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# THE COMMENTARY AS POLEMICAL TOOL

## THE ANONYMOUS COMMENTATOR ON THE *THEAETETUS* AGAINST THE STOICS

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*RÉSUMÉ* : Contrairement à ce qui est pris d'ordinaire pour acquis, le Commentateur Anonyme du Théétète est philosophiquement stimulant, comme le démontre la confrontation avec le Stoïcisme. Le Commentateur Anonyme déploie une stratégie subtile, ne visant pas tant à rejeter des doctrines nettement stoïciennes qu'à les incorporer dans son propre système platonicien, en présupposant que seul ce dernier peut assurer des fondements adéquats aux doctrines. Le Commentateur Anonyme peut de la sorte s'approprier le Stoïcisme et régler de manière définitive l'ancienne querelle entre Stoïcisme et Platonisme. Qui plus est, le Stoïcisme n'est pas une question séparée, mais il fait partie d'une question plus large. Car la comparaison avec le Stoïcisme aide aussi le Commentateur Anonyme à défendre son interprétation unitaire de la tradition académique platonicienne. Commenter un texte n'est pas une pratique neutre, mais bien plutôt un des aspects les plus importants de la philosophie post-hellénistique.

*ABSTRACT* : Contrary to what is usually assumed, the Anonymous Commentator on the Theaetetus is philosophically stimulating, as the confrontation with Stoicism shows. The Anonymous Commentator displays a subtle strategy, aiming not so much to reject distinctively Stoic doctrines as to incorporate them into his own Platonist system, on the assumption that only the latter can secure adequate foundations to the doctrines. The Anonymous Commentator can thus appropriate Stoicism and definitely settle the ancient quarrel between Stoicism and Platonism. Besides, Stoicism is not a separate issue, but is part of a wider issue. For the comparison with Stoicism also helps the Anonymous Commentator to defend his unitary interpretation of the Platonic-Academic tradition. Commenting a text is not a neutral practice but one of the most important aspects of post-Hellenistic philosophy.

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### I.

Over the years, the philosophical importance of ancient commentaries on Plato and Aristotle has become unequivocal, and many efforts have been devoted to show that the commentators often prove capable of many unexpected subtleties. This is also true of the Anonymous Commentator on the *Theaetetus* (henceforth Anon.), but in the opposite direction. Since it is the first extant Platonist commentary, its

historical importance cannot be dismissed. But Anon.'s (relatively) early date<sup>1</sup> has also served scholars to point out his philosophical limits and deficiencies. Admittedly, in many cases it is difficult to deny Anon.'s "stupefying banality"<sup>2</sup> or to dispute that he is "uninspiring".<sup>3</sup> Yet, the situation is more complex, as was made clear by the new commented edition by David Sedley and Guido Bastianini, which encouraged closer scrutiny and has shown that Anon. is not always uninspiring or trivial. The aim of my paper is to further contribute to the rehabilitation of Anon.'s reputation. More precisely, I will concentrate on his confrontation with Stoicism. At first sight an interest for Stoicism may appear out of place in a commentary devoted to Plato's *Theaetetus* — a dialogue written many decades before Zeno entered the philosophical scene. A possible explanation for this anachronism is that the Stoics are randomly hinted at for didactical purposes, as a mean exploited by Anon. to teach some major points without an effective interest for the philosophy of the Porch.<sup>4</sup> In fact, as I will try to show, the confrontation with Stoicism is a substantial issue for Anon.'s Platonism, that will lead to a better assessment of his overall philosophical position.

## II.

1) In the extant part of the commentary, which covers only a small part of the dialogue (until 158a), the Stoics are explicitly mentioned four times.<sup>5</sup> At stake are fundamental doctrines such as the *kathekonta*, the *oikeiosis*, virtues and the "growing argument". Given the continuous rivalry between Stoics and Platonists in the post-Hellenistic centuries, and given Anon.'s Platonist commitment, it is hardly surprising to see that his references to Stoicism are polemical. The most explicit example is the discussion of the *oikeiosis* theory (V 3-VIII 6). The motivation for dealing with this *polythryleton* (VII 21) theory is given by *Theaetetus* 143d1-5, where Socrates says that he cares more about the young men of Athens than about those of Cyrene. Plato's verb for "caring" is *kedesthai*. Since one kind of *oikeiosis* was called *kede-*

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1. On palaeographical grounds the papyrus dates to the II<sup>nd</sup> century AD, and it was assumed that the commentary was composed in this same period. Harold TARRANT ("The Date of Anonymous *In Theaetetus*", *Classical Quarterly*, 33 [1983], p. 161-187), and David SEDLEY (in G. BASTIANINI, D.N. SEDLEY, *Commentarium in Platonis "Theaetetus"*, in *Corpus dei papiri filosofici greci e latini*, III, Firenze, Olschki, 1995, p. 227-562), argued for an earlier date (I<sup>st</sup> century BC), but the hypothesis raised more doubts than approval, see J. OPSOMER, *In Search of the Truth. Academic Tendencies in Middle Platonism*, Brussel, Paleis der Academiën, 1998, p. 34-36; C. BRITAIN, *Philo of Larissa. The Last of the Academic Sceptics*, Oxford, OUP, 2001, p. 249-254; M. BONAZZI, *Un dibattito tra accademici e platonici sull'eredità di Platone. La testimonianza del commentario anonimo al Teeteto*, in *Papiri filosofici IV*, Firenze, Olschki, 2002, p. 41-74.
  2. J. DILLON, *The Middle Platonists*, London, Duckworth, 1996<sup>2</sup>, p. 270.
  3. D. RUNIA, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato*, Leiden, Brill, 1986, p. 56.
  4. Thus, for instance, late Neoplatonist commentators contrast presumably "sceptical arguments", which had almost nothing to share with Pyrrhonians and Academics, but which served as a first introduction to issues such as the principle of non-contradiction or what is knowledge or substance; see M. BONAZZI, *Accademici e Platonici. Il dibattito antico sullo scetticismo di Platone*, Milano, Led, 2003, p. 13-55.
  5. Zeno is also mentioned in a doxography with Plato and Aristotle at XV 16-29, see H. TARRANT, "Zeno on Knowledge or on Geometry? The Evidence of Anon. 'In Theaetetus'", *Phronesis*, 29 (1984), p. 96-99.

*monike* (VII 28), Anon. can introduce the Stoics and interpret Socrates' phrase as an implicit criticism of their doctrine.<sup>6</sup>

More precisely, Anon. rejects *oikeiosis* as an adequate basis for justice (V 24-27).<sup>7</sup> The reason for claiming that *oikeiosis* is the basis of justice would be that there are no degrees of "appropriation"; but this patently goes against evidence (V 34-35) because it is clear to everyone a) that there are different degrees of appropriation (some parts of ourselves being more important than others and we as a whole being more important still, V 36-VI 16) and b) that such different degrees are not mutually compatible, as the counter-example of the shipwrecked people shows, where only one of two sages can be saved (VI 17-VII 14). The critical situation of a shipwreck, by showing that "self-interest conflicts with the equal rights of the other person",<sup>8</sup> demonstrates that human nature is too egoistic to secure justice. Hence any degree or inequality between our own and another's good are sufficient to dissolve the formal perfection of Stoic "justice". Anon. can thus conclude in favour of Plato, who did not extract justice from our faulty nature but established its foundation in the divine with the doctrine of *homoiosis toi theoi*, assimilation to God (VII 15-20).

What is remarkable is not so much the opposition between Platonism and Stoicism as the fact that the *oikeiosis* doctrine, whose distinctively Stoic character is acknowledged, is not completely rejected. Since human nature is intrinsically egoistic, *oikeiosis* alone does not suffice to ground ethics: the rejection of Stoic naturalism, and of what follows from Stoic naturalism, is patent. But this is not to say that the doctrine as such is abolished, for it still maintains a practical value and helps to classify the different kinds of human behaviour (VII 26-VIII 6). In this more circumscribed sense, Anon. further argues, the doctrine had already been introduced by Plato in the dialogues through both Socrates and the Sophists (VII 20-25). Anon.'s strategy is clear: by reducing its importance he can incorporate the Stoic theory into his own Platonist system.

A second point, whose importance will become clear later, is that Anon., in his polemics against the Stoics, uses arguments of the sceptical Academy. The shipwrecked people argument is Carneadean (Cic. *Resp.* III 30; *De off.* III 90) and another Academic argument, with an explicit mention of the *oi ex Academiis*, immediately follows, exploiting against the Stoics what Stoics argued against Epicureans.<sup>9</sup>

2) Sceptical Academic influence on Anon. is further confirmed by the account of the "growing argument" at LXX 18. The reason for introducing the growing argument is Protagoras' "secret doctrine" of universal flux, namely that nothing "is" but everything "changes" (*Tht.* 152). Unfortunately, the papyrus is lacunose and hinders the reconstruction of Anon.'s argument, which has been dismissed as "surprising" by

6. D. SEDLEY, *Commentarium in Platonis "Theaetetus"*, p. 491.

7. See for example *SVF* I 197.

8. J. OPSOMER, *In Search of the Truth*, p. 45.

9. On this argument, see D. SEDLEY, *Commentarium in Platonis "Theaetetus"*, p. 493-494.

David Sedley.<sup>10</sup> The standard version of the *auxanomenos logos*, as introduced by Epicharmus and later adopted by the sceptical Academics, argues that “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”.<sup>11</sup> The Stoics countered the argument by distinguishing between “substance”, i.e. the material substrate, and the “peculiarly qualified”, which is not identical with the substrate (though constituted by it), and which retains identity through the process of growth and diminution.

Anon.’s criticism, as I reconstruct it from the damaged papyrus, disputes the Stoic distinction by claiming that if the “peculiarly qualified” is the principle of identity of a substance and the substance grows, it must necessarily follow that also the “peculiarly qualified” grows. For growth and diminution (of a substance), on the one hand, and the “peculiarly qualified” on the other mutually implicate one another,<sup>12</sup> so that a) either the Stoics accept that the “peculiarly qualified” grows and diminishes or b), they have to deny the existence of growth and diminution. Anon.’s argument is not entirely clear ; however, further confirmation that the main target of the attack is the much disputed “peculiarly qualified” can be found in the next phrases. After noticing that Pythagoras first introduced the argument and that also Plato used a version of it in the *Symposium*, Anon. says :

Those from the Academy too argued for this, although they testified that they believed in the existence of growth. But because the Stoics try to demonstrate this, which is in no need of proof, they [the Academics] showed that if someone wants to prove what is evident, someone else will easily find more persuasive arguments to the contrary (LXX 12-26).

Since, together with the Stoics, both the Academics (who exploited the “growing argument” against the Stoics) and Anon. (who sides with the Academics) agree on the existence of growth, it is clear that the problem is the “peculiarly qualified”. More precisely, as it emerges from the above statement, the problem with Stoicism is their claim to “demonstrate” sensible reality. By introducing the “peculiarly qualified” as principle of identity, the Stoics claim to account for sensible things in themselves. But the result, contrary to their expectations, is that they redouble reality without accounting for it. Stoics redouble reality by positing both substance and the “peculiarly qualified” as subjects of growth and diminution ; and this, far from being an account, is a further complication of a complicated issue, as the Academic counterarguments demonstrate.<sup>13</sup> Eventually we get to the core problem. The major error of the Stoics is

10. D. Sedley (*ibid.*, p. 554), who suggests a different reading of the argument.

11. A.A. LONG, D. SEDLEY, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. I, Cambridge, CUP, 1987, p. 172.

12. On “mutual implication” (*antakolouthia*), see also *infra*, n. 21.

13. An interesting parallel comes from POxy 2008 (= 28C Long-Sedley) : « [...] since the duality which they say belong to each body is differentiated in a way unrecognizable by sense-perception. For if a peculiarly qualified thing like Plato is a body, and Plato’s substance is a body, and there is no apparent difference between these in shape, colour, size and appearance, but both have equal weight and the same outline, by what definition and mark shall we distinguish them and say that now we are apprehending Plato himself, now the substance of Plato ? For if there is some difference, let it be stated and demonstrated. But if <they can> not even say [...] ».

methodological : they want to account for sensible reality in itself — but sensible reality, taken in itself, does not require any scientific account (*apodeixis*).<sup>14</sup> Regrettably Anon. is not so eloquent as one may desire, and the risk is to “overinterpretate” his remarks. But the reference to Plato’s *Symposium* (the reference clearly being to 207b-208b) makes clear that the sensible world (and the “growing argument”) can be explained only when backed on the adequate metaphysical context. Even though it is difficult to reconstruct exactly Anon.’s argument, it is clear that his main target is the Stoic materialistic and immanentist perspective. Unlike the *oikeiosis* testimony, Anon. seems to reject *in toto* the Stoic doctrine of the “peculiarly qualified”.<sup>15</sup> But in both cases the confrontation with the Stoics relies on the same anti-materialistic assumption. More striking is Anon.’s attitude towards Hellenistic Academics, on which he depends for the “growing argument”. Anon. introduces Academic arguments as dialectical and *ad hominem* arguments, to the effect that they “look much more weakly sceptical”.<sup>16</sup> As I will try to show this is not accidental.

3) David Sedley has demonstrated that the short reference to *kathekonta*, “proper functions”, at IV 17-27, is part of a wider dispute among Stoics and Platonists (including Old Academics such as Crantor and Polemo) on the role of practical ethics.<sup>17</sup> Whereas Stoics systematically classified practical moral rules and developed an all-inclusive theory on “proper functions”, Platonists claimed that rules of conduct were best conveyed the way Plato conveyed them, by practical example.<sup>18</sup> The portrayal of proper conduct we read in the dialogues are didactically far more effective than rule books and this explains why Platonists such as Anon., Proclus or Simplicius were not worried with detailed comments : “The proem includes a sketch of the appropriate action which the Stoics call *kathekonta*. Things of this kind are found most clearly in the Socratics, and do not need commentary” (IV 17-27 ; trans. Sedley).<sup>19</sup> Anon. does avowedly use *kathekon* as a Stoic technical term. But while acknowledging borrowing it from the Stoics, he claims that Plato’s philosophy provides a better explanation of the issue at stake. Again, the result is not the refusal but the appropriation of a distinctively Stoic doctrine and its marginalization within a wider context.

14. See also II 52-III 15 with M. BONAZZI, *Academici e Platonici*, p. 201-202.

15. Regrettably, due to lack of evidence, it is impossible to see whether Anon., after rejecting the *Stoic* theory of the “peculiarly qualified”, could also propose a *Platonist* interpretation of the same doctrine and on what ground. It is interesting, however, to note that later Platonists such as Porphyry employed the “peculiarly qualified”, cf. R. CHIARADONNA, “La teoria dell’individuo di Porfirio e l’*idios poion* stoico”, *Elenchos*, 21 (2000), p. 303-331.

16. A.A. LONG, D. SEDLEY, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. II, p. 170.

17. D. SEDLEY, “The Stoic-Platonist Debate on *Kathekonta*”, in K. IERODIAKONOU, ed., *Topics in Stoic Philosophy*, Oxford, OUP, 1999, p. 128-152.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

19. Cf. also PROCLUS, *In Parm.* 665, 37-666, 21 ; *In Tim.* I, 15, 23-16, 20 ; I, 18, 29-19, 9 ; I, 24, 12-17 ; *Simpl. In Epict. Encheiridion* 83, 4-14. It is not entirely clear what “Socratics” means : Anon. probably wants to state that an adequate account of “proper actions” is to be found not only in Plato’s Socratic *logoi* but also in those of others, like Xenophon or Aeschines ; see D. SEDLEY, *Commentarium in Platonis “Theaetetus”*, p. 490 and, for a much debated parallel, Cic. *De or.* III 67.

4) The fourth passage has not yet, to my knowledge, attracted the attention it deserves.<sup>20</sup> Not surprisingly, the strategy followed by Anon. does not differ from what we have so far outlined. But as I will try to show, some points need to be taken into account for a better assessment of Anon.'s philosophy. At the beginning of the dialogue Socrates and Theodorus talk about human characters and natural gifts (143d-144c). This leads Anon. to a short digression on virtues and "good natural dispositions" (*euphuiai* ; XI 12-40, commenting on 144b1-3). What is at issue is the mutual implication (*antakolouthia*) of good natural dispositions and corresponding virtues. The problem of the mutual implication of virtues and the account of "good natural dispositions" was first formalized by Stoics.<sup>21</sup> In the commentary, however, the employment of Stoic terms and notions does not involve any subordination to their doctrine. According to Anon., it is not necessary that good natural dispositions mutually imply one another (IX 37-X 3 ; XI 16-20), even though this may sometimes happen, as the very case of Theaetetus shows (X 10-12). Anon.'s claim rests on his part-based psychology : since natural dispositions relate to different parts of the human soul — some to the rational part others to the irrational part — it may be the case that a contrast emerges, perfectly mutual implication belonging only to perfectly developed virtues (IX 32-X 3). The psychological model also explains why the Stoics did not confront this problem : their psychological monism implies that there is only one good natural disposition (XI 22-31).<sup>22</sup> Such assumption, Anon. further argues, legitimates the inference that for the Stoics there is one virtue only. For, as Aristo claimed, if there is one *euphuia* only, it follows that there is one virtue only (XI 31-40). According to Anon., then, the problem of the mutual implication of *euphuiai* also helps to clarify the Stoic position on the mutual implication of virtues.

Anon.'s claims are paradoxical. For the Stoics accepted that there was only one *euphuia* of the soul, but argued for a multiplicity of virtues (namely the four cardinal virtues : prudence, moderation, courage, justice) by asserting that virtues share the same principles each in its primary area of expertise.<sup>23</sup> Therefore the exploitation of Aristo's view as explanation of the "Stoic" position does not correctly account for Zeno and Chrysippus and other Stoics. As a matter of fact, this is confirmed by the last sentence (XI 38-40). As David Sedley noticed (p. 498), the phrase "as concede those to whom the argument is directed" occurs also at VI 38-40 in the context of the (sceptic) Academic struggle against the Stoics. On the basis of this parallel it is a fair assumption that the last sentence comes from Anon. himself and must not be attrib-

20. An interesting exception is H. TARRANT, *Recollecting Plato's Meno*, London, Duckworth, 2005, p. 158-161.

21. On *antakolouthia*, see *SVF* III 275, 295-302 with J. WHITTAKER, *Alcinoos. Enseignement des doctrines de Platon*, introduction, texte établi et commenté par J.W. et traduit par P. Louis, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1990, p. 143, n. 479. In the Platonic *corpus euphuia* occurs only in *Def.* 412e4, 413d6, 8 ; the term was common in Aristotle (*EN* 1114b12) and the Peripatetic tradition (*Stob.* II, p. 131, 17 ; *Alex. Aphr. Quaest.* 158, 14-18 ; *Asp.* 166, 22). For the Stoics, cf. *SVF* III 366 and A.M. IOPPOLO, *Aristone di Chio e lo stoicismo antico*, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 1980, p. 120-123.

22. See also O. LUSCHNAT, "Das Problem des ethischen Fortschritts in der alten Stoa", *Philologus*, 102 (1958), p. 200.

23. See e.g. A.A. LONG, D. SEDLEY, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. I, p. 383-384.

uted to Aristo directly. And this shows that Anon. moves from an apparently impartial report (XI 22-31) to a highly partisan argument (XI 31-40).

The argument of the incompatibility between psychological monism and the plurality of virtues does not occur only in Anon. Characteristically Plutarch too follows a similar line of attack.<sup>24</sup> Whereas Aristo was wrong but consistent (wrong in positing one single psychic faculty, but consistent in deriving one single virtue from this faculty), Chrysippus was both wrong and inconsistent (wrong in positing one single psychic faculty, and inconsistent in deriving many virtues from this single faculty). As so often in his anti-Stoic treatises, Plutarch is probably adopting, here also, an argument stemming from the Hellenistic Academy. Indeed, Academics regularly took advantage of Aristo's radical rigorism in their struggle against the Stoics.<sup>25</sup> Like Plutarch, Anon. was probably also following the Hellenistic Academics. But it is no less remarkable that Galen credits Posidonius with a similar argument<sup>26</sup>, so that one may speculate that Anon. was depending on a Stoic source — a perplexing but intriguing hypothesis. In recent years, however, Galen's reliability has been doubted, and it is difficult to determine how Posidonian is the disapproval of the psychological monism that grounds the argument.<sup>27</sup> Here as elsewhere, Galen applauds Posidonius for repudiating a cardinal Stoic doctrine; yet it cannot be excluded that Posidonius was simply proposing a new (but not heterodox) interpretation of Chrysippus. Be that as it may, assessing exactly the identity of Anon.'s source is not what really matters. More important for our knowledge of Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic philosophy is to realize how the same (or similar) set of arguments circulated among different philosophers and schools, to be exploited in different ways. In this context Anon. is a good example of the polemical tone that distinguishes much philosophical speculation of the time. The practice of the commentary is far from being neutral.

A further detail deserves attention. Anon. opposes to the Stoics not Plato alone, as we might expect from his Platonist commitment, but the "ancients" (XI 13). Clearly it is Plato and Aristotle who are referred to.<sup>28</sup> This is not without importance for the reconstruction of Anon.'s historical views. The association between Plato and Aristotle implies a) that the latter was part of the *Platonica familia* and b) that his doctrines could therefore be legitimately exploited in a Platonic context. In the same spirit, at LXVIII 7-15, Anon. extracts some Aristotelian categories from *Theaetetus* 152.<sup>29</sup>

24. Plut. *De virt. mor.* 440e-441d.

25. In ethics, see for example Cic. *De fin.* IV 40, 43; *Luc.* 130.

26. Gal. *De plac.* VII 589 = fr. Posid. 182 Kidd. See Kidd's comments *ad loc.*

27. See J. COOPER, "Posidonius on Emotions", in J. COOPER, *Reason and Emotions. Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 449-484; C. GILL, "Did Galen understand Platonic and Stoic thinking on Emotions?", in J. SIHVOLA, T. ENGBERG-PEDERSEN, ed., *The Emotions in Hellenistic Philosophy*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1998, p. 113-148; T. TIELEMAN, *Chrysippus' On Affections. Reconstruction and Interpretation*, Leiden, Brill, 2003, p. 198-287.

28. See D. SEDLEY, *Commentarium in Platonis "Theaetetus"*, p. 497; P. MORAUX, *Der Aristotelismus bei den Griechen*, vol. II, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1984, p. 493.

29. Among the "Ancients", I would suggest that we can enlist together with Plato and Aristotle Pythagoras and his adepts, who were equally credited with Platonic-Aristotelian psychology and with the doctrine of the mutual implication of virtues. See ps.-Archytas, *De educ.*, p. 40, 19-20 (Thesleff). B. CENTRONE, *Pseu-*

We can then conclude that this fourth testimony exhibits the same strategy against the Stoics. Anon. does not explicitly reject the Stoic theory of the mutual implication of virtues ; but rather adapts it to his different Platonic system, on the assumption that only his system is capable of securing adequate foundations to the doctrine. In sum, the *antakolouthia* doctrine is correct, but requires the Platonically part-based psychology to make sense. Conversely Stoic monism is fatally condemned to one virtue thesis, regardless of what the Stoics claim.

### III.

In sum, Anon.'s attitude towards Stoicism is more subtle than one may expect. Clearly and not surprisingly, the Stoics feature as Anon.'s main adversaries, to the effect that some cardinal doctrines such as the "peculiarly qualified" appear to be rejected. But this antagonism does not always conclude in an open opposition. For open opposition leaves hanging the issue of who is right between the two rivals. And this is a conclusion that the *engagé* Anon. definitely could not accept — and did not accept by showing that what is good in Stoicism can make sense only within a Platonist background. Anon. can thus settle the dispute by appropriating (and subordinating) some of the Stoic cardinal tenets. Controversial as they are, Anon.'s arguments then reveal a definite strategy, whose main target is to show that there can be one coherent philosophical system only, which is Platonism. And if one considers that Stoicism was traditionally praised for the coherence of its system, one can realize how ambitious Anon.'s challenge was.

In addition, comparing the texts also shows that the confrontation with Stoicism is not a separate issue, but is rather part of a wider problem. A major concern of Anon. is the definition of his Platonist identity, the establishing of what Platonism amounts to, and in this case Stoics prove to be very useful. Facing the issue of accounting for such a complex tradition, composed by different tendencies, dogmatic as much as aporetic, Anon. takes a strikingly radical position by claiming that there is one single tradition stemming from Plato (LIV 38-LV 13). But what about Hellenistic Academics such as Arcesilaos, Carneades and Philo of Larissa ? Their confrontation with the Stoics provides the solution. For, as we have seen in particular apropos of the "growing argument", by stressing the importance of the dispute with the Stoics Anon. can argue in favour of a dialectical interpretation of the Hellenistic Academics, who are presented as "Platonists *in terra infidelium*". In their struggle Academics presuppose Plato's philosophy, but, like Socrates in the *Theaetetus*, their primary target is to confute the doctrines of their adversaries and not to state their Platonist creed. And since their confrontation with Stoic materialism is compatible with the cardinal tenets of Platonism, they can be accepted as a legitimate part of the tradition stemming from Plato.

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*dopythagorica ethica. I trattati morali di Archita, Metopo, Teage, Eurifamo*, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 1990, p. 29, 186.

Anon.'s anti-Stoic arguments show that commenting a text is not a neutral practice and further confirms that in the philosophical debates of his time, Anon. took a definite stance, which I propose to call "hard unitarianism". Anon. not only assumes that Plato's works constitute a unified and consistent body of doctrine, but he also claims that Plato and Platonism coincide and that this consistent body of doctrine endured over the centuries. Moreover, as if this was not enough, he further maintains that Plato's philosophy is the only true philosophy and, as a result, can appropriate the doctrines of other schools. To be sure, Anon.'s claims are far from being unquestionable, and they have indeed been questioned several times. But the least we can conclude is that his commentary is not as arid and uninspiring as has been suggested ; it is rather an interesting example of philosophical practice in the Early Imperial Age.<sup>30</sup>

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30. My thanks to Harold Tarrant and Andrea Falcon for many helpful suggestions.