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Stoic Influences on Plotinus' Theodicy?

1.

The aim of this paper, as the interrogative form of its title indicates, is to critically examine the widespread opinion that in constructing his theodicy, Plotinus utilized quite a few building blocks of Stoic origin. Since his philosophical encounters and engagements with the Stoics in the *Enneads* are both obvious and well-recorded,¹ their influence on Plotinus' theodicy has also been taken as significant and unquestionable.² It should be noted, however, that I do not harbour the ambition to provide here an exposition and evaluation of either the Stoic or the Plotinian theodicy – such a task is clearly beyond the scope of a single paper. Instead, I shall limit my efforts to an attempt to isolate the Stoic answers to the problem of evil, try to see how they reflect on and to what degree they affect Plotinus' theodicy, and investigate whether they have a prior source, i.e. whether they can be called Stoic in the full sense of the word. My hope is to demonstrate that their influence on Plotinus' theodicy is mostly indirect, on account of the fact that the key Stoic theodicean strategies are borrowings or elaborations of the Platonic ones.

Unlike Plotinus', the Stoic attitude towards theodicy must have been ambivalent; on the one hand, it can be taken as almost redundant on account of Stoic determinism, identification of fate and providence, and their theory of indifferents (*adiaphora*),³ while on the other, the necessity to present a theodicy may seem inherent to the Stoic system due to the fact that theology, as a division of physics, played an important role already for the early Stoics.⁴ Now, the Stoic Deity is understood to be a “living being, immortal, rational, perfect or intelligent in happiness, admitting nothing evil [into him], taking providential care of the world and all that therein is”.⁵ These properties are so intrinsic to and inseparable from God, that they are included in the very preconception of the divine as formed in men: “therefore, we apprehend God as a living being, blessed and immortal, and beneficent towards men”.⁶ Thus, with these declarations of God's providential care and beneficence, the Stoics actually commit themselves to a notion of an actively benevolent Deity, and consequently

1 Karamanolis 2006, 216.

2 Armstrong 1967, 38; Bréhier 1924; Graeser 1972, xiii; Merlan 1967, 130.

3 DL VII. 104–107.

4 For an account of Stoic theology and further references, see Algra 2003, 153.

5 DL VII. 147 (tr. Hicks 1925).

6 *St. Rep.* 1051F (unless otherwise noted, the translations from Greek are mine).

to the task of defending and justifying his goodness in the face of omnipresent suffering and moral decadence.

2.

The aforementioned internal tension notwithstanding, the Stoics set out on a task of composing theodicy, which is in fact rather developed and detailed. Despite the unrecoverable loss of the early Stoics' writings, it can be reconstructed by turning to the preserved fragments of Cleanthes and Chrysippus, as well as to some works of the Stoics of the Imperial Period.

Plutarch noted in his *De Stoicorum Repugnantiis*⁷ that the existence of badness creates an incongruity within the Stoic monistic natural philosophy, according to which the entire cosmos is pervaded by the Divine and all of the events that take place within its framework are directed at the good of the whole and unfold in accordance with rational nature and providence. He even declared that the statements extolling the all-encompassing and beneficent providence stand in contradiction to the observable promulgation of vices and sufferings that infect the world of men and animals. How is it possible, asks Plutarch, for Chrysippus to witness a profusion of maladies, disasters, murders, rapes, and countless other evils daily, and nevertheless state that "everything comes to be in conformity with the universal nature and its reason, in uninterrupted succession",⁸ as well as: "for none of the particulars, not even the smallest one, have come about otherwise than in conformity with the universal nature and in conformity with its law"?⁹ Do not these proclamations come into a headlong clash with the innumerable instances of events and properties so obviously contrary to justice and providential care? In other words, if universal nature, i.e. God, brings itself or its parts into states and motions which include inauspicious, unwanted and bad things, then it is not fully rational and beneficent, while the so-called providence is nothing but blind fate.

The Stoics themselves might have not acknowledged similar accusations as a threat to their system but were nevertheless obliged to respond to the plaintiffs. They, at least starting with Cleanthes and Chrysippus, were trying to devise means to exculpate their God from responsibility for evil, and to simultaneously harmonize the latter's presence with providence's workings. Such efforts put together give rise to Stoic theodicy, which is comprised of at least ten different strategies.

a) *Sub specie dei*, not only the seemingly senseless suffering, but even the actions of vile and vicious people have their proper place in the overall scheme, and they, in

⁷ *St. Rep.* 1048F.

⁸ *St. Rep.* 1050C–D = *SVF* II. 937. 22–28.

⁹ *St. Rep.* 1050A = *SVF* II. 937. 10–12.

some way unknown to us, contribute to the goodness of the whole. Cleanthes, in his celebrated *Hymn to Zeus*, writes:

Nay, but thou knowest to make crooked straight.
Chaos to thee is order; in thine eyes
The unloved is lovely, who did'st harmonize
Things evil with things good, that there should be
One Word through all things everlastingly.¹⁰

God, as the Reason pervading the entire cosmos, arranges all parts in such a way as to guarantee the supreme good of the whole. Evil cannot be its feature: *qua* something bad it is incongruent with global goodness. However, juxtaposed to the whole – in a form of a part gone bad – evil itself, paradoxically, turns into something good. Chrysippus provides the famous analogy of a comedy, where even jokes which may be basic or vulgar somehow contribute to its overall charm and beauty.¹¹ In a similar way, God's absolute wisdom and beneficence ennobles and harmonizes with the all-embracing good even such seemingly obvious evils as undeserved suffering and immoral behavior are.

b) A significant number of illnesses, injuries and other kinds of trouble that human beings suffer actually result from the abuse of divine benevolence. After all, numerous beneficiaries insolently waste away the inheritances they have received, but it would be absurd to blame this on the alleged deficiency of love and attention which should have been shown to them by their parents. In the same vein, God cannot be considered responsible for the damages that human beings inflict upon themselves and upon each other. It is true that everything that happens in heaven or on earth is part of God's plan; however, there is an exception: "save what the sinner's works infatuate", says Cleanthes.¹²

This is obviously an attempt to attach the blame for the evils done and experienced to the moral agent, which has been a staple strategy of theodicians up to the present day. It remains, however, highly controversial within the context of Stoic philosophy, on account of the apparent incongruence of their hard determinism on the one hand, and moral responsibility on the other.¹³

10 Cleanthes, *Hymn to Zeus* 18–21 (tr. Adam 1911, 107).

11 See Plutarch's *Comm. Not.* 1065D = *SVF* II. 1181. Unlike Plutarch, Marcus Aurelius (*Med.* VI. 42.) mentions Chrysippus' comedy analogy approvingly.

12 Cleanthes, *Hymn to Zeus*, 17 (tr. Adam 1911, 105): πλὴν ὅποσα ῥέζουσι κακοὶ σφετέραισιν ἀνοίαις. The same idea of the moral agent's personal responsibility is expressed in lines 21–25.

13 Of course, what seems incompatible and irreconcilable to us need not have seemed as such to the Stoics. The *locus classicus* on Stoic determinism and freedom remains (Bobzien 1998). See also: Brennan 2005, 235–305; D. Frede 2003; Salles 2005.

c) Badness must necessarily be present in the world, since it is connected with the good as a kind of “Heraclitean opposite”. According to the testimony in Gellius’ *Noctes Atticae*, Chrysippus stated explicitly that only the foolish could imagine good without evil; for, since good things are opposites of bad ones, it is necessary that they both subsist in a state of mutual interdependence. Chrysippus believed that goodness and badness are inseparably connected, both in the logico-epistemological and in the ontological sense. With regard to the former, he claims that the notions of justice, moderation, etc., cannot be understood without their correlative notions, i.e. their opposites (*quo enim pacto iustitiae sensus esse posset, nisi essent iniuriae?*).¹⁴

As for the latter, he falls back on Plato’s short “Aesopian myth” of the *Phaedo* 60a–c, where pain and pleasure are depicted as Siamese twins joined at the crowns of their heads, so that when a person obtains one of them, the other inevitably follows. Chrysippus concludes that good and evil cannot exist apart from each other: if one is eliminated, the other will be eliminated as well (*situleris unum, abstuleris utrumque*).¹⁵ Therefore, Chrysippus’ philosophical opponents should not denounce the Stoic God on account of the existence of evil; for disposing of them would mean disposing of good things as well.

d) Many of the so-called evils are but unavoidable consequences of the purposeful acts aimed at some higher good. This approach is observable in Chrysippus’ answer to the question “do even human diseases arise according to nature?”, again preserved by Gellius.¹⁶ Chrysippus claims that the primary intention of God was certainly not to create men as miserable animals susceptible to all kinds of maladies and injuries. However, while God was producing his magnificent work, certain unwanted properties came about together with the final product. These were also created in accordance with nature, but as certain necessary by-products, which Chrysippus denominates as *kata parakoluthēsīn* (incidental, collateral concomitances). As an example of such phenomenon, he brings up the structure of the human skull, which is built out of thin and fragile bones, thus remaining liable to numerous injuries. However, such composition is indispensable for a creature meant to lead a life primarily characterized by the rule of reason; therefore, the good generated by its sensitivity greatly outweighs the evils, that is, the likelihood that any individual possessing such a skull may suffer pains, or even an untimely death.

14 SVF II. 1169. 38–39.

15 SVF II. 1164. 30–45, as well as SVF II. 1170. 26–28. Plutarch reports that Chrysippus goes so far as to say that even vice is not without use to the whole, because without it the good would not exist either (*Comm. Not.* 1065A–B).

16 SVF II. 1170. 7–25.

And if this does not sound Platonic enough, Plutarch also reports Chrysippus to have explicitly evoked the spirit of the *Timaeus* by explaining inauspiciousness in the world by the claim that “the admixture of necessity is also significant.”¹⁷

e) A great many things imposing themselves on the unlearned as evils are in fact blessings in disguise. Bedbugs are useful because they wake us up, mice encourage us not to be untidy and lazy,¹⁸ while leopards, bears and lions make it possible for us to receive training in courage.¹⁹ What is more, in the sea, on land and in the air, there are many animal species and phenomena which – even if they do not leave such impression – are actually meant to benefit humanity. The only problem is that we have not as of yet discovered what their utility consists in; but with the passing of time and development of science, their value will be determined.²⁰ Finally, not only the seemingly trouble-giving living entities have their role in the improvement of men's moral and physical status, but even dreadful phenomena like wars ultimately have some useful purpose – they reduce the surplus population and thus make cities more pleasant places to live in.²¹

f) Possibly confronted with the apparently undeserved sufferings of the honest and virtuous, Chrysippus allowed for some instances of negligence to have sneaked within the all-encompassing plan of providence.²² Perhaps a number of inexplicable states of affairs are due to certain oversights (*amelumenōn tinōn*), just like in every large household, a little flour or grain falls away and is wasted, even though the household as a whole is well managed (*tōn holōn eu oikonomumenōn*); or even:

g) Could those oversights actually be ascribable to the presence of evil spirits (*daimonia phaula*), who preside over such minute matters?²³ The last two suggestions, together with the proposal that God actually may not know everything,²⁴ significantly diverge from the overall spirit of Stoic physics and theology.

h) According to yet another Stoic strategy, the evils that humans experience are actually kind interventions of the Divinity, through which he puts them in order and trains them in virtue. Such imposition of disciplinary measures has a twofold manifestation. The first one is revealed through the sufferings of the wrongdoers, which are taken to be instances of just penalty. Chrysippus notes that by punishing the wicked, God cautions the others what might be their share if they fail to tread the path

17 *St. Rep.* 1051C = *SVF* II. 1078. 33: πολὺ καὶ τὸ τῆς ἀνάγκης μεμίχθαι. See also Seneca's *Prov.* V. 9: “*Non potest artifex mutare materiam.*” (The craftsmen cannot alter his material).

18 *St. Rep.* 1044D = *SVF* II. 1163. 25–28.

19 *SVF* II. 1152. 26–30.

20 *SVF* II. 1172. 43–45. This testimony comes from Lactantius' *De Ira Dei*, and is presented as an example of a very inapt answer offered by the Stoics during their polemics with the Academicians.

21 *St. Rep.* 1049B.

22 *St. Rep.* 1051C = *SVF* II. 1178. 29–31.

23 *St. Rep.* 1051C = *SVF* II. 1178. 29–31.

24 See *SVF* II. 1183. 18f.

of rectitude.²⁵ The second becomes most conspicuous in Seneca's *De Providentia*. He goes a few steps further than Chrysippus and claims that the hardships and calamities *in themselves* have a beneficial effect when experienced by people of a worthy character. The virtuous are actually able to perceive their misfortunes as evidence of God's concern and love. For, just as caring parents raise their children by often employing harsh measures, so does God prevent the good man from wallowing in luxuries, and instead tests him, hardens him, breeds him for his own service.²⁶ Virtuous men actually welcome the so-called calamities, because they provide them with the opportunity to put their virtuous characters to trial, but also rescue them from idleness.²⁷ Thus, by embracing a viewpoint diametrically opposed to the common one, the Stoic philosopher is in a position to embrace all trouble as divine blessings and expressions of grace and affection.²⁸

i) Furthermore, it is actually not right to say that anything bad happens to good men.²⁹ Although this idea had been formulated already by Chrysippus,³⁰ it gained great prominence with the theodicies of the late Stoics.³¹ Thus, we hear that the virtuous remain happy, despite the severity of the surrounding external circumstances, knowing them to be utterly irrelevant.³² Poverty does not bother such persons,³³ diseases come and go and are inseparably bound to the body, and even death is not a matter of grave concern: were it so, a wise man like Socrates would have found it disturbing, which he did not.³⁴

j) Lastly, the solution to the problem of evil most congruent with Stoic ethics and theology was given by Epictetus. As a matter of fact, the goal of this strategy is not to explain evil or solve the problem, but to dissolve it, i.e. to demonstrate that, in every relevant sense, evil is non-existent. This position is visible throughout his *Enchiridion*, especially in sections 1–33, as well as in the *Discourses*.³⁵ Epictetus there keeps on trying to impress upon his readers the understanding that nothing external matters to them;

25 *St. Rep.* 1040C = *SVF* II. 1175. Besides, the suffering of the good and fearless also sometimes has a didactic function – it teaches those who aspire to virtue how to bear their own misfortunes with dignity. See Seneca *Prov.* VI. 3.

26 *Prov.* I. 6: *Bonum virum in deliciis non habet, experitur, indurat, sibi illum parat*. In addition, see especially II. 1–6, III, IV.

27 *Prov.* III. 1–4.

28 For more information on this and other theodicean strategies employed by Seneca, see Sellars 2018.

29 This solution seems quite close to the previous one, but also to the following. And, although they indeed share a common denominator – which is the triviality of suffering – I nevertheless decided to distinguish them on the following grounds: the solution h) seems to allow for the existence of evils (at least as conventions), but attributes positive value to them; i) denies that any evil can be associated with good men, while j) denies the reality of evil altogether.

30 *St. Rep.* 1038B.

31 As Seneca puts it in *Prov.* II. 1: “It is impossible that any evil can befall a good man.” (*Nihil accidere bono viro mali potest*). See also VI. 1, and Epictetus *Diss.* III. 26, 28.

32 Cicero *Fin.* III. 42.

33 *Diss.* III. 17. 8. 1–9.

34 *Ench.* V.

35 E.g. *Diss.* I. 28, II. 16, III. 17, 24, 26.

in other words, such things that are not up to them are in no way related to their person, and are, therefore, neither good nor bad.³⁶ By managing to discern what is up to them and what is not, and by succeeding to turn a blind eye to the latter, people can practically become able to transcend the so-called evils. “The other will not hurt you, unless you want that; then you will become hurtable, when you accept to be hurt.”³⁷ And this principle is applicable even to horrendous evils – like sacking and burning of cities, rape, and vicious murders of innocents.³⁸ The whole sense of the event of losing one’s spouse and children to the sword of a bad man, can and should be encapsulated in a simple sentence – “I gave them back.”³⁹ Thus, it turns out that the only bad thing is ignorance. Human beings are misled into blaming providence, or, significantly, men, for their own losses and sufferings.⁴⁰ This blame game, however, is unjustified and unsubstantial, and such understanding, aided by the act of forming the correct notion regarding the gods as supremely just and caring rulers, will help them to “never blame the gods nor accuse them of being neglectful.”⁴¹

These are the main strategies applied by the Stoics in their defense of God’s benevolence. They have been here, somewhat artificially, divided into ten types, although some of them are rather intertwined, and despite the fact that the Stoics themselves did not know such a taxonomy. This was done for reasons of clarity of exposition and precision, which will make the comparison with the Plotinian solutions much more straightforward.

3.

By the time Plotinus offered his contribution, serious thought had already been devoted to the concept of providence,⁴² and a relative profusion of works entitled *Peri pronoias* / *De providentia* existed.⁴³ However, Plotinus’ essay (divided by Porphyry into two treatises and named *On Providence* I and II) surpasses them all both in scope and manner of execution and stands as the most valuable monument of theodicy in Antiquity. His defense of the providential governance of the universe and of God’s goodness is indeed comprehensive

³⁶ *Ench.* I. 1. 1–2.1, *Ench.* XXXII. 1. 5, *Diss.* II. 16. 1–2.

³⁷ *Ench.* XXX. 1. 8–9.

³⁸ *Diss.* I. 28. 14–33.

³⁹ *Ench.* XI.

⁴⁰ This means that Epictetus actually to a significant degree abolishes even the moral aspect of the problem of evil – i.e. the evil that men do.

⁴¹ *Ench.* XXXI. 1.6 –2.1. Marcus Aurelius emphasizes the same point in *Med.* VI. 16. and 41. See also Seneca, *Prov.* V. 1–2.

⁴² Kalligas 2004, 441–45.

⁴³ The most notable ones being Philo Judeaus’ and Seneca’s.

although sometimes repetitive, and in the spirit of Plotinus' general methodology, not systematically presented. He tackles, to a greater or lesser degree of success, all of the items in Leibniz' taxonomy of evil. However, as already mentioned, the aim of this paper is not to provide an account of Plotinus' theodicy. Instead, here I shall only try to examine those passages of Plotinus' *Peri pronoiias* that bear resemblance to the Stoic solutions to the problem of evil outlined above, and briefly explore the cause of the resemblance.

Plotinus was a man of vast learning, well acquainted with the Aristotelian and Stoic ideas. Somewhat surprisingly, Porphyry even claims that "His writings, however, are full of concealed Stoic and Peripatetic doctrines".⁴⁴ I believe that this statement does not do full justice to Plotinus; his approach to Aristotle was complex, but he mostly took up a polemic stance,⁴⁵ and the same applies to the Stoics. He certainly held that his opponents were interesting and important enough to be discussed and refuted, but probably would not acquiesce to the charge that he was much indebted to them. Graeser summarizes Plotinus' stance on the Peripatetics and the Stoic as follows: "[P]lotinus' relation or attitude towards both of them can be characterized as open criticism of some doctrines and as tacit, though modified, acceptance of others".⁴⁶ The tacitness of Plotinus' acceptance, however, may also be understood as being due to his conviction that the ideas in question were actually borrowings or interpretations of certain Platonic teachings,⁴⁷ a claim which need not sound overly extravagant. This outlook concerning Plotinus' philosophy in general is more than applicable to his theodicy in particular, since the Stoics in that specific area relied heavily on Platonic (and Socratic) inspirations, as I shall attempt to demonstrate in what follows.

a) The first Stoic take on the problem of evil we identified above was the so-called Aesthetic solution. According to it, God succeeds in harmonizing each and every part of the creation – even those gone rogue – with the incomprehensible unity of the whole, and allows them to contribute to the overall beauty of the cosmic symphony, although some produce melodious, while others produce dissonant sounds. The part is, thus, not created first and foremost for its own benefit, but instead for the best interest of the whole. Indeed, both the Stoics and Plotinus make a copious use of this strategy, and especially of the artistic analogies related to it, which involve drama, painting and music.⁴⁸

44 *Vita* 14. 5–6 (tr. Armstrong). A few lines later (10–15), we learn that, in order to stimulate debates at Plotinus' lectures, only some Platonic and Peripatetic texts, but no Stoic ones, were read.

45 Karamanolis 2006, 216–242.

46 Graeser 1972, 2.

47 Karamanolis 2006, 217; and Gerson 2007, 265, where it is stated that Plotinus' position was not syncretic, but instead influenced by the "[a]pplication of the principle that Aristotle's philosophy and, at least in psychological and ethical matters, Stoic philosophy, were in harmony with Platonism." As well as Gerson 2007, 274–275.

48 For the drama images, see Arison of Chios (DL VII. 160), the already mentioned Chrysippus (*SVF* II. 1181), Aurelius (*Med.* III. 8, VI. 42–45, XII. 36), and Epictetus (*Ench.* 17, 31). In Plotinus, the Aesthetic solution represents one of the main motifs, so we have it in III. 2. 3, III. 2. 4. 9, III. 2. 5. 23–25,

However, the Aesthetic solution does not originate with the Stoics; its first formulation is to be found in Plato's *Laws*.⁴⁹ And although Plotinus in his work undoubtedly draws on the examples that the Stoics used, even most of those examples can be traced back to Plato's dialogues. Thus, the image of life as a sometimes tragic and sometimes comic stage comes from the *Philebus* 50b; the painter unwilling to use only bright colours because he knows that it is the contrast that makes the whole beautiful, is to be found in the *Republic* 420c4–d5; the dancing marionettes and actors are found in the *Laws* 644d6–8, 803c–804b.⁵⁰

b) The second Stoic strategy identified above was Cleanthes' solution from personal responsibility. The tendency to place the blame, at least for some aspects of the evil we experience, on the fallible moral agents was amply exercised by Plotinus.⁵¹ But again, the idea of personal responsibility was of great importance to Plato as well; it can be found in his myth of Er,⁵² in the *Timaeus*, in the theodicy of the *Laws* X.

c) According to the third strategy proposed by Chrysippus, the good and the bad are mutually dependent. In other words, this solution makes evil as a logical and metaphysical counterpart of the good, a necessary requisite for the latter's very existence. In this regard, Graeser writes: "The argument employed by Plotinus for the necessity of the existence of evil [...] is exactly that reported by Gellius [...] to be held by Chrysippus".⁵³ This statement, however, is problematic in at least two ways. First, Chrysippus, to reiterate, drew on Heraclitus,⁵⁴ and on Plato's little *Phaedo* myth.⁵⁵ And in my opinion, he wrongly interpreted the myth; Plato's point is not that the good cannot exist without the bad, but that pain and pleasure are inevitably bound together in this world, in such a way that the sufferer of today is going to be the enjoyer of tomorrow, and *vice versa*, which is a claim much less forceful than Chrysippus'. Be that as it may, had Plotinus held the opinion ascribed to him here, he could have been interpreted to have fallen back on Plato (and

III. 2. 11 (together with the similes of painting and the imperative of including vulgar characters in a play), III. 2. 15. 22–60 (with plenty of dramatic stage and human puppets comparisons), III. 2. 16. 23–60 (with abundance of dance, drama, and musical similes), III. 2. 17. 10–90 (life is a play in which the good actor is promoted, the bad degraded, with more dance and music).

49 "The caretaker of the universe has arranged everything with an eye on the preservation and prosperity of the whole, where each individual part, according to its capacity, suffers and does what is befitting to it..." (*Laws* 903b4–c5).

50 For a brief comment on the passage as related to Plotinus' reuse, see Armstrong 1967, 90 fn. 2. For a more detailed elaboration of the world/living beings – stage/performers comparison, and for a historical overview of its application from Plato to Plotinus, see Dodds 1965, 8–10. Cf. Graeser 1972, 81.

51 Some of the passages where he underlies the guilt of the chooser are III. 2. 4. 34–41, III. 2. 5. 1–5, III. 2. 7. 15–22, III. 2. 8. 9–12, III. 2. 12. 10–13, III. 2. 17. 24–26, III. 2. 17. 50–54, III. 3. 3. 34–37, III. 3. 5. 33–40.

52 *Republic* 617e4–5.

53 Graeser 1972, 56.

54 Graeser 1972, 56, but also DK 22. B111: "Illness made health pleasant and good, hunger – satiety, fatigue – rest".

55 For a detailed elaboration of the Aesopian myth, see Betegh 2009.

Heraclites), and Chrysippus' mediation would have been superfluous. Secondly, I believe that Plotinus' passage in question, which evokes the concept of comparatives,⁵⁶ actually expresses a different idea. Plotinus there refers to his emanation theory, i.e. to the oft-repeated doctrinal facts that the descent from the One had to stop somewhere, and that the cosmos could have not existed if it were not worse than its paradigm, the world of Intellect. Thus, the third Stoic attempted solution to the problem of evil can be either traced back to Plato, or considered non-Platonic/Plotinian.⁵⁷

d) The Chrysippian explanation of evil as a collateral concomitance of teleological act and his invocation of *anankē* are, of course, very prominent in Plotinus' theodicy.⁵⁸ There is, however, no need to argue that this is a genuinely Platonic take on the issue, considering both the Timaeian example provided by Chrysippus,⁵⁹ and the overall Timaeian spirit, even wording, of the solution. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that while Plotinus does not make any use of Chrysippus' propositional phrase *kata parakoluthēsin*, variants of the latter are rather conspicuous in Philo's *Peri pronoias*.⁶⁰ This phenomenon can be legitimately seen as a very strong indication of direct influence, unlike in the case of Plotinus.

e) Next comes the Stoic idea that some seemingly troublesome entities and events are in fact useful, while the utility of still others will be discovered in the future. Plotinus in this regard seems to follow Chrysippus closely. He even gives the same example of biting insects and sleeping men,⁶¹ and states that the presently obscured benefits brought by some lower creatures will become evident with the passing of time.⁶² As far as I can tell, this suggestion reveals no obvious Platonic correlations.

f) Plotinus does not consider Chrysippus' proposal that evil might be due to providence's negligence of smaller things, in the course of its diligently taking care of more significant matters. This view stands in blatant contradiction to Plato's carefully woven proof to the opposite, i.e. that even the minutest thing is not left unattended by the gods.⁶³

g) The suggestion that evil is produced by the intrusion of evil spirits within the cosmic order does not figure in Plotinus' theodicy either.

h) The interpretation of the pains and miseries as God's intervention undertaken in order to cause moral improvement was embraced by Plotinus, and especially so in

56 III. 3. 7. 1–3.

57 For a more general criticism of the interdependent opposites argument, see Sandbach 1989, 105–106.

58 E.g. I. 8. 5–10, III. 2. 2. 32–42, III. 2. 5. 29–32, III. 2. 5. 7. 1–15, III. 2. 14. 7–10, III. 3. 7. 1–28.

59 *Timaeus* 75b–d.

60 2. 45 – ἐπακολουθεῖ, ἐπακολουθήματα; 2. 47 – ἐπακολουθήματα; 2. 48 – παρακολουθεῖ; 2. 49 – ἐπακολουθήματα; 2. 53 – ἐπακολουθοῦντα; 2. 59 – κατ' ἐπακολουθήσιν.

61 III. 2. 9. 34–35.

62 III. 2. 9. 35–37.

63 *Laws* 900b–902e.

its form of disciplinary measures. Plotinus conceived of the latter as meant to both rectify the wrongs done by the wicked, and provide an example of just punishment to those who are not such, and who would, on that account, refrain from possible future transgressions.⁶⁴ Yet, the motifs of character-forming powers of remedial punishment, its didactic application to the lives of the innocent and its overall beneficence are not genuinely Stoic, but once again Platonic. They are present already in the *Gorgias*, as well as in the *Republic*.⁶⁵ The punishment of the wicked as an expression of divine justice and victory of right over wrong is emphasized again in the *Laws*.⁶⁶

i) Plotinus certainly follows the Stoics in asserting that nothing bad happens to the good.⁶⁷ This idea, however, also does not originate with the Stoics. It can be found fully explicated by Plato already in the *Apology* 41d1–2: “[t]hat nothing bad happens to a good man, neither in life nor after death.”⁶⁸ As a matter of fact, Epictetus in the *Discourses* quotes this statement of Socrates almost verbatim: “[t]hat to a good man nothing bad happens neither in life, nor after perishing”,⁶⁹ together with his assurance that God will never neglect such a person.

j) Epictetus' attempt to explain away evil completely is inapplicable to Plotinus' theodicy, because the latter has a very dissimilar ontological stance; namely, he holds that evil has its own principle, which is matter. This does not mean that Plotinus grants full reality to evil – he actually approximates something like Epictetus' position by stating that evil is nothing more than falling short of good,⁷⁰ and also through the many instances in which he relativizes pain, death and the like, reducing them to phantasmagorias, children's games and theatre plays.⁷¹ Although not in the *Peri pronoiias*, he also uses a comparison quite close to the one already employed by Epictetus, when writing that a man of virtue should endure the blows of destiny not as something dangerous, but as things that incite only children to fear.⁷² Epictetus has: “for just as masks seem dangerous and fearful to children on account of their inexperience [...]”⁷³ Plotinus' rationale for such statements is, however, different than Epictetus': he considers the external conditions insignificant,

64 III. 2. 24–25, III. 2. 4. 44, III. 2. 5. 17, III. 2. 5. 15, III. 2. 5. 23–25, III. 2. 8. 26–27. With regard to this *locus*, Graeser 1976, 84 remarks: “Plotinus believes that wicked men will be punished by being turned into wolves [...]. This is exactly the opinion expressed by Epictetus, *Diss.* 4. 1. 27.” However, the image of evil men turning into wolves in this life, and suffering further punishment in the next, has its origins in Plato's *Republic* 566a.

65 *Gorgias* 478a–480b, 505b–c, 524e, 525d; *Republic* 380a–b, 615a–d, 619d.

66 *Laws* 904b3–6, 904b8–c4, 904e4–905b2.

67 III. 2. 5. 7, III. 2. 6. 1–4.

68 ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνδρὶ ἀγαθῷ κακὸν οὐδὲν οὔτε ζῶντι οὔτε τελευτήσαντι. See also *Apology* 30c6–d1.

69 ὅτι ἀνδρὶ ἀγαθῷ οὐδὲν ἔστι κακὸν οὔτε ζῶντι οὔτ' ἀποθανόντι, III. 26.28. 5–6.

70 III. 2. 5. 26.

71 E.g. III. 2. 15. 25–29 – death is likened to the changing of clothes; III. 2. 15. 35–37, 54–58 – wars, sufferings are like children's games

72 I. 4. 8. 27: οὐχ ὡς δεινὰ, ἀλλ' ὡς παισιφοβερά.

73 *Diss.* II. 1. 15. 2–4: ὡς γὰρ τοῖς παιδίοις τὰ προσωπεῖα φαίνεται δεινὰ καὶ φοβερὰ δι' ἀπειρίαν.

because they do not affect the soul but only the shadowy body, while the latter's basic premise is the inevitability of destiny. Besides, Epictetus himself – in the aforementioned instance of banalizing the evil's impact by associating it with irrational fears of ignorant children – only illustrates his reference to Plato's Socrates.⁷⁴ The latter, in the *Phaedo* 77e–d, speaks of the fear of death as a childish fear of hobgoblins (*ta mormolukeia*), while in the *Crito* 46c, he calls penalties of fines, imprisonment and death as things that should not scare him like they frighten children.⁷⁵ Thus, it becomes obvious once again that Epictetus, much the same as the other Stoics, used to employ not only Platonic ideas, but also even direct quotations from Plato's dialogues. And this fact allows for a different understanding of the sources of most of the Plotinus' theodicean passages into which direct Stoic influences have been read. A modest proposal along those lines was presented throughout this section and will be summarized in what follows.

All in all, any attempt to deny the existence of Stoic ideas in Plotinus' *Enneads* would indeed be a futile one, and the same goes for his theodicy. To reiterate, the teachings of the Stoics were not at all unfamiliar to Plotinus, and he used to engage with them in many instances. Did he read the early Stoics? We do not know and probably never will,⁷⁶ but Plotinus seems to have been acquainted with some Chrysippean passages. Did he read the Roman Stoics? He most probably did.⁷⁷ Thus, his frequent encounters with the Stoics could not have but left some traces on his philosophizing. The same is applicable to the particular case of *Peri pronoias*, where he obviously makes use of several solutions integral to the Stoic theodicy, as well as of many examples and analogies employed by them. So, instead of the far-fetched denial of any Stoic influence, I propose that those influences are not genuinely Stoic. On closer inspection, most of the aforementioned solutions and illustrations turn out to be not only commonplaces shared by the Cynics, the Stoics and the Middle Platonists, but also easily traceable back to Plato's works. In other words, Plotinus might have taken up some of the Stoic *elaborations* of the Platonic solutions, but he, as well as they, was well aware that these have their origins in Plato. A significant exception is the idea of usefulness of troublesome animals and natural phenomena, which occurs in III.2.9.34–37. That one seems to be a direct borrowing from the Stoics, particularly from Chrysippus.

Taking the aforesaid into account, I would like to propose that, in the possible world where Stoicism never arose or where the Stoics never wrote on providence and theodicy, Plotinus would have nevertheless been able to compose a theodicy very similar to the present one, relying chiefly, if not exclusively, on Platonic sources and his own ideas.

74 II. 1. 15. 1–2: τὰτα δ' ὁ Σωκράτης καλῶς ποιῶν μορμολύκεια ἐκάλει.

75 46c4–c5: ὡςπερ παῖδας ἡμᾶς μορμολύττηται.

76 Graeser 1972, xiii–xiv.

77 As firmly asserted by Graeser 1972, 9. Gerson is also adamant: "Plotinus certainly had a knowledge of Epictetus' *Discourses*." (Gerson 2007, 276 fn. 44).

Therefore, I take the claim that Plotinus' theodicy is strongly influenced by the Stoic one to be an exaggeration, unless subjected to significant qualification, which would underline the Platonic origins of Stoic theodicy itself.⁷⁸

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