object, but the argument together with the case of the shipwreck (see below) poses a dilemma according to which the foundation of justice in *oikeiosis* is problematic whether affinity is conceived as equal or variant. (cf. Opsomer, 1998, p. 45)

<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, the part of the commentary with the discussion on the “assimilation to God” is missing.



ἔξαρκεῖ δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τεχνῆς καὶ ἐπὶ ἀρετῆς παραβαθεῖς  
 κἂν εἷς ἀριθμὸς ἐκάτερον αὐ τῶν ἀφανίσαι· ὅθεν οὐκ  
 ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκειώσεως εἰσάγει ὁ Πλάτων τὴν  
 δικαιοσύνην, ἀλλὰ ἀπο τῆς πρ[ὸ]ς τοὺς . θεὸν  
 ὁμοιω[σεως], ὡς δεῖξομεν. (7.15-20)

What is particularly interesting about Anon.'s argument against the stoic concept of *oikeiosis* is that the stoic theory is not completely rejected even after its refutation.<sup>9</sup> Rather, Anon. finds a positive role for this concept, adapting it to become consistent with his own interpretation of Platonism. So, just after his criticism of the stoic concept of *oikeiosis*, Anon. introduces the distinction between *airetike oikeiosis* and *kedemonike oikeiosis*, and uses this distinction as a way to establish a positive role for the concept of affinity. Elective affinity (*airetike oikeiosis*) is necessary for the identification of individuals that are well disposed to the rational enquiry and the virtuous life.

Of affinity itself, one kind is 'caring', namely that which is displayed towards oneself, and towards one's neighbors *as if* they were to a certain extent equal; another is 'elective', namely that by which we choose goods for ourselves, not because we care for them, but because we want to have them. It is clear that affinity towards oneself and those like oneself is not elective: no-one *chooses* himself (what he chooses is that he should exist, and that what is good should belong to him). A person *cares* for himself, and his neighbors. (8) This is why he [Socrates] said 'If I cared more for those in Cyrene', making it clear that such affinity is 'caring'. (...) 'And concerning the young men of Cyrene, especially, I desire to know which show some signs of becoming moderate.' In matters of love, it is said that the sage knows who is worthy of love. The question arises how Theaetetus could have escaped his [Socrates] notice, since he has a good nature. The answer is that he did not escape his notice: he does not find all those who are beautiful by himself, but there are some whom he finds through others. And he made this clear, because he himself does all he can to look for them, and also asks others whom he sees

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<sup>9</sup> As noted by Bonnazzi (2008, p. 599).

associating with the young. For being around either of them points the way to those who have good natures. (7.26-8.6)

[α]ὐτῆς δὲ δι[ῆ] τῆς οικειώ[ς]εω[ς] ἢ μὲν. [ἔστι]ν κηδεμονική [...].ς[.....] 7.30 [...].τουσ[ .....] [...].ωσ, ἀντι[...].ενσοι[ .....] αἴρο[ύ]μεθα ἑαυτοῖς τὰ- γ[αθὰ οὐ]κ ἀ[ύ]τ[.....] 7.35 κ[.....]κηδόμενοι, ἀ[λ]λὰ βουλόμενοι <αὐτὰ γενέσθαι ἡμῖν, δηλοῖ, ὅτι ἢ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν καὶ τοὺς ὁμοειδεῖς 7.40 οὐκ ἔστιν αἰρετική· οὐδεὶς γὰρ αἰρεῖται ἑαυτὸν, ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν<μὲν εἶναι, τὰγαθὸν δὲ ἑαυτῷ εἶναι, κήδε 7.45 ται δὲ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τῶν 8.1 πλησίον. διὰ τοῦτο ἔφη· <Εἰ μὲν τῶν ἐν Κυρήνῃ μᾶλλον ἐκηδόμην> δηλῶν ὅτι ἢ 8.5 τοιαύτη οικειώσις ἔστιν κηδεμονική. <Καὶ μᾶλ[λ]ον ἐπιθυμῶ εἰδέναι[ι τί]νες ἡμῖν τῶν [νέω]ν ἐπὶ 8.10 δοξοὶ γίνεσθαι ἐπεικεῖς. «Καί»> (περὶ τῶν ἐνθάδ[ε] ν[έ]ων εἶπε, <οὐ> περὶ τῶν ἐ[ν Κ]υρήνῃ) <«μᾶλλον ἐπ[ι]θυμῶ εἰδέναι τί[ι]νες> ὑποφαίνουσι ἐλπίδας τοῦ γε<νέσθαι μ[έ]τριον.» <Ταῦτα δὲ αὐ[τό]ς τε ς]κο-<<πῶ καθ' ὅ[σον] δ[ύ]ναμαι καὶ το[ύ]ς ἄλλου]ς ἐρωτῶ οἷ[ς] ἂν ὁρῶ το[ύ]ς νέους ἐθέλον[τας] <συγγίνεσθαι.> Ἐν [τοῖ]ς ἐρωτικοῖς λέγεται, 8.25 ὅτι τοῦ σπουδαίου [έ-]στὶν τὸ γ[ν]ῶναι τὸν ἀξίερ[ασ]τον. ζητεῖται οὖν, πῶσ[ ] ὁ Θ[ε]αί-]τητος ἔλ[α]θεν αὐτὸν] 8.30 ὦν ε[ύ]φυ[ή]ς. ἀποκρι-]τέον[ν τ]οῖνυν, ὅ[τι] οὐδὲ οὗτος αὐτὸν ἔλ[α]-<θεν· οὐ πάντας γὰρ<τοὺς καλοὺς δι' ἑαυτοῦ 8.35 εὐρίσκει, ἀλλ' ἔστιν οὐς καὶ δι' ἄλλων, καὶ τοῦτο ἐδήλωσεν, ὅτι <<Αὐτός τε> σκοπε[ῖ] <καθ' ὅ-<σον> ἐνδέχεται <καὶ 8.40 τοὺς ἄλλους> ἐρωτᾷ,<<οἷς> ὁρᾷ συμβάλλον-<τας <τοὺς νέους.>> καὶ γὰρ τὸ τοῖσδε ἢ τοῖσδε συνε[ῖ]ναι μηνύει 8.45 τοὺς εὐφυε[ῖ]ς.

It is through *airetike oikeiosis* that Socrates finds the wise and beautiful young men. Thus, by serving to classify the different kinds of human nature, elective affinity becomes the very condition for the emergence of philosophical communities, and ultimately for the exercise of philosophy itself. In fact, as Anon. points out at the beginning of the passage, it is through this kind of disposition that we choose any goods for ourselves.

## 1.2 The case of the skeptical Shipwreck and Growing Argument

The same pattern of argumentative appropriation can be found on the use of skeptical arguments. As a way of proving the impossibility of a theory of justice based on the concept of *oikeiosis*, even if we admit the existence of different degrees of affinity, Anon. presents the famous Shipwreck Argument. As we know, this argument was created by Carneades (Cic. *Resp.* 3.30; *De off.* 3.90)<sup>10</sup> to devise a situation in which people would clearly display the different degrees of affinity they have towards each other. In a shipwreck, everyone tries to save himself. And even in the case of stoic sages, if two of them are in a shipwreck, how would they decide which one should survive? Anon.'s assumption here seems to be that, all being equal, each will look out for himself.

On the other hand, if they themselves [sc. the stoics who introduce justice from affinity] say that affinity can be intensified, then it will allow for the existence of philanthropy, but the situation of the shipwrecked people (where only one of them can be saved) will refute them. Whether or not this situation would ever arise, they nevertheless find themselves being refuted. (6.17-29)

εἰ δὲ καὶ ἀ[ὐτ]οὶ φήσουσι ἐπιτεί[ν]εσθα[ί] τὴν οἰκείω[σιν], ἕς]ται μὲν 6.20 φιλανθρ[ωπί]α, ἐλέγξουσι δὲ τ[ούτους] ἀ[ί] περιστάσεις. [...], ὅπου ἀνάγκη μόνον σώζεσθαι τὸν ἕτερον αὐτῶν· κἂν μὴ γένωνται δὲ περιστάσεις, ἀλλ' αὐτοὶ γε οὕτως διάκ[εινται] ὡς ἐλεγχθησόμενοι.

In this case, Anon. deploys a skeptical argument to refute a stoic position. Here, we do not have to assume that Anon.'s use of the shipwreck argument makes him a skeptical philosopher. Rather, than subscribing to skepticism, Anon. is adapting parts of the skeptical argumentation for his own philosophical intentions. His use of the shipwreck argument must be analyzed in context. And in regard to its

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<sup>10</sup> Levy, 1990, p. 302-304; Levy, 1993, p. 151-152.

context, the argument can only make sense as part of a larger defense of the “assimilation to God” theory.

However, the most remarkable use of a skeptical argument can be found on the discussion of the “Growing Argument” (69-71). This time the textual justification to evoke stoic thesis is given by the theory of universal flux that the *Theaetetus* ascribes to Protagoras.<sup>11</sup> According to the standard version of the Growing Argument, “just as number or measure when added to or subtracted from becomes a different number or measure, so too a person who grows or diminishes becomes a different person” (Long & Sedley, 1987, p. 172). The argument was particularly relevant to some stoic formulations that identified the substance with its material substrate (*hypokeimenon*). If matter is the sole principle of individuation, then a change of matter constitutes a change of identity. Hence Socrates is a different person from the same individual with one extra particle of matter added. The argument implies that the stoic concept of growth is contradictory, on the ground that for anything to grow it must exist from the beginning to the end of the process, and the denial of identity over time presented by the argument exclude this.

The Stoics (for instance Chrysippus) countered the argument by distinguishing between “substance”, *i.e.* the material substrate, and the “peculiarly qualified” (*idios poiios*), which is not identical with the material substrate, although constituted by it. This way, a mere quantitative change in the material substrate would not imply any change in the “peculiarly qualified”, which would, thus, be capable of retaining identity through the process of growth and diminution.

Despite the poor state of the papyrus’s pages on this part of the text, it is possible to reconstruct the *Commentary*’s argument as stating the identity between the individual and the sum of all its essential properties: that is, its material substrate plus its peculiarly

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<sup>11</sup> “What is really true is this: the things of which we naturally say they ‘are’ are in process of coming to be, as the result of movement and change and blending with one another. We are wrong when we say they ‘are’ since nothing ever is, but everything is coming to be” (152d7-e1).

qualified. If that is the case, say the Academics skeptics, then any change in the material substrate will imply the emergence of a different individual:

What is in flux, according to some, does not increase or decrease in the way that something peculiarly qualified can. Their point is that only what is the same thing can acquire addition; similarly, it is the same thing that becomes smaller, viz. when it is reduced by a certain amount. Increase, decrease and individual qualification, then, are inter-entailing, so that (70) if one of them is conceded, the rest are given, and if one is denied, the rest are denied. (69.43-70.5)

τὸ ῥέον κατὰ τινὰς οὐ[τ'] ἀ[ὐ]ξ[άνεται οὐτε] μ[ει]οῦται, ὥ[σπερ] ἅ[ν] ἰδίως π[οι]ά ἐστι. δύνα[σθαι γὰρ] [έωσι μόνον] τὸν αὐτὸ[ν ποσθῆ] κην λαμ[βάνειν, ὁ-] μοίως δὲ κ[αὶ ἐκ μει]ώσεως τοσ[ῶδε τὸν] 69.45 αὐτὸν γίνεσ[θαι ἐλατ]τονα· ἀντακο[λουθεῖ] γὰρ ταῦτα [ἀλ]λ[ήλοισ] αὔξησις, [μ]εῖ[ωσις] ἰδίως π[οιοί, ὥστε] 70.1 [συ]γχωρηθέντος ἐνὸς [τού]των καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ [δε]δῶσθαι καὶ ἀναρε[θέ]ντος καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ 70.5 [ἀν]ηρῆσθαι.

This time, Anon. fully rejects the stoic theory of the *idios poios*, agreeing with the skeptical argument. The strategy is to accept the academic argument as a real proof of the incapacity of understanding movement and change within the limits of a materialistic philosophy. The *Commentary*, on the other hand, leaves open the possibility of explaining material growth with reference to the transcendental aspect reality. Thus, the skeptical argument is used to disqualify the stoic materialism, but the argument has its scope restricted to the sensible world, therefore not holding against a Platonic theory of substance.

These examples show that in regard both to the concept of affinity and to the concept of material change Anon. makes use of arguments and theses of different philosophical schools. However, his methodology cannot be described as the a-critical juxtaposition of inconsistent theories. Rather, Anon.'s eclecticism is actually very complex, since it involves the critical appreciation and adaptation of theses from different philosophical schools. These theses are not

simply refuted and rejected, but are appreciated and adapted in order for them to become consistent with the author's own platonic system.

## **Second level of eclecticism's defense: the attribution of an eclectic methodology to Plato and the Academy**

The Commentary contains some indications that the Anonymous author attributes to Plato the same kind of eclectic methodology that is at work in his use of skeptical and stoic arguments. During the discussion of the Growing Argument, for instance, Anon. states:

Pythagoras was the first to use the Growing Argument, and Plato used it, as we noted in commenting on the Symposium. Members of the Academy argue in this direction as well: they themselves are clear that they believe in growth, but since the Stoics establish this when it does not need proof, they show us that, if someone wishes to prove what is obvious, someone else will easily find more persuasive arguments to the contrary. (70.9-22)

τὸν δὲ [περ]ὶ τοῦ αὐξομένου [λ]όγον ἐκείνησεν [μ]ὲν πρῶτος Πυθα[γόρ]ας, ἐκείνησεν 70.10 [δὲ] καὶ Πλάτων, ὡς ἐν [τοι]ς εἰς τὸ Συμπόσιον [ὑ]πεμνήσαμεν· ἐπι[χει]ροῦσι δὲ εἰς αὐτὸ [καὶ] οἱ ἐξ Ἀκαδημείας 70.15 μ[α]ρτυρούμενοι μὲν, ὅτι ἀρέσκονται τῷ εἶναι αὐξήσεις, διὰ δὲ τὸ τοὺς Στωικοὺς κατασκευάζειν τοῦτο 70.20 οὐ δεόμενον ἀποδείξω[ς] διδάσκοντες, ὅτι ἂν τις τὰ ἐναργῆ θέλη ἀποδεικνύειν, ἕτερος εἰς τὸ ἐναντίον πιθανωτέρων εὐπορήσει λόγων.

In this passage, Anon. claims that Plato himself used the Growing Argument, which he believes to have Pythagorean credentials. Since the Commentary clearly denies the possibility of understanding Plato as a skeptic philosopher (cf. 54.38-55.10), we must conclude that, according to the author, Plato deployed the Growing Argument in order to argue for his own theories.

Likewise, about the distinction that enabled the commentator to restrict *oikeiosis* to the immediate sphere of social interactions, and, in doing so, to find a positive role for that concept, Anon. says: “This much-discussed ‘affinity’ is introduced not only by Socrates, but also by the sophists in Plato” (7.10).

Again, it is clear that the author is assigning to Plato not the original stoic understanding of affinity, but his own distinction between *airetike oikeiosis* and *kedemonike oikeiosis*. The most remarkable feature of this last sentence, however, lies in the fact that it ascribes to the sophistic characters in Plato’s dialogues the introduction of platonic doctrines. Considering that the sophists depicted in the dialogues have any measure of similitude to the real individuals they represent, we can understand the *Commentary* as stating that Plato adapted the arguments of the sophists in order to present his own philosophy. This way, the different characters of Plato’s dialogues, although initially arguing for their own point of view, at the end of the day, serve to express the philosophy of Plato himself.

This interpretation of the platonic methodology allows Anon. to recognize a fundamental unity under the many different academic tendencies:

Some people infer from these words that Plato was an Academic, in the sense of not having doctrines. My account will show that even other members of the Academy did, with very few exceptions, have doctrines, and that the Academy is unified by the fact that its members hold their most important doctrines in common with Plato. In any case, the fact that Plato held doctrines and declared them with conviction can be grasped from Plato himself. (54.40-55.10)

ἐκ τοιούτων λέξεων 54.40 τι νες οἶονται Ἀκαδημαϊκὸν τὸν Πλάτωνα ὡς οὐδὲν δογματίζοντα. δείξει μὲν οὖν ὁ λόγος καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους Ἀκαδημαϊκοὺς ὑπεξηρημένων πάνυ ὀλίγω[ν καὶ] δογματίζοντας καὶ μίαν οὖσαν Ἀκαδημειαν κατὰ τὸ κά[κ]είνους τὰ κυριώτατα τῶν δογμάτων ταῦτα ἔχε[ι]ν τῷ Πλάτων[ι.] ἤδη μ[έ]ντοι τὸν Πλάτωνα ἔχειν. 55.10

δόγματα καὶ ἀπ[ο-] φαίνεσθαι πεπ[ο]ιθότως πάρ[εστι]  
ἐξ ἀ[ὐ]τοῦ λα[μβάν]ει[v.]

The text does not tell us which are these most important doctrines, but we can suppose that the author recognizes the use of a method based on the confrontation and evaluation of arguments and hypothesis from other thinkers or philosophical schools an unifying trait of the platonic tradition. Academic skeptics and dogmatics share the same method of investigation, based on the dialectical confrontation and critical evaluation of their opponent's theses. Furthermore, Platonists appropriate arguments from other philosophical schools, even if this appropriation is only methodological as, for example, in the case of skeptics. Hence, by interpreting the negative dialectics of academic skeptics as part of the same argumentative strategy of Plato and the dogmatics, Anon. could maintain his eclectic methodology as a source of unity for the whole academic tradition.

### **Third level of eclecticism defense: the formulation of a subjectivist theory of knowledge**

Surprisingly, the author of the *Commentary* does not accept what seems to us to be the most fundamental insight of the Platonic theory of knowledge, namely the distinction between two kinds of objects, one of them able to generate knowledge (the Forms), and the other able to generate only opinions (the sensibles). In fact, the *Commentary* clearly denies this interpretation of the Platonic epistemology, which relates the aporetic end of the *Theaetetus* to the fact that Forms do not take part in the discussion. Instead of a theory of knowledge that measures the value of a cognitive act only by its object, the commentator proposes a subjectivist epistemology that defines knowledge as “correct opinion bound by *the reasoning of the cause (aitias logismós)*” or “correct opinion bound by *the cause of reasoning (aitias logismou)*” according to Anonymous heterodoxical reading of the *Meno*'s definition of knowledge:



Some Platonists thought that the dialogue is about the criterion, since it is rich in investigation of this. This is not right. Rather, it is about [2.20] simple and incomposite knowledge: for this purpose it has to look into the question of the criterion. By 'criterion' I mean that through which we judge, as a tool. For we need something by which to judge things: then, as long as this is accurate, the steadfast acceptance of [2.30] well-made judgements gives us knowledge. But these people say that, having proposed to search for knowledge, he shows in the Theaetetus what its objects are not, and in the Sophist what its objects are. [2.40] They came close, but they did not reach the truth: for he does not seek the material with which knowledge is concerned, but [2.50] what its essence is. This is a different thing, as in the case of skills it is one thing to look for the essence of each of them, another to look for the material with which they concern themselves. [3.1] Knowledge is right reason bound 'by the cause of reasoning' [Men. 98a] – for we know things when we know what they are, but also why they are. But there were those who valued the senses highly because they possess [3.10] something striking, attributing accuracy to them as well. Because of this, he is first going to put their supposition to the test; then he will pass on to right opinion, and after this to right opinion with reason. [3.20] Then he will cease the investigation – for he would only need to add the bond of explanation for his account of this kind of knowledge to be complete. This sort of thing will be clarified in the exegesis. (2.15-3.26)

τῶν δὲ Πλατωνικῶν] τινες ὥθησαν περὶ κριτηρίου εἶναι τὸν διάλογον, 2.15 ἐπεὶ καὶ πλεονάζει ἐν τῇ περὶ τούτου σκέψει. τὸ δ' οὐχ οὕτως ἔχει, ἀλλὰ π[ρ]όκειται περὶ ἐπιστήμης εἰπ[ε]ῖν 2.20 τῆς ἀπλῆς καὶ ἀσυνθέτου· εἰς τοῦτο δὲ ἀναγκαίως περὶ κριτηρίου σκοπεῖ. λέγω δὲ νῦν κριτήριον τὸ [δ]ι' οὗ κρίνομεν ὡς ὀργάνου. [δ]εῖ γὰρ ἔχειν ὧν κρινοῦμεν τὰ πράγματα, εἴτα ὅταν ἀκριβὲς ᾖ τοῦτο, ἢ τῶν καλῶς κριθέντων μόλιμος παραδοχὴ [γί-]γνεται ἐπιστήμη. ἀλλ' ἐνιοὶ φασιν αὐτὸν περὶ ἐπιστήμης 2.35 προθέμενον ζητεῖν ἐν μὲν τῷ Θεαίτητῳ περὶ ἃ οὐκ ἔστιν δεικνύειν, ἐν δὲ τῷ Σοφιστῇ περὶ ἃ ἔστιν. προσήλθον μὲν οὖν ἐγγύς, οὐ μὴν ἔτυχον ἀληθοῦς· οὐ γὰρ ζητεῖ τὴν ὕλην, περὶ ἣν σ[τρέ-]φεται ἡ ἐπιστήμη, 2.45 ἀλλὰ τίς οὐσία αὐτῆς. [ἔ-]τερον δὲ ἔστιν τοῦτο ἐκείνου, ὡς ἐπὶ τῶν

τεχν[ῶ]ν ἄλλο μὲν ἐστὶν τὸ [ζη]τεῖν [ἐ]κάστης 2.50  
 τὴν [ο]ύσιαν, ἄλλο δὲ τὸ τὴν ὕλην, περὶ ἣν  
 πραγματεύονται. ἐπεὶ [δὲ ἐπι]στήμη ἦν δόξα ὀρθή  
 δεθεῖσα αἰτία λογισμοῦ (τότε γὰρ ἴσμεν τὰ πράγματα,  
 ὅταν μὴ μόνον εἰδῶμεν ὅτι ἔστιν ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τί),  
 ἦσαν δὲ οἱ τὰς αἰσθήσεις ἐκτετειμηκότες διὰ τὸ ἔχειν  
 3.10 αὐτάς τι πληκτικὸν [ἀ]νατιθέντες αὐταῖς καὶ τὴν  
 ἀκρεΐβειαν, πρῶτον μὲν ταύτην βασανιεῖ τὴν  
 ὑπόλημψιν, εἶτα μεταβήσεται ἐπὶ δόξαν ὀρθήν, μετὰ  
 ταύτην ἐπὶ δόξαν ὀρθήν μετὰ λόγου, καὶ [ἐ]νθάδε  
 κατ[α]παύσει [τῆ]ν ζήτη[σιν· εἰ γὰρ] προσλάβοι [τὸν]  
 δεσμὸν τῆς αἰτί[ας, γί]νεται αὐ[τ]ῶι τέλει[ο]ς ὁ τῆ[ς]  
 τοιαύτης 3.25 ἐπ[ι]τή[μης λόγ]ος. τ[ᾶ] [μὲν] οὖν  
 τοι[αῦτ]α κα[ὶ] [ἐν] τῇ ἐξηγήσει σα[φον]ισθῆσεται.

The first aspect we should note about this subjectivist theory of knowledge is that it naturally explains the passage from opinion to knowledge, which is something that the object-orientated formulation has notorious difficulties to explain. For, if the nature of our cognitive acts is a function of the object to which it is oriented, then we would not be able to pass from the state of opinion about a object *x* to the state of knowledge about the same object *x*. The theory of knowledge presented in the Commentary, on the other hand, does not take objects or modes of apprehension as criteria of truth. Rather it defines knowledge as a certain mode of justification of propositions. Knowledge is different from opinion because of the argumentative articulation it has with the reasoning of causes (cf. Sedley, 1996).

This interpretation of the Platonic theory of knowledge seems to provide a theoretical foundation for the eclectic methodology of Anon. As we have seen, the appropriation of arguments and thesis of other schools take place only after the confrontation, evaluation, and reasoning about its relations to the platonic point of view of the commentator. According to the text it is through this process of polemic confrontation between arguments that the dialectician is able to purge the false opinions and articulate by recollection (*anamnēsis*) the knowledge already existing in his soul:

So do you know that I myself have the same skill as my mother, [47.30] because I act as midwife?’ He

called himself a midwife after her because his method of teaching was that kind of thing. Sometimes he expounded and committed himself to doctrines; but when he was teaching, he prepared [47.40] his students to talk about things themselves, unfolding and articulating their natural concepts. And this way of doing things follows from the doctrine that so-called acts of 'learning' [48.1] are in fact acts of recollection, and that the soul of every man has seen what exists and does not need the mathematical sciences to be inculcated – it needs recollection. This doctrine will be discussed in my commentary on [48.10] *On the Soul* [i.e. the *Phaedo*]. (47.30-48.10)

Ἄρ' οὖν ἦσθου, ὅτι καὶ αὐτὸς τὴν αὐτὴν τέχνην ἔχω τῆ[ι] μη[τρι], ὅτι μα[ιεύομαι].[ἐξ ἐκείν]ης ἔλεγεν ἑα[υτοῦ]ν μαίευ[τι]κόν, [ὅτι ἡ] διδασκα[λ]ία αὐ[τοῦ] τ[ο]ιοαύτη ἦν· 47.35 [εἰδ]ῶς μ[έ]ν γὰρ ἀπε[τίθ]ετο [κ]αὶ εἶχεν [..]ματα, ἐν δὲ τῶι [διδά]σκειν αὐτοὺς [παρ]εσκεύαζεν 47.40 [τοὺς] μαγθάνοντας [λέγει]ν περὶ τῶν π[ραγ]μάτων ἀναπτύ[ς]σων αὐτῶν τὰς φυσ[ι]κὰς ἐννοίας καὶ διαρ[θρ]ῶν καὶ τοῦτο ἀκόλο[υ]θον τῶι δόγμα[τι] τῶι τὰς λεγομένας [μ]αθήσεις 48.1 ἀναμνήσεις εἶ[ν]α[ι] κ[αὶ] πᾶσαν ἀνθρώπου ψυχὴν τεθεᾶσθαι τὰ ὄντα καὶ δεῖν αὐτῆι 48.5 οὐκ ἐνθέσεως μαθημάτων, ἀλλὰ ἀναμνήσεως. περὶ δὲ τούτου τοῦ δόγματος ῥηθήσεται ἐν τοῖς εἰς 48.10 τὰ *Περὶ ψυχῆς ὑπομήμασι*.

The most striking feature of the interpretation put forward by the *Commentary* lies in the fact that the Anonymous author identifies in the *Theaetetus* itself the realization of the eclectic methodology he adopts, and ascribes to Plato and the Academy. According to his reading of the text, the different attempts of defining knowledge we find in the dialogue represent progressive stages towards the correct definition stated in the *Meno*. In this way, the whole dialogue represents an argumentative engagement with different non-platonic definitions of knowledge, such as the Protagorean relativism, and its secret doctrine of universal flux, the aviary model, the block of wax model, and so on. At the end of this process of evaluation and adaptation of non-platonic thesis, the young Theaetetus should articulate the correct platonic definition. The dialogue ends in *aporia* in order for the reader to conclude the process by himself. So after

the last definition proposed by Theaetetus, i.e.: Knowledge is correct opinion with a *logos*, the reader should only supply the reference to the causes in order to get the correct definition of knowledge as stated in the *Meno*:

For the natural concepts are in need of articulation. Before this, people apprehend things insofar as they have traces of them; but they do not apprehend them clearly. This is why [47.1] Theaetetus was not in a position to give an adequate account of knowledge, but did not find it easy to listen to anyone else properly either, as Socrates encouraged him to do. (...) And yet, although he did not hit on it, Theaetetus does not give up searching for what knowledge is. [47.20] His good nature meant that he was full of common concepts, and that they were not buried too deep in him. (47.1-47.20)

Αἱ γὰρ φυσικαὶ ἔννοιαι δέονται διαρθρώσεως, πρὸ δὲ τούτου ἐπιβάλλουσι μὲν τοῖς πράγμασι τῶι ἔχειν αὐτῶν ἴχνη, οὐ μὴν τρανῶς. διὰ 47.1 τοῦτ[ο] οὔτε ὁ Θε[ε]αίτητος ἰκανῶ[ς] εἰ[ῆ]χεν λέγειν. πε[ρ]ὶ ἐπ[ι]στήμ[ης] οὔτε ἄλλου οὔτω[ς] ἀκοῦσαι [ῥ]αῖδιον ἦ[ν], ὡς διε[κ]ελεύετο [Σω]κρά[τ]ησ. Καίτοι μὴ ἐπι[υ]γγ[άν]ων 47.15 ὁ Θε[ε]αίτητος οὐκ ἀφί[ς]τατ[αι] τοῦ σκοπεῖν περὶ [τῆς] ἐπ[ι]στή[μ]ης, [τί] π[ό]τ' ἐ[στ]ί. [ἦ]ν γὰρ πλήρης ὡς 47.20 [ἄ]ν ε[ύ]φνης τῶν κοι[ν]ῶν ἐννοιῶν καὶ [ἐ]κεί[ν]ει κ[α]ί[ι] τὰς σφ[ό]δρα ἐπικεκα[λυμμέ]ν[α]ς.

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