

The Middle Platonist Demiurge and Stoic Cosmobiology

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Given the variety of speculation on world-generation, this article examines the extent to which use of the Demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus* by subsequent thinkers can be regarded as part of a coherent narrative. Although not advocating the existence of a demiurgic "system," demiurgy is defined in contrast to Judaeo-Christian creation and its chief characteristics are enumerated. While the Demiurge is not of major importance within the Old Academy, he survives within Stoic conceptions of the *logos*, which itself combines aspects of the technological or banausic imagery of the Demiurge, alongside influences derived from Aristotelian biological theory. This article examines the extent to which the Stoic *logos* can be regarded as the ancestor of the Demiurge found in Philo of Alexandria and Plutarch, suggests reasons for the ubiquitous nature of the demiurgic motif during the first to third centuries CE, and considers the main philosophical problems that influenced its development.

The Theoretical Background

The Demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus* is a figure whom it makes little sense to interpret literally, and despite the disagreement among modern scholars, the internal evidence of the dialogue suggests that the functions carried out by the Demiurge in the myth are really those pertaining to a demythologized World-Soul. Arguments in favor of a non-literal interpretation include Plato's own statement that the narrative is no more than a "likely story" (*eikota mython*; *Tim.* 29d). Also cogent is a difficulty with the structure of the myth, which deals with the generation of the body of the world, before its soul, which is temporarily prior. However,

if soul is prior to bodies, it cannot be composed of an element which is “divided about bodies.”

Plato’s first interpreters in the Old Academy similarly regarded the Demiurge as introduced for “the purposes of exposition,” to explain what the world would be like if deprived of Reason. He was regarded simply as a World-Soul by Philip of Opus and Polemon. Plato’s nephew and successor as head of the Academy, Speusippus, not only rejected the Demiurge, but even radically altered “the theory of Forms” by regarding them as only existing at the level of the World-Soul, but not at a higher level. Xenocrates, in his attempts to reverse the speculations of Speusippus and to return to what he viewed as the original thought of Plato, similarly avoided a return to literal acceptance of the Demiurge, but preferred to present world-generation as the result of the collaboration of a Monad and a Dyad. Thus, long before the Middle Platonist period, the notion of a Demiurge had already been severely undermined by the Platonist camp itself, even if this was under the influence of Aristotelian criticism.

First, however, there is the question of whether the Middle Platonist Demiurge can be said to exist as a concept or whether we are simply dealing with unrelated and independent speculations relating to the generation of the cosmos, particularly since the Demiurge disappears from view under Plato’s successors. This is in spite of Matthias Baltes’ *Die Weltentstehung des platonischen Timaios nach den antiken Interpreten* (1976)¹ and the research of Jan Opsomer² and Franco Ferrari.³ This is perfectly understandable: speculation on world-generation has existed as long as humanity has been capable of rational thought. Indeed, if one considers the existence of various cosmological myths spanning cultures, it precedes the existence of any sort of “scientific methodology.” The search for an explanation of world-generation can be found both at the beginning of Greek science and philosophy, in the speculations of the pre-Socratics, and in early Greek literature, exemplified by Hesiod’s *Theogony*. The task

¹ Baltes and Dörrie also collected and commented upon relevant Bausteine: especially relevant in this context are Bausteine 125–35 on the Theory of Forms, Bausteine 136–45 (the generation of the world), and Bausteine 146–150 (the elements), all in Dörrie, *Antike* V; and Bausteine 159 (the generation of soul), in idem, *Antike* VI 1/2.

² Opsomer has published extensively on Neoplatonic demiurgy. In particular see “Proclus”; “La démiurgie”; “Plutarch’s *De Animae Procreatione*”; and “Craftsman.”

³ Ferrari, *Dio*.

facing us, then, is to demonstrate that it is possible to trace the influence of the *Timaeus* upon concepts of world-generation and to clarify why the Demiurge returned to popularity during the first to third centuries CE.

Demiurgy can be described as world-generation via the ordering of preexistent matter by an entity, sometimes represented as endowed with only limited abilities, according to some sort of model, so that the activity is generally regarded as intellectual. This contrasts with the notion of *creatio ex nihilo* envisaged in the Judaeo-Christian concept of creation, where God creates simply by willing it to happen. There are naturally some complexities in attempting to delineate both approaches to world-generation, which shall be dealt with later. I further contend that there are a range of subdivisions of demiurgy, depending on the sect by which and the period in which they were applied, even if historically dependent upon each other and all ultimately stemming from Plato's myth in the *Timaeus*. Thus, for example, Neoplatonic demiurgy differs from its Middle Platonist counterpart in positing multiple demiurges, which function within triads and which are assigned a highly circumscribed role, such as responsibility for partial or universal demiurgy at the encosmic or hypercosmic level. Even if this can be viewed as simply the development of already existent trends, it differs from what is found in Middle Platonist philosophers, since the system of world-generation posited by Plotinus is one of "procession" and "return." So the One does not generate as the result of conscious activity, in the same way that the Demiurge does, but rather overflows its own Being, producing the next ontological level, which orders itself in response to the one above. Similarly, the Gnostic conception differs in regarding the Demiurge as either evil or ignorant and placing him in opposition to the First Principle. In Numenius, by contrast, the Demiurge collaborates with the First Principle. Admittedly, the Gnostic version is in many ways the ultimate development of Numenius' insistence on a distinction between the First God, who is the First Principle, and the Second God, who is the Demiurge.

The situation is further complicated by the appropriation of aspects of demiurgy by members of the Judaeo-Christian tradition as a mechanism for providing a "scientific" exegesis of the creational account of Genesis. The two most notable proponents are Philo and Origen, although St. Basil is also influenced by demiurgy in his *Hexaemeron* and, like Calcidius in his great commentary on the *Timaeus*, *In Timaeum* (hereafter *In Tim.*), is more

heavily influenced by the Middle Platonist variant than by Neoplatonism.⁴ Since a dichotomy even between Judaeo-Christian creation and Platonic demiurgy has not been observed, how then do we set about defining the concept?

The first question is the issue of terminology. The noun *demiourgos*, “craftsman,” and the verb *demiourgein*, “to labor like a craftsman,” are both frequently used by thinkers influenced by this concept. St. Basil describes the world as *demiourgia*, or craftsmanship. Since this term before Plato would have been somewhat strange to use in reference to God, we can identify in such terminology the influence of the *Timaeus*. This does not help with our definition, since it could be argued that Plato’s influence merely helped to develop a common language without necessarily referring to an identical concept, and furthermore that this had simply become part of the philosophical heritage of the period, rather than being the result of any more extensive legacy. Indeed, not all accounts that are influenced by demiurgy refer to their instrumental cause as a Demiurge. Numenius clearly posits a demiurgic figure, even though he refers to him as a Second God. Philo’s demiurgic entity is called the Logos and Origen’s instrumental cause is the Son-Logos (although he applies the title of “Demiurge” to the Father and describes the Son as the “immediate Demiurge”). Calcidius also never uses the Latin loan-word *demiurgus* to translate the Greek *demiourgos*, and in both his translation and his commentary prefers to use words like *opifex* or *fabricator*. Using the imagery of craftsmanship to represent a divine entity when describing world-generation might seem like a more promising definition. Yet that runs into difficulties when we consider that God in the creation accounts of Genesis (Gen. 1:1–2:4a and Gen. 2:4bff.) is described as a potter or builder, and clearly we are not dealing here with either the ordering of preexistent matter or a text influenced by the *Timaeus*.

In spite of this, analysis of the texts reveals a shared heritage, not just among Middle Platonist thinkers, but even in the Christian and Gnostic traditions. However, beyond stating that the Demiurge performs the intellectual activity of ordering matter, which is preexistent, according

⁴ St. Basil uses the demiurgic image to highlight God’s sympathy for artisans, since He is one, too, and presents the Son as the demiurgic power, while the Father is the final cause, much like Origen, even if elsewhere in the *Hexaemeron* he adopts an anti-philosophical stance. See my forthcoming article, “St Basil’s Explanation of Creation.”

to a model that is also preexistent, and that this ordering takes place on rational lines (i.e., according to geometric or mathematical principles), there is no coherent “system” of demiurgy. What can be demonstrated is that the thinkers surveyed here are influenced by the *Timaeus*, rather than presenting unrelated speculations on world-generation, with only superficial similarities caused by the common subject matter. Clearly Philo’s understanding of the creation does not derive entirely from the spontaneous sort of activity described in biblical accounts, and his attempt to integrate a noetic realm with the Genesis account can only have arisen under Platonic influence.

Demiurgy cannot be reduced to a single, coherent pattern, since the motif was exploited by such a range of thinkers. Even within Platonism, Plutarch and Atticus do not demote the Demiurge to a second-rank figure as Numenius does. However, the unity of my thesis is that while there are different representations of demiurgy, this is a result of divergent readings of the *Timaeus*. However, that does not mean a range of atomized opinions. Certain trends emerge. Frequently, for example, the Demiurge produces the world as the result of his goodness. He desires that the world should be as good as possible, and achieves this by bringing order to the disordered elements. The Demiurge may also function as an intermediary between the higher, noetic world and the sublunar, material realm.⁵ However, any attempt at a definition does not exhaust the complexity of the demiurgic notion or truly account for the various ways in which it is exploited. It is also misleading to represent those who exploit the motif as conceiving demiurgy as part of a coherent system; rather, they respond differently to the questions raised and the intellectual challenges posed by the *Timaeus*. Modern exegeses of the dialogue have similarly failed to reach a consensus.

Influence of the Stoic Logos

Having attempted to define demiurgy and at least managed to delineate some of its most pervasive features, the next step is to consider why such an approach to world-generation should prove inconsequential in the Old Academy, only to reemerge in the first century CE. Demiurgy ceased to

⁵ O’Brien, “Platonism,” 60.

be of interest within the Old Academy because it no longer favored the Theory of Forms, without which there is not much need for a Demiurge to instantiate Forms in the material realm. The Demiurge's return to prominence may be attributed to his usefulness in the academic climate of the first to third centuries CE, as a means of accommodating dualistic systems that were popular during this period.

In any case, the Demiurge did not simply disappear but persisted in the Stoic concept of the *logos*, as a rational divine element that assisted with the better ordering of the world. This Stoic contribution to the interpretation of the *Timaeus* has been conclusively demonstrated by Gretchen Reydam-Schils' 1999 study, *Demiurge and Providence*. It might appear counterintuitive to suggest that the Stoics played an important role in cosmological theory, since they displayed such limited interest in the area in the period following Poseidonius, although this is mainly due to their reliance on the doxographical codification of their viewpoints. As Lapidge points out, the resultant lack of an adequate expertise in cosmology to respond to the criticisms of figures such as Plutarch leaves us with a highly biased account of the technical level of Stoic cosmology.⁶ The Stoics were also less interested in cosmology once it seemed to be less important for achieving their ethical objectives. Cosmology could be justified if the *telos* of life was to bring oneself into harmony with the cosmos, but as the Stoics began to adopt an increasingly more realistic understanding of the minor role that man played in the cosmos as a whole, interest in this discipline waned. The Stoics, though, are an important intermediary stage in the development and transmission of demiurgy.

Plato in the *Timaeus* presents world-generation in two different ways, the more famous of which is the account of a craftsman-god toiling at fashioning the universe, and the description of Reason and Necessity can be regarded as complementary to this. The second, less celebrated image is a biological one—the Receptacle is described as the mother and nurse of all. The Stoics use the language of the technological image, but ultimately reject it in favor of the biological one, which is enriched with appropriations from Aristotle's theory of sexual generation. In his important article "Nature as Craftsman in Greek Thought," Friedrich Solmsen demonstrates that both images of world-generation, that of

⁶ Lapidge, "Archai," 240.

craftsmanship and procreation, actually precede Plato, but the primary model in Greek cosmogony is the biological one. This is illustrated by the marriages of various deities in the earliest Greek cosmogony that we possess, Hesiod's *Theogony*. However, it should be noted that both there and in the *Works and Days*, Hephaestus fashions the first woman, meaning that both technological and biological concepts coexist from the beginning of Greek speculations in this area.

Empedocles, too, uses an image that can be regarded as demiurgic in his description of earth "receiving in broad melting pots two portions of water and four of fire" (frag. 31b Diels-Kranz, trans. Solmsen).⁷ Plato's Demiurge echoes elements of Anaxagoras' *Nous* to the extent that they are both ordering Intellects. As Anaxagoras comments, "mind also devised this orderly revolution in which now the stars, the sun and the moon revolve" (frag. 59b12 Diels-Kranz, trans. Solmsen). Despite this, Solmsen concludes that "the Demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus* is a conception much too original to be explained as a synthesis of earlier thinkers' ideas."⁸ It is not that Plato's Demiurge is merely a Mind that orders; rather, he is capable of deliberately pursuing rational choices in order to further his objectives. For example, he chooses a skull constructed of bone rather than flesh because this will endow humans with greater rational capacity, thereby furthering his objective of a cosmos with increased order and intelligibility (*Tim.* 75b).

The Stoics distinguish between an active and a passive principle, which can be described in various ways—as god (or *logos*) and matter, or as fire and moisture. Despite this, the Stoics adopt a monistic approach, similar to that of the pre-Socratics. Their two principles do not exist independently of each other, and the distinction is essentially one that is made in thought, rather than observable in actuality. While it may seem evident that that which acts could not possibly have much of a role to play without that which is acted upon, such an argument provides another weapon in the arsenal of those engaged in polemical attacks against the Stoics, who are already vulnerable as a result of what appears to be a failure to differentiate properly between principles, such as God and matter, and elements, such as fire and water.

⁷ References to Presocratics are from *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. H. Diels and W. Kranz. Translations are all from works listed in the bibliography below.

⁸ Solmsen, "Nature as Craftsman," 480.

In any case, the Stoics account for two of the principles of the *Timaeus*, but positively reject its third principle, the Forms. In their version, god is immanent:

The Stoics also criticize Plato for saying that, because exemplars of all things exist of old in another sublime and most excellent substance, the sensible world was made by God after an immortal exemplar. In their opinion, no exemplar is needed, because a fertilizing reason, pervading an entirely susceptible nature, brought the whole world and all that it contains into existence. (Calcidius, *In Tim.* 294, p. 296.11–16, trans. Van Winden)

The Stoic model is a different one: there is no separation between God and his creation, since Reason works from within matter. Once matter is regarded as passive, it detracts somewhat from God's accomplishment. He no longer has to labor at world-generation, and it becomes an effortless activity. This immanence can be regarded as a failure to distinguish between God and matter: "they arrived at the impious opinion that God is identical with, or even an inseparable quality of, matter, that He passes through it as seed through the genitals" (Calcidius, *In Tim.* 294, pp. 296.19–297.3 [= SVF 1.87], trans. Van Winden).⁹ The terminology does, however, reveal the influence of the Platonist demiurgic image. One has to only consider passages such as "fire, acting like a craftsman [*technikôs*] proceeding on a course toward change" (SVF 1.171; 2.1027, trans. Todd), with fire referring to God or nature. Similarly, God is described as "producing like a craftsman (*demiourgeîn*) every single thing throughout all matter" (Diogenes Laertius [DL] 7.134, trans. Long and Sedley, modified). As Zeno comments: "What in the process of our crafts is done by our hand is done with far more skilful craftsmanship by nature, that is to say by the craftsmanlike fire which is the teacher of the other crafts" (SVF 1.171 = Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.57, trans. Solmsen).

The parallel in the Stoic mind between cosmogony and procreation is evident: "Just as the sperm is enveloped in the seminal fluid, so God, who is the seminal reason of the world, stays behind as such in the moisture, making matter serviceable to himself for the successive stages of creation" (DL 7.136, trans. Long and Sedley, slightly modified by Gourinat). An important mediator between the technological and biological images is

⁹ SVF = *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, ed. J. von Armin.

Aristotle, who referred to the sperm as a craftsman in his *Generation of Animals* (at *GA* 1.22.730b5–32).¹⁰ He also compares the seed to a moving tool that can bring form to matter through its motion (though by this Aristotle means the actualization of a potentiality). Aristotle notes “it makes no difference whether we say ‘semen’ or ‘movement which causes each of the parts to grow’ nor whether we say this movement is one ‘which causes to grow’ or ‘which constitutes from the beginning.’ The *logos* of the movement is the same” (*GA* 4.3.767b18–20, trans. Hahm). Despite Aristotle’s criticism of the demiurgic model, he everywhere betrays its influence. He distinguishes between Reason and Necessity, as Plato does, and numerous details, such as the diaphragm serving as a partition between the exalted and more degraded parts of the body, are clearly drawn from the *Timaeus*.¹¹ Aristotle compares *pneuma* to a multifunctional instrument (*polychreston organon*) in *GA* 5, where it is also described as a hammer or anvil.¹² As Solmsen notes, even in his disagreements with Plato, Aristotle betrays his influence: Plato asserts at *Tim.* 74a7–d2 that flesh was produced as a protective covering for bone, whereas Aristotle in his *On the Parts of Animals* (at *PA* 2.9.654b29ff.) inverts this by claiming that bone was designed as a support for flesh.¹³

For Aristotle, there was no need to posit a craftsman who worked upon nature; rather, nature itself was capable of directing itself toward a teleological function: “wherever there is an end the former and successive steps are for the sake of this end. Hence as in action so in nature and as in nature so it is in every action, if nothing interferes. Now action is for the sake of an end. Therefore nature too is for the sake of an end” (Aristotle, *Phys.* 2.8.199a8 ff., trans. Solmsen). Even though there is no need for the image of a Demiurge, nature itself in Aristotle’s account is envisaged as working like a craftsman, with analogies drawn from a variety of occupations. As Solmsen notes, each of these analogies tends to be self-contained; there is no attempt to assemble them within a coherent overarching scheme, as Plato does with the Demiurge. To be more

¹⁰ Todd, “Monism and Immanence,” 144; Hahm, *Origins of Stoic Cosmology*, 73.

¹¹ Solmsen, in “Nature as Craftsman,” cites numerous examples of these similarities: On the distinction between Reason and Necessity, “Nature is in the class of purpose clauses,” Aristotle, *Phys.* 2.8.198b10 ff.

¹² Aristotle, *GA* 5.8.789b6–13.

¹³ Solmsen, “Nature as Craftsman,” 486.

accurate, it is not that Nature works like a craftsman, but that craftsmen imitate Nature (as stated at *Phys.* 2.8.199a15 ff.,¹⁴ and also at *Phys.* 2.8.199a12 ff., trans. Solmsen): “if a house were one of the things made by nature, it would come into being in the same way as it now does by art; and if the products of nature came into being not only by nature, but also by craft, they would come into being in the same way as by nature.” This does not imply that Nature considers the “end” of its productions, as Plato’s Demiurge does; the spider does not do so when it weaves a web, or the swallow when it builds its nest.¹⁵ Solmsen sees a further trace of Aristotle’s Academic heritage in his choice of the term *hylē* to mean matter, although the term literally means “wood,” but this is an obvious choice for the material of a craftsman, particularly if one envisages him as a carpenter fabricating a bed, like the *demiourgos* of *Republic X*.

Aristotle applied this conception of nature to his theory of sexual generation. The father does not supply any material content to his offspring; that is supplied by the mother. The father’s contribution is to shape this material “just as from the carpenter nothing passes into the timber, his material, and no physical part of the art of carpentry is present in the product, what is due to the carpenter is the shape and form” (GA 1.22.730b9–15, trans. Solmsen).

By using this biological theory, the Stoics can present world-generation in terms of sexual intercourse:

Zeus, remembering Aphrodite and genesis, softened himself and having quenched much of his light, changed into fiery air of less intense fire. Then having had intercourse with Hera . . . he ejected the entire seminal fluid of the All. Thus he made the whole substance wet, one seed of the All, he himself running through in it, just as the forming and fashioning (*demiourgoun*) *pneuma* in seminal fluid. At this time, he most resembles the other living things, inasmuch as he would properly be said to consist of soul and body. Then he easily formed and moulded the remaining things, having poured around himself the substance in a smooth, soft and easily-yielding state. (SVF 2.622, trans. Hahm)

So the Stoics drew not just upon Aristotelian biological theory and

¹⁴ As Solmsen points out, at “Nature as Craftsman,” 488, a similar attitude is expressed in Democritus, frag. 68b154 Diels-Kranz.

¹⁵ Solmsen, “Nature as Craftsman,” 488.

the biological theory of the *Timaeus*, but also the Greek cosmogonical tradition, to form their cosmobiology. After all, the idea of equating fire with *logos* can be found in Heraclitus. While they reject a demiurgic model, the imprint of the *Timaeus* can easily be observed. Plato, too, regards the cosmos as a living being. Like Plato, the Stoics also drew a distinction between two cosmic levels. Again, it is problematic to see how one might draw such a divide in a pantheistic system, if God is meant to be immanent in all of matter, although the Stoics are able to explain it through parallelism with the human soul: “(this) mind pervades every part of it, just as the soul does in our bodies. But through some parts it pervades more, through others less. Through some parts it passes as a ‘hold’ or ‘grip,’ functioning as the bones and sinews in our bodies; it pervades other parts as mind, functioning as the command center in our bodies” (SVF 2.634, trans. Lapidge, 1978).

This command center, or *hēgemonikon*, is the Stoic equivalent of the Platonic intellect, where *pneuma*, used as an equivalent of God or *logos* in certain contexts, occurs in such a concentration that it provides the ability to think.¹⁶ It therefore exists in the human soul (SVF 2.458), meaning that for the Stoics, as for Plato, the human soul is a microcosm of the world. The idea of the world being regulated by a *pneuma* is clearly influenced by the notion of the Platonic World-Soul, which is the metaphysical system Plato posits in the *Timaeus*, if one decides to demythologize the Demiurge. Zeno drew a distinction between heavenly fire, where he located God (SVF 1.154), and the sublunar realm, and Chrysippus, too, observed a distinction, even if his pronouncements are a little confusing, locating God both in the *aithēr* (SVF 2.579) and in the purest part of the *aithēr* (SVF 2.644), though naturally both of these statements can be regarded as consistent.

Hence the basic Stoic position is that a *pyr technikon*, a crafting-fire, transforms part of itself into water or matter, and that subsequently acting upon this it produces the four elements, and at the end of the cosmic cycle the universe dissolves back again into a *pyr technikon* that consumes it. It is easy to see that such a position creates numerous problems: (1) How can fire and water be regarded as principles and subsequently as elements? (2) The Stoic concept of *ekpyrosis* resolves a question that Plato had left live in the *Timaeus*—namely, why God should spontaneously decide to generate

¹⁶ Lapidge, “Archai,” 171.

the world—by contextualizing it as an event within a cosmic cycle, but it does not manage to escape from related weaknesses. What does God do in the period between *ekpyrosis* and world-generation? (3) From a Platonist perspective, there is a difficulty with God's immanence in the world and his operation directly upon matter, without mediation.

To be fair, the Stoic system does have the advantage of ensuring that if Providence is immanent in the world, the way the cosmos is ordered is the best sort of arrangement¹⁷ (or if one wants to be pessimistic, it is a matter of indifference, but any other arrangement would equally be a matter of indifference). Plato, admittedly, regards the Demiurge as producing the best possible world, but it is a world where the Demiurge is constrained by factors outside of his control. As Cicero comments in *De natura deorum* (*ND*) in response to the Platonists, it does appear to be beneath God's dignity to have to labor at world-generation.¹⁸ The Demiurge seems to be a particularly unfortunate image, when one of the advantages of positing a Demiurge in the first place is that it can be used to avoid placing the First Principle in parts of the cosmos where it might be regarded as beneath its dignity to go:

For you yourselves are fond of saying that there is nothing that a god cannot accomplish and that without any toil; as man's limbs are effortlessly moved, merely by his mind and will, so, as you say, the god's power can mould and move and alter all things. Nor do you say this as some superstitious fable or old wives' tale, but you give a systematic and scientific account of it: you allege that matter which constitutes and contains all things is in its entirety flexible and subject to change, so that there is nothing that cannot be moulded and transmuted out of it however suddenly, but the moulder and manipulator of this universal substance is divine providence and therefore providence whithersoever it moves, is able to perform whatever it will. (Cicero, *ND* 3.92, trans. Rackham)

The influence of the Stoic *logos* can be clearly seen in Philo's and Plutarch's conceptions of the Demiurge (even if in the case of Plutarch it can be conceived of as a reaction against the Stoics).

Additionally, the Demiurge in the first to third centuries CE is

¹⁷ Long, "Cosmic Craftmanship," 47.

¹⁸ This is illustrated, for example, by the comments of the Epicurean at Cicero, *ND* 1.19.

represented as an intermediate entity, midway between matter and the Forms. In Plato, even though the Demiurge looks to a model, he himself is a paradigm. He fashions the cosmos like himself (*Tim.* 29e), and in the procession of souls in the *Phaedrus* (252d), each soul follows the god who is its paradigm. As Doherty points out, though, there is an ambiguity in Plato concerning whether the paradigm exists in the mind of the artisan or whether it is an external model.¹⁹ For example, at *Rep.* 501b the legislator uses nature and just men as his model, yet at 561e, the democratic man has the models of different sorts of constitutions within himself. The issue seems to become more of a problem under Aristotelian influence. For Aristotle, the paradigm referred to the *logos* immanent in the mind of the artisan at *Physics* (194b24) and *Metaphysics* (1013a27).²⁰ Thus, irrespective of whether the Forms are considered as a separate noetic world or as the thoughts of God (as the Middle Platonists would have it), the Demiurge “must possess them intentionally in order to act efficiently.”²¹ So only once these Forms enter into the mind of the Demiurge can he function as a Demiurge. This aspect of the Demiurge’s activity is illustrated by his contemplation of the Forms, which figures such as Numenius insist upon. This intermediate role is relevant in accounting both for the Demiurge’s original activity of world-generation (if one posits a temporal creation) and for the mechanics of demiurgy (the manner in which the Demiurge engages in the continuous ordering of matter to ensure the functioning of the world).

Philo and the Return of the Demiurge

It is quite clear that demiurgy was exploited even in a modified form, before its return to popularity in the Platonist camp. Demiurgy has a number of important advantages over the Stoic notion of an immanent God, which can be attacked, even if somewhat unfairly, for being incapable of drawing a distinction between God and the cosmos. It also helps to

¹⁹ Doherty, “Location of the Platonic Ideas,” 62.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

²¹ Syrianus, *In Metaphysica Commentaria*, ed. G. Kroll, *Acad. Litt. Reg. Borus* 6.1.1079a4 (Berolini, 1902). Cf. Doherty, “Location of the Platonic Ideas,” 58.

insulate the First Principle from matter—an important consideration for philosophers of a dualist persuasion—although it should be noted that, for the Stoics, no part of the cosmos was beneath God’s dignity. Furthermore, it serves as an explanation of the existence of evil; evil exists not as a result of divine failure, but rather because matter’s recalcitrance prevents the Forms from being fully realized in a material instantiation.

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that our earliest witness to a renewal of the demiurgic model is Philo of Alexandria, who was influenced by both Stoicism and Platonism, though Philo also follows in the steps of Stoicizing Platonists, such as Antiochus of Ascalon and Eudorus of Alexandria. Clearly the overt mythologizing features of a divine craftsman such as the Demiurge would not have appeared as a disadvantage to a devout Jew such as Philo, familiar with a similar account in Genesis. The main objection Philo would have had with the Stoic model is that the lack of differentiation between God and the cosmos might lead to cosmos-worship, a position which he attacks when practiced by the Chaldaeans in *De Abrahamo* (at *Abr.* 69). The Stoic influence on Philo is clearly indicated by his choice of designation for his demiurgic entity, Logos. Like its Stoic namesake, the Logos is immanent and pervades those parts of the cosmos where it would be beneath God’s dignity to go. Another reference to its Stoic origins is Philo’s division of fire into two kinds in *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit* (at *Her.* 136): the *pyr technikon*, and fire as an element.

There is a well-known problem with the concept of a *creatio ex nihilo* from a Greek philosophical perspective, in that it raises the question of what God was doing previously. We cannot think that He was prevented from creating, since nothing is more powerful than God, or that it suddenly occurred to God to create a world, since if His nature is already perfect, it cannot change, because any change would be for the worse. The Stoics resolve this problem partially by placing God in a continuous cycle of world-generation and destruction, although God remains idle for the period between *ekpyrosis* and the new cycle of cosmic creation, as well as vulnerable to criticism on opposing grounds: he seems to be over-industrious. Since the Stoics equate God with his wisdom, as *logos*, and therefore regard him as Providence, the Stoic God not only generates the world but is responsible for its continual management, if we are to regard subsequent events as being in accordance with Providence.

Similarly, Philo envisages the Logos as involved in continuous activity.

The Logos never ceases to cleave matter at *Her.* 235. In portraying the Logos as a saw or sword used by God to divide matter, Philo draws upon a complex mélange of several aspects of his philosophical and religious inheritance: the demiurgic image, Aristotle's understanding of the role of the *logos* in sexual generation, and the Stoic immanent *logos*, as well as the image of the flaming sword of the Cherubim at Gen. 3:24. Philo, like the Stoics, tries to counter the view that certain parts of the cosmos are undignified: "But with God no kind of material is held in honour and therefore he bestowed upon them all the same art and in equal measure. And so in the holy Scriptures we read, 'God saw all things which He had made and behold, they were very good' (*Gen.* 1.3) and things which receive the same praise must be of equal honour in the eyes of the praiser" (*Her.* 159, trans. Colson et al.) Just like the Stoics, Philo claims that many things that appear to be evil are actually beneficial upon closer inspection, like the poisonous animals which are useful for medicine in *De Providentia* (at *Prov.* 60f.). Philo conceives of the Logos as *colla*, or glue, similar to the role which the Stoic *logos* plays as a *hexis*:

And a unit admits neither of addition nor subtraction, being the image of God who is alone in His unity and yet has fullness. Other things are in themselves without coherence and if they be condensed, it is because they are held tight by the divine Word, which is a glue and bond, filling up all things with His being. He who fastens and weaves together each separate thing is in literal truth full of his own self, and needs nothing else at all. (*Her.* 187–188, trans. Colson et al.)

Despite these modifications, Philo uses his adaptation of Platonic demiurgy to explain Genesis. God creates the world using a beautiful model in *De opificio mundi* (at *Opif.* 16), a feature not found in the biblical account, and His use of the Logos to divide matter into opposites that are then held together by the Logos is compared to diaeresis.

Plutarch's Response to the Stoics

An interesting Middle Platonist parallel to Philo is Plutarch, a figure who was open-minded enough to accept that non-Greek traditions could supply sources of universal truth, but whose relationship with the Stoics

was rather more problematic than is the case with Philo. Indeed, he was openly hostile to them. Like Philo, Plutarch was similarly engaged in use of the “scientific” elements of the *Timaeus*, as a means of expounding a religious account, although since Plutarch’s cross-cultural project involved interpreting an Egyptian myth, he could simply jettison those aspects of the story which did not suit his purpose in a way that was not available to Philo.

Plutarch’s opposition to Stoic metaphysics centers on the problems we identified earlier: the relationship which they posit between God and the cosmos confuses God with matter, according to Plutarch. If matter is completely passive and God generates the world effortlessly, this makes him responsible for evil. Like Philo, Plutarch accepts the figure of the Demiurge literally, although he repeatedly rejects the Stoic account of cosmic generation in terms of biology. At *Quaestiones conviviales* 718a, although God is described in Timaeian fashion as the “father and maker” of the universe, He does not produce by means of insemination or mate like a man. Instead, as the second question of *Quaestiones conviviales*, Book VIII, makes clear, God is continuously involved in geometric activity—precisely the activity in which the Demiurge of the *Timaeus* is engaged, because matter is continuously attempting to return to its disordered state (719a). In the *De Iside*, a comparison with the biological system of world-generation is rather inevitable, given Plutarch’s use of Isis to represent the Receptacle of the *Timaeus*—she is, after all, described as a “nurse” (*tithēnē*) and “universal receptacle” (*pandechēs*) at *De Iside* 373e—while her husband Osiris is presented as the Logos and together they have a son, Horus, who at 373a is interpreted as the sensible world.

Despite this, Plutarch favors the technological or demiurgic model here, too. In case we might be tempted to interpret Plutarch’s Isis allegory as a reference to *logos* working inside matter in a manner similar to procreation, Plutarch provides the grotesque detail that when Isis has assembled all the pieces of the dismembered Osiris, his phallus is missing (358b). Furthermore, Plutarch distinguishes between Osiris as a transcendent Logos (and therefore a demiurgic figure) and Hermes, who functions as immanent *logos*. Horus must continually struggle with Typhon, represented by Plutarch as a personification of disorder, which allows Plutarch to explain the origin of evil, since it is impossible that this evil force should completely disappear (367a, 371a). This is Plutarch’s counterpart to the

Necessity of the *Timaeus* (described as an irrational and unstable element in the soul at 371b).

Conclusion

Despite its fall from favor within the Old Academy, the motif of a Demiurge and his role in world-generation survived as the ancestor of the Stoic *logos*, which accounts for the form and designation of Philo's mediating entity. It enjoys a number of advantages over alternative models of world-generation, allowing the First Principle to be presented as transcendent, insulated from matter, and it also accounts for the existence of evil. The Stoics are often inaccurately described as "monists" despite the fact that they posit two principles, and they are unfairly criticized as materialists when, as Lapidge points out, their employment of a *logos* means that they were really vitalists. Such fine distinctions seem to have been lost on their opponents, deliberately or otherwise, and with the dualism prevalent in the first to third centuries CE, it is apparent that the Demiurge offered a philosophical means of accommodating this belief.

There is a certain difficulty inherent in attempting to define Middle Platonist demiurgy, given the influence which this model of world-generation had on other traditions, but Stoicizing Platonism is evident in Philo's account alongside his inheritance from the Jewish tradition, bequeathing Platonism as one of the languages of biblical exegesis to his Christian successors. Despite the criticism that Plutarch levels at the Stoics, mostly stemming from differences in religious beliefs, it is quite clear that much of his own philosophical development is shaped by them, even if only to the extent of the incredible energy he expends in refuting their doctrines (the Lamprias catalogue suggests that he composed nine polemics against them). The aspect of the Demiurge which was most objectionable to the Old Academy, namely, its mythological nature, made it ideally suited to Philo's situation in expounding the account of a Creator God in Genesis in philosophical terms, as it similarly proved to be in Plutarch's demonstration of the truth to be found in Egyptian myth.

KEYWORDS | creation, Demiurge, Logos, Platonism, Stoicism

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