Diogenes Laertius and Platonism

John Dillon


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Diogenes’ *Life of Plato* (the third book of his *Lives*) is indeed, along with his *Life of Epicurus* (the tenth book), one of his most substantial achievements, and is thus a particularly suitable perspective from which to evaluate his “method”. In the case of Plato, apart from the *Life* proper, which covers the first 46 chapters of the whole, and which is not my concern in the present instance, we have, by way of an appendix, an extensive survey, first, of the details of his works and their editing (chapters 47-66), and then of his philosophy (chapters 67-109), both of which contain much information of great value. It is to this final section, or rather to its first segment (chapters 67-80),¹ that I wish to direct my attention on this occasion.²

¹ The second, and rather longer segment (chapters 80-109), I will not be concerned with, though it is not without interest. It consists of a most curious collection of allegedly Platonic “divisions” (διαιρέσεις) of philosophical concepts, attributed, rather implausibly, to Aristotle. Since these also occur in a Christian recension, we may suppose that Diogenes is transcribing them from some (probably Hellenistic) source. He makes no attempt to link this to what precedes it.

² I note in passing his “dedication” of this section of the work to his lady patron, whom he characterizes as “a lover of Plato (φιλοπλάτων), who eagerly seek out that philosopher’s doctrines in preference to all others”. Modern scholarship is rather wary of identifying this lady, but I would regard the Empress Julia Domna – the patroness also of Galen, and of the sophist Philostratus, who dedicated to her his *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* – a as a pretty good bet. I admit that it is odd that Diogenes Laertius only addresses her now, rather than in a formal dedication at the beginning of the work, but that may have been lost. His emphasis in the Prologue on the “barbarian” origins of Greek philosophy may be a bow in her direction, as she was well known to favour Oriental wisdom – and was, of course, herself a Syrian.
Diogenes’ account of Plato’s doctrines (ἀρέσκοντα) needs to be viewed against the background of the tradition of Platonic doxography, going back some hundreds of years before his time, and in some form even into the period of the Old Academy. It seems likely that it was the third head of the Academy, Xenocrates of Chalcedon, in the period 339-314 B.C., who first strove to forge Plato’s philosophical insights into a systematic body of doctrine. He, however, was not concerned to produce anything like a doxographic summary of Plato’s doctrines, such as we find in later times. The nearest approach to that at this early stage we find, in fact, from the pen of Theophrastus of Eresus, Aristotle’s successor as head of the Peripatetic School, who composed a work *Opinions of the Physicists* (Φυσικῶν Δόξαι, in which he included Plato, crediting him with a two-principle system of the same type attributed to him by Diogenes. The next doxographers of any significance date from the first centuries B.C. and A.D. Arius Didymus, the court philosopher of the Emperor Augustus, seems to have composed a comprehensive survey of the opinions of the philosophers. He may personally have been of the Stoic persuasion, but, if so, he does not impose his views very strongly. His work is preserved fairly extensively in the much later Anthology of Johannes Stobaeus (late 4th cent. A.D.), but it also seems to be an important source for *The Handbook of Platonism* (Didaskalikós) of Diogenes’ approximate contemporary Alcinous. In chapter 12, “On the generation of the world”, for example, we can see (from parallels in Stobaeus, and in Eusebius’ *Praeparatio Evangelica*) Alcinous using Arius’ *On the doctrines of Plato* virtually verbatim, and we may

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3 Diogenes lists an impressive body of works from his pen (IV 11-14), covering virtually all aspects of Platonist philosophy.

4 “Plato wishes to make the principles two in number, the one a substrate, in the role of matter, which he calls ‘the all-receiving’ (πανδεχές; cf. *Timaeus* 51A), the other as cause and motive agent (κινοῦν), which he connects with the power of God and of the Good” (Diels, 1879, p. 484, 19ff.).
suspect that such borrowing is much more widespread than we can observe. The work of a later doxographer, Aetius, who seems to date from the late first century A.D., is preserved in a compilation On the physical doctrines of the philosophers falsely attributed to Plutarch. In contrast to Theophrastus, but in agreement with Arius (if we may judge from Alcinous, chapters 8-10), he attributes to Plato a system of three principles, God, Matter and Idea (in the singular).⁵

All these figures attest to a flourishing tradition of doxography on which Diogenes can draw, but it cannot be said that he is particularly close to any of the surviving practitioners of the genre. As we shall see, although he is, like them, very much dependent on the Timaeus for the majority of his exposition, there is much that is peculiar in his presentation of the material. We may now turn to an examination of this.

Diogenes seems broadly to be following the traditional division of philosophy into the three areas of physics, ethics and logic. He begins, unlike his predecessors, with the soul, which is a significant choice, betokening, it seems to me, a recognition of the pivotal role of the soul both in the structure of the universe and of the individual. Complications arise, however, straight away. He declares first that the soul is immortal and that it takes on many bodies in succession, and that it has a numerical first principle (ἀρχὴ ἀριθμητική, 67.2). So far, so good – although the emphasis on the soul’s arithmetical nature is more characteristic of Plato’s immediate successors, Speusippus and Xenocrates, than of Plato himself (even if derivable from his account in the Timaeus, 35A-37C).⁶ The phrase tacked on to this, “while the

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⁵ Diels (1879, p. 287, 17ff). He describes “idea” as “an incorporeal essence in the thoughts and imaginings of God” (οὐσία ἀσώματος ἐν τοῖς νοήμασιν καὶ ταῖς φαντασίαις τοῦ θεοῦ). This concords well with Alcinous (chapter 9); Diogenes (76-7), however, is less than specific as to whether the Ideas are thoughts in God’s mind, though he probably assumes them to be such.

⁶ And indeed from Aristotle’s report in the De Anima I 2, 404b16ff (see below).
first principle of the body is geometrical” (67.3) has aroused suspicion, not unreasonably, because of its apparent irrelevance, but it could be argued that there is at least a loose association of ideas here: the soul, once in the body, gives it a geometrical structure derived from its own mathematical essence.\(^7\)

Worse complications are to follow, however. We are presented next with a definition of the soul: “the Form of the omni-dimensionally extended \((\textit{vital} \text{ spirit})\) \((\iota\delta\epsilon\alpha \tau\omicron \upsilon \varpi \alpha \tau\omicron \tau\omicron \omega\omicron \tau\omicron \omicron \upsigma \mu\alpha\omicron \tau\omicron\omicron, 67.3-4)\). What we have here is, to all appearances, a fine farrago: the core of the definition, without \(\pi\nu\epsilon\vartheta\mu\alpha\omicron\omicron\) tacked onto it, is the definition of the soul propounded by Plato’s successor Speusippus, a formulation which follows logically from Speusippus’ overall metaphysical scheme.\(^8\)

The final \(\pi\nu\epsilon\vartheta\mu\alpha\omicron\omicron\), however, introduces a new concept entirely, specifying that what is thus extended is actually a \(\pi\nu\epsilon\omicron\vartheta\omicron\alpha\). This might seem at first sight a mere witless conflation, but in fact it betokens something more interesting; for this form of the definition actually corresponds to that of the Stoic Posidonius (fr. 141 Edelstein-Kidd). Posidonius himself seems substantially to adopt the mathematicizing definition of Speusippus: “the Form of the omni-dimensionally extended, constructed according to number which comprises harmony”, while also characterizing the soul – as would after all befit a Stoic materialist – as hot \(\pi\nu\epsilon\omicron\vartheta\omicron\alpha\). What we may in fact be seeing here in Diogenes, however, is not so much the direct influence of Posidonius, but rather the Stoicizing tradition of Platonism descending ultimately from Antiochus of Ascalon, which

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7 We may note, perhaps not irrelevantly, that Cicero, in \textit{Academica} I 6, makes Varro, his spokesman for the Platonist position of Antiochus of Ascalon, declare that the union of the “efficient force” and matter involves the introduction of geometry – implicitly in the creation of three-dimensional bodies.

8 Discussed by me at more length in Dillon (2005, p. 40-64).
incorporates certain formulations of Posidonius. Πνεῦμα, after all, is a concept already utilised by Aristotle, after he had largely “deconstructed” the soul in its Platonist sense, to explain how φαντασία and purposive action arise in the soul-body complex – specifically, the “innate spirit” (σύμφυτον πνεῦμα) residing especially in the blood around the heart (On the generation of animals 736b27ff.). Further, Heraclides of Pontus, within the old Academy, held that the soul was composed of αἰθήρ, or pure fire, akin to the substance of the heavenly bodies, a position which would have strengthened Antiochus’ in his Stoicizing stance.

What we would seem in fact to have here in Diogenes is the transmission of a largely Antiochian form of Platonism. We will see how far this impression is confirmed or challenged by what follows. First, however, we appear to be faced with a further confusion, this time between individual soul and World Soul (68-70). At any rate, Diogenes now, drawing heavily on that passage of the Timaeus (36D-37C) where the construction of the World Soul by the Demiurge is described, presents the soul as “enclosing the body from the centre outwards on all sides in a circle, and being compounded from the elements” (συνεστάναι ἐκ τῶν στοιχείων).

9 In fact, Mario Untersteiner (1970) has gone so far as to propose Posidonius as the source behind Diogenes Laertiu’ exposition of Platonic doctrine here. This is not an unreasonable proposal, but in fact Antiochus will fill the bill equally well, without straying outside the Platonist fold.

10 In the Antiochian summary of Platonist philosophy at Cicero (Academica I 26), we may note, the stuff of souls as well as of the stars is declared to be the Aristotelian fifth substance, or αἰθήρ.

11 He goes on to characterize the soul as “selfmoved and tripartite”, appealing, for the former assertion, no doubt to Phaedrus 245C, and, for the latter, rather to the Timaeus 69Cff. than to Republic IV – though the epithets of the three parts, λογιστικόν, θυμοειδές, and ἐπιθυμητικόν, are borrowed from the Republic, being not so named in the Timaeus.
This reference to “the elements” may well give us pause. What can Diogenes mean by this? What seems to be the case is that he (or his source) has overlaid Plato’s statement at *Timaeus* 37A that the soul, through being made up of its components, Sameness, Otherness and Being (the process of composition described back at 35A) – though these are described here as μοῖραι, not στοιχεῖα – is able to discern all the aspects of its environment, with the report of Aristotle, at *De Anima* 404b16ff., that Plato “makes the soul out of the elements” (τὴν ψυχὴν ἐκ τῶν στοιχείων ποιεῖ), on the grounds that like must be known by like. However, the “elements” that Aristotle has in mind here are actually the first four numbers (the Pythagorean τετρακτύς), viewed as the principles of the point and the three dimensions. Some other creative soul, however, – if not Diogenes himself – seems to have interpreted these στοιχεῖα as the basic elements of the physical world, presumably on the grounds that the soul, in order to cognise the physical world, will need to contain within itself its basic elements, at least in some sublimated form.\(^1\)

This may well seem a deeply bizarre development, not even concordant with the orthodox Stoic view of the soul’s composition, but it need not, I think, be dismissed as entirely witless. It seems to me, in fact, that a Stoicizing Platonist in the tradition of Antiochus could well have fastened on the basic concept, enunciated by Aristotle, and arguably adumbrated in the above-mentioned passage of the *Timaeus*, that like must be known by like, and concluded that the four basic numbers identified by Aristotle as presiding over the dimensions must actually comprehend also the *principles* of the four elements. After all, Aristotle adds a little further down (*De Anima* 404b25-6) that “numbers are alleged to be identical with the Forms themselves.

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\(^1\) This is perhaps what Diogenes has in mind below, in 69, when he speaks of the soul being able to cognise reality (τὰ ὄντα) through having the elements harmoniously (κατὰ ἁρμονίαν) disposed within it.
and ultimate principles (ἀρχαί), and they are composed (or derived?) from the elements (εἰσὶ δ’ ἐκ τῶν στοιχείων)”. This is a rather obscure remark of Aristotle’s. Probably he has in mind the first principles of One and the Great-and-Small which he attributes to Plato, but he could be taken to be referring to the four material elements, and I would suggest that this is what our source did take him to be doing.

To return to the text, however: one might say, in Diogenes’ defence, that Plato himself begins, at Timaeus 35A, by describing the composition of the soul in a manner compatible with the individual soul as well as the world soul, and maintains a close parallelism between the two, only later, at 41D, specifying that individual human souls are actually the outcome of a “second mixing” in the demiurgic Mixing-Bowl, resulting in a somewhat inferior product – second and third pressings, as it were. This is a detail which Diogenes chooses to ignore, possibly because the later Stoicizing tradition makes no such distinction between World Soul and individual souls.

At any rate, in the middle of chapter 69, he turns from the description of the soul to the specification of the first principles. Here we find initially a two-principle universe, very much as it is presented in Cicero’s account of Antiochian metaphysics at Academica Posteriora 26ff., with the proviso that in the Ciceronian passage (29) the active principle, while termed “God” and “Intellect”, is also characterized as “the soul of the world” (animus mundi), whereas Diogenes is sticking closer to the Timaeus in distinguishing between these. What we find is the following:

He set forth two principles (ἀρχαί) of all things, God and Matter, and he calls God “Intellect” (νοῦς) and “Cause” (αἴτιον). He held that Matter is formless and unlimited (ἄσχημάστιστος καὶ ἄπειρος), and from it arise composite things (συνκρίματα). (69.5-7)
In this initial statement, no account is taken of what in other doxographical accounts is listed as a third principle, Form, or Idea, representing the Paradigm of the *Timaeus* as the sum-total of the Forms. This turns up a little further on, however, though not presented as a third principle on a level with the other two, as it is in Alcinous’ *Didaskalikos*, for example. The “pattern” (here ὑπόδειγμα, rather than παράδειγμα) in accordance with which the cosmos is created is mentioned in 72.1, and the Forms are introduced later, characterized as “causes and principles” (αἰτίαι καὶ ἀρχαί), in 77.8, but they are implicitly subordinated to God as creator, the contents of whose mind they presumably are assumed to be. Indeed, in one rather odd distortion of Plato’s text (*Timaeus* 33B) in chapter 72, the cosmos is described as spherical “because such is the shape of its maker (ὁ γεννήσας)”, whereas Plato says that the physical world is spherical because its model, “the Essential Living Being” (i.e. the Paradigm), is spherical; but of course Diogenes is incorporating the Paradigm within the Demiurge. We may note, however, that this characterization of God as spherical also accords with Stoicism (cf. Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* I 18; 24), and thus probably also with the views of Antiochus.

The rest of the description of the creation of the world, in chapters 69-77, exhibits little that is worthy of note, being closely dependent upon the account in the *Timaeus*. Diogenes, like Alcinous, accepts the temporal creation of the physical cosmos (69), against the prevailing consensus of Platonists, but in accordance with the views of Plutarch and Atticus in the second century CE: matter “was once in disorderly motion but, inasmuch as God preferred order to disorder (cf. *Timaeus* 30A), was by him brought together into one place”. He then gives an account of the elements, as combinations of the basic

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14 Diogenes does not, however, as does Plutarch in the *De Animae Procreatione in Timaeo*, postulate a pre-cosmic disorderly soul; he sticks with matter.
triangles, making a distinction (71) between the microcosmic levels of these, which are compressed together in the centre to form living and inanimate beings, while on the macrocosmic level they are separated to their own proper spheres, i.e. fire at the outermost region, then air, then water, and finally earth at the centre (cf. *Timaeus* 58A-C).

In one detail, at chapter 75, concerning the functioning of the earth in the cosmos, Diogenes plumps, interestingly, for a minority interpretation of a passage of the *Timaeus* (40B8-C1), where Plato is saying *either* that the earth is “compressed” (ἰλλομένην/εἰλλομένην) around its centre, *or* that it is “winding” (sc. in motion) around it (interpreting variants of the same verb). Aristotle, in *De Caelo* 293b30-2 and 296a26-7, takes it in the latter sense, whereas such authorities as Plutarch (*Quaestiones Platonicae* 8. 1006C), Alcinous (*Didaskalikos* 15), and Proclus (*In Timaeum* III 136, 29-138, 11) take it in the former sense. Diogenes states firmly that the earth, “being at the centre, revolves (κινεῖσθαι) around the centre” (75.2-3). It is interesting, in this connection, that Cicero (*Academica Priora* 123) takes Plato as saying that the earth revolves, though he admits that there is some obscurity about this (*sed paullo obscurius*); so that we may here have once again an Antiochian connection.

Just at the end of the section on physics, however, Diogenes seems to contradict all that he has said previously on the soul by declaring baldly: “He holds God, *like the soul*, to be incorporeal (ἀσώματος); for only thus is he exempt from change and decay” (77.5-6). What are we to make of this, in view of all that has preceded? All I can suggest, if we are to preserve some vestige of consistency in Diogenes’ account, is that one may relate this to a phenomenon that I have noted already in the Jewish Platonist philosopher Philo of Alexandria (Dillon, 1998), namely that Philo is prepared to describe the Logos, in its immanent aspect within the cosmos, as well as the heavenly bodies and the soul, as ἄσώματος, while also recognising that they are composed of “heavenly fire” (the Stoic πῦρ τεχνικόν or νοερόν), since this is
consistent with their changelessness and eternity. I suggest that this role could also have been assumed by the Aristotelian (and Old Academic) concept of αἰθήρ. Such a position would once again bring Diogenes quite close to the presumed position of Antiochus; but, as I say, such an interpretation requires a generous quotient of charity.

Diogenes ends by speaking of “the Ideas” as “causes and principles (αἰτίαι καὶ ἀρχαί) of the world of natural objects (τὰ φύσει συνεστῶτα) being as it is” (77.8-9) – a formulation quite reminiscent of the definition of Forms attributed to Xenocrates: “the paradigmatic cause of whatever is at any time composed according to Nature” (αἰτίαν παραδειγματικὴν τῶν κατὰ φύσιν ἀεὶ συνεστῶτων). One could imagine such a definition being filtered down to Diogenes though Antiochus, but there is unfortunately no evidence to support this.

If we turn now to ethics, which Diogenes treats of, much more briefly, in chapters 78-79, we find that he begins, quite normally, with a definition of the télos, or purpose of life. And this is the prevailing definition in later Platonism, from Eudorus of Alexandria on: “likening oneself to God”, ὁμοίωσις θεῷ, deriving from Theaetetus 176BC – though Diogenes chooses to strengthen this to ἐξομοίωσις (78.2), a compound form that he shares with Philo of Alexandria. However, this produces a complication for my provisional theory, in that it distances Diogenes from Antiochus, for whom the preferred télos is the Stoic one of “life in conformity with Nature” (ὁμολογούμενως τῇ φύσει ζῆν), e.g. Cicero, De Finibus II 34; V 26-7. There is admittedly one interesting passage, De Legibus I 25, where,

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15 In Proclus, In Parmenidem 888, 18-19 Cousin; cf. further on this Dillon (2005, p. 119-20).

16 Forms are mentioned at Cicero Academica I 30, but only as the eternally simple and uniform objects of the intellect, not as causes (though that is what they must be).

17 This is certainly Philo’s preferred formulation, used fully six times, De Opificio Mundi 144; De Decalogo 73, 107; De Specialibus Legibus 4, 188; De Virtutibus Legibus 8, 168. The compound form derives, doubtless, from Plato’s use of it in Timaeus 90d4.
in an Antiochian context, Cicero asserts that “virtue is the same in man as in God, and in no other species apart from that. Yet virtue is nothing else than one’s nature made perfect and brought to a peak (of excellence): it constitutes therefore a likeness of man with God”. This effectively assimilates the Stoic definition to what would become the Platonist one, but the fact remains that Antiochus does appear to have retained the Stoic definition as his preferred formulation. Diogenes would thus seem to be reflecting here a later stage in the development of Platonist doctrine, possibly stemming rather from the first century B.C. Platonist Eudorus of Alexandria.

On the matter of the role of virtue (ἀρετή), however, he is once more in accord with Antiochus. “Virtue”, he begins by declaring, “is sufficient for happiness (αὐτάρκη πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν)” (78.2-3) – the Stoic position; but he immediately qualifies this, as would Antiochus, by specifying that the presence of both bodily and external goods are required (προσδεῖσθαι) as “instruments” (ὄργανα) – though on the other hand the Sage will be no less happy in the absence of these (78.2-6). As Diogenes sets out the doctrine, it comes dangerously near to self-contradiction, but then the Stoic position itself lends itself to that. Antiochus’ solution was to make a distinction between being “happy” and being “supremely happy”. The Sage is always happy, and this happiness cannot be removed from him; but the fullest happiness is only achieved with the aid of at least a sufficiency of the lower goods (and absence of their opposites).

18 A good discussion of this passage, and of the télos in general, is to be found in Tarrant (2007).
19 This is laid out in a passage of Varro’s De Philosophia preserved by Augustine in his City of God (XIX 3) Varro being in philosophy as faithful follower of Antiochus – but is also widely implied in De Finibus V. Alcinous, we may note, is more austere (Didaskalikos 27); he declares that happiness is dependent upon virtue alone.
Of the bodily and external goods, he lists only three of each (rather than four, to match the virtues): in the case of the former, strength, health, and “keen sense-perception” (εὐαισθησία), in the case of the latter, wealth, good birth and reputation. It is notable – but perhaps not surprising – that, just below, in the “divisions” (chapter 80), a more usual list of four bodily goods is presented: beauty, good constitution (εὐεξία), health and strength (more closely reflecting a Platonic list given in Republic IV 444D); while, conversely, we find there a rather less usual list of three “external” goods: friends, the welfare of one’s country, and wealth. The fact that Diogenes makes no attempt to coordinate these two lists, presented within a page of each other, says something about his methods of compilation.

Next, Diogenes specifies (78.6-9) that the Sage will take part in public affairs (πολιτεύεσθαι), will marry, and will not transgress the established laws; he will even legislate (νομοθετήσειν) for his country, if circumstances call for that, and his state is not excessively corrupt. All this adds up to a vote for the “mixed life” (σύμμικτος βίος) as commended by the Antiochian spokesman Piso in De Finibus V (especially V 58), but set out already by Aristotle in Politics VII 3. All these injunctions, however, can be exemplified in Plato. Although Plato himself never took part in the affairs of his city, many people were trained in the Academy to do so in their own cities, such as Erastus and Coriscus of Scepsis, or indeed Dion in Syracuse, and Plato himself is a deeply “political” philosopher. Marriage is commended in particular at Laws VI 772DE. “Not transgressing the laws” is the

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20 This term is actually found in Timaeus 76d2, in connection with the description of the Demiurge’s fabrication of the head. We may note that Philo uses it three times (Legum Allegoriarum III 86; De Sobrietate 61; De Abrahamo 263), always in conjunction with health, and in the last passage as part of a sequence of four bodily goods, along with health, strength and beauty.

21 I would certainly here read ἀπαραίητα, with Casaubon, for the εὐπαραίητα of the manuscripts, which gives only a very forced sense.
moral, in particular, of the *Crito*. And the injunction about being prepared to legislate for one’s state if it not hopelessly corrupt can be derived from Plato’s remarks in the *Republic* VI 488A-497A.

Diogenes passes on now to the doctrine of divine providence – “the gods exercise oversight over human affairs” (ἐφορᾶν τὰ ἀνθρώπινα, 79.1). This is a thoroughly Platonic doctrine, hardly requiring illustration. But one could refer to such passages as *Timaeus* 30B or 44C, where “the providence of the gods” (πρόνοια θεῶν) is adduced; *Philebus* 28DE is also a good statement of the doctrine.

He tacks on to this the assertion of the existence of daemons, for which the major passage would be *Symposium* 202E, but “daemons and heroes” are listed as a matter of course along with gods in such passages as *Cratylus* 397DE or *Republic* III 392A, and are given roles in a number of Plato’s myths, such as those of the *Phaedo* or the *Gorgias*; and such stalwarts of the Old Academy as Xenocrates had developed quite an elaborate theory of daemons (Dillon, 2005, p. 129-31).

Divine providence and daemons are presumably subsumed under ethics because of the moral quality of the interventions of superior beings in our lives. The section on ethics is rounded off, however, by a curious “definition” of “the fine” (τὸ καλόν). Plato, it is declared, was the first to declare the concept (ἔννοια) of τὸ καλόν to be bound up with “the praiseworthy (ἐπαινετόν), the rational (λογικόν), the useful (χρήσιμον), the fitting and the suitable” (79.2-3); and these in turn are all connected with the concept of “what is consistent and in accord with Nature” (79.4), a clear reference to the Stoic definition of the télos, adopted by Antiochus, “living in accordance with Nature” (ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν). This whole sequence of epithets, although it contains nothing contrary to Platonic doctrine, seems to be influenced rather by Stoic syllogistic definitions of virtue – though we may note also, for example, Aristotle’s disquisition in *Nicomachean Ethics* I 12 as to why happiness is praiseworthy (ἐπαινετός).
We pass on, lastly, to the topic of Logic, which Diogenes passes over very briefly: “He also discoursed on the correctness of names (περὶ ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητος), and indeed he was the first to frame a science for rightly asking and answering questions, having employed it himself to excess (κατακόρως) (79.5-7).

This is a cursory reference, first to the practice of etymology, as carried out by Socrates (with a degree of irony that seems generally to have been lost on later generations) in the Cratylus; and then to that of dialectic – which Diogenes, very oddly, characterizes as being employed by Plato “to excess”, a judgement perhaps emanating from a later dogmatic Platonist (such as was Antiochus) impatient with the use of the aporetic aspect of Socratic dialectic to buttress a sceptical Academic position.

At any rate, that is all he cares to say about Logic. The summary of Plato’s philosophy is rounded off (79-80), very curiously, by what might appear to be a return to an ethical topic, but which is really, I think, intended as a comment on Plato’s use of myths, which Diogenes feels to be in need of some defence. What he says is that Plato, in his dialogues, presents justice (δικαιοσύνη) as the law of God, as a stronger inducement to men to behave justly, by showing them what punishments await malefactors after death – and this move of his lays him open, in the view of some, to being “too fond of mythologizing” (μυθικώτερος, 79.7-80.1).22 Again, such criticism could come from either inside or outside the Platonist tradition, but we cannot put our finger on a source. The reference would seem to be primarily to the Republic, and in particular to the Myth of Er in Book X, though of course many other myths, such as those of the Phaedo, the Gorgias, and the Phaedrus, could be taken into consideration.

This, then, is Diogenes’ account of the doctrines of Plato, and, as we have seen, it is in many ways a rather muddled-headed and superficial

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22 Using this adjective in a sense apparently found nowhere else.
production; but yet, as I suggested at the outset, not devoid of interesting aspects. On the whole, it seems to emanate from a strongly Stoicized Platonist source, itself influenced by such a figure as Antiochus of Ascalon (perhaps his Kanoniká, which seems to have concerned epistemology, but also some work or works on ethical themes), but borrowing at least one formulation (the definition of the soul) from the Stoic Posidonius, and departing from Antiochus in its adoption of the later Platonist télos (a feature it may owe to some such figure as Eudorus). The various characterizations of the soul are of particular interest, and I have tried valiantly to argue for their coherence, but I may be being somewhat too optimistic here. A charitable view of Diogenes, however, can, I would submit, on the whole yield more fruitful results than a straightforward hatchet job.

Referências


