

Anchoring Innovation in the Platonic *Axiochus*

Albert Joesse

Among the texts in the Platonic corpus that we know Plato did not write, the *Axiochus* seems to be an especially late dialogue, written just in time for it to be included into the corpus at all.¹ Like a number of other spurious texts, the *Axiochus* was not included in one of the tetralogies that Thrasyllus organized in the first century CE, but it was included in a further group, now usually referred to as the *appendix Platonica*, which in the later course of transmission was always associated with the set of ten tetralogies itself. The fact that the *Axiochus* did insert itself into this corpus, despite its late date, is remarkable. It is possible that the organizers of the corpus (be they Thrasyllus or earlier figures) considered the text to be old and worth preserving for that reason. But given the doubts about its authenticity that were voiced already in ancient times, it more likely was its perceived contribution to our understanding of Platonic philosophy that made them include it, testifying to its impact.²

Compared to other texts in the *appendix Platonica*, the *Axiochus* shows some peculiar characteristics. It is longer and has a more developed dramatic part than other texts in the appendix. Furthermore, it combines arguments that derive from Epicurean philosophy, from the Cynic tradition, and Platonic arguments. It portrays Socrates, moreover, as an effective deathbed consoler, a philosopher of the therapeutic kind so common in Hellenistic philosophies. These characteristics lend the *Axiochus* a strong individual profile but at the same time make it hard to understand the exact purpose of the *Axiochus*.

I now outline four different, more or less current views of what this purpose could be, and then outline an alternative approach, based on the concept of ‘anchoring innovation’. This approach integrates the strong points of each of the four approaches but makes much better sense of the format of this dialogue. Although I do not intend to provide new readings of individual arguments in the *Axiochus*, taking the ‘anchoring innovation’ approach does improve our understanding of their status and the way they relate to each other. Before giving these

¹ The dialogue is usually dated in the first century BCE or, less frequently, the first century CE; a second-century BCE date is also possible. This range is determined by Thrasyllus’ collection as *terminus ante quem* and by a combination of arguments for the *terminus post quem*: the way it refers to the education of the epebes (only possible later in the 3rd century BCE), terminology that occurs in prose texts only from the second century BCE onwards at the earliest, and the use of Epicurean, Cynic, and possibly Stoic philosophical ideas (see Chevalier 1914, 24–85 for a full account; and Hershbell 1981, 12–18 and Männlein-Robert 2012, 4–13 for succinct overviews).

² Ancient doubts are reported in Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives* iii 62. The case for seeing a close connection between the *appendix* and the tetralogical ordering is made by Müller 1975, 32–36.

views of the dialogue's purpose, I provide a brief outline of the dialogue.

The *Axiochus* starts in narrative mode. Socrates relates how he walks towards the Cynosarges, when the voice of someone shouting his name stops him in his tracks. Cleinias, the son of Axiochus, calls on him to come and console his father, who is on his deathbed. Having presented himself as a tough and self-controlled man for many years, Axiochus has now become thoroughly frightened of death (364a-c).

Socrates agrees to come and console Axiochus. He first offers a rebuke to Axiochus, contrasting his former toughness with his current fear. Axiochus replies that his strong arguments have gone with the wind at the all too real approach of death. His fear, he says, is of being deprived of seeing the light of day and all the goods, and of rotting away as food for worms (364c-365c).

Socrates' response to this description of fear is composite. He asserts that Axiochus inconsistently thinks that he will perceive the rotting away of his body, when death is the absence of perception. Nothing evil will concern Axiochus after his death any more than hundreds of years before his birth. Socrates also claims that at the moment of death the soul gets separated from the body and departs to its proper place, where it will enjoy pure pleasures (365d-366a).

Socrates then goes on to report as the teaching of Prodicus that life in its different stages is always troublesome and pitiful. Happiest are those who are granted death, a thought for which Socrates adduces citations from various poets (366b-368a). Socrates also points out that all occupations in life are full of evils, with politics as their climax. Socrates' illustrations of famous politicians whom their fellow citizens treated badly elicits a strong endorsement from Axiochus, who gives voice to his own disappointment in the life of politics (368a-369b).

After this endorsement Socrates reverts to the argument that death is of no concern to anyone. This again leads to a distinctive response from Axiochus, who qualifies the things Socrates has been saying as superficial talk (ἡ ἐπιπολαζούση λεσχηνεία, 369d1). They do not reach the soul: sufferings have no patience with sophisms, as Axiochus arrestingly puts it (τὰ δὲ παθήματα σοφισμάτων οὐκ ἀνέχεται, 369d8-e1). But Socrates once again insists that there can be no suffering where there is no perception. And he offers a new argument to show that there is something immortal in the human soul: human beings have made enormous cultural and technological progress and are now able to comprehend the course of the cosmos (369c-370d).

When Axiochus now says that this cosmic argument has suddenly freed him from the fear of death, Socrates doubles down, offering a story that he has heard from a Persian sage, Gobryas. This is a story about the happy fate of those who have lived well and the sufferings of criminals. Axiochus, Socrates claims, can look forward to a splendid life of pure pleasure, spent in festivals and philosophical discourse. Axiochus now testifies to his complete change of heart: he actually wishes to die. Socrates promises to check in again in the afternoon and resumes his walk to the Cynosarges (370d-372a).

Four common responses to the question of the *Axiochus*' aim are that it is (i) a

work of consolation, (ii) a polemical work, (iii) a work in Platonic form that makes an anti-Platonic point, or (iv) a work that updates Platonism in a new age. (i) The dramatic premise of the work, that Axiochus is dying and in need of encouragement, supports viewing the text as a work of consolation. This view involves both a generic judgment—the work is part of consolatory literature—and the identification of consolation as the aim of the dialogue. Other works of consolation aim to drive out grief in their addressee.³ The addressee typically mourns the death of a loved one and needs, in the view of the sender, to curb or even eradicate his grief. Similarly, the *Axiochus* presents the addressee of Socrates' remonstrations as being in a sad mood, in need of consolation about death. The *Axiochus* is also like some other consolations in including citations from poetry to bolster the consolatory effect of the address (cf., e.g., [Plutarch] *Cons. ad Ap.*; Cic. *Tusc.* i 34-37, 105-107, 115-117). Moreover, a number of the texts we identify as consolations combine arguments of different, on the face of it even incompatible, philosophical origins, just like the *Axiochus*.⁴ Viewing the *Axiochus* as a work of consolation helps us explain why it is seemingly fine with inconsistencies across the work: the demands of the consolation genre do not include consistency but do include effective therapy, and it is worth trying out different arguments on the addressee to achieve that.⁵

This interpretation does full justice to the therapeutic language used in the *Axiochus* and to the portrayal of Socrates as an expert therapist. It also accounts for the presence of arguments from different philosophical traditions, although it still seems unsatisfactory that a Platonic author would advance Epicurean views incompatible with Platonic notions contained in the same work. As scholars have pointed out, however, the *Axiochus* is not itself a work of consolation.⁶ The addressee is not grieving, but is afraid. Not the death of a loved one is the object of his emotion, but his own death. (Indeed, if at all, one should rather argue that the conversation is an advance consolation for Cleinias, Axiochus' son.) All characters, moreover, are long dead at the time of writing. Finally, the narratee of Socrates the narrator is not Axiochus, but unnamed. It is far from clear that the narratee himself is in need of consolation.⁷

³ Among these we count Crantor's *Peri penthous* (lost), Cicero's *Consolatio* to himself (lost), his *Ep. Fam.* 4.5 (Sulpicius to Cicero), Seneca's *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, Plutarch's *ad uxorem*, [Plutarch] *Consolatio ad Apollonium*, Mara bar Sarapion's *Letter* to his son, and many more. For accounts of Greco-Roman consolation literature, see Buresch 1886, Kassel 1958, Scourfield 1993, 15-33 and the essays in Baltussen ed. 2013.

⁴ This too applies to the *Cons. ad Ap.*; Cicero states this as his procedure in his self-consolation at *Tusc.* iii 76 (and see Baltussen 2013, 73-74).

⁵ Erler 2005 and O'Keefe 2006 argue in detail for this view (though see next note); and see Hutchinson in Cooper ed. 1997.

⁶ See, e.g., Feldmeier 2012, 141-142; Männlein-Robert 2012, 13-15; cf. the notes of caution on the question of genre by Erler 2005, 82, 86 and O'Keefe 2006, 395-396. Benitez 2019, 24-26 rightly points out that the degree of inconsistency exhibited by consolatory texts is much lower, or alleviated by greater distances between the inconsistent claims, than what we find in the *Axiochus*.

⁷ Cf. the distinction of Scourfield 2013, 19 between an 'address mode' and a 'reflective mode';

(ii) A second approach differentiates between the arguments Socrates brings forward to rid Axiochus of his fear of death. The mainly Epicurean arguments that predominate in the first part of the text are advanced only to be rejected, on this view, while the Platonizing ones that we find above all in the last part of the text are presented as being superior. Central to this approach are three comments Axiochus makes to Socrates. The first comment comes when Socrates has once again argued that death is no concern for the living. Axiochus responds: ‘These fine sayings of yours are part of the current chatter of the times. ...Sufferings are not content with clever arguments, but are satisfied only with those things able to touch the soul’ (369d1-e2).⁸ The second is Axiochus’ claim after Socrates’ ‘heavenly argument’ (as Axiochus himself calls it, 372a11) that it has turned him ‘to the opposite point of view’ (370d7). The third comment comes after Socrates’ telling of the myth of Gobryas: ‘I am so far from fearing death that I now feel love toward it. In such a way has this discourse, as well as the one about the heavens, convinced me’ (372a9-12). These comments show, some argue, that the aim of the *Axiochus* is to show the superiority of Platonic arguments against the fear of death and the rejection of Epicurean ones.⁹

An advantage of this interpretation is that it can explain why this text makes a distinction between the conversational level on which we find Socrates, Cleinias, and Axiochus and the narrative level on which Socrates narrates the whole conversation to his anonymous audience. The text invites its readers to identify with Socrates’ anonymous audience on the narrative level and to assent to Axiochus’ dismissive response to the non-Platonic arguments on the conversational level. It also gives a clear idea of the point of the text itself. The text is not meant to console anyone. The text is meant to demonstrate the superiority of arguments offered by the Academy to arguments offered by its philosophical rivals, in particular the Epicurean school. However, as Isnardi 1961, 38-39 observes, advocates of this view have difficulty explaining why Socrates, in response to Axiochus’ complaint about the ‘chatter of the times’, that is, within the part in which he is supposed to present his superior solution, reemphasizes the Epicurean argument of insensibility (369e3-370b1).¹⁰

(iii) A third way of interpreting the aim of the *Axiochus* also connects the dia-

the *Axiochus* would be the latter, if we classify it as consolatory at all.

⁸ Hershbell trans. 1981, here and below. Note that Hershbell’s rendering in Cooper ed. 1997 differs from his 1981, sometimes significantly.

⁹ The view was advanced by Immisch 1896, 23-37. A strong contrast between accepted Platonic views and rejected Epicurean ones is also presented by Hutchinson 2007, although he considers 370b-d Stoic; Erler 2005, 85 and 92. Long 2019, 168 agrees with respect to the argument of 369b, attributed to Prodicus, that death is nothing to us (he argues that the earlier Symmetry argument no longer has its exclusively Epicurean connotation, 153-173).

¹⁰ The original proponent of the view, Immisch, avoids this difficulty in reorganising the text. The main moves are the insertion of 369e3-370b1 after 365c7, as a variant of 365d1-e2; and the insertion of 365e2-366a8 between 369e2 and 370b1 (see his text at 1896, 89-90 and 95-96). Beghini 2020, 48-67 has revived the hypothesis of a dislocation, proposing that 369b5-370b1 must be inserted at 365e2.

logue to intellectual developments of the (post-)Hellenistic period, but mostly with literary ones. Erler 2012, 111-114 suggests that we should see the *Axiochus* as a text that squarely signals its debts to Plato's dialogues as to the reference texts of its genre, but within that frame wishes to prove a non-Platonic point, according to the literary principle of *oppositio in imitando*. Erler derives this principle specifically from studies of Callimachean poetics. Very roughly put, the idea is that an author invokes authorities and uses old forms to say new things.¹¹

Like the second, this approach does justice to the distinction between narrative and conversational layers in the text. It is better able to account for the marked references and allusions to Platonic texts in the *Axiochus*. It is also helpful in providing a generic background to this peculiar text beyond the association with consolatory literature. However, first, the term *oppositio* suggests a reversal with respect to the model or to generic expectations that is present only to a limited extent in the *Axiochus*. It is true that the Platonic opening of Socrates' narration raises expectations of elenctic questioning, which are overturned. It is also true that Socrates is presented as a wise person by the others in this text, and protests very little himself against this designation (these two points are noted by Erler 2012, 101-103). Nevertheless, the Platonizing arguments, though presented differently from ones in the Platonic dialogues, are not in contrast with Platonic views. Second, it remains unclear how this approach accounts for the tension between more Epicurean and more Platonic-sounding arguments in the text.

Benitez 2019, 30-32 has recently advanced a genre-based reading of a quite different nature. Not Epicureanism but consolatory discourse is the target of the *Axiochus*, which Benitez argues is a parody of such discourse (cf. Nesselrath 2012, 126). He notes that the contradictions in the dialogue are too stark even for the consolatory genre. Their use in a dialogue in which Socrates reproves Axiochus for entertaining inconsistent beliefs must be understood, Benitez argues, as heightening the parodic effect for readers familiar with the eclectic nature of much consolatory literature. Other elements of the dialogue can also be understood as contributing to the parody: Axiochus' 'laughably unrealistic' change of heart, for instance, or Socrates' statements, in the course of his long speech (366b-369b), that he will stop, even though he does not, or omit things, which he does not.

This position helps us understand the *Axiochus* as presenting, rather than asserting, particular therapeutic arguments. It is surely right as well to underline the need to explain the apparent contradictions in the text. An appeal to the concept of parody as an explanans, however, seems problematic to me. As admiring statements of readers in earlier ages can serve to attest, our expectations of gravity and ridicule may not match those of the *Axiochus*' first audience.¹² Moreover, it is not clear to me what specifically the purpose of the parody would be, beyond

¹¹ Erler draws on Kuiper 1896-98. See Citroni 2011 for an overview of more recent work along these lines in Callimachean studies. I am grateful to Annette Harder for discussion on this point.

¹² See the glowing Renaissance descriptions collected by Chevalier 1914, 117-128.

focusing attention on the arguments used in therapeutic literature.

(iv) A fourth approach sees the *Axiochus* as the attempt, by a member of the Academy, to offer the public an update of Platonism, in order to meet the demands for philosophical therapy that had become so important on the philosophical market. The core piece of this strategy is the integration of Epicurean arguments into the philosophical portfolio of the Academy. The *Axiochus* shows us an Academy that opens up towards Hellenism, welcomes a range of approaches and can cater to therapeutic needs of different kinds.¹³

This view must be right in paying close attention to the aspect of updating at play in the *Axiochus* and to the question of its intended audience. It can also account well for the interweaving of Platonic and Epicurean-sounding arguments in the dialogue. It loses in explanatory specificity, however, since the inclusion of Epicurean arguments rather than arguments of other origins appears to be arbitrary. Moreover, while some suggestions have been made to explain how Epicurean-sounding elements in the *Axiochus* can be read as compatible with Platonism, the worry of inconsistency remains. It is not clear how an inconsistent Academy would be successful on the philosophical market.¹⁴

The suggestion I propose is that we can best understand the *Axiochus* as a text that seeks to anchor the innovation of Platonic therapy in the conceptual background of two different audiences: with respect to Platonists, it anchors philosophical therapy in the Socratic dialogue; with respect to non-Platonists, it anchors Platonic ideas in the cultural paradigm of the doctor-philosopher. First, the dialogue appeals to the Socratic dialogue as conceptually familiar to Platonists and as a marker of their identity. In so doing, the dialogue seeks to make therapy acceptable as a description of what Platonic philosophy is. As part of that endeavour, it seeks to make therapeutic arguments of Epicurean origin, which had proven themselves to be so successful in consolatory discourse, available as lower-order arguments to the Platonic therapeutic philosopher. At the same time, the dialogue appeals to the discourse of philosophical therapy itself as conceptual ground familiar to non-Platonic philosophers and the educated elite, in which it anchors Platonic ideas and a specifically Platonic version of philosophical therapy. For this second audience it is not therapy, but Platonism that is new. I argue, in other words, that the *Axiochus* has two main objectives and a subsidiary one: (I) to make Platonists see their philosophy as a type of therapy; (II) to expand the arsenal of Platonic philosophers to include Epicurean arguments; and (III) to demonstrate the superior value of Platonizing views. In all three cases, the dia-

¹³ Tulli 2004 and 2005 favor this view. Isnardi Parente 1961 espouses this kind of view but evaluates it in very negative terms—the dialogue is ‘il supremo punto di stanchezza del platonismo tradizionale’ (47).

¹⁴ Tulli 2004, 2009 argues, for instance, that the text contains a certain amount of revisionary conceptualization, of which he finds an instance in Epicurean terminology such as the σύγκρισις (365e3); Tulli claims this no longer stands for the compound human being, consisting of body and soul, but only for the body. This is possible but not compelling. Moreover, it does not address the concern that Socrates’ references to insensibility after death are incompatible with the soul’s persistence after death.

logue is a broker between what different audiences are familiar with and what its author wants them to accept.

The terminology of ‘anchoring innovation’ is useful to describe combinations of innovative and familiar elements. Central to this concept, which is currently being developed by Dutch classicists, is the insight that it is a universal human cognitive mechanism that we understand and come to accept new and unfamiliar things by ‘anchoring’ them in something old and familiar. As Sluiter 2017, 23 puts it: ‘Innovations may become acceptable, understandable, and desirable when relevant social groups can effectively integrate and accommodate them in their conceptual categories, values, beliefs and ambitions. This is the case when they can connect what is perceived as new to what they consider familiar, known, already accepted, when, that is, innovations are “anchored”.’¹⁵ Actors and texts can exploit or facilitate this mechanism by presenting their target audience with innovations as already linked to what is familiar to them. I emphasize that anchors are audience-specific: different things may serve as a frame of reference for different groups of people, or people in different capacities. This helps explain why the *Axiochus* anchors different innovations, relative to different audiences, and why therapeutic philosophy can be both an innovation and an anchor: for Platonists, it anchors the philosophical practice of therapy in the figure of Socrates; for philosophers of other stripes and the general intellectual public, it anchors Platonism in the therapeutic mode of philosophy.

When we recognize its anchoring function as the dialogue’s main contribution, we can preserve the best of the four other approaches. The author’s choice to write a text that is close to the genre of consolatory literature fits in perfectly with the role of philosophical consolation as both an anchor and an innovation, relative to the dialogue’s different audiences. Furthermore, the double demand of familiarity and rejection that is integral to any anchoring of innovation makes sense of the ambiguous presence of Epicurean arguments in the text. Their use and characterization in the text can indeed be characterized as polemical, but they are not simply rejected: they are needed as a foothold to demonstrate Platonic superiority. Nor does the dialogue’s imitation of Platonic features serve to reject Platonic ideas. This imitation helps connect what is new to what is old. Rather than of *oppositio* we ought to speak of *innovatio in imitando*. Finally, the expansion of the Platonists’ arsenal to include Epicurean arguments is not an unmediated addition of ideas that happen to be popular at the time of writing. The dialogue promotes therapy in its very imitation of the Platonic dialogue, the genre that has become partly constitutive of Platonic identity. This allows Platonists to accept therapy as part of their philosophical identity. In the three sections that follow I describe in more detail how we encounter the three forms of anchoring innovation in the dialogue.

¹⁵ I use the word ‘innovation’ for new features, ideas, and practices, regardless of whether they have already been successfully incorporated into a particular culture or professional practice (Sluiter uses ‘innovation’ to refer to accepted ‘inventions’).

I. Anchoring philosophy as therapy

First, let us see how the *Axiochus* presents an Academic kind of philosophical therapy as a new feature that is anchored in a familiar Platonic and Socratic substrate. The very choice to write a text in the genre of the Platonic-Socratic dialogue is part of this strategy. It signals that what this dialogue offers is part of Platonists' heritage, even if it strikes its reader as new at first.

These new, therapeutic elements are present from the start. Cleinias calls Socrates in as a kind of doctor, as the strikingly medical language at the beginning of the dialogue underlines.¹⁶ This starts with Cleinias' sketch of the situation: his father 'is suddenly very weak' (αἰφνιδίου ἀδυνάτως ἔχει, 364b5) and bears the end of his life 'badly' (ἀνιαρῶς, b6), groaning (implied in ἀστενακτί, c2). Socrates understands the situation and 'hurries' (ἐπειγόμεθα, c5) towards Axiochus' deathbed. Cleinias is relieved at this response and predicts that his father will 'get better' (βᾶσει, c7) by the very sight of Socrates. He also explains that his father has more often 'recovered' from this kind of 'collapse' or 'symptom' (πολλάκις αὐτῷ γέγονεν συμπτώματος ἀνασφῆλαι, c8). When they arrive at the death scene, Socrates describes Axiochus as having 'recovered' (συνειλεγμένον τὰς ἀφάς, 365a2), physically 'strong'. Nevertheless he remains psychically 'weak' or 'ill' (τῷ σώματι ῥωμαλέον, ἀσθενῆ δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν, a3), 'sighing and groaning' (ἀναφερόμενον καὶ στεναγμοῦς ἰέντα, a4).

Socrates the narrator characterizes his own help, which he is about to offer at this point in the narrative, using a central word of philosophical therapy. Axiochus is, he concludes, 'much in need of consolation' (πάνου ἐνδεᾶ παραμυθίας, a3-4). Axiochus' own judgment of what he expects of Socrates (369d-e) also emphasizes its therapeutic character. 'Sufferings are not content with clever arguments, but are satisfied only with those things able to touch the soul' (d8-e2).

The ideal end result of a therapeutic session, which for most consolatory texts is the effect that the text has beyond itself, is, in the case of the *Axiochus*, included within the limits of the text. Axiochus puts it in terms reminiscent of the description of his sick state: 'from my weakness I have recovered' (τῆς ἀσθενείας ἐμαντὸν συνειλεγμαι). Socrates has been a successful soul doctor and can resume his walk—but he will check in on Axiochus at noon (372a14-16).

The elements I just listed are not stylistic embellishments or isolated expressions. They fit together to create an image of Socrates' core activity as one of therapy. Cleinias puts that point most directly. In his request for Socrates' help, he urges him to show his wisdom and adds that Socrates' exhortation would be in line with his usual activity (364b3-4, c1-2). For Cleinias, therapeutic speech is Socrates' core business. And via Socrates, who in so many Platonic texts embodies philosophy, the *Axiochus* conveys a conception of philosophy itself as a kind of therapy.

This conception of philosophy, and textual features like the ones we have been reviewing, are familiar from Hellenistic philosophy. In the Hellenistic philosoph-

¹⁶ Joyal 2005, 108n37 very helpfully lists medical terminology with parallels in medical writers.

ical schools of Epicurus and the Stoics, the idea that philosophers should heal souls much as doctors heal bodies was a common assumption.¹⁷ On the Stoic side, for instance, Chrysippus developed extensive parallels between bodily and psychic conditions, in terms of dispositions as well as occurrent episodes, in terms of sickness as well as health (see esp. Tieleman 2003, 142-157). Epicurus' words that 'empty is the discourse of that philosopher by whom no human affection is cured' (Fr. 221 Usener = Porphyry, *ad Marcellam* 31) underwrite his various statements about the relation between physical and epistemological theories and the ethical result they ought to lead to: the deliverance from fear, of the gods, of death, and the embrace of the simple life of natural, easily-satisfied desires. In Cicero's description of the consolatory strategies that different philosophers adopt (*Tusculan Disputations* iii 76-79), we find a wide range of names and schools: the Stoics Cleanthes and Chrysippus, the Epicureans, the Cyrenaics (implicitly), and the Peripatetics (and Lyco in particular).

Yet it is somewhat paradoxical to speak of therapy as an innovation among Academics. After all, it was the Academic Crantor who our sources say was the first to write a work of consolation: his *On Grief*. This was an influential work, as attested by its explicit invocation in Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* and in the *Consolatio ad Apollonium*.¹⁸ Let us review the evidence we have of Academic engagement with consolation to determine to what extent the *Axiochus* innovates in its therapeutic picture of philosophy. We start with Plato himself. After all, the idea that the philosopher is like a doctor is a common presence in Plato's work.¹⁹ Explicit comparisons of their respective methods occur in many dialogues, including *Charmides* 155b1-157b7, *Gorgias* (especially 464a1-465e1), *Phaedrus* 270b1-d7, and *Sophist* 230c4-d4. Plato invokes the notions of health and disease to characterize the well-ordered and badly ordered soul, respectively (most famously in *Republic* iv, see 444c6-e1). The *Phaedo*'s consolatory elements need no comment.²⁰ Plato's own work, then, provides a broad basis of therapeutic elements for later authors to appeal to (we will see below how the *Axiochus* appeals to the *Phaedo*). It nevertheless is a different conception of philosophy that emerges in his pages. To put the difference between Plato and the Hellenistic mainstream starkly, the task of a philosopher in Plato is not to produce happiness and to cure emotions by applying arguments, but to come to know the truth and to educate.²¹

¹⁷ The Hellenistic conception of philosophy as therapy of the soul is described in Nussbaum 1994, esp. 13-40.

¹⁸ *Tusc.* i 115, iii 12,71 (cf. *Ac. Pr.* ii 135). *Cons. ad. Ap.* 102d, 104c, 114c, 115b. Cullyer 2008, 539n9 suggests Crantor's treatise responds to Zeno, which would reduce its pioneering quality.

¹⁹ As it is in earlier texts, for instance in the famous analogy in *Gorgias*' *Helen* §14, and in other Socratics (Antisthenes SSR V A 53.19-21, 124, 174, 187.27-29 [cf. 167, 169]; Aeschines SSR VI A 53.9-15; cf. Aristippus SSR IV A 106).

²⁰ Cf. Boys-Stones 2013, 128, which calls it 'an *Ur*-text of philosophical *consolatio*'; and Adamson 2013, 179-180, which shows that Plato himself undermines a straightforwardly consolatory reading of this dialogue.

²¹ See Nussbaum 1994, 17-24 on the difference between Plato's view of philosophy and the ther-

When we come to the Hellenistic period, we should note that the Academics are a surprising absence when Cicero details the approaches of the various philosophical schools in his time (see his list in *Tusc.* iii 76). Cicero mentions Carneades in *Tusc.* iii 59-60 as having criticized Chrysippus, who used to cite Euripides to show that suffering is the common fate of humankind.²² According to Carneades, pointing this out does not help the consoler's cause, for it is even sadder that all humans have to suffer. This may well have been part of Carneades' polemic with Chrysippus rather than a positive contribution to consolatory literature. Nonetheless, Cicero also tells us (iii 54) of a work by Clitomachus, sent to the Carthaginians upon the destruction of their city. This work is an actual consolation, written by an Academic philosopher. In it, Clitomachus claims that he has noted down a *disputatio* by Carneades against the thesis (*contra dixerit*) that a wise man will be troubled by the capture of his country. From Cicero's use of the word *disputatio* it seems unlikely that Carneades himself advanced this as a consolatory argument, although sceptical suspension of judgment was probably recommended as an antidote to grief even among Academic sceptics (as it would be later by Aenesidemus and other Pyrrhonists).

A different picture emerges with Philo of Larissa, who develops an elaborate therapeutic program as an account of philosophical activity. A brief look at it will be useful to situate the *Axiochus* within the Academic tradition. According to Stobaeus' report (*Ecl.* ii 39.24-41.25 = fr. 2 Mette), Philo provided an account of the whole of philosophy in terms of the metaphor of medical therapy. The job of a doctor is (a) to convince the patient to receive treatment, (b) to undermine contrary advice, then to apply his treatment by (c) purging the patient of the causes of illness and (d) inserting what produces health. Finally he ought (e) to give advice about how to preserve the body in a state of health. According to Philo, much the same applies to the philosopher. The protreptic part of philosophy includes (a) a demonstration of the great worth of philosophy and (b) a refutation of those who deride philosophy (40.4-9). The next part of philosophy Philo calls 'therapeutic'. This consists of the discussion of good and bad (40.21), which (c) takes away bad judgements that corrupt the criteria of the soul (40.18-19) and (d) introduces healthy judgments (40.20).²³ Next comes the discussion of lives (41.2), which (e) ensures that the τέλος, i.e., εὐδαιμονία, is preserved (41.7). Finally Philo mentions (f) a discourse of precepts (ὑποθετικὸς λόγος, 41.23) that is specifically intended for those who do not come to philosophy with ideal pre-conditions and do not have much time; this discourse is concise (ἐν ἔπιτομαῖς, 41.25).

apeutic conception (a characterization, I should add, that overstates the distance between these positions).

²² From the *Hypsipyla*, fr. 757 Nauck. Cicero writes *ut uideo nostrum scribere Antiochum*; the exchange may have been part of Antiochus' rejection of Academic scepticism in the *Sosus*.

²³ I depart here from the reconstruction by Brittain 2001, 277-280 and Schofield 2002, 95, 108-9. τῶ περι τελῶν λόγῳ in 41.2 must, I think, refer back to ὁ περι ἀγαθῶν καὶ κακῶν τόπος (40.21). My argument, however, is compatible with either interpretation.

We do not have more evidence about Philo's programme or the way he put it into practice. But Stobaeus' report is enough to show that this was a grand scheme of philosophy in which all types of philosophical discourse were given their proper place. Stobaeus' account strongly suggests that Philo was the first Academic to employ such a scheme. The evidence suggests, then, that Academics before Philo were engaged in consolatory writing, but did not identify their philosophical mission with therapy in quite the way the other schools did or in the way that Philo was to do.

The *Axiochus*' presentation of Socrates as a therapeutic philosopher squares with Philo's vision of philosophy in a general way. This is not the place to offer a detailed comparison of the therapeutic structure of the *Axiochus* and Philo's scheme, but it will be clear from this brief overview that the *Axiochus* is not an obvious fit with any of the particulars of the latter.²⁴ However, I think the main point is that the *Axiochus*, like Philo, presents Socrates, not just as also engaging in consolation or other therapy now and then, but as a therapeutic philosopher: as I noted, Cleinias states that the proof of Socrates' wisdom is in his successful therapy of Axiochus (νῦν ὁ καιρὸς ἐνδείξασθαι τὴν αἰεὶ θρυλουμένην πρὸς σοῦ σοφίαν, 364b3-4), along the lines of what he is used to doing (παρηγόρησον αὐτὸν ὡς εἴωθας, c1-2). For all their differences, Philo and the *Axiochus* both advocate a reorientation of Academic philosophy along the therapeutic lines so common in the Hellenistic schools.²⁵

We would have a firmer grasp of the contribution of the *Axiochus* if we had independent grounds for its dating. The degree of innovation in the *Axiochus* is much lower if it postdates Philo by a long period; and much higher if it predates him. Unfortunately we do not have independent evidence for a date that is more specific than the range 2nd century BCE-1st century CE.²⁶ Under these circumstances, we can make educated guesses based on content, although to do so inevitably involves a degree of circularity. Nevertheless, indications of when it would have made most sense to write a certain work do carry weight. And in this case, it would have made much sense for an Academic to write a Platonic dialogue that advocates a therapeutic vision of philosophy at around the time of Philo. Viewing the dialogue in the conceptual terms of anchoring innovation helps us see this more clearly. Let us now see in more detail, then, how the dialogue frames its therapeutic reorientation of Academic philosophy.

The *Axiochus* does so in a form that anchors this innovative conception in the

²⁴ This counts against the close connection Beghini 2020, 72-76 draws between both schemes. We should also note that the *Axiochus* evinces a much less sceptical attitude than we would expect from Philo.

²⁵ Schofield 2002, 96 states: 'One might say that all Philo has done (not without Platonic authority) is rewrite and articulate the Socratic conception of philosophy in the language of the favoured Hellenistic metaphor of therapy.' I worry that the 'all' is a little reductive in this formulation. One might also say, furthermore, that the *Axiochus* supplies the Platonic authority for this therapeutic innovation.

²⁶ Beghini 2020, 81-84 interestingly suggests that the negative emphasis on the Athenian people in 368c5-369b5 has to do with the events of the First Mithridatic War, but this remains speculative.

literary form of the Socratic dialogue as manifested in Plato's writings, so central to the philosophical identity of the Academics, and in the Academic hero Socrates himself. This anchoring is achieved through the generic choice of writing a Socratic dialogue. It is additionally achieved through the frequent allusions to dramatic and narrative features of Plato's dialogues, of which I would like to consider four: descriptive elements of the dialogue, its characters, specific doctrines, and its structure.²⁷ Consider first the dramatic action at the beginning of the dialogue (cf. Erler 2012, 100-111). It opens with the line 'While I was going to the Cynosarges and nearing the Ilisus, the voice of someone shouting "Socrates, Socrates" reached me.' (ἐξιόντι μοι ἐξ Κυνόσαργες καὶ γενομένῳ μοι κατὰ τὸν Ἰλισὸν διήξε φωνὴ βοῶντός του, "Σώκρατες, Σώκρατες." 364a1-2.) While the Cynosarges itself does not actually occur in other Platonic texts, the reader recognizes Platonic motifs when the first-person narrator relates that he was on his way to a gymnasium (*Lys.* 203a1-b1; gymnasia are places of philosophical dialogue in other dialogues as well), nearing the Ilisus (*Phdr.* 229a1, and compare 227a3 περίπατον with *Ax.* 172a16), and hailed by someone (*Smp.* 172a2-6; *Rep.* 327a1-b5). This very line also shows the extent to which the author of the *Axiochus* interweaves familiar and new elements. In the *Republic*, a slave runs after Socrates to ask him to wait; in the *Symposium* one of his acquaintances 'calls' Apollodorus (ἐκάλεσε, 172a4); but in the *Axiochus*, the unplatonic, emotional tone of what follows is announced by Cleinias' 'shouting' (βοῶντος) Socrates' name twice.²⁸

If we look at the figures in the introductory scene, the author's concern to anchor his innovations in familiar Platonic terrain becomes evident in a different way. In addition to Cleinias, we are confronted with Charmides and Damon, all three familiar figures (present or, in the case of Damon in the *Republic*, absent) in other Platonic dialogues. But we do not hear from them again after the dialogue turns its focus onto Axiochus, a figure who in Plato's work is only mentioned as the father of Cleinias on one occasion (two passages, *Euthd.* 271b1, 275a10). Similarly the mention of Charmides and Cleinias' erotic relationship (ὁ δ' ἐξ ἐταιρείας ἐραστής ἄμα καὶ ἐρώμενος, 364a6-b1) plays no role in the rest of the text. As Joyal 2005, 99 puts it in noting these developments, this is an 'obviously calculated switch'. But what is its purpose? Joyal suggests that it serves to create a contrast between recognizable elements and the new content to follow. But it is not clear to me what specific *contrast* is created by mentioning the erotic dimension vis-à-vis the rest of the text, or between the first three and Axiochus. This kind of shift ought rather to be understood as the transition between anchoring devices and the novel ideas they serve to anchor.

In addition to elements of the dramatic description and the figures of the dialogue, specific references to Platonic doctrines also serve to anchor the text's novel approach. The *Phaedo*, for one, is an important reference dialogue. It is

²⁷ Feddersen 1895, 22-29 presents a great number of Platonic citations and allusions in parallel columns. See Joyal 2005, 102-103 for parallels with the *Apology*.

²⁸ The point is noted by Joyal 2005, 100 and accepted by Männlein-Robert 2012, 32.

evoked by Cleinias' comment that his father used to ridicule 'those who were scared of death' (τοὺς μορμολυττομένους τὸν θάνατον, 364b7-c1) and Socrates' later remark to Axiochus that being afraid of death 'is proper to a child' (νηπίου δίκην, 365b7). This refers to a passage in the *Phaedo* that could stand as a maxim for the *Axiochus*. Cebes remarks: 'but perhaps there is a child in us who has these fears; try to persuade him not to fear death like a bogey' (Grube trans.; ἴσως ἐνι τις καὶ ἐν ἡμῖν παῖς ὅστις τὰ τοιαῦτα φοβεῖται. τοῦτον οὖν πειρῶ μεταπειθεῖν μὴ δεδιέναι τὸν θάνατον ὥσπερ τὰ μορμολύκεια, 77e5-7).²⁹ Philosophical motifs from the *Phaedo*, such as the prison metaphor for the body (365e6-366a1; *Phd.* 62b3-4) and the soul's exile (365b4-5; *Phd.* 61e1, e2, 67c1; also *Ap.* 40e4-5) increase recognizability. In the same thematic context the *Axiochus* evokes the *Alcibiades I* when Socrates says that 'we are soul' (ἡμεῖς μὲν γάρ ἐσμεν ψυχή, 365e6; *Alc. I* 130c3); and later on the *Phaedrus*' programmatic claim that 'all soul is immortal' (ψυχὴ ἅπανσα ἀθάνατος, 372a5-6; *Phdr.* 245c5). The *Apology* serves as an anchor in a similar way. The text invokes its explicit denial of expertise on Socrates' part (366b5-8) and alludes to its hypothetical alternative of death as a deep sleep or a migration (40c6-41c7, more on this below).³⁰

The structure of the dialogue, finally, also anchors its new therapeutic direction in the Platonic dialogues. Here again, the *Phaedo* is an important dialogue. In addition to its shared thematic concern with death, the *Phaedo* like the *Axiochus* also features a sequence of arguments, the first of which do not succeed in convincing (all) interlocutors. Similar to the *Phaedo* but also the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, finally, is the dialogue's capping eschatological myth.

In terms of its structure as well as motifs, figures and scenic introduction, then, the dialogue offers its Platonic readers a familiar framework within which it anchors its novel therapeutic vision of philosophy. It is worth pointing out that this framework is based specifically on the Platonic Socratic dialogue, not just Socratic dialogues as written by other 4th-century authors.³¹ Finally, note that the text itself signals its intertextual strategy. When Cleinias requests Socrates to 'come and console him in your usual way' (ὡς εἴωθας, 364c2), we can take his words in a metapoetic way: the text claims of itself that it presents the usual familiar Socrates, even when it gives him a new look.

II. Anchoring Epicurean therapy

Parallel to anchoring its innovative view of Platonic philosophy as therapy, the dialogue has a subsidiary objective in making available Epicurean therapeutic arguments within a Platonic framework. The dialogue surprises modern-day readers because these Epicurean ideas are voiced by none other than Socrates. One might detect a proto-Epicurean attitude in the Socrates of the *Apology*, who after all speaks of the dead as 'nothing, nor having any perception of anything'

²⁹ On this motif and its importance for the *Axiochus*, see Erler 2005, 89-91.

³⁰ Joyal 2005, 101-104 explores the *Apology* parallels.

³¹ As Isnardi Parente 1961, 42 states, other pseudo-Platonic dialogues share significant features with Socratic literature more generally (she thinks particularly of Xenophon's Socratic writings).

(40c7). But the hypothetical alternative of the *Apology* (ἤ... ἤ, 40c6, 8, εἴτε δὴ... εἰ δ' αὖ, 40c10, e4) is very different from the positive statement of the Epicurean option in parts of the *Axiochus*.³² And while there may have been earlier texts that combine Epicurean with more Platonic arguments, to integrate Epicurean therapy into a Socratic dialogue is new.³³ The main question here is why the author chose to do so.

Before we consider the reasons why they are present, let us briefly look at the Epicurean elements themselves. The clearest ones are the arguments concerned with our status after death. We find the argument of insensibility (there is no sensation in death, therefore there is no evil in death: 365d1-6, 369e3-370b1) as well as the argument from absence (we are not there when death is there: 365e2, 369b6-c3; cf. Epicurus, *Ep. Men.* 124-125; *RS* 2; Lucr. *DRN* iii 830-831, 864-893). Not unlike many Epicurean texts, the *Axiochus* does not clearly separate between them (see Warren 2004, 17-55). Socrates also advances a version of the symmetry argument (just as your non-existence many years before your birth does not concern you, so your non-existence when you are dead does not concern you: 365d6-e1)³⁴ and of the empty fear argument (it is non-sensical to fear something if its presence does no harm: 369c3-7; cf. Epicurus, *Ep. Men.* 125).

The arguments against the fear of death are not the only Epicurean elements in this dialogue. We also find Epicurean terminology. First, there is a marked use of the verb ἐπιλογίζεσθαι, a terminus technicus in Epicureanism that Socrates starts using even before he gets to the specifically Epicurean arguments (οὐκ ἐπιλογιῆ τὴν φύσιν περισκεμμένως, 365b1-2).³⁵ This term seems to be used to underscore the Epicurean origin of the arguments against the fear of death. Its meaning in Epicureanism is not entirely clear, but most scholars think it must be a kind of rational reflection based upon empirical input.³⁶ In the *Axiochus* Socrates uses the word in particular to describe Axiochus' failure to connect two aspects of the same situation: correct ἐπιλογίζεσθαι would have enabled Axiochus to realize (or would have constituted the realization) that the insensible state that is death leaves no room for one's sensation of that state.³⁷

³² As Immisch 1896, 32 insists. Long 2019, 167 contrasts this with the procedure of the *Cons. ad Ap.* Cicero too preserves the hypothetical in the macrostructure of *Tusc.* i.

³³ Some argue that Crantor's *περὶ πένθους* already contained a combination of Platonic and Epicurean arguments (e.g., Pohlenz 1912, 15-19; Tulli 2004, 207-208; 2005, 266). However, this view depends on an unjustified use of the *Cons. ad Ap.* for reconstructing Crantor's work (see Kassel 1958 *passim* for arguments *contra*; they also undermine the view of Chevalier 1914, 77-81 on Crantor).

³⁴ This may be the first extant version of the symmetry argument, see Warren 2004, 68 with n15. Cf. Lucr. iii 832-842, 972-976.

³⁵ Immisch 1896, 25-27 was the first to note this. The term occurs, e.g., in Epicurus *Ep. Her.* 73; *Ep. Men.* 133; *KD* 20, 22; *VS* 35, 63; *Nat.* fr. 34.28.10. Further instances in Epicurean texts include Phld. *Sign.* 23.5-6; Diog. Oen. fr. 44.I.8, 44.III.11-12, 125.III.2 Smith (this last may be a citation from a letter by Epicurus). I am grateful to Frederik Bakker for discussion of this point.

³⁶ Some argue it is inference (De Lacy 1958), others the determination of the properties of the perceptible object (Essler 2011, 200-211), others comparative judgment (Schofield 1996).

³⁷ The *Axiochus*' uses of (ἀν)ἐπιλογι- compare very well with, e.g., Epicurus, *Nat.* xxxiv 18.10

Second, the *Axiochus* frequently uses Epicurean terminology of pleasure. We find such terms, however, in the very un-Epicurean contexts of the soul's condition after death. In conclusion of his cosmic argument Socrates speaks of the soul's enjoyment of pure pleasures (370c8-d2) and of perfect, toilless calm (370d3-5, with the Epicurean watchwords γαλήνως, ἡσυχία, ἄπονος βίος; cf. Männlein-Robert 2012, 82n96; cf. Usener 1977 *s.v.* γαλήνη). The myth of Gorgyas too ends on a note of pure enjoyment for the souls of the good (371d3, 372a6-7). By contrast, life here yields only pleasures soiled by pains of all kinds (366a2-7, d2-5, 370d1). The dialogue's use of this terminology is clearly polemical: real pleasure is different from what the Epicureans claim it is.

Let us now return to the question of why the author included Epicurean arguments against the fear of death in the dialogue. According to the polemical reading, this is in order for the dialogue to criticize them. But if this is true it is hard to see, as I noted earlier, why Socrates would restate the Epicurean position *after* Axiochus' complaint about fashionable, superficial talk (369e3). It is also hard to understand the tight connection between Epicurean and Platonic elements in the first part of Socrates' case (365d1-366b1). The difficulty here is to square Socrates' apparent acceptance of the Epicurean arguments with the inconsistency between them and the Platonic elements in the text.

We can explain this inconsistent presence of Epicurean arguments when we regard them as being employed *ad hominem* and with only limited validity. We should realize that the text presents us with an Axiochus who accepts Epicurean notions. We can see this when we consider Socrates' remarkable repetition of the criticism that Axiochus is being thoughtless, which introduces two of the three places in the dialogue in which we find the Epicurean arguments of insensibility and absence. In very similar wording (365d1-5 and 369e3-370a1) Socrates faults Axiochus for failing to make cognitive connections (*ἀνεπιλογιστώς*). In the first passage, he specifies: *καὶ σεαυτῷ ὑπεναντία καὶ ποιεῖς καὶ λέγεις*, 365d2-3. What Socrates describes is an inconsistency within Axiochus' cognitive world. This implies that we are meant to think of him as having accepted Epicurean notions about death in addition to his ordinary beliefs about the evils of death. The inconsistency between these sets of beliefs is the place where Socrates' therapy of Axiochus' emotional state begins. He wields Epicurean arguments, connecting to part of Axiochus' beliefs, to call out his inconsistency, and in so doing puts Axiochus into a position in which he can think about his beliefs. Socrates employs the Epicurean arguments as part of his therapy, not because he supports them but because his patient does.³⁸ Once these have done their work and Axiochus has become susceptible to reason, Socrates can proceed to Platonic notions and arguments. His repeated criticism of Axiochus' inconsistency should help Axiochus realize later (between Socrates' visit and his return after noon?)

Arrighetti (in LS 20 C6). See Joosse forthcoming on the role of *epilogismos* in the dialogue.

³⁸ It is worth noting that Chrysippus advocates this therapeutic procedure in dealing with Epicureans and Peripatetics; see SVF iii 474 (from the *Therapeutics*, i.e., *On Emotions* iv) with Tieleman 2003, 166-170.

that accepting the Platonic arguments means relinquishing the Epicurean ones.³⁹ For the Academic readers of the dialogue, this procedure means that they too can adopt Epicurean arguments as part of their therapeutic mode of philosophy. They need not accept them to use them. They can bring their patients to Plato's philosophy by means of Epicurus' arguments. For this strategy, the *Axiochus* provides the backing: it anchors the Epicurean arguments in Socratic discourse and so makes them acceptable in an Academic context.

Depending on readers' prior knowledge, the side effect of this strategy may have been to overrule Epicurean claims to authorship of these arguments. For us it is clear that Epicurus was the first to pen these arguments. But this may not have been so for the ancient audience of the *Axiochus*. Here it is important to note that the likely time of authorship of the *Axiochus* roughly overlaps with early Epicurean teachers in Rome, like Philodemus, and with Latin works by Lucretius and others before him (Gaius Amafinius and others) that sell Epicurean therapy to the Romans, or at least their upper classes.⁴⁰ If the date of the *Axiochus* is indeed close to Philo of Larissa's activity, as I suggested above, the dialogue may even have had a pre-emptive objective. For the *Axiochus* to present a therapy that is very similar to the Epicurean project but that claims to descend from an earlier generation than Epicurus is for it to challenge head-on Lucretius' and others' claims that Epicurus is the one to turn to for salvation. Moreover, if readers see Socrates treat these arguments as second-best, the effect is a disqualification of the Epicurean therapeutic project in the eyes of these readers.⁴¹ In a period when Greek philosophy starts to look to Rome for its cultural future, the *Axiochus* may have sought to unmoor any Epicurean attempts to present themselves as the origin of therapy.

In this connection we should note that Socrates presents the Epicurean arguments as deriving from Prodicus. While his first reference to his remarks as 'echoes of Prodicus' (366c1) seems to refer indiscriminately to both the Epicurean and Platonic elements in 365d1-366b1 and Socrates presents the pessimistic, long passage of 366d1-369b5 as part of the content of Prodicus' teaching, he later specifies that Prodicus pronounced death to be nothing to us

³⁹ I explore form and function of the inconsistencies of the *Axiochus* in Joosse forthcoming.

⁴⁰ We only know of Amafinius (and the even more obscure Cadius, Rabirius, and Saufeius) via Cicero *Tusc.* i 6, ii 7, iv 6, *Acad.* i 5; Cassius to Cicero *Fam.* XV.19.2 = 216 Shackleton-Bailey). His date is unknown. It appears from Cicero's remarks that he predates Lucretius, but he may also have been a contemporary of his (as suggested by Howe 1951, less plausibly in my view). Roskam 2007, 84-85 sounds a welcome note of caution against the common view of Amafinius as a 'popularizing' author. Given Roman reading culture, any author of Latin philosophical works will have written for the educated elite. See also Erler 1994, 363-366 and *s.v.* Amafinius in *DPhA*.

⁴¹ There is a further aspect to this challenge, as noted by the proponents of the polemical view. *Axiochus* himself says explicitly that arguments about insensibility after death fail to touch him (369e2). This is a direct challenge to a system of thought that regards therapeutic effectiveness as a criterion of philosophical truth (for discussion, see Lohmar 2012, 158-163). On the implied superiority of the Platonic arguments, see below.

(369b5-7).⁴² At the time of writing this may have either or both of two effects. For those unaware of the recent origin of the *Axiochus*, this construction challenges Epicurus' prime authorship of the notion that death is nothing to us and that we cannot perceive evil in death. Those in the know will have recognized Prodicus as a mask for Epicurus; for them the reference indicates that the text is self-conscious about its borrowing of Epicurean material. In combination with the ambiguous characterization of Prodicus as a money-hungry sophist (366c1-5) and *Axiochus*' complaint about fashionable but superficial talk (369d1-3) this serves to disqualify these arguments to some extent.

III. Anchoring Platonic philosophy in therapeutic discourse

The *Axiochus* integrates therapeutic elements and specifically Epicurean arguments into core Academic discourse. But there is also another innovation that runs in the opposite direction. The *Axiochus* also communicates Platonic ideas to its (likely) first-century BCE audience in a form that allows for maximum acceptance.

The *Axiochus* presents Platonic material in three stages. (A) In 365e3-366b1, which is the second part of Socrates' second address of *Axiochus*, he speaks of a place to which the soul goes after death (365e4-5, cf. 370d2); he states that we are our soul (365e6); that the soul is immortal (365e6, 370b2, 372a5-6); and that the soul is imprisoned in the body (366a1, cf. 370d2-3). By implication from the contrast with the body, which is qualified as earthlike and irrational (365e5), the soul is not earthlike and rational. (B) In 370b1-d6, Socrates repeats that the soul is immortal (370b2); and elaborates on the cultural and scientific achievements of human beings, arguing that these are unthinkable if the human soul did not contain a 'divine breath' (θεῖον πνεῦμα), which implies immortality (370c5-7).⁴³ (C) In 371a1-372a3, finally, Socrates relates the myth he heard from Gobryas, about post-mortem judgment and the rewards for the virtuous; and reaffirms that the soul's immortality is more certain than the details of the myth (372a5-6).

For the non-Platonists among the dialogue's first readers, its therapeutic aspect will have appeared familiar: therapy is what they have come to expect from philosophy. But they too are being offered something new: the Platonic material. The strategy of the dialogue, I argue, is to use the familiar framework of therapy as an anchor for new ideas like the immortality of the soul. In other words, by presenting them as therapy, the text makes its audience more receptive to Platonic ideas.

⁴² It has been suggested that the longish pessimistic section portraying the evils of life (366d1-369b5) is also to be read as Epicurean (Immisch 1896, 48, with reference (p. 28) to Epic. *VS* 47, and Lucr. *DRN* iii 938 and 971). Some scholars think a Cynic provenance is more likely (Feddersen 1896, 12-16; Chevalier 1914, 81-83; in view of the close parallels of 366d2-367b7 with Teles fr. 5, 49.7-50.17 Hense). There are, however, also significant parallels with ps-Pl., *Epinomis* 973d-974a (cf. Isnardi Parente 1961, 44), Aristotle, *Eudemus* fr. 65 (cf. Tulli 2004, 203-206) and I add *EE* 1215b18-30.

⁴³ Earlier scholarship saw Posidonius behind 370b, in connection with Cicero's *Tusc.* i 62-64, e.g., Pohlenz 1912, 86-87.

This anchoring strategy is visible also in the immediate textual context of the passages that introduce Platonic material. The first and second passages (365e3-366b1 and 370b1-d6) are appended in an immediate way to the preceding Epicurean statements. In 365e2-5, we read: ‘For you, whom it would concern, will not exist. Away, then (τοιγαροῦν), with all this nonsense (φλύαρον), and realize this: that once the union of body and soul is dissolved and the soul has been established in its proper place...’. Taking this out of context it might be attractive for a polemic reader to have ‘nonsense’ refer to the Epicurean ideas voiced immediately before (Immisch 1896, 41 edits the text to do just that; followed by Beghini 2020, 51-55), but it unmistakably refers to Axiochus’ scared talk. With τοιγαροῦν, therefore, we expect a statement of the same point or an inference from it, an expectation that is briefly shored up by Socrates’ Epicurean terminology of dissolving a union of body and soul (σύγκρισις is a standard Epicurean way to refer to macro-objects of any kind).⁴⁴ But our expectation is thwarted: when the union is dissolved, a Platonic soul escapes. Socrates does not mark this or the following Platonic ideas as a new point. As to the second passage, we find a similar lack of demarcation, but more starkly, at 370a8-b2: ‘And you dread the absence of sensation, but you think that you will comprehend the future absence of sensation with sensation. In addition to the many and beautiful discourses on the immortality of the soul...’.

Here we do not even find a particle to tie the two sentences together. So sudden is the transition that many readers have suspected a lacuna.⁴⁵ But the comparable, though weaker, absence of proper demarcation at 365e2-5 should make us resist that move. Both, I suggest, express the author’s strategy to build his Platonic message onto the Epicurean therapeutic ideas that are familiar to a large portion of his audience. It builds on them in the sense that the Epicurean argumentation clears away some of the confusion that besets the patient, and makes him receptive to new ideas. It also builds on them because Epicurus’ therapy is the anchor for the author’s Platonic innovations. Many in the text’s intended audience are familiar with Epicurean therapy. By invoking it, the author can indicate what kind of thing his new Platonic vision is to be understood as, to what sort of practice it belongs.

We can go further, however. These transitions indicate not only that the text seeks to make Platonic ideas recognizable and acceptable. The order of first presenting Epicurean arguments and following up immediately with Platonic ideas is also an indication that the latter are meant to be taken as superior. A second feature of the transitional passages strongly supports this. The second and third of them (370b1-d6 and 371a1-372a3) are followed by Axiochus’ enthusiastic

⁴⁴ Beghini 2020, 48-49 describes the expectation and views its non-fulfilment as evidence of disorder in the text.

⁴⁵ Buresch 1886, 14; Immisch 1896, 39-40. See Feddersen 1895, 8-9; Brinkmann 1896, 447-450 for arguments *contra*. Others have taken the transition as evidence for the author’s incompetence (e.g., Hermann 1838, 583n166; Chevalier 1914, 40; O’Keefe 2006, 404). Beghini 2020, 48-67 transposes 369b5-370b1 to 365e2 in part because of this abrupt transition (44-45) but admits that the transition remains abrupt, even if it is from 369b5 (59).

response: he has exchanged fear for a longing to die (370e1, 372a10-11) and he makes explicit that the myth and the οὐράνιος λόγος have worked this change in him (372a11-12), in implicit contrast to the earlier superficial talk (369d1). To the modern reader, Axiochus' change of heart may seem sudden and the arguments that produce it not quite convincing. Nevertheless, the most plausible interpretation of the presence of his responses in the text is that they are invitations to the contemporary reader to join Axiochus, perhaps not in his longing for death, but certainly in recognizing Platonic ideas as superior or more attractive.

The dialogue's strategy, then, is to present innovative, Platonic ideas as anchored in Hellenistic therapy. This anchoring in Hellenistic, specifically therapeutic discourse is reinforced by elements of the text that anchor its Platonic ideas in Hellenistic philosophical notions more generally. We see this in a number of cases of reinterpretation. We have seen this apply to Epicurean pleasure terminology. In the transition at 365e2-5, we already saw a Platonic reorientation of the notion of the dissolution of the σύγκρισις of body and soul. In the same context, Socrates describes the soul as 'spread throughout the pores of the body' (366a6), an Epicurean-sounding description but one that serves a Platonic view, since this soul is really at home in the heavens (366a7-8). As to the heavens themselves, Socrates describes them using Peripatetic terminology: they are said to consist of αἰθήρ (366a7), to which the soul is akin (σύμφυλον, 366a7) and in which it has its own place (οἰκεῖος τόπος, 365e4-5). However, he does not explicitly specify that αἰθήρ is the soul's substance, leaving it open that it may be immaterial.⁴⁶ Another instance is the Stoic notion of πνεῦμα, which is harnessed to Platonic ends in the οὐράνιος λόγος. Stoics spoke of πνεῦμα as the πῦρ τεχνικόν and as the living God that shapes the cosmos. For them, however, this πνεῦμα always remained material and in no way made the human soul immortal (though the wise may be long-lived). Yet the *Axiochus* draws precisely that inference: the θεῖον πνεῦμα that allows the soul to understand guarantees Axiochus' immortality and his ability to enjoy pure pleasures uncorrupted by contact with the body (370c4-d5). It also speaks of this divine breath as being *in* the soul rather than being identical to the soul, as a Stoic would say.⁴⁷

There is a further indication of the author's objective to present his audience with a Platonism in terms familiar to them. The transition from an inconsistent Epicureanism on Axiochus' part to Platonism at 370a8-b2, cited above, also suggests that the author is reticent about his Platonism. The remark that there are many other discourses (or arguments, λόγοι) about the immortality of the soul, while serving as an invitation to the interested reader to study more Platonic works, marks the author's choice to be selective about the Platonic ideas he now

⁴⁶ Here the text is very close to the views formulated in Cicero, who in *Tusc.* i 36-70 speaks at greater length about the soul's kinship with the substance of the heavens, although his suspension of judgment about the question of the substance of the soul itself is much more emphatic and explicit.

⁴⁷ The closest we find in Cicero is more general: *illa...quae declarant inesse in animis hominum divina quaedam*, *Tusc.* i 56; similarly Manilius iv 886-910. Note the close parallel in Philo of Alexandria, *Quod det.* 87-90.

wants to present to his audience. Given the many allusions to the *Phaedo*, ideas left unmentioned here but that may still be part of the author's view could include arguments based on the Forms. It is worth noting for instance that Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* i, which shares so many of its themes and concerns with the *Axiochus*, does refer to the Forms. On another point too, the *Axiochus* leaves Platonic ideas unmentioned. In *Tusc.* i 61-63 and 68-70, Cicero argues for the divine nature of the soul, and of its power of *inuentio* in particular, on the basis of the remarkable cultural and cognitive achievements of humankind. While this is closely parallel to *Ax.* 370b (albeit more elaborate), a major difference between the texts is that Cicero argues for the divinity of the human soul *via* the divinity of the maker of the cosmos, at least in the case of our cognitive achievements. Cicero's argument is that if we are able to comprehend the workings of the cosmos, and the workings of the cosmos have been caused by a divinity, then our soul must contain something divine too (i 63, 70). In the *Axiochus*, there is no such reference to a demiurgic agent. But it is unlikely that a Platonist would not accept some version of Forms and of a demiurgic agent. It appears, then, that the author of the *Axiochus* has chosen to make his work less theoretically heavy and explicit than Cicero. This reticence suits an author who seeks to communicate Platonism to an audience new to it.

As a corollary, this view of the *Axiochus*' Platonic agenda also has chronological implications. I have argued that the *Axiochus* presents Platonic ideas on the nature of human beings and of the soul in a communicative form that has the highest chance of 'touch[ing] the soul' (369e2) of its contemporary readers, i.e., in the guise of therapy. In other words, it anchors its Platonic innovation in the dominant therapeutic discourse of Hellenistic philosophy. It does so by offering a reflection on consolation and emphatically using therapeutic language; by connecting its Platonic ideas immediately to Epicurean consolatory arguments specifically; by using Hellenistic philosophical notions more generally to its Platonic ends; and by exercising a certain degree of reticence in its presentation of Platonism. I suggested earlier that the attempt to present a therapeutic vision of philosophy for Platonists would sit well with an origin for the *Axiochus* at the time of Philo of Larissa or shortly afterwards. As far as the attempt to promote Platonism on the Hellenistic philosophical scene is concerned, such a context would also work well—although I note again that this is a matter of plausibility only. It features Epicureanism as its principal target, exercises theoretical caution, promotes immortality and transcendence in a relatively modest way, accommodates Peripatetic and Stoic notions, and exhibits strong parallels to Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*. All these indicate, I think, an early first-century BCE date, which would make it part of what we now see as the transition of the Sceptical Academy to the beginning of Middle Platonism.

Conclusion

The *Axiochus* is a fascinating document of the reception of Plato's work in the late Hellenistic or Early Imperial age. Within the Platonic corpus it is unique in

the type of questions it raises. Some of these have to do with its unusual embrace of Epicurean elements; other questions concern Axiochus' spirited rejection of Socrates' initial attempts at consolation; with the generic proximity of the dialogue to consolatory texts; yet other questions with its unusual philosophical vocabulary; or its at times rhetorical register. Its unusual features have led to quite divergent interpretations and approaches. The approach advocated here does not answer all of these questions. I hope to have demonstrated, however, that it helps us greatly to understand the *Axiochus* when we see it as a text that seeks to anchor philosophical innovation. I have sought to show how it anchors philosophical innovation for a double audience. For Platonists, it presents a therapeutic conception of philosophy in the familiar terms of the Socratic dialogue. In so doing it encourages Platonists to embrace this conception as part of their identity. For non-Platonists, it does the reverse, using the same anchoring mechanism: it presents Platonism as a philosophy that can be understood within the familiar frame of philosophy as therapy of the soul, while advancing Platonism as the best of its kind within that frame.⁴⁸

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
 Janskerkhof 13
 3512 BL Utrecht
 The Netherlands

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