

ANTIQVORVM PHILOSOPHIA

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

3 · 2009



PISA · ROMA

FABRIZIO SERRA EDITORE

MMX

Direzione
Prof. GIUSEPPE CAMBIANO
Scuola Normale Superiore, Piazza dei Cavalieri 7, I 56126 Pisa

*

Autorizzazione del Tribunale di Pisa n. 41 del 21/12/2007
Direttore responsabile: Fabrizio Serra

*

Sono rigorosamente vietati la riproduzione, la traduzione, l'adattamento, anche parziale o per estratti, per qualsiasi uso e con qualsiasi mezzo effettuati, compresi la copia fotostatica, il microfilm, la memorizzazione elettronica, ecc., senza la preventiva autorizzazione scritta della *Fabrizio Serra editore*[®], Pisa · Roma.
Ogni abuso sarà perseguito a norma di legge.

*

Proprietà riservata · All rights reserved
© Copyright 2010 by *Fabrizio Serra editore*[®], Pisa · Roma.

www.libraweb.net

Stampato in Italia · Printed in Italy

ISSN 1973-5030
ISSN ELETTRONICO 1974-4501

Amministrazione e abbonamenti
FABRIZIO SERRA EDITORE[®]

Casella postale n. 1, succursale n. 8, I 56123 Pisa,
tel. +39 050 542332, fax +39 050 574888, fse@libraweb.net

I prezzi ufficiali di abbonamento cartaceo e/o *Online* sono consultabili presso il sito Internet della casa editrice www.libraweb.net.

Print and/or Online official subscription rates are available at Publisher's web-site www.libraweb.net.

I pagamenti possono essere effettuati tramite versamento su c.c.p. n. 17154550 o tramite carta di credito (*American Express, CartaSi, Eurocard, Mastercard, Visa*)

*

Uffici di Pisa: Via Santa Bibbiana 28, I 56127 Pisa, fse@libraweb.net

Uffici di Roma: Via Carlo Emanuele I 48, I 00185 Roma, fse.roma@libraweb.net

SOMMARIO

JAAP MANSFELD, <i>Bothering the Infinite. Anaximander in the Nineteenth Century and Beyond</i>	9
--	---

L'AUTORITÀ DEGLI ANTICHI E I COMMENTI FILOSOFICI

MICHAEL PUETT, <i>Sages, Gods, and History: Commentarial Strategies in Chinese Late Antiquity</i>	71
MARWAN RASHED, <i>Le prologue perdu de l'abrégé du Timée de Galien dans un texte de magie noire</i>	89
RACHEL BARNEY, <i>Simplicius: Commentary, Harmony, and Authority</i>	101
HAN BALTUSSEN, <i>Simplicius and the Subversion of Authority</i>	121
LUC BRISSON, <i>Le commentaire des œuvres de Platon comme révélation de vérités divines</i>	137
AMOS BERTOLACCI, <i>Different Attitudes to Aristotle's Authority in the Arabic Medieval Commentaries on the Metaphysics</i>	145

DISCUSSIONI E RICERCHE

WEI LIU, <i>Aristotle's City-Soul Analogy: Some Preliminary Observations</i>	167
Norme redazionali della Casa editrice	181

SIMPLICIUS: COMMENTARY, HARMONY, AND AUTHORITY

RACHEL BARNEY

NOTORIOUSLY, the late Neoplatonists were committed to affirming and demonstrating the harmony [*sumphônia*] of Plato and Aristotle.¹ This stance is sometimes presented as a commitment so deep and constitutive as to make questions of philosophical motivation almost beside the point. Because both Plato and (to a lesser degree) Aristotle are accepted by the late Neoplatonists as philosophical *authorities*, they must be found to agree on all matters of importance, no matter how much distortion this requires. And this commitment to the authority of Aristotle is in turn explained as largely a matter of pedagogical necessity. Aristotle's accounts of place, matter, causality, and the like are needed to fill out Plato's sketch of the cosmos in the *Timaeus*; his *Categories* are the handy *Introduction to Philosophy* which Plato never wrote, and so forth. In their defense, it has been noted that the Neoplatonists' interpretive distortions rise at times to the level of philosophical creativity. In a remark which has become infamous, Richard Sorabji says, in the general introduction to his series of translations of the Aristotelian commentators: «Not for the only time in the history of philosophy, a perfectly crazy proposition proved philosophically fruitful».² Most obviously, the elaborations of Neoplatonic metaphysics were in part generated by the need to find niches for all of the competing ontological commitments of the two systems.

The Neoplatonist interpreters have of course been defended against this kind of back-handed praise. Notably, Lloyd Gerson has argued that, correctly understood, the project of harmonization is not crazy at all.³ For it does not require the Neoplatonists to claim that Aristotle is infallible or that his philosophy is *identical* to that of Plato. Most seem rather to see the two as complementary, with Aristotle engaged primarily in the

Rachel Barney, Department of Philosophy, University of Toronto, 170 St. George St., Toronto, Canada. rachel.barney@utoronto.ca

¹ The term 'Neoplatonism' has become controversial in recent years, due to its allegedly arbitrary and even pejorative character. While I sympathize with some of the objections, 'Neoplatonist' remains the most convenient term for the late Platonists for whom harmonization becomes a central philosophical concern. The term as used here obscures various complications and caveats. Plotinus, standardly taken as the founder of Neoplatonism, imports an enormous amount of Aristotle into his Platonism (as was recognised at the time, cf. PORPHYRY, *Life of Plotinus* 14.5); but he is also prepared to criticise Aristotle in a way which would be unacceptable to later harmonizers such as Simplicius. On the other hand, some of Plotinus' predecessors (including his teacher Ammonius, the Middle Platonist Alcinous, and much earlier figures such as Antiochus) may have been just as committed to harmonizing Plato and Aristotle as the later Neoplatonists, albeit along very diverse philosophical lines. I will here use 'Neoplatonism' to pick out the post-Plotinian intellectual tradition to which Simplicius belongs, in which Plotinus' student Porphyry seems to properly inaugurate the harmonizing project. I will not be concerned with earlier versions of harmonization, on which see KARAMANOLIS 2006.

² SORABJI 1987, p. 7; cf. also SORABJI 2004-2005, vol. 3, pp. 37-55 for a general account of the methodology of the commentators. For a fuller account of this «doctrinal fecundity of exegetical misinterpretations», see HOFFMANN 2006 (acknowledging the influence of P. HADOT 1995a), an excellent brief sketch of the Neoplatonic thought-world and the interpretive projects it informed. For case studies of the ways in which the Neoplatonic commitment to harmonization could stimulate creative philosophical problem-solving, see MENN (forthcoming) and P. HADOT 1990.

³ GERSON 2005a.

investigation of nature, and Plato offering a more comprehensive account of the ultimate principles of reality. As Simplicius says:

Aristotle always refuses to deviate from nature; on the contrary, he considers even things which are above nature according to their relation to nature, just as, by contrast, the divine Plato, according to Pythagorean usage, examines even natural things insofar as they participate in the things above nature.¹

Moreover, since the Neoplatonists disagreed amongst themselves about many things, the price of admission to the Platonic school is not uniformity, but only assent to a certain basic framework of principles; and, all their differences notwithstanding, that framework may be reasonably attributed to Aristotle as well. «What may have appeared to Aristotle as a great chasm between himself and his teacher may have reasonably appeared much narrowed to those looking at both philosophers, some six hundred to nine hundred years later».²

Gerson's presentation of the Neoplatonists as reasonable and informed readers of Plato and Aristotle is very persuasive. But it cannot be the whole story. For Platonist harmonizations come in many flavours. Some are expansively cross-cultural. The «Chaldean Oracles» are important for Iamblichus and Proclus; earlier, Numenius found in Plato the wisdom of Pythagoras, the Egyptian priests, and the Jewish scriptures. Simplicius, whom I will discuss in this paper, is very different: his interest is strictly in establishing the unity of a certain central Greek philosophical tradition, including the Pre-socratics and on occasion the Stoics. (Though it tends to be neglected by scholars who focus on the Aristotelian commentators, Simplicius is the author of an entire *Commentary* on the Stoic Epictetus' *Encheiridion*).³

So to understand Neoplatonic harmonization we must look beyond their reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle, however crazy or compelling we may happen to find it. Two further questions also need to be addressed: first, how and why different Neoplatonists constructed their more comprehensive projects of harmonization as they did, each with its distinctive scope and strategies; and second, what if anything we can say about the salient features of *harmonization as such*, as an interpretive and philosophical practice with rules and rewards of its own. In this paper, I will try to address these questions, albeit in a brief and preliminary way, with regard to the late commentator Simplicius.⁴ First, I will outline the norms and methods which govern Simplicius' argument for the

¹ in *Cat.* 8.6.27-30, trans. Chase 2003. Texts of Simplicius are cited in the standard *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* edition (CAG vols. 7-10); translations used are from the Duckworth/Cornell University Press series edited by Richard Sorabji. These and other translations are in some cases with minor modifications.

² GERSON 2005a, p. 10.

³ Neglected to the point that scholars sometimes forget it exists: «Like many of his contemporaries, Simplicius wrote voluminously; and his works (those that survive at least) all take the form of commentaries on Aristotle» (HANKINSON 2004, p. 5). One could easily form the same impression from BALTUSSEN 2008, a book-length study of Simplicius' works in which the *Encheiridion* Commentary is apparently mentioned three times. And yet this is the work of Simplicius which contemporary scholarship has made the most accessible: see the magisterial edition of I. HADOT 1996 and the very helpful annotated translation of BRITAIN and BRENNAN 2002. Simplicius also seems to have been the author of lost commentaries on Euclid's *Elements*, Iamblichus' *On Pythagoreanism*, the *Technê* of the rhetorician Hermogenes, and perhaps other works (including Aristotle's *Metaphysics*) (see I. HADOT 1990, p. 303); his authorship of the extant *De Anima* commentary (CAG xi) is hotly contested, and I will not rely on it here.

⁴ As he indicates at in *Phys.* 9.601.12, Simplicius himself sees his office as 'commenting' or making notes [*hupomnêmatismos*].

essential harmony of his tradition. Second, I will sketch, in admittedly rather abstract terms, some of the intellectual attractions of harmonizing projects in philosophy, and will attempt to locate Simplicius within this broad genre. Harmonizing interpretations come in many forms, ranging from almost purely exegetical works to ones in which the harmonization falls out of an original and independent philosophical project. Neoplatonist harmonizations are typical in being exegetical and philosophical both, approaching philosophical problem-solving *through* interpretation – and in particular, through interpretation of a canon of *authoritative* texts. As Glenn Most observes, «the author about whose text one writes a commentary is always an authority»;¹ and authoritative texts are just those which *must* be vindicated by being shown to be in harmony with themselves, with each other, and with the truth. Harmonizing commentary thus becomes a central interpretive mode for philosophers who, like Simplicius, are working in a canon-based tradition. However, it would be a mistake to dismiss harmonization as an essentially passive response to the inherited reality of conflicting authorities. Philosophical harmonization is often a very creative business, in which the texts reconciled have only a limited and heuristic authority, or indeed an authority constructed by the act of harmonization itself. We should always see the authority of the texts reconciled as serving a functional role for the interpreter: the interesting question in each case will be what the twin presumptions of harmony and authority enable the interpreter to *do*.

I. SIMPLICIUS ON THE AGREEMENT OF THE PHILOSOPHERS

Simplicius' methods deserve, and have recently received, book-length study;² my aim here is merely to offer a sketch of some of the more distinctive features of his harmonizing project, the better to make visible the norms and aims which guided it.

In a general way, Simplicius' strategies are explicit and well understood. As he informs us near the start of his *Physics* commentary, his defense of the harmony of the ancients is a response to Christian polemic:

But we must not, hearing of such great variation [*diaphora*], think that these are contrary accounts on the part of those who have philosophized, a thing which some people, who encounter only reports and write-ups [*tais historikais anagraphais*] and understand nothing of the things said, try to criticize – although they themselves are divided into myriad schisms not with regard to the principles of nature (for of these they have not even a dream-understanding), but with regard to the demolition of divine superiority. But perhaps it's not a bad idea, making a digression, to display for those more desirous of learning how the ancients, although appearing to disagree in their doctrines about the principles, nonetheless come together in harmony [*enarmoniôs sumpherontai*]. (28.31-29.5)³

The argument from *diaphônia* (literally 'discord' or 'disagreement') purports to show by a kind of induction that philosophers never agree among themselves about any-

¹ (1999a), pp. viii, cf. xii. On the commentary form, see Goulet-Cazé (ed.) 2000. Stephen Menn points out to me that hostile commentaries are not unknown: in addition to Philoponus on Aristotle, examples would include Hipparchus on Aratus and Eudoxus and Oresme on Aristotle's *de Caelo*. But these are certainly the exception, and arguably still involve treating the text commented as in some way canonical.

² BALTUSSEN 2008.

³ Translations from *in Phys.* 1.1-2 are from the draft translation by Stephen Menn and myself, currently in preparation for the series edited by Richard Sorabji: comments and suggested improvements are welcome.

thing, and thus that philosophical reason is self-defeating and worthless. In this general form the argument goes back to the sceptics, and to the sophists and anti-philosophical rhetoricians long before them.¹ It was adopted by Christian writers in turn,² and Simplicius' accusation of sullyng the divine shows that he has Christian opponents particularly in view. So indeed does the tone of angry contempt, very unlike his usual objective and scholarly manner,³ which Christians alone (who are by Simplicius' lights atheists) seem to trigger. This tone is pervasive and even stronger when he engages with his Christian nemesis, John Philoponus, in the *De Caelo* commentary and the commentary on Book VIII of the *Physics*.⁴ These two massive works are thus in a very general way unified by a polemical purpose, and their harmonizations have an explicitly defensive aim. Some major philosophical traditions are excluded from this defense, notably the Epicureans and sceptics; so it is mistaken to speak of Simplicius as attempting to synthesize the *whole* of Greek philosophy,⁵ as if he were merely a cultural traditionalist. Rather, his purpose is to defend *the central Platonic-Aristotelian tradition* of ancient Greek philosophy, as he himself constructs it, against Christian attacks on its coherence and cogency. And it is important to him that a wide range of 'ancient' thinkers, including the Presocratics discussed by Aristotle himself as his precursors in the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, are included in that tradition.

Simplicius' central argument for *sumphônia* is that the differences or variation [*diaphora*, not the stronger *diaphônia*] to be found among the ancients are merely matters of superficial expression and selectivity; his adversaries can inflate this into outright conflict only by sloppy and uncharitable reading, relying on superficial reportage⁶ of philosophical views rather than in-depth analysis. Sophisticated, careful readers will instead detect the underlying agreement in thought [*nous*] which is obscured by differences in expression [*lexis*] and emphasis. The point of this *lexis-nous* contrast, which is central to Simplicius' interpretive strategies, is not, of course, that one should *ignore* the author's precise phrasing; on the contrary, it is that close reading may show his mean-

¹ The earliest extant versions are probably XENOPHON, *Mem.* 1.1.13 and ISOCRATES, *Ant.* 268-9; see also MANSFELD on Gorgias' likely use of the trope (1985, pp. 97-103).

² E.g., EUSEBIUS, *Praep. Ev.* XIV.

³ The other striking departure from this tone is in the other direction: Simplicius' exalted evocations of the divine, especially in the closing prayers of the *in de Cael.* 7.731.25-9, in *Encheir.* 138.22ff., and in *Cat.* 8.438.33-6.

⁴ On Simplicius' polemics and the Neoplatonic stereotype of the Christians, see HOFFMANN 1987b. HOFFMANN 1987a and 1987b rightly emphasises the religious import of Simplicius' commentaries. His reconciliation of the *Timaeus* and *de Caelo* in response to Philoponus reaffirms divine transcendence; indeed it is itself «a religious act, a spiritual exercise designed to turn the soul (both Simplicius' and his reader's) towards the Demiurge» – a kind of Neoplatonist liturgy (1987b, p. 57).

⁵ As do e.g. BALTHUSSEN 2008 («his rather extreme position of harmonising all Greek philosophers» (p. 9, cf. 18, 62, 85, etc.) and GOLITSIS 2008 («une systématisation de l'ensemble de la philosophie grecque», p. 98). Simplicius is well aware of the diversity of (what was already for him) ancient philosophy: in listing the different ways in which philosophical schools are named at *in Cat.* 8.3.30-4.9, he mentions, among others, Pythagoreans, Cyrenaics, Megarians, Stoics, Pyrrhonians ('Ephektikoi'), Epicureans ('Hedonists'), and Cynics. Of these, only the Pythagoreans and Stoics fall regularly within his ambit; the Epicureans are cited occasionally, together with Democritus, as being wrong on various matters of physics; the others are simply ignored.

⁶ Just what sort of literature Simplicius associates with the Christians is unclear, but *historia* is used by Simplicius (as by Aristotle) for observation-based writings – *reportage* – as opposed to analytical works: e.g., for the *Historia Animalium* in contrast to the *Generation of Animals* (not, *pace* GOLITSIS (2008, p. 95), for «des recueils d'opinions classées par ordre chronologique» as such). So it is natural to suppose he has in mind the cruder ranges of the *Placita* literature ('doxography'), with their potted, decontextualized, argument-free summaries of doctrines. Simplicius' own account of the Presocratics is undoubtedly also a descendant of this literature, and of Theophrastus' pioneering *Phusikai* (or *Phusikôn*) *Doxai* in particular; but it obviously draws on the most full and sophisticated accounts available, not to mention the original texts.

ing to be other than hasty or uncharitable readers might assume. One should «look to both the author's phrasing and his intention [*skopos*]»: anyone who does so will see that the ancients differ in terminology rather than about the fact of the matter.¹ After his *tour de force* 'division' [*diairêsis*] of the varying accounts of the principles [*archai*] discussed by the ancients, Simplicius sums up at *in Phys.* 9.36.15ff.:

So in this way, some looking to the intelligible and others to the sensible world-ordering, some seeking the proximate elements of bodies and some the more principle-like ones, some laying hold of the elemental nature in a more particular way and some doing so more universally, some seeking the elements alone and some seeking all the causes and auxiliary causes – they say different things [*diaphora*] when they give an account of nature, but not contrary things [*enantia*], for someone who is able to judge correctly. And Aristotle himself, who appears to be displaying their disagreements, will say a bit further down that 'they differ from each other in that some took prior and others posterior things 'as their principles', and some took things that were better known by reason, others by sensation';² 'so that,' he says, 'in a way they are saying the same things as each other, and in a way different things.'³ But we were compelled to draw this out at greater length on account of the people who are easily inclined to accuse the ancients of disagreement [*diaphônia*] (36.15-25).

So Simplicius is avowedly following Aristotle himself, guided by the latter's comment that 'in a way' his predecessors are 'saying the same things'. We might also be reminded of Aristotle's insistence in *Metaph.* 11.1 that each of his predecessors made his own contribution to the progressive discovery of the truth:

...no one is able to attain the truth adequately, while, on the other hand, no one fails entirely, but every one says something true about the nature of things, and while individually they contribute little or nothing to the truth, by the union of all a considerable amount is amassed... It is just that we should be grateful, not only to those whose opinions we may share, but also to those who have expressed more superficial views; for these also contributed something, by developing before us the power of thought. It is true that if there had been no Timotheus we should have been without much of our lyric poetry; but if there had been no Phrynis there would have been no Timotheus. The same holds good of those who have expressed views about the truth; for from better thinkers we have inherited certain opinions, while the others have been responsible for the appearance of the better thinkers.⁴

In his earlier exposition and criticism of previous views, all were found in their limited and defectively expressed ways to converge on his own position:

we have learnt this much from them, that of those who speak about principle and cause no one has mentioned any principle except those which have been distinguished in our work on nature, but evidently all have some inkling of *them*, though only vaguely (988a20-23).

The strategy of charitable reconciliation and appropriation becomes even stronger in Simplicius, and is placed on a firmer footing. Where Aristotle vindicates the Presocratics through a narrative of historical development, Simplicius, largely indifferent to chronology, insists on the distinctive *permanent* value of each contribution. Parmenides teaches the unity of Being, Anaxagoras the status of Nous as principle, and so forth. And what makes this stance of positive appropriation and incorporation more fully available to Simplicius is the Neoplatonic proliferation of metaphysical levels and lev-

¹ *in de Cael.* 7.69.11-15.

² *Physics* 1.5, 188b30-4.

³ 188b36-7.

⁴ 993a31-b19; translations from the *Metaphysics* are by W. D. Ross [Barnes (ed.) 1984].

els of philosophical discourse: once the riddling discourse of the ancients has been disambiguated, these provide a happy niche for each of what would otherwise be conflicting theories.

So Simplicius sees his assimilation of the Presocratics to the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition as an adaptation of Aristotle's own methods and attitudes. A later passage faces the inevitable and awkward question of how far non-Platonist post-Aristotelian philosophy can receive the same treatment. For it is harder to see how the philosophical systems which followed Plato and Aristotle could depart from them except through gratuitous error. Simplicius' strategy seems to be to largely ignore and exclude wholly false paths such as scepticism and Epicureanism (while allowing the earlier atomists, Democritus and Leucippus, to retain their inclusion in the Aristotelian canon of predecessors, as in *Metaph.* I.4). The Stoics are often corrected, but sometimes subsumed as if they were just another set of Presocratic *phusikoi*.¹ They slip inconspicuously into his *diairêsis* in *Physics* I:

And of those who said that they [the principles] were finite, some said that they were two, as Parmenides (in what he wrote about Appearance [*doxa*]) posited fire and earth, or rather light and darkness, or as the Stoics posited god and matter, clearly not meaning god as an element, but rather one as agent and the other as patient (25.14-18).

One gets the impression that the history of philosophy as told by Aristotle himself is supposed to be more or less the whole story, with later developments reducible to footnotes or brief addenda. In exceptional cases a fuller recourse to later philosophy is called for, most strikingly in the so-called 'Corollaries' on time and place later in the *Physics* commentary. Discussing place, Simplicius again affiliates himself with Aristotle's own *modus operandi*, and offers to extend it: «For there have been other opinions about place since Aristotle, an examination of which he would have handed down to us if they had arisen before him. So he would approve of them also being examined» (10.601.5-7). Again, the aim is to reconcile the competing views which have been offered, by carefully differentiating the objects to which they apply:

Why, then, should we say that so many great men were mistaken in their opinions about place, putting forward our problems as an unfortunate feast for those who are accustomed to take pride in the apparent contradictions of the men of old [*hoi palaioi*]? Should we not rather follow up each of those who wrote about place and show that none of them missed the truth about place? But, since place has many aspects, we should show that each man has seen and revealed a different aspect of it (in *Phys.* 640.12-18).²

Note that Simplicius' strategy of reconciliation through the disambiguation of earlier views is unchanged even though the *palaioi* here are presumably, rather oddly, not the ancient philosophers but the Neoplatonic predecessors discussed throughout the

¹ Simplicius is happy to criticise the Stoics where they clearly differ from Aristotle (e.g. in *Cat.* 36.9ff., 165.32-167.36 (on which see LUNA 1987, pp. 172.2ff.), 217.32, 287.32ff.), though he does not share the hostility of some earlier Platonists towards them. Still, his comprehensive appropriation of Epictetus notwithstanding, for Simplicius to attribute some view to the Stoics is certainly never to attribute any *authority* to it – rather the reverse. So harmonization extends more broadly than authority: and if Most is right that the text commented on is always an authority, we should perhaps say that the *Encheiridion* counts as authoritative because Simplicius chooses to write a commentary on it, and not vice versa. (Note that Brittain and Brennan (2002) are generally sceptical as to how far Simplicius actually grasps the Stoic theories at stake in the *Encheiridion*: «Simplicius perhaps misunderstands, and certainly misinterprets, some central views of Epictetus and of the earlier Stoics» (p. 24).

² Trans. Urmson 1992.

Corollary (Proclus, Syrianus, Damascius, et al.).¹ And on place and time alike, Simplicius undertakes not only to settle the state of the art, putting various predecessors in their place and reconciling their insights (e.g. 10.795.4-26), but to add some new philosophical contributions:

If I were able myself to contribute to the articulation of our thoughts about place I think that Aristotle would countenance my daring, since he has provided the basis himself. So if I shall seem to exceed the office of a commentator [*exô tou hupomnêmatismou*], let those who notice it blame the difficulty and complexity of the problem (10.601.10-13, cf. 795.27-36, 799.9ff.)

Once again, the interpretive standard invoked is that of Aristotle himself, which is here taken to license both a survey of later views and the offering of independent solutions to any residual puzzles [*aporiai*]. Simplicius' most extended use of later philosophy is, however, rather different: this is, of course, his Platonizing commentary on Epictetus' *Encheiridion*. I cannot here say much about the distinctive features of this work; but at any rate it demonstrates that if Simplicius' *oeuvre* as a whole has a unified aim, we cannot describe it as 'the harmonization of Plato and Aristotle and their predecessors': it is more sweepingly the exposition and vindication of Platonism wherever it may be found, and incorporating later developments, like earlier ones, with whatever degree of prominence the subject-matter seems to demand. From a contemporary perspective, to harmonize Platonic and Stoic ethics, given the (orthodox) Stoic rejection of the Platonic tripartite soul, is at least as unlikely a project as the harmonization of Plato and Aristotle; but the *Encheiridion* manages to treat Stoic ethics as rudimentary Platonism without even thematizing many of their differences.²

In his commitment to bringing Presocratic and post-Aristotelian thought into the Platonic mainstream, Simplicius seems to be casting his net as wide as possible. But what his project leaves *out* is also striking. Simplicius is markedly uninterested in The Mysterious and Exotic Ancient Theology, which deeply engaged some other Neoplatonists – including figures like Iamblichus, Proclus and Damascius who, in other matters, influenced him enormously.³ The Chaldean Oracles are, so far as I can tell, engaged with on only one occasion, having been dragged into the discussion of place by Proclus (*in Phys.* 9.613-7; there is also a reference *en passant* at 9.785.9). There are occasional references to Orpheus (the subject of two whole works by Syrianus), and to the religious traditions of various cultures (e.g., *in Phys.* 9.641.30-35, 643.27-30; the Psalms are used against Philoponus at *in de Cael.* 90.13-18): but little seems to hang on them. Homer

¹ Simplicius also offers to append the views of more recent thinkers [*hoi neôteroi philosophoi*] on chance and luck, and to show that 'they in no way differ' from the ancient teaching (356.35-357.1) – though it is unclear whose views are actually in play in what follows.

² As Brittain and Brennan note, Platonist adaptations of the *Encheiridion*, including one by Theosebius, would also have been available for Simplicius to comment on; his preference for the *Encheiridion* itself, apparently because of the vivid and persuasive quality of its writing, confirms his doctrinal broadmindedness (2002, pp. 5-10).

³ For the accord of Greek and barbarian, mythological and philosophical wisdom, cf. Marinus *Life of Proclus* (22.18). For details on the inclusion of Orpheus and the Chaldean Oracles in earlier Neoplatonic harmonizations, see SAFFREY 1992. Simplicius also seems to be less interested than we might expect in Pythagoras: he is much less likely than Syrianus, for instance, to casually speak of 'Plato and Pythagoras' as a unity – though he accepts that Plato's *Timaeus* is genuinely Pythagorean (*in de Cael.*, 7.561.10-11), and that Aristotle's ten categories are somehow derived from 'Archytas' and from the decad (*in Cat.* 8.2.15, 8.51.3-4, 8.67.23-4). The Pythagoreans are referred to on selected topics, rather than being a pervasive presence, and these references often seem to be prompted by Simplicius' sources (including Aristotle himself), whom he is careful to credit for his information (e.g. *in de Cael.* 7.471.5, 507.13, 511.31, etc.).

is said to be ‘most wise’ (*in de Cael.* 7.392.6); he is used not as a fount of allegorical wisdom, however, but merely for casual quotations and ethical insights (e.g. *in de Cael.* 7.288.14, 374.27-30). By modern standards these are all the choices of a sober scholar; they are also, once again, the choices of Aristotle himself, for whom philosophy begins with Thales and is written in Greek. It is tempting to argue *ex silentio* that Simplicius outright rejects the syncretism of his predecessors;¹ it is at any rate safe to say that he sees his own job as lying elsewhere.

At the heart of this comprehensive harmonization, of course, lies Simplicius’ *rapprochement* of Plato and Aristotle: my emphasis on the breadth of his project is not meant to deny that this was for him a specially important task. Here it is clear that the roles of Plato and Aristotle are asymmetrical. Plato is the unique and towering figure: an authority in the strongest possible sense, with his quasi-divine status not just deeply felt but institutionally realized in the Academy with its prayers and feast-days.² The chasm in status between Plato and Aristotle emerges in the *Categories* commentary when Simplicius describes the good interpreter:

His judgment must be impartial [*adekaston*], so that he may neither, out of superficial understanding, show to be unacceptable something that has been well said, nor, if some point should require demonstration, should he obstinately persist in trying to demonstrate that Aristotle is always and everywhere infallible, as if he had enrolled himself in the Philosopher’s school. [The good exegete] must, I believe, not convict the philosophers of disagreement [*diaphônia*] by looking only at the letter [*lexis*] of what [Aristotle] says against Plato; but he must look towards the spirit [*nous*], and track down the harmony [*sumphônia*] which reigns between them on the majority of points. (*In Cat.* 8.7.23-32)

For the Platonist, Aristotle is *not* infallible, and to treat him as if he were is denounced as *trop de zèle*. And this is the same as saying that Aristotle is not in agreement with Plato about *everything*, but only ‘on the majority of points’. The virtue Simplicius here trumpets is being *adekastos*, impartial – literally being unbribed, like a virtuous judge (cf. *in Encheir.* 65.25, 118.35). The complementary virtue, which he invokes more often, is *charity*: interpreting the text *eugnômonôs*, with a benevolent intention, rather than with a view to finding fault (*in Phys.* 9.38.6, 45.29, 87.3, 148.28, etc.) This is the virtue which, according to Simplicius, Plato and Aristotle themselves show towards their predecessors (Aristotle ‘emulates Plato’s charity’, *in Phys.* 9.161.23-162.2, cf. 9.430.30, 475.22).³

This advocacy of both impartiality and charity is a typical Simplician balancing act. Simplicius likes to present himself as the voice of moderation and compromise, the mean between two extremes and the resolver of conflicting perspectives.⁴ In practice,

¹ And silence is a popular Neoplatonic strategy for rejecting the excesses of one’s predecessors: cf. VAN DEN BERG 2004 and 2007 on Ammonius’ *De Interp.* commentary as a reaction to Proclus on divine names (on which see also SHEPPARD 1987).

² As evidence for the Platonic ‘party line’, cf. Damascius’ *Philosophical History* on Marinus (fr. 38, 97) and Domninus (fr. 89, 93) (cf. ATHANASSIADI 1993 and 1999).

³ Just how this compares to the modern ‘principle of charity’, either as theorized by Donald Davidson or in the more casual sense in which any historian of philosophy would avow it, is an interesting question I cannot here address.

⁴ See, for instance, his synthesizing answer to the much-debated question as to the *skopos* of the *Categories*. Simplicius begins by discussing the three traditionally prominent readings, each of which shows ‘an incomplete grasp’ (8.10.6) of the issue, and then finds a place for each. The *skopos* of the *Categories* is not *just* simple words, or the realities they signify, or concepts; rather, it is simple words *insofar* as they signify realities, and it ‘teaches together’ the objects and concepts signified [8.9.4-13.18, cf. HOFFMANN (1987a), pp. 66-67]. For a typical case on a

the points at which Simplicius is willing to impute error to Aristotle are few and far between: so we might be tempted to dismiss his praise of impartiality as rhetorical self-positioning and nothing more. On the other hand, it is important to bear in mind that Simplicius' harmonization comes at the end of a centuries-long tradition: and where there is an interpretive tradition, there is also *competition*. Once the harmony of Plato and Aristotle is established as a general interpretive desideratum, a 'ratcheting up' effect becomes inevitable, as successive authors compete to find harmony where their predecessors and rivals have failed. If Simplicius' version of the accord of Plato and Aristotle seems to be particularly strong and exceptionless,¹ this may be less a function of personal conviction than of his technical skill, and the belatedness within his tradition which enables him to outbid his predecessors.²

This belatedness, and Simplicius' consciousness of his location in a tradition, shape his work in a number of ways. The rather onerous length of his commentaries suggests a determination to produce a *summation* of the long history of Platonic wisdom on his chosen topics.³ Simplicius treats every *topos*, small and large; he sums up the state of the art, incorporating the best of his predecessors and correcting their errors; and he documents his discussions with frequent, extensive quotations – all as if to produce a one-man library, which could stand alone without recourse to any other work. His remarkable use of quotation serves a number of overlapping purposes in different cases.⁴ Quotations are used to show that his readings of the ancient texts are well-founded (e.g. *in de Cael.* 141.1ff.); to raise and clarify issues of text and phrasing; and to reassure us that his rivals and predecessors are fairly presented, especially when he takes issue with them – even his *bête noire* Philoponus.⁵ Occasionally, as with Parmenides, Simplicius quotes at length «because the book is becoming rare» (*in Phys.* 9.144.28, cf. *in Cat.* 352.22-4 on 'Archytas'). In all this his motives are very recognisably those of the modern scholar; but Simplicius' anxious comprehensiveness seems to express, in addition to scholarly caution, a rather poignant awareness of his status as the end of the line – the Last of the Platonists, who can only hope to bequeath a last will and testament of his tradition to a very uncertain future.⁶

smaller scale, consider his discussion of an ambiguous reference to contrary principles at *Physics* 184b20, which Porphyry takes as referring to Anaxagoras and Alexander takes as referring to Democritus. The pros and cons are complex, involving considerations of grammar, the completeness of the division in question, and consistency with Aristotle's references to Democritus elsewhere. Simplicius rejects at least some of the reasoning of both sides: his own view, introduced at the end with his signature *mêpote* ('perhaps') involves taking the crucial phrase as referring to Democritus and Anaxagoras *both* (*in Phys.* 9.43.27-45.12).

¹ «Simplicius was, as far as the harmony thesis went, the purest of the pure» (HANKINSON 2004, p. 6); «Simplicius, who goes further than anyone» (SORABJI 1987, p. 8).

² Cf. VAN DEN BERG 2004 and 2007 for a relevant case study: Proclus' student Ammonius quietly corrects his teacher's reading of the relation between Plato's *Cratylus* and Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, so as to defuse its anti-harmonizing implications. Any study focussed on a single Platonic or Aristotelian text might generate readings with the potential to undermine *sumphônia*, which it would naturally fall to the next generation to correct.

³ Though even this is presented as *via media*: «I wanted to reduce somewhat the vast multitude of variegated writings: not, as the most philosophical Syrianus did, to an absolute minimum, but as far as was compatible with leaving out nothing necessary» (*in Cat.* 8.3.8-11).

⁴ On which cf. BALTUSSEN 2008, pp. 42-48.

⁵ See BALTUSSEN 2008, p. 127. Regarding his presentation of Philoponus, Wildberg concludes «that the arguments preserved in this is presented as *authentic*, and that the extant citations do provide us with a fairly comprehensive impression of the original work» (1987, p. 29). But cf. the less sanguine verdict of SORABJI 1991, p. 97.

⁶ I have nothing to add to recent discussions of Simplicius' murky biography and the possible impact of his circumstances on his work: see I. HADOT 1990 and the recent summaries of the debate in GOLITSIS 2008 (pp. 18-

In so doing, Simplicius is really engaging with two traditions at once. For he aspires both to encompass, amalgamate and perfect the insights of his Platonist predecessors (as Plato and Aristotle did *their* predecessors); and, on *behalf* of the Platonist tradition, to outdo alternative modes of reading Aristotle. Thus Simplicius has a markedly agonistic relationship with the great Peripatetic exegete Alexander of Aphrodisias. His attitude to and use of Alexander is complex and ambivalent: Simplicius by turns appropriates, cites, praises, and strives to refute him.¹ (Thus Simplicius' signature, the hesitant *mêpote de* ('but perhaps') which introduces his own view after a survey of the problem and the alternatives, appears particularly often in juxtaposition to the views of Alexander (e.g. after *houtôs men Alexandros*, in *de Cael.* 7.15.13, cf. 7.3.12, 7.41.18, 7.54.19, 7.116.22 7.153.11, etc., in *Phys.* 9.45.23, 46.17, 49.23, etc.).² His guiding aim is to beat Alexander at his own game of careful, detailed, sympathetic philosophical exegesis, and in doing so show that an appreciation of Aristotle *as a Platonist* is indispensable. For it is by missing Aristotle's Platonism that even the great Alexander goes wrong: «It is my opinion that Alexander of Aphrodisias obviously understands the words of Aristotle well on other occasions – and does so better than the other Peripatetics – but, in the case of the things which Aristotle says concerning Plato, he does not seem to me to bear in mind that Aristotle's counter-arguments are directed at the surface import of Plato's statements».³

I cannot here give a full picture of Simplicius' techniques of harmonization, but will note three points. First, the tactics he uses to reconcile Plato and Aristotle are also very similar to those deployed in his broader harmonizations. Not only does the distinction between *nous* and *lexis* underwrite all his harmonizing tropes, the key tactic is again the canonical Neoplatonic move we might call the *disambiguation of objects*: apparent contradictions between different philosophers are dissolved when their claims are clarified as being about distinct objects or aspects of a phenomenon, usually located at different metaphysical levels. (Likewise in ethics, apparently conflicting accounts of the virtues are reconciled by being taken to apply to different *grades* of virtue, following Plotinus *Enn.* I.2.) The claim that Aristotle differs from Plato only superficially is spelled out in two connected ways: Aristotle (I) is always oriented to the natural world and (II) ex-

22) and BALTUSSEN 2008 (pp. 12–14). At a minimum, it seems clear that Simplicius' teaching activity must have been disrupted, if not ended forever, by the closing of the Academy in 529 A.D. and his subsequent exile in Persia; and the scope and content of his works independently suggests a detachment from any immediate teaching context. GOLITSIS perceptively notes that it is not only the length of his quotations and digressions which point in this direction: Simplicius at times breaks the Neoplatonic rules which he himself acknowledges regarding the pedagogical order of various topics (2008, pp. 16–18). It seems reasonable to infer that at least some of his works are addressed to future generations, and aimed more at prospective teachers than at students (cf. BALTUSSEN 2008, pp. 10, 22, GOLITSIS 2008, p. 18).

¹ For a fuller discussion, see Ch. 4 of BALTUSSEN (2008). Of course earlier Neoplatonists also made use of Alexander [BALTUSSEN (2008) p.123]; it is hard to gauge how exceptional the degree of Simplicius' engagement might be.

² Naturally it is also used in response to various others, including Syrianus (7.711.27, 8.231.12), Andronicus (8.143.1), Boethus (8.484.18) and especially Iamblichus (particularly in the *Categories* commentary, where he and Porphyry replace Alexander as Simplicius' exegetical starting point, 8.101.12, 8.144.22, 8.160.35, 8.321.15, 8.332.29, 8.336.30, 8.341.21). A complication is that, far from being proprietary, *mêpote* was evidently a standard locution: at any rate it also appears in Simplicius' quotations from Alexander (in *de Cael.* 7.311.5, 7.429.17, in *Phys.* 9.173.8, 340.30–1, 10.1093.27), Boethus (in *Cat.* 8.373.18), Iamblichus (in *Cat.* 8.144.7, 144.18, 395.2, 415.31, 8.426.9), and Syrianus (in *Phys.* 9.192.29). So it has to be used with caution as a marker for Simplicius' own views, given that the scope of his quotations is often less than obvious.

³ in *de Cael.* 7.377.20–4, trans. Mueller 2004.

presses his thought in more commonplace and empirical terms.¹ Meanwhile, various Presocratics are read as offering accounts which are more seriously *incomplete*, and badly or cryptically expressed in various ways; but Simplicius insists that they are nonetheless compatible with Plato and Aristotle alike, when carefully restated and put in their proper place. On this latter front Simplicius is again taking his cue from the more charitable and positive moments of Aristotle's engagement with his predecessors in *Physics* I (188a19-27, b26-9a1) and *Metaphysics* I-II (987a2-9, 988a20-23, b16-20, 993a11-24, 31-b19).

Second, harmonizing the substance of the views in question is only half the job: Simplicius must also defuse the passages in which one author explicitly *criticises* another as incorrect. Here too, Simplicius applies the same solution to Aristotle's criticisms of the Presocratics and to his attacks on Plato. In both cases he insists that only a superficial (mis)reading of the view in question is really under attack. Of Aristotle *contra* Plato, Simplicius says:

It is opportune to say again what I am accustomed to repeating, that the difference between the two philosophers is not substantial [*ou pragmatikê tis esti tôn philosophôn hê diaphônia*]; but Aristotle often confronts the outward appearance of an argument which can be understood in a worse way, and out of consideration for those who take Plato's argument superficially [*epipolaiôs*], appears to contradict Plato... (*in de Caelo* 7.640.27-31).

Likewise, in introducing his *diairesis* of Aristotle's predecessors, Simplicius says that Aristotle argues against them – that is, «against the apparent sense, in order to come to the help of those who took them superficially [*epipolaiôs*]» (9.21.19-20). His apparent refutations are actually clarifications: the need for these stems from the fact that these early philosophers discussed their principles in an obscure and riddling way (9.21.15-19). Aristotle himself is often guilty of obscurity [*asapheia*]: indeed, Simplicius and other Neoplatonists treat this as characteristic of him,² whereas the ancients are more typically characterised by 'riddling' [*ainigmatôdês*] speech:

these people 'Plato and Aristotle', being concerned about those who listen more superficially, refuted what appeared absurd in their accounts, since the ancients were accustomed to express their doctrines in riddles [*ainigmatôdês*]. ... So they 'sc. Aristotle, Plato, etc.' *seem* to be refuting, when sometimes they are supplying what was left out, sometimes making clear what was said unclearly, sometimes distinguishing [*diakrinein*] what was said with regard to the intelligibles as being unable to apply to natural things (as in the case of those who said that Being is one and unmoved), sometimes forestalling the easy acceptances of more superficial people (36.28-37.7).

Reading superficially [*epipolaiôs*] is characteristic of superficial people – those who, were it not for the philanthropy of careful interpreters, would take the words of the ancients without regard for the qualifications and disambiguations clear to those who understand their underlying intentions.

It is easier to see the appeal of this strategy if we bear in mind that it is, again, a silent correction and outbidding of Simplicius' predecessors. Proclus and Syrianus are prepared to criticise Aristotle outright when he criticises Plato. In the prologue to his com-

¹ See HOFFMANN 1987b, pp. 78-79, with references, especially *in de Cael.* 69.11-15, 679.27-31, *in Phys.* 1249.12-17, and *in Cat.* 6.22-30.

² As he says in the *in Cat.*: «unlike some of his predecessors, Aristotle did not make use of myths or of symbolic riddles, but preferred obscurity [*asapheia*] to all other kinds of veiling» (8.6.31-3, cf. 7.6-9). Obscurity was even used as a criterion for the authenticity of Aristotelian works: cf. TUOMINEN 2009, p. 3.

mentary on the *Metaphysics*, after an extended tribute to Aristotle's accomplishments and sagacity, Syrianus adds:

Yet since – for what reasons I do not know – ... Aristotle was moved to charge violently in an assault on the first principles of Pythagoras and Plato, without saying anything sound or adequate against them and even, if one must speak the plain truth, without succeeding for the most part in touching them (because in these attacks he puts forward his own presuppositions), it appeared reasonable, in order to prevent the newest among my auditors [from being carried away] ... to submit the text to a critical and impartial [*adekastôs*] examination using the best of our abilities and to show that the doctrines concerning Plato's and Pythagoras' first principles remain unrefuted and unshaken, and that Aristotle's undertakings against these doctrines most often miss their mark and examine subjects which in no way concern these divine men, whereas in a small number of cases they strive to say something no doubt which holds against them and to criticise them, but without being able to effect a refutation, whether great or small. And it had to be thus, since 'the truth can never be refuted' ...¹

The defense of Plato against these criticisms is a central point of Syrianus' Commentary; his primary strategy, announced here, is the same as that adopted later by Simplicius, namely clarification through disambiguation. For the most part, Aristotle's criticisms sail harmlessly past Plato's claims properly understood, though they would be fair were those claims made with regard to different or less differentiated objects.

This earlier approach is likely to strike us as more plausible than Simplicius', by being less strained in its defense of Aristotle: but it is clearly unstable. There is an irredeemable tension between, on the one hand, Syrianus' enormous respect for Aristotle and his general picture of Plato and Aristotle as in accord, and on the other hand the implication that Aristotle is, inexplicably, an incompetent or malicious reader of Plato. Simplicius resolves this by silently correcting his respected predecessor through the minimum interpretive adjustment. His tweak is ingenious: Aristotle *means* to criticise those misguided views against which his criticisms are in fact valid; and he does *not* mean to impute those views to Plato. Instead his concern is to *prevent* misguided readings to that effect.

This line of reading is not quite as dodgy or ad hoc as it sounds. First, Simplicius' commitment to charitable interpretation *requires* that he read the ancient writings (including their criticisms of each other) as compatible with the truth – and to that extent compatible with each other – insofar as possible. Simplicius is also consistent (and, in my view, not unreasonable) in presuming that some of the most important Presocratics, and perhaps Plato to some extent as well, tended to express themselves in 'riddling' terms. Their texts are oracular, using a heightened style which is often mythic or figurative and which deliberately blocks the comprehension of the many, thus *demanding* the kind of disambiguating interpretation that both Aristotle and Simplicius supply. Aristotle himself has, by contrast, undertaken to write more openly, for a broader, less advanced audience in a less heightened style – though he too sometimes baffles through deliberate obscurity [*asapheia*]. (Plato seems to be somewhere in between Aristotle and the Presocratics, writing of elevated matters in an elevated and thus difficult style (cf. *in Phys.* 9.8.9-15, nb. *ainigmatôdês* 9.454.15 and his rejection of customary usage at *in de*

¹ in *Metaph.* 13, CAG 6.1.80.16-81.3, translation by SAFFREY 1990, pp. 174-175. My understanding of Syrianus as harmonizer is heavily indebted to SAFFREY 1990 and 1992.

Cael. 7.69.11-15 and in *Phys.* 10.1249.12-17).¹ Moreover, Simplicius is right that it is not always so easy as we might assume to distinguish critique from clarification in the texts he is concerned with. After all, for the Neoplatonists the philosophical text *par excellence* is Plato's *Parmenides*, which *seems* both to refute the author's own doctrines and to demonstrate contradictions. Scholars still argue over just how we should read some of the apparent self-corrections in Plato's own works, not only in the *Parmenides* but (for instance) in the argument against the 'Friends of the Forms' in the *Sophist*.

Still, it has to be admitted that Simplicius' solution is in the end unsatisfying. There is, after all, every difference between *criticising* a certain position as false and *warning* that it risks being *misunderstood* as false, unless carefully rephrased and explained. And it is very hard to believe that Aristotle was unaware of the distinction, or to read him as always intending to do the latter. If Aristotle is so worried about misunderstandings by the vulgar, why would he frame his clarifications of his predecessors in such a deeply misleading way?

So far as I can see, Simplicius has no clear answer to this question. On the other hand – and this is my third general point about his methods –, the question may be somewhat unfair in its presuppositions. Simplicius is, as I have already suggested, influenced by Aristotle's own very expansive version of the principle of charity, which he deploys in order to state, translated into his own terms, what his predecessors were really getting at. For Aristotle, the interpretive question is not one of 'authorial intention' narrowly construed. What matters is not really what Empedocles consciously intended to assert at the time of writing; it is what a revived, dialectically re-educated Empedocles would have to say to an enlightened reformulation of his ideas: «But while he would necessarily have agreed if another had said this, he has not said it clearly» (993a22-3).² It is these corrected, reformulated views which are in a sense 'the same', each contributing in its own way to the great mass of truth as described in *Metaph.* II.1. Though the results may be extreme, Simplicius' interpretive methods here are, it seems to me, largely Aristotle's own. And perhaps they are not really so extreme or unfamiliar by modern standards. For most modern readers of Plato or Shakespeare as well, the interpreter's job is not just to clarify the author's explicit and conscious intentions in their own terms, but to reveal dimensions of meaning of which he might or might not have been aware.

A related factor is that it is hard to overstate the depth of Simplicius' commitment to the objective truth and metaphysical reality of the Platonic system. The levels of reality expounded by Plato and his successors are all objectively *there*, and all serious philosophy is an expression of engagement with them. Moreover, no such expression can be final and complete. Language is an imperfect business with an essentially remedial function;³ and all uses of it are necessarily incomplete, shaped and limited by orientation to

¹ On these passages, in which Simplicius tends to run together considerations of method, expression and subject matter in contrasting Plato and Aristotle, cf. HOFFMANN 2006, pp. 603-604.

² This Aristotelian ideal of re-education has both deep roots in ancient dialectical practice and a long afterlife in historically informed philosophizing: I discuss this in a paper on Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A.3, currently in preparation for the proceedings of the XVIII Symposium Aristotelicum.

³ See HOFFMANN 1987a. Language goes with the fall and embodiment of soul, and its function is to make possible the philosophical pedagogy which enables our return to the higher levels of being: «Le langage est tendu vers la reconquête de l'unité perdue, c'est-à-dire vers sa propre abolition» (p. 87). I wonder whether we can see in Neoplatonic harmonizing interpretation an echo of this conception of language itself as having an essential function of *reunification*.

a particular audience in need of a particular pedagogy.¹ Within this framework it is natural – not forced – for Simplicius to treat the differences between different philosophical authors as differences in emphasis, expression, and pedagogical orientation. For him, philosophical systems are like a series of paintings of the same vista produced by different artists, each from a somewhat different angle and focussed on a distinctive set of features – but depictions of the same reality for all that, and at worst misleading rather than conflicting or outright wrong.² If a philosophical view deserves consideration at all, it is because it captures *some* aspect of a reality which none can express completely.

II. HARMONIZATION AS A PHILOSOPHICAL AND INTERPRETIVE PROJECT

Simplicius' project of harmonization is thus shaped by some rather distinctive features of his work: his belatedness in his tradition, his polemical and agonistic aspirations, his Aristotelian impulses towards charity and appropriation, and his profound commitment to Platonism. But it is still worthwhile to locate his work in the broader philosophical context: for projects of harmonization are endemic to philosophical exegesis and may serve many functions at once. Seen as a genre, harmonizations range in scope from a single work (e.g., arguments that Book X of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is compatible with Book I), to the oeuvre of an author as a whole (as in 'unitarian' readings of Plato), to the whole of a tradition – or even the whole of philosophy or wisdom cross-culturally, as in Pico della Mirandola's synthesis of the Greek, Christian, Cabbalistic, Zoroastrian (and other!) traditions in his *Nine Hundred Theses*.

I cannot here aspire to a typology of harmonizations: but some recurrent features are worth noting. Often there is an apologetic or polemical motivation: to harmonize a family of texts is to *vindicate* them against at least one obvious line of critique, and I have already noted that Simplicius sees himself as defending the whole of the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition against charges of *diaphōnia*. Second, though harmonization might seem to be in principle a purely exegetical matter, it standardly takes the form of pressing texts in the direction of the truth. To put it another way, to harmonize texts seems to involve treating them as presumptive authorities. Consider two very early examples from the Greek tradition. In Plato's *Protagoras*, Protagoras tries to get Socrates to agree that a certain ode of Simonides is well-made, then that it contradicts itself (i.e., exhibits internal *diaphōnia*) by making the same claim for which it criticizes Pittacus (339a-d). Socrates responds by vindicating the poem with a close reading (actually a succession of three readings, of which the first two are abortive); by leaning heavily on the distinction between 'being' and 'becoming', he renders the argument of the poem coherent – and, as he elaborates it, true (339e-47a). Second, the very earliest surviving work

¹ Thus incompleteness in a theory is no real reproach. Since philosophy is essentially a pedagogical enterprise, directed at a particular audience, all philosophical authors operate on a 'need to know' basis, including Simplicius himself: so for instance, when his *Encheiridion* commentary touches on relations, he does not bother to bring in the Aristotelian definitions discussed exhaustively in the *Categories* commentary (as is noted by LUNA 1987, p. 139).

² This attitude can be glimpsed in an odd turn of phrase at *in Phys.* 9.3.19, in Simplicius' recounting of the *skopos* (object, topic) of the *Physics*: «And the principles are the causes strictly speaking and the auxiliary causes; and the causes, according to them [the Peripatetics], are the efficient and the final, and the auxiliary causes the form and matter and the elements generally [*holōs*]. But Plato adds [*prostithēsi*] the paradigmatic as a cause, and the instrumental as an auxiliary cause». Even though we, like Simplicius, use the present tense for the content of philosophical theories, the 'adds' here sounds very odd to us. But Simplicius finds it a natural way to express what is for him the significant point, namely the timeless fact that Plato gives the richer account.

of Greek hermeneutics, the *Derveni Papyrus* (probably dateable to the late 5th century B.C.),¹ is a harmonization of sorts, largely in the form of a commentary on an Orphic cosmogonic poem. The authorship and purpose of the text are enormously controversial, but its apparent purpose is to defend the Orphic hymn by showing that it expresses, in 'riddling' language, the insights of modern (i.e., Presocratic) science.²

So, standardly, a harmonization presents the texts it treats as authoritative by showing them to be (1) internally and/or mutually coherent, and (2) convergent on the truth.³ There is no conceptual *necessity* for a harmonizing interpretation to take this form. Hippolytus' *Refutation of All Heresies*, one of our most important sources for Presocratic texts, is a kind of harmonization as *reductio*, attempting to reveal that various Christian sects are really just repeating ancient Greek ideas. But it is harmonization of the standard kind which seems to have deep roots in the ancient exegetical enterprise, as a basic modality of charitable interpretation. And the idea that ancient wisdom is expressed in 'riddling' form, for which an exegete's decoding is the necessary complement, also goes back to the beginning. It is a central presumption of the *Derveni Papyrus* (cols. 7, 9, 10, 13, etc.); and, though it is not quite a harmonization, we might also think of Socrates' interpretation of the Delphic oracle as recounted in Plato's *Apology* (20d-3b).⁴ This is surely, for a Platonist, the primal scene of intelligent interpretation; and what provides a model here is that, rather than presume understanding, Socrates undertakes to discover the meaning of the riddling oracle by independent investigation of the facts. Precisely because the god cannot lie, Socrates can determine the meaning of his enigmatic utterance by testing and even trying to 'refute' it (21b-c). On this conception, an authoritative text is not one which obviates or precludes inquiry but one which *requires* it: for only when we have established the truth can we be sure that we have correctly understood the authoritative text which encodes it.

In cases such as these, it seems natural to suppose that the oracle, or Orpheus, or Simonides, is simply passively received as an authority by his interpreter, whose interpretation follows as a sort of externally imposed duty. But harmonizations may be motivated along radically different lines: some are constructive philosophical projects in which the engagement with earlier texts is secondary, and the authority of those texts a largely heuristic presumption. The great modern example is Leibniz, who sought to reconcile the views of scholastics and Cartesians (and other 'moderns'), Protestants and Catholics, Platonists and Aristotelians. His harmonizing stance was explicit and principled (and quite possibly influenced by the Neoplatonists, who were a powerful influence on him in other respects):⁵ «Most philosophical schools are largely right in what they assert, but not so much in what they deny».⁶ For «when one comes down to the

¹ Though this traditional dating has been challenged by FREDE 2007.

² For the *Derv. Pap.* cf. the edition of KOUREMENOS *et al.* 2006, BETEGH 2004a and 2004b, Laks and Most (eds.) 1997, and FREDE 2007. BETEGH 2004b shows that the bulk of the *Derv. Pap.* is correctly classified as a commentary.

³ E.g., the *De Anima* commentary attributed to Simplicius (but likely by Priscian) (CAG XI) explicitly seeks to harmonize Aristotle with himself, with the truth and with Iamblichus. See STEEL 1978, pp. 7-9.

⁴ BETEGH 2004b suggests not only that «the hermeneutics of oracles functioned as a general exegetical paradigm» for the *Derv. Pap.* (p. 49), but that «the hermeneutics of oracles, considered as the paradigmatic form of textual exegesis, might have had a significant role in other early commentaries as well» (p. 49).

⁵ Cf. MERCER 2001, Chapters 5 and 6.

⁶ G iii 607, trans. Ross 1984, p. 75. Leibniz as harmonizer is a central theme of ROSS 1984 and MERCER 2001 («conciliatory eclecticism», pp. 47ff., 112-119, 383-384). Presumably it is not a coincidence that harmony of various kinds is a central motif of Leibnizian metaphysics, as unity is for the Neoplatonists.

basics, one finds that most philosophical schools have more of the truth than one would have believed... They come together as at a centre of perspective, from which an object (confused if looked at from any other position) displays its regularity and the appropriateness of its parts. The commonest failing is the sectarian spirit in which people diminish themselves by rejecting others». ¹ One can see many of Leibniz' philosophical innovations as attempts to combine and reconcile the bitterly divided intellectual traditions to which he was heir.

A different point of comparison again would be with contemporary Kantians such as Chris Korsgaard, Barbara Herman and Allen Wood. How far it makes sense to speak of Kant as an *authority* for these philosophers is unclear (though to speak of them as working in the Kantian tradition seems fair enough); and their philosophical originality is uncontroversially equal to that of their tradition-free contemporary rivals. But what this shows, I take it, is that their Kantianism is more a matter of *method* than dogma: a Kantian is a philosopher who finds it fruitful to work on philosophical problems concurrently with related interpretive problems in Kant. This is what I have in mind by saying that philosophical authority may be *heuristic*; and such authority goes naturally with philosophically constructive projects of harmonization. For instance, Christine Korsgaard develops a general account of her own views in the lecture series, *The Sources of Normativity*, in part by surveying a range of major modern ethical theories. In her final lecture, she comments: «I hope by now it is clear that all of the accounts of normativity which I have discussed in these lectures are true». ² For instance, «voluntarists like Pufendorf and Hobbes held that normativity must spring from the commands of a legislator... As we saw, that view is true. What it describes is the relation in which we stand to ourselves». ³ Likewise, «Realists like Nagel think that reasons are intrinsically normative entities... This view is also true. What it describes is the activity of the thinking self as it assesses the impulses that present themselves to us, the legislative proposals of our nature». ⁴ Important earlier views each contain a profound grain of truth, but they may well be misunderstood and overextended by their own authors; it is by seeing how they can be reconciled with each other – and, in particular, with the central insights of Kantianism – that we can see exactly where that grain of truth lies. This seems to me very close to the spirit of Aristotle in *Metaphysics* II.1, and Simplicius in the Corollary on place (*in de Cael.* 7.640.12ff., quoted above).

It would obviously be a mistake to press these parallels too far. Simplicius, unlike these philosophical harmonizers, is avowedly more an exegete than an independent theorist; and Plato (and perhaps even Aristotle) is for him more than a merely heuristic authority. Still, the general point stands that authority in philosophy has this heuristic function, as a scaffolding for creative problem-solving; and harmonization is a leading mode by which that problem-solving, at once philosophical and exegetical, takes place. After all, a harmonization is formally a solution [*lusion*] to a puzzle [*aporia*] with the following structure: A, in text x, says P; on the other hand B, in text y, says ~P. But there is no puzzle here without some presumption to the effect that both P and ~P should be accepted (or that both x and y are correct, that both A and B are wise, etc.). Now this presumption, and the motivation behind it, might take any number of forms. The harmonizer might be a scholar-exegete antecedently committed to the authoritative wis-

¹ G iv 523-4, trans. Ross 1984, p. 75.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 164-165.

² KORSGAARD 1996, p. 164.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 165.

dom of both A and B; at the other extreme, the presumption of correctness might be adopted for the sake of argument, as the occasion for a virtuoso display of philosophical or exegetical technique. A constructive philosopher like Leibniz or Korsgaard is likely to be drawn to harmonization in cases where A *seems to make a plausible argument* for P and B does the same for \sim P; in such cases, harmonization becomes a way of discovering where the truth lies. Exegesis can help us to think through the question, 'P or \sim P?', by framing questions like: in what sense exactly does A seem to mean P, and B \sim P? What other senses are available? Which of these senses are genuinely incompatible with each other? At this point techniques of close reading come to the aid of philosophical inquiry: such harmonization is a kind of textually framed variant of the dialectical method of 'argument on both sides' [*antilogikē*], which Aristotle and others take over from the sophists.

So for philosophical harmonizers, the *function* of authority (whatever the origin and grounds of that authority) is to enable such philosophical problem-solving by exegetical means. One way to put this, in the case at hand, would be to say that the authoritative texts of Plato and Aristotle provide the Neoplatonists with something like a Kuhnian scientific paradigm: that is, a conceptual framework which determines basic postulates and rules for evidence and reasoning, and which earns its keep by enabling interesting problems to be resolved.¹ And if Simplicius is anomalous as a philosophical harmonizer, it is not – as the comparanda above should make clear – because his enterprise is unusually ambitious or his results extreme. Rather, he is unusual (and falls at the opposite end of the spectrum from a Leibniz or Korsgaard) in that his harmonization is performed under the guise of almost pure exegesis.

III. CONCLUSIONS

I have tried to make the case for two claims. First, we can do better than to speak of Simplicius as simply being committed to 'the' Neoplatonic project of harmonizing Plato and Aristotle. Simplicius' project is a very distinctive one, and properly speaking it is not to harmonize Plato and Aristotle. Nor, on the other hand, is it to harmonize the whole of pagan wisdom, or even the whole of Greek philosophy. Rather, it is to vindicate the unity of a certain dominant, broadly Platonic philosophical tradition which importantly includes Aristotle, the Presocratics, and to a lesser extent the Stoics, the better to defend that tradition against Christian attack. The scope, methods and spirit of this project are all modeled on Aristotle's own treatment of his predecessors, including an expansive but not unreasonable version of the principle of charity. Second, I have tried to bring out that projects of harmonization in philosophy have a perennial attraction for philosopher and interpreter alike, and not only those who are antecedently committed to a canon of conflicting authorities. Projects of harmonization come in many guises, and range across a spectrum from the primarily philosophically to the purely exegetical. Simplicius comes close to the latter extreme: his persona and methods are in fact strikingly close to those of a familiar sort of modern scholar, notwithstanding the strong philosophical commitments which inform his project. Finally, I would suggest that this self-appointed role as exegete is, more than anything else, an ex-

¹ KUHN 1970. A broadly Kuhnian account of the functioning of philosophical traditions can be found in MACINTYRE (1981): Kuhn is not an explicit reference point there, but cf. MACINTYRE (1977).

pression of Simplicius' self-conscious belatedness. With a few exceptions, such as the residual puzzles about place and time addressed in the Corollaries, Simplicius's work shows us *what it is like to do philosophy after all the philosophical problems have been solved*. All that remains open to him is the essentially interpretive work of showing how the correct solutions fit together.¹

WORKS CITED

- Adamson P., Baltussen H. and M. Stone (eds.) 2004, *Philosophy, Science and Exegesis in Greek, Arabic and Latin Commentaries*, 2 vols., London, Institute of Classical Studies.
- ATHANASSIADI P. 1993, *Persecution and Response in Late Paganism: The Evidence of Damascius*, «Journal of Hellenic Studies», 113, pp. 1-29.
- Athanassiadi P. (ed., trans., notes) 1999, *Damascius: The Philosophical History*, Athens, Apamea.
- BALTUSSEN H. 2004, *Plato Protagoras 340-8: Commentary in the Making?*, in P. Adamson et alii (eds.) 2004, vol. 1, pp. 21-35.
- BALTUSSEN H. 2008, *Philosophy and Exegesis in Simplicius: The Methodology of a Commentator*, London, Duckworth.
- Barnes J. (ed.) 1984, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- BETEGH G. 2004a, *The Derveni Papyrus*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- BETEGH G. 2004b, *Exegesis in the Derveni Papyrus*, in P. Adamson et alii (eds.) 2004, vol. 1, pp. 37-50.
- Blumenthal H. and H. Robinson (eds.) 1991, *Aristotle and the Later Tradition*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- Bos E. and A. Meijer (eds.) 1992, *On Proclus and His Influence in Medieval Philosophy*, Leiden, Brill.
- Brittain C. and T. Brennan (trans., notes) 2002, *Simplicius: On Epictetus' Handbook 1-26 and 27-53* (2 vols.), Ithaca, Cornell University Press.
- Chase M. (trans.) 2003, *Simplicius: On Aristotle's Categories 1-4*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.
- FREDE M. 2007, *On the Unity and the Aim of the Derveni Text*, «Rhizai», 1: pp. 9-33.
- Furley D. and C. Wildberg (trans.) 1991, *Philoponus and Simplicius: Place, Void, and Eternity*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.
- GERSON L. 2005a, *Aristotle and Other Platonists*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press.
- GERSON L. 2006a, *The Harmony of Plato and Aristotle according to Neoplatonism*, in H. Tarrant and D. Baltzly (eds.) 2006, pp. 195-222.
- GERSON L. 2006b, *What is Platonism?*, «Journal of the History of Philosophy», 43(3), pp. 253-276.
- GILL M. L. and P. Pellegrin (eds.) 2006, *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy*. Oxford, Blackwell.
- GOLITSIS P. 2008, *Les commentaires de Simplicius et de Jean Philopon à la Physique d'Aristote: tradition et innovation*, Berlin, De Gruyter.
- Goulet-Cazé M.-O. (ed.) 2000, *Le commentaire: entre tradition et innovation*, Paris, Vrin.
- Hadot I. (ed.) 1987, *Simplicius: sa vie, son oeuvre, sa survie*, Berlin, De Gruyter.
- HADOT I. 1990, *The Life and Work of Simplicius in Greek and Arabic Sources*, in R. Sorabji (ed.) 1990, pp. 275-303.
- HADOT I. 1996, *Simplicius: Commentaire sur le Manuel d'Epictète*, Leiden, Brill.
- HADOT P. 1990, *The Harmony of Plotinus and Aristotle According to Porphyry*, in R. Sorabji (ed.) 1990, pp. 125-140.
- HADOT P. 1995a, *Philosophy, Exegesis, and Creative Mistakes*, in P. HADOT 1995b, pp. 71-77. [Cited by HOFFMANN 2006 as first pub. 1968].
- HADOT P. 1995b, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, edited by A. Davidson. Oxford, Blackwell.
- Hankinson R. J. (trans., intro.) 2004, *Simplicius: On Aristotle On the Heavens 1.5-9*, London, Duckworth.
- HOFFMANN P. 1987a, *Catégories et langage selon Simplicius*, in I. Hadot (ed.) 1987, pp. 61-90.
- HOFFMANN P. 1987b, *Simplicius' Polemics*, in R. Sorabji (ed.) 1987, pp. 57-83.

¹ My thanks to Stephen Menn and Giuseppe Cambiano for very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

- HOFFMANN P. 2006, *What Was Commentary in Late Antiquity? The Example of the Neoplatonic Commentators*, in M. L. Gill and P. Pellegrin (eds.), pp. 597-622.
- KAROMANOLIS G. 2006, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- KORSGAARD C. 1996, *The Sources of Normativity*; Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Kouremenos T., Parassoglou G. and K. Tsantsanoglou (eds.) 2006, *The Derveni Papyrus*, Firenze, Olschki (= «Studi e Testi Per il Corpus dei Papiri Filosofici Greci e Latini», 13).
- KUHN T. 1970, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd edn., Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Laks A. and G. Most (eds.) 1997, *Studies on the Derveni Papyrus*, Oxford, Clarendon.
- LUNA C. 1987, *La relation chez Simplicius*, in I. HADOT 1987, pp. 113-147.
- MACINTYRE A. 1977, *Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science*, «Monist», 60.4, pp. 453-472.
- MACINTYRE A. 1981, *After Virtue*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press.
- MANSFELD J. 1985, *Historical and Philosophical Aspects of Gorgias, On What is Not*, as reprinted in MANSFELD 1990, pp. 97-125.
- MANSFELD J. 1990, *Studies in the Historiography of Greek Philosophy*, Assen, Van Gorcum.
- MENN S. (forthcoming), *Self-Motion and Reflection: Hermias and Proclus on the Harmony of Plato and Aristotle on the Soul*.
- MERCER C. 2001, *Leibniz' Metaphysics: Its Origins and Development*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- MOST G. 1999a, *Preface*, in G. Most (ed.) 1999b.
- Most G. (ed.) 1999b, *Commentaries – Kommentare*. (= *Aporemata* 4), Gottingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Mueller I. (trans.) 2004, *Simplicius: On Aristotle's On the Heavens 2.1-9*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.
- Pépin J. and H. D. Saffrey (eds.) 1987, *Proclus, Lecteur et Interprète des Anciens*, Paris, CNRS.
- ROSS G. M. 1984, *Leibniz*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- SAFFREY H. D. 1990, *How Did Syrianus Regard Aristotle?*, in R. Sorabji (ed.) 1990, pp. 173-179.
- SAFFREY H. D. 1992, *Accorder entre elles les traditions théologiques: une caractéristique du néoplatonisme athénien*, in E. Bos and A. Meijer (eds.) 1992, pp. 35-50, cited as reprinted in SAFFREY 2000, pp. 143-158.
- SAFFREY H. D. 2000, *Le Néoplatonisme après Plotin*, Paris, J. Vrin, 2000.
- SHEPPARD A. 1987, *Proclus' Philosophical Method of Exegesis: The Use of Aristotle and the Stoics in the Commentary on the Cratylus*, in J. Pepin and H. D. Saffrey (eds.) 1987, pp. 137-151.
- SORABJI R. 1987, *General Introduction*, in Wildberg (trans.) 1987, pp. 1-17.
- SORABJI R. (ed.) 1987, *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, London, Duckworth.
- SORABJI R. 1990, *The Ancient Commentators on Aristotle*, in R. Sorabji (ed.) 1990, pp. 1-30.
- Sorabji R. (ed.) 1990, *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and their Influence*, London, Duckworth.
- SORABJI R. 1991, *Introduction*, in D. Furley and C. Wildberg (trans.) 1991, pp. 97-100.
- SORABJI R. 2004-2005, *The Philosophy of the Commentators 200-600 AD: A Sourcebook*, 3 vols., London, Duckworth.
- STEELE C. 1978, *The Changing Self*, Brussels, Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België.
- Tarrant H. and D. Baltzly (eds.) 2006, *Reading Plato in Antiquity*, London, Duckworth.
- TUOMINEN M. 2009, *The Ancient Commentators on Plato and Aristotle*, Stocksfield, Acumen.
- Urmson J. (trans.) 1992, *Simplicius: Corollaries on Place and Time*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.
- VAN DEN BERG R. M. 2004, *Smoothing over the Differences: Proclus and Ammonius on Plato's Cratylus and Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, in P. Adamson et alii (eds.) 2004, vol. 1, pp. 191-201.
- VAN DEN BERG R. M. 2007, *Proclus' Commentary on the Cratylus in Context*, Leiden, Brill.
- Wildberg C. (trans.) 1987, *Philoponus: Against Aristotle, on the Eternity of the World*, London, Duckworth.

COMPOSTO IN CARATTERE DANTE MONOTYPE DALLA
FABRIZIO SERRA EDITORE, PISA · ROMA.
STAMPATO E RILEGATO NELLA
TIPOGRAFIA DI AGNANO, AGNANO PISANO (PISA).

★

Febbraio 2010

(CZ 2 · FG 24)



