

Contribution to Academy Colloquium

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Polemon, *grosse Schatten* of the Old Academy

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The mystery of Polemon has been a concern to me ever since I began to take an interest in the Old Academy after Plato, an interest which goes back, to at least a certain extent, all the way to the mid-1970's. At the time of composing *The Middle Platonists* (1977), I was moved to remark (p. 40) that though Polemon "administered the Academy for over fifty years, and certainly left a mark on it, .. of the nature of that mark we are miserably ill-informed." The 'fifty years' is, it must be said, a slight exaggeration. Polemon was scholarch from 314 to 267, which gives us 47 years -- but no matter; the point is valid enough.

I do note, of course, that such sources as we have put a strong emphasis on practical ethics, and I quote Diogenes Laertius on the topic (IV 18):

"Polemon used to say that we should exercise ourselves with facts (*pragmata*), and not with logical speculations (*dialektika theôrêmata*), which leave us, like a man who has got up some paltry handbook on harmony but never practised, able, indeed, to win admiration for skill in asking questions (*erôtêsis*), but utterly at variance with ourselves in the ordering of our lives (*diathesis*)." (trans. Hicks).

This is certainly the remark of a man who has due contempt for abstract theorizing in an area where the quality of practical activity is crucial, and it may well reflect the overall attitude to theoretical philosophy of our subject today, but I do not think that it can be the whole story.

Two larger questions seem to me to arise as background to any inquiry into the nature of Polemon's place in the Platonic tradition. The first is what it means to be a Platonist at all; and the second is the extent to which the

Stoicism of Zeno of Kition and his successors can reasonably be viewed – in the way that it was viewed by Antiochus of Ascalon, for example¹ -- as a sort of ‘correction’, or ‘tidying-up’, of the teachings of Polemon.

On the first question, I must say that I have been most attracted of late by a bold formulation of Lloyd Gerson, in a new book of his on a subject that he has been worrying away at for some time now,² concerning the basic characteristics of what he wants to term ‘Ur-Platonism’ (UP). He chooses to express this as a set of negativities, tendencies in philosophy that Plato is *against*. They are as follows: *anti-materialism, anti-mechanism, anti-nominalism, anti-relativism, and anti-scepticism*. Gerson does not wish to claim that these ‘anti’s were ever formalized by Plato as such, or that they constituted any kind of creed to which members of the Academy had to swear allegiance; simply that these negativities were a sort of framework within which Plato and those who became his companions were content to work.

In connection with Polemon -- and indeed certain other members of the Academy, such as Philip of Opus and Heraclides of Pontus – the most interesting of these ‘taboos’ is ‘materialism’. As far as Plato was concerned, the materialism which he opposed would have been above all the atomism of Leucippus and Democritus, which also involved ‘mechanism’. What I would like to suggest, in the context of Polemon, is that such arguable ‘material’ entities as the Aristotelian *aither*, or indeed the ‘craftsmanly’ or ‘intellectual’ fire (*pyr tekhnikon, noeron*) of the Stoics would not necessarily fall under the Platonist ban, and that thus it becomes a permissible option to adopt such a concept as *aither* to serve as the substance of the heavenly bodies, the soul, and even of God; but more of that presently.

The second question is one which is central for evaluating the project of Antiochus of Ascalon in the 1st cent. B.C. Antiochus, as is by now well enough known,³ bases his return to a dogmatic system of Platonism on the premiss

¹ Cf. Cic. *Acad*, I 35; 43..

² *From Plato to Platonism*, Ch. 1 (forthcoming).

³ In this connection, I have been deriving much stimulation recently by a reading of a number of the papers contained in *The Philosophy of Antiochus*, ed. David Sedley (Cambridge, 2012), specifically

that Zeno, in founding Stoicism, is simply engaged on a kind of ‘re-vamping’ of the brand of Platonism being promulgated by Polemon and his associates in the final stage of Old Academic period, during the first two decades of the third century. The issue is whether he is engaging here in some wholesale deception, or self-deception, or whether, after all, he (who is likely to have known a great deal more about the Old Academy than we can ever do) has some solid basis for his postulate. I would like to suggest that the truth here lies, as so often, somewhere in the middle between two extreme positions: the acceptance at face value of all of Antiochus’ claims, so far as we can discern them; and what one may call the ‘Barnesian’ position,⁴ that the whole concept of the revived ‘Old Academy’ and its wide-ranging concordance with Stoicism is a fantasy and a fabrication by Antiochus. It seems to me quite probable that Antiochus is massaging the evidence to some extent, in order to maximize the degree of concordance (though he is not behind-hand either in criticizing the Stoics when he feels they have deviated from the Old Academic tradition!),⁵ but that he could not have advanced his theory at all, had he not had at least some stimulus to it from his knowledge of the philosophical positions of Xenocrates and, in particular, Polemon.

That said, let us turn briefly to look at the biographical details on Polemon as preserved in Diogenes Laertius – probably borrowed by him in large part from the Hellenistic gossip-columnist Antigonus of Carystus, who was a virtual contemporary (fl. c. 240 B.C.), and thus not entirely devoid of credibility.⁶ Antigonus gives us the – presumably reliable – ‘hard’ facts that Polemon was the son of one Philostratus, of the deme of Oea, who was a very

those of Roberto Polito, Sedley himself, Charles Brittain, Brad Inwood, George Boys-Stones, David Blank, and Mauro Bonazzi (though all the papers are excellent in their ways).

⁴ That is to say, the position adopted by Jonathan Barnes, particularly in his essay ‘Antiochus of Ascalon’, in *Philosophia Togata*, edd. M. Griffin & J. Barnes, Oxford, 1989.

⁵ As, of course, he is prepared to criticize Aristotle and Theophrastus when they deviate, despite his stance on the essential unity of the Academy and the Peripatos (cf. e.g. Cic. *Acad.* I 33).

⁶ DL drops his name à propos of some slightly later details, but it is plain from a more or less parallel passage in Philodemus’ *History of the Academy* (cols. IV 40 – XIII 10) that Antigonus is responsible for the earlier details as well.

prominent member of Athenian society (*prôtos tôn politôn*), and kept a stable of horses for chariot-racing (*harmatotrophêsai*) – this detail being presumably selected as a characteristic mark of great wealth. Philostratus does not seem to figure in the contemporary inscriptional record, so he may have avoided public life, and stuck to the tendance of his horses! At any rate, that is more or less the last hard fact we are going to get; the rest of our information comes under the category of anecdote – though that is not to say that useful information may not be derived from it.

. These anecdotes fall into two sections: those that concern Polemon's earlier life of dissipation, and those which concern his notable austerity following his conversion.

As to the former group, as I was reading over the account of Polemon's conversion to philosophy, something possibly significant struck me, which had not done so previously. This is a very popular anecdote, of which Gigante is able to list fully 19 versions in his collection of the 'fragments,'⁷ which involves Polemon, who at this stage is a notorious rake, on the head of an agreement with his young friends (*synthemenos tois neois*) – presumably some sort of wager was involved – lurching into Xenocrates' seminar, drunk and garlanded (*methyôn kai estephanômenos*), with the purpose, we must imagine, of causing some sort of mayhem, and discomfiting the notoriously unflappable Xenocrates. Instead, however, Polemon slumps down at the back of the lecture-room, and finds himself listening to Xenocrates calmly continuing to deliver a lecture on *sôphrosynê*, which results in his becoming hooked on philosophy as a way of life, the *bios philosophikos*.

What struck me, as I say, on re-reading this story, is the 'drunk and garlanded' bit. Now no doubt young Athenian rakes, lurching around town on a *kômos*, tended generally to be drunk and garlanded, but one cannot help thinking of the very similar arrival of Alcibiades at Agathon's intellectual dinner party in the *Symposium* (212E), also *methyôn kai estephanômenos*. Could it be that the purveyors of this anecdote, acquainted as they would be both

⁷ M. Gigante, *Polemonis Academici Fragmenta*, Naples, 1977, Frs. 15-33.

with Plato's *Symposium* and with the whole saga of the fraught relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades, might be setting up here a contrast between the two cases, to the advantage of Xenocrates? Xenocrates captivates the riotous young Polemon, and he *stays* captivated; Alcibiades, captivated though he was also, sadly and notoriously, did not stay faithful.

Another curious detail also provided by Antigonus (DL IV 17) seems to set up a further resonance. He tells us that Polemon's wife (he must therefore have been at least in his late twenties when he barged into Xenocrates' seminar) actually sued him for cruelty (she brought a *dike kakôseôs* against him), by reason of his inconsiderate lifestyle, 'chasing after boys' (*hôs meirakiois synonta*). We know (from Plutarch's *Life of Alcibiades*, 8. 3-4), and presumably therefore Antigonus and/or his sources also knew, that Alcibiades' wife brought an identical case against him, for similar reasons. It rather looks to me as if someone is setting up Polemon here as a sort of 'successful' version of Alcibiades: Xenocrates' teaching stuck in a way that Socrates' did not – and perhaps that would be because Xenocrates' teaching was dogmatic, while Socrates' was aporetic.

But such speculations are perhaps somewhat far-fetched. Let us return to the biographical record. Once Polemon had been converted – an event which must, I think, have occurred no later than 320, if not earlier, if he is to be in a position to succeed Xenocrates as head of school in 314 – his lifestyle changed dramatically, and he became noted for his unalterable sobriety. Antigonus tells us (DL IV 17) that "from the time when he began to study philosophy, he acquired such firmness of character (*tosouton epiteinai to êthos*) as always to maintain the same unruffled calm of demeanour." This plainly was particularly impressive to all who knew him. His colleague Crantor, when asked what especially attracted him to Polemon, is said to have replied, "The fact that I never heard him raise or lower his voice in speaking" (*ibid.* 24). There is further the remarkable story of his remaining quite calm after being bitten by a mad dog, despite the general uproar which surrounded the

incident. We must presume that the dog was not really rabid -- otherwise even philosophic calm would not have prevented a deeply unpleasant death from rabies; but the story plainly imprinted itself upon the public consciousness.

He was not, nonetheless, impervious to personal affections. Though we always need to take with a grain of salt the readiness of philosophical biographers to describe a given philosopher's favourite disciple or chosen successor as their 'beloved' (*erômenos, paidika*), Polemon's attachment to his favourite pupil Crates, who ultimately succeeded him, was plainly very close. We are told (*ibid.* 21) that "the two so loved each other that they not only shared the same pursuits (*epitêdeumata*), but grew more and more alike to their latest breath, and in death shared the same tomb." Arcesilaus, who succeeded Crates as head of the Academy, and is himself described (probably by Antigonus, *ibid.* 22) as being the *erômenos* of Crantor, spoke of them as being "sort of gods, or left-overs from the Golden Race" (*theoi tines ê leipsana tôn ek tou khrysou genous*), a compliment the exact significance of which is not entirely easy to unravel, and which may possibly embody just a touch of irony. In the living arrangements of the senior members of the school, as reported by Antigonus, Polemon lived with Crates in the house of a certain Lysicles, while Arcesilaus lived with Crantor. One would like to be able to claim Polemon as one of the very few Platonist philosophers who is attested as having been married,⁸ but presumably his unfortunate wife (if she is not just a figment of anecdotage) had been let go before his conversion to philosophy; his affections after his conversion seem to be confined to those of his own sex.

However, it is time now to focus on what we might be able to identify as his philosophical position. To begin with ethics, one might perhaps conclude from the details that we have of his way of life that Polemon is approaching

⁸ The only others that I can think of being Plutarch and, in a very highminded and restricted sense, Porphyry.

near to the later ideal of the Stoic Sage, and this may indeed be significant. His notable impassivity is, of course, a characteristic which he shares with his mentor Xenocrates, and from the later perspective of Antiochus their ethical positions are closely allied, asserting the overwhelming superiority of virtue for the achieving of happiness, but not rejecting the role of the 'lower' goods, goods of the body and external goods, as being instrumental in its perfection.

We may accept, I think, the (probable)⁹ testimony of Antiochus, *via* Cicero in *De Finibus* II 33-4, that Polemon, following Xenocrates, had already put forward a formulation akin to the Stoic doctrine of 'self-conciliation' (*oikeiôsis*), as the basis for a system of ethics:

"Every living creature, from the moment of birth, loves itself and all its parts; primarily this self-regard embraces the two main divisions of mind and body, and subsequently the parts of each of these. Both mind and body have certain excellences; of these the young animal grows vaguely conscious, and later begins to discriminate, and to seek for the primary endowments of nature and shun their opposites... And this is the fountain-head from which one's whole theory of goods and evils must necessarily flow. Polemon, and also before him Aristotle, held that the primary objects were the ones I have just mentioned. Thus arose the doctrine of the Old Academy and of the Peripatetics, maintaining that the end of goods is to live in accordance with nature, that is to enjoy the primary things granted by nature (*prima a natura data = ta prôta kata physin*) with the accompaniment of virtue." (trans. Rackham)

It is interesting here that Polemon is not linked, as so often elsewhere, with Xenocrates, but rather with Aristotle (the Aristotle of the exoteric works, necessarily, not the esoteric works available to us), and that may be significant of some slight distinction between Polemon and his Master – but one must

⁹ I say 'probable', because unfortunately Antiochus is not mentioned by name in this context, and I note that, in the Appendix to the *Philosophy of Antiochus* volume (p. 334), David Sedley has decided to exclude the passage from his list of testimonies (contra Mette, for whom it is Fr. 9a). I just do not believe that Cicero has any other sources of information on the Old Academy – that is, that he would bother using – so that Antiochus has to be at the back of this,

reflect that it is *Xenocrates* and Aristotle that are credited, in a later passage (Book IV 15-18), with a very similar theory, so there may not be much in that.

We seem to have here, at any rate, the outline of a fairly distinctive Old Academic theory of the genesis and nature of an ethical system, from which (at least the *exoteric*) Aristotle does not dissent. It is based on an anticipation of the Stoic theory of *oikeiôsis*, according to which the rational living being, building on the instincts of self-preservation common to all living beings, progressively develops an understanding of the true nature of the excellence (*aretê*) proper to him, which consists in the fullest possible development of the goods of the soul, which are the virtues, together with a proper appreciation of the – greatly inferior, but still *instrumentally* necessary – goods of the body and external goods. This, for Antiochus, is the correct theory, as developed in the Old Academy, in particular by Xenocrates and Polemon. The Stoics are criticized for taking up a position that is *too* austere, denying the status of goods of any sort to the lower two levels of Platonist good, the ‘human goods’, as they are termed in the *Laws* (I 631BC),¹⁰ and substituting a rather waffling category of ‘preferred indifferents’. And as a counterweight to this criticism of Stoic doctrine, Theophrastus, within the Peripatos, is scolded for “robbing virtue of her beauty and weakening her strength by denying that the happy life (*beate vivere*) is based in her alone.”¹¹

For Xenocrates and Polemon, therefore, it is not required or desirable that the human being totally transcend *ta prôta kata physin*; it is enough simply to discern clearly how they are to be subordinated to the acquisition of the virtues. That said, can we discern any differences of emphasis between master and pupil on this fundamental question? I think that we can, and for that we need to turn to two testimonia of Clement of Alexandria, who presents in the

¹⁰ Antiochus, indeed, is reported at *Fin.* V 28 as taking a dig at Chrysippus for so framing his ethics as to present man as being, not a mind in a body, but a mind without a body! Varro, in his *De Philosophia*, as quoted by Augustine at *CD* XIX 3, states the Antiochian position – and therefore Antiochus’ view of the Old Academic position – very clearly and well, highlighting the dual nature of man.

¹¹ This, as I will argue, is probably a Polemonian, rather than a Xenocratean, criticism of Theophrastus.

Stromateis (II 22 = Fr. 77 H/232 IP) accounts of the definitions of *eudaimonia* by Xenocrates and Polemon respectively. First Xenocrates:

“Xenocrates of Chalcedon defines happiness (*eudaimonia*) as the acquisition of the virtue proper to us and of the resources with which to service it. Then as regards the proper seat (*en hôi*) of this, he plainly says the soul; as the motive causes of it (*hyph' hôn*) he identifies the virtues; as the material causes (*ex hôn*), in the sense of parts, noble actions and good habits and attitudes (*hexeis te kai diatheseis*); and as indispensable accompaniments (*hôn ouk aneu*), bodily and external goods.”

I don't wish to dwell on this in great detail in the present context, since we are primarily concerned with Polemon, but we may note in particular the status of the bodily and external goods as *hôn ouk aneu*, situating them as thoroughly inferior and subordinate to the virtues, certainly, but on the other hand as necessary underpinnings of the happy life.

When we turn to Polemon, though, in the same source, what do we find?

“Polemon, the associate of Xenocrates, seems to wish happiness to consist in self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) in respect of all good things, or at least the most and greatest of them. For he lays it down that happiness can never be achieved apart from virtue, while virtue is sufficient for happiness *even if bereft of bodily and external goods.*”

May we not discern here a significant shift in emphasis – provided, of course, that we can trust Clement's basic accuracy? I think that we may, and that it sets up Polemon as a plausible antecedent of Stoic austerity. This report seems to indicate that, even though Polemon may have recognized some subsidiary role in the achieving of *eudaimonia* for the lower goods, he makes the important assertion that virtue alone is sufficient for its attainment. It is notable, certainly, that if we were entirely dependent on Antiochus, *via* Cicero, for our information, we would not derive a clear impression of divergence between Xenocrates and Polemon on this issue, but then it was by no means in Antiochus' interest to stress differences between the *veteres*,

seeing as they communally possessed the whole truth. Fortunately, though, we are not entirely dependent on him for our information. We may assume, I think, that virtually the only respect in which Polemon differed from his pupil Zeno was in maintaining the status of the lower two classes of good as *goods*, not simply 'indifferents' (*adiaphora*).

That Polemon should have had a distinctive ethical theory, then, largely anticipating that of the Stoics, may be accepted as reasonable. Much more controversial, however, is the question as to whether he had developed a distinctive physical theory that might also serve as an anticipation of Stoicism. Nonetheless, there seems to me to be some evidence on the question that should not be dismissed.

There is not much to go on here, certainly, but there is at least one straw in the wind, in the shape of a bald doxographic report from Aetius, preserved in Stobaeus (just prior to a much more elaborate report on the theology of Xenocrates), declaring that "Polemon declared that the cosmos is God" (*Polemon ton kosmon theon apephê NATO*). Now it might be thought that this need only mean that Polemon thought that the cosmos was *a* god, which would not be of great interest. However, the context in which it occurs excludes that. The whole section in Stobaeus is concerned with the nature and functions of the supreme principle, not of any subordinate or partial divinity, so this must give Polemon's views on that subject.

The question is, how outlandish or outrageous would such a position be in the context of the Old Academy? Somewhat surprising, perhaps, but I would argue that his doctrine here can be viewed as being in line with certain other tendencies that had been manifesting themselves within the Academy since shortly after Plato's death. I think particularly here of such a figure as Philip of Opus, who in the *Epinomis* (which I take to be his production, rather than a senile effusion of the aged Plato) plainly presents an immanent rational World Soul as the supreme principle in the universe (cf. e.g. 981B-E, 983 CD, 988C-E), the workings of whose mind we may study by pursuing astronomy

(976Dff.), which thus seems to supplant dialectic as the supreme science. It is not clear, certainly, what Philip considers might be the composition of this World Soul – sc. whether it is assumed to be immaterial, or rather composed of some distinctively fine substance such as aether – but we know that his contemporary Heraclides of Pontus held that the human soul – and no doubt the world soul – was composed of aether, being of the same substance as the heavenly bodies (Fr. 99 Wehrli). Indeed, if we look closely at certain details of the doctrine of Xenocrates, we note, first of all, that – unlike Plato himself, who remains studiously vague on the question – he is prepared to identify the dodecahedron (of the basic Platonic bodies set out in the *Timaeus*, 55Aff.), with aether, as the substance of the heavens (accepting Aristotle’s position on this).

Again, in Aetius’ summary of Xenocrates’ theology, which is to be found in Stobaeus immediately following the cryptic sentence on Polemon, Xenocrates is presented as postulating his supreme active principle, the Nous-Monad as “reigning in the heavens” (*en ouranōi basileuousan*). This phrase is plainly inspired by the description of Zeus in the myth of the *Phaedrus* (246E), and could be regarded as merely figurative, but it need not be. I would suggest that Xenocrates in fact viewed his supreme principle, not as transcendent, but rather as occupying the highest part of the heavens – the realm of the fixed stars – and directing the universe from there. What is not yet clear is precisely what the Nous-Monad is composed of, and indications are that he remained true to Plato’s doctrine as to the immateriality of spiritual substances. At any rate, there is an interesting remark in Cicero’s *Academica Posteriora*, §39, where Varro, representing Antiochus, portrays Zeno as dissenting from his immediate predecessors in the Academy as to the existence of aether as a fifth substance, in favour of a pure form of fire:

“He laid it down that the natural substance that was the parent of all things, even of the senses and the mind, was fire. He also differed from the same thinkers in holding that an incorporeal substance, such as Xenocrates and the older thinkers also had pronounced the mind to be,

was incapable of any activity, whereas anything capable of acting or being acted upon in any way could not be incorporeal.”

I find this a significant passage in many ways. Varro does not mention Polemon here, though usually he is linked with Xenocrates, and he refers to *Xenocrates et superiores*, not the Old Academy in general (which he would normally refer to as the *veteres*). I would take this as a devious way of indicating – Antiochus would not wish to highlight a difference of position among the *veteres* – that in fact Polemon did *not* maintain that the supreme principle was incorporeal. If Polemon did accept that the substance of the supreme principle was aether, then Zeno still has a quarrel with him, since he dismissed the Aristotelian and Old Academic postulate of aether as a fudge – a so-called ‘fifth element’ that was presented as a quasi-immaterial entity – and plumped firmly for a pure form of fire.

In fact, of course, the Zenonian *pyr tekhnikon* turns out to be just as peculiar as aether, and not at all like ordinary sublunar fire, but this assertion has enabled Zeno to differentiate himself satisfactorily from his Old Academic mentors, in particular Polemon, and assert a distinctive ‘materialist’ position, even as in ethics he differentiated himself by downgrading the ‘mortal goods’ to the status of ‘indifferents’, and thus claimed the moral high ground there – before letting back them in as ‘preferred indifferents’. Such are the strategies necessary for founding a school of one’s own!

In conclusion, I think that we can rescue Polemon to some extent from the status of being merely a *grosse Schatten*. He was plainly a notable character, but he also, I would maintain, made some distinctive contributions to Old Academic doctrine. It is undeniable, though, that that is not what he was most remembered for, at least if we may trust Diogenes Laertius. Let us just end with a few more anecdotal details, to round off our picture of the man.

The first one that I select (IV 19) is one of which I must confess I do not entirely grasp the significance. “He would not, as they say, even sit down to

deal with the themes of his pupils (*pros tas theseis*), but would argue walking up and down.” This seems to have some connection with his being ‘refined and generous’ (*asoloikos kai gennaios*), as specified just above, so it is presumably an indication of his informal and companionable style of teaching, but I fail to see how that helps from a pedagogical point of view.

Another detail is somewhat clearer in implication, though still not entirely so (*ibid.*): Polemon “withdrew from society”, or “became reclusive” (*ekpepatêkôs*)¹², and “spent his time in the Garden” (*kêpos*, which I take to refer to Plato’s villa adjacent to the Academy park), so that his pupils took to constructing little huts (*kalybia*) for themselves in the grounds, not far from the shrine of the Muses (*mouseion*, which I take to be the spiritual focus of the School) and the lecture-hall (*exedra*).¹³ If we could properly unravel the implications of this report, it would tell us something about the physical structure and organization of the School, as well as about the peculiarities of the Scholarch. We know of the *Mouseion* from the report, again in Diogenes (IV 1), about Speusippus, that “he set up statues of the Graces in the *Mouseion* erected by Plato in the Academy”. This makes it sound as if the *Mouseion* was situated in the Academy Park, rather than in the *kêpos*, but Diogenes may not have known where it was. At any rate, wherever the *Mouseion* was, there was the *exedra* also, and there also were the huts of the students, so I would suggest that they were all in the *kêpos*. I am not familiar with the regulations on overnight camping in public parks in Athens in the fourth century B.C., but I doubt that such activity would have been tolerated. Polemon himself, as we have seen, did not actually live in the *kêpos*, but (with Crates) in the house of Lysicles. We must suppose, however, that this was not far away.

The final report that I would like to dwell on is one that reveals an interestingly positive attitude on Polemon’s part to the poets – considering

¹² *Ekpateô*, used four times by Diogenes, once of Epimenides (I 112), here of Polemon, once of Heraclitus (IX 3), and once of Pyrrho of Elis (IX 63), seems to have the general connotation of ‘retreating into solitude’, or ‘withdrawing from society’. It places Polemon in curious company.

¹³ I have discussed the problem of the physical dispositions of the Academy in more detail in ‘What Happened to Plato’s Garden?’ (*Hermathena* 133 (1983), pp. 51-9 = *The Golden Chain*, Essay 1), but without, I fear, solving all the difficulties.

the well-known strictures of Plato himself. Polemon, we learn (IV 20), was a great admirer of Sophocles – seemingly, if we may so interpret the rather cryptic explanation given by Diogenes, in particular the austere ethical sentiments expressed in the plays. He liked to term Homer the Sophocles of epic, and Sophocles the Homer of tragedy. I would suggest that this more positive attitude to tragedy may be indicative of the development within the later Academy of a theory – allowed for already, it must be said, in Plato’s *Phaedrus* – of a ‘higher’ form of poetry, composed by poets who have acquired a vision of the truth, and who thus escape the strictures of Plato, who condemns the poets for the *mimesis* of appearances, and thus being three degrees from the truth. This of course assumes that Sophocles can be regarded as such a poet, but after all Plato allows Socrates to speak well in general of Sophocles; it was rather Euripides to whom he objected.¹⁴

At any rate, there, I think, we may leave the fourth head of the Academy, having, I hope, fleshed out to some extent the rather skeletal image of him that has been transmitted to posterity.

¹⁴ His colleague Crantor, we may note (DL IV 26), is said to have admired Homer *and Euripides* above all other poets, which carries things a stage further.