

Platonic Interpretation in Aulus Gellius

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ALTHOUGH IT IS UNDERSTANDABLE that historians of philosophy prefer to deal with material from the philosophers' own works, the works of informed amateurs can often say much about the intellectual world in which they lived, and may supplement comparatively meagre information from the pens of esteemed professionals. The Platonism of the second century is particularly prone to this problem, with a much fuller picture being built with the help of those whom we are inclined to think of only secondarily as philosophers. Plutarch can be fitted into this category in spite of his standing in philosophy. The figures of Theon of Smyrna, Apuleius, and Maximus of Tyre all contribute considerably to the picture of a vital new Platonism, which none of them has quite seemed to master. Many principal figures within the philosophical schools, such as Taurus, Atticus, and Numenius, are by contrast known only from fragments, and these fragments frequently derive from non-philosophers.

Much of what is known of Taurus comes from Aulus Gellius, himself no theorist.¹ His *Noctes Atticae* mark the reflections of a fairly conservative, practically minded Roman on his educational experiences in Greece. The issues about which he writes are sometimes interesting, sometimes less so, sometimes of far-reaching importance, sometimes of curiosity-value only. All are treated quite briefly, from the simplest matters of etymology and pseudo-etymology to the treatment of the most far-reaching ethical questions. Gellius, an interesting witness to the workings of the intellectual world of the second century, writes from a perspective essentially beyond it. He had found within it a great deal of useful advice and a great deal of unhelpful bickering; morally uplifting teachers, and others who had simply

¹ On Taurus as a philosopher see J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London 1977) 237-47.

adopted the rôle of philosopher or sophist as a profession without, so far as he could see, displaying any inclination to lead the kind of life that would be a good example to the pupil. His attitudes were probably widely shared, for there was great concern during this period about the prevalence of teachers who were engaged in higher education to suit their wallets rather than their hearts. Nowhere is this more evident than in the works of Lucian.²

The use of Gellius to shed light upon the intellectual world of the early second century is a legitimate but at times a difficult task. It appears from his preface (1) that a gap of one generation separates the notes, which were to form the basis of the work (ca 140) and the author's preparation of them for his own children and other interested readers. His memory may have been above average, but it is likely that he could no longer supply all the details that his original notes lacked. At times he may have misunderstood these notes or forgotten the context in which they had been written. Certainly he seems acutely conscious of his dependence on them and of their dependence in turn on a number of sources, for he exhorts the critical reader to blame his sources rather than himself for any inadequacies, and to balance the reasoning and authorities used by those sources against any reasoning and authorities of the critic's own (18). This disclaimer of responsibility should not be taken as proof that the *Noctes Atticae* contain nothing original; even when students do not try to be original, it is most improbable that their notes consistently reflect their teachers' views: particularly as they interpret those notes when reading them some decades later. At very least the particular prejudices of the author are bound to come to the surface at times.

The present study seeks insights into the interpretation of Plato in Gellius' day, *i.e.*, his student years at Athens. Even where no source is named, it is legitimate to expect that views expressed originally in his notes and subsequently in his

² The theme is so widespread in Lucian that it would be pointless to attempt a comprehensive catalogue of passages on pseudo-philosophers, but the most important works in this category are perhaps *Fisherman*, *Symposium*, and *Icaromenippus*. In Lucian (*Pisc.* 11, 46; *Merc.* 25, 40; *Bis Acc.*) beard and rough cloak are the (much abused) symbols of the philosopher, just as in Gellius, *e.g.* *NA* 9.2, where Herodes says to a 'philosopher': *video barbam et pallium, philosophum nondum video*. L. Holford Strevens, *Aulus Gellius* (London 1988) 192 n.2, suggests that for immoral philosophers one should see Cic. *Tusc.* 2.11, *Nep. fr.* 39 Marshall, *Sen. Exhort.* fr. 18 Haase, and, for their abundance under Marcus Aurelius, Dio 71.35.2. Surprisingly, he omits Lucian.

published work, derive from or were inspired by intellectuals or written compositions prominent at Athens at the time. We should naturally like to know which individuals or writings had inspired which parts of the *Noctes Atticae*, and hence judicious *Quellenforschung* may serve a legitimate purpose. Although I do not shy away from this responsibility, identifying sources is not my primary purpose, which is rather to ensure a more intelligent discussion of certain passages of considerable importance for an accurate assessment of the quality of Platonic interpretation during this period.

By the second century, Platonism was again a dominant philosophy,³ enjoying a revival in which it was able to capitalize on relatively prosperous economic conditions, on a high regard for ancient authority, and on widespread desire for some kind of religious fulfilment. With the dependence of the teachers on the reputation of Plato, considerable debate arose about how one should approach the Platonic corpus and interpret its contents. The commentary was therefore becoming an important vehicle in the teaching of Plato—though the evidence is slim, apart from Plutarch's essay *De animae procreatione* and the papyrus commentary on the *Theaetetus*, of which around a quarter survives in various states of preservation. Even beyond the commentaries, the study of Plato was closely linked with the interpretation of texts. Hence the material of Platonic interpretation discussed here will be important regardless of its exact origin. And though Gellius' own views may colour it at times, it has probably suffered less from the distorting mirror of the informant's words than most information about fragmentary second-century Platonists, preserved by such figures as Proclus and Eusebius.

³ A brief bibliography on the period from the first century B.C. to the second century A.D. might include the following: M. Baltes, *Der Weltentstehung des platonischen Timaios nach dem antiken Interpreten* (Leiden 1976–78), and with H. Dörrie, *Der Platonismus in der Antike* III (Stuttgart 1993); Dillon (*supra* n.1), and *Alcinous: The Handbook of Platonism* (Oxford 1993); P.-L. Donini, *Le scuole, l'anima, l'impero: La filosofia antica da Antioco a Plotino* (Turin 1982); F. Ferrari, *Dio, idee e materia: La struttura del cosmo in Plutarco di Cheronea* (Naples 1995); J. Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy* (Göttingen 1978); D. T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* (Leiden 1986); H. Tarrant, *Scepticism or Platonism* (Cambridge 1985), and *Thrasyllean Platonism* (Ithaca 1993); J. Whittaker, "Platonic Philosophy in the Early Empire," *ANRW* II.32.2 (Berlin 1985) 81–102, and *Alcinoos, Enseignement des doctrines de Platon* (Paris 1990).

I. Taurus in Gellius

Where Gellius adequately labels his sources he can be of undisputed use. Apart from being an important witness to the good side of Lucian's *bête noire* Peregrinus Proteus (*NA* 8.3, 12.11) and supplementing our knowledge of Herodes Atticus (*NA* 1.2, 9.2, 19.12), Gellius' most important contribution to knowledge of the world of sophists and philosophers is his information on Favorinus and Calvenus Taurus. Passages concerning Taurus have recently been collected (with other testimonia) with full commentary by Marie-Luise Lakmann.⁴ I do not propose to concentrate on issues that arise directly from her treatment, but to consider other passages in which Gellius can be informative on the kind of Platonic interpretation that flourished in Taurus' Athens and the relation of Platonism, if any, to the dwindling 'Academicism' to which Favorinus still adhered.⁵ Gellius fleshes out our knowledge *whether or not* he follows philosophers of eminence.

Just how often references to Plato in Gellius are inspired by his Platonist teacher Taurus is difficult to decide.⁶ One cannot assume that frequent references to Taurus always signal where his interpretation or his interpretative method have been influential. It may be presumed that Gellius will in some cases be predisposed towards acknowledging Taurus, as when the master offers a *distinctive* reading of Plato or when his attitude to Plato seems *characteristic of Taurus*. At other times, when Gellius is not conscious that his teacher is adding anything significant to Plato, why should Taurus be mentioned, even if he had introduced Gellius to the material in question?

⁴ *Der platoniker Taurus in der Darstellung des Aulus Gellius* (Leiden 1995: hereafter 'Lakmann').

⁵ See now A. M. Ioppolo, "The Academic Position of Favorinus of Arelate," *Phronesis* 38 (1993) 183–213; Glucker (*supra* n.3).

⁶ References to Plato in Gellius, unless otherwise labelled, are sometimes seen as owing more to Favorinus than to Gellius: e.g. S. Gersh, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin Tradition* (Notre Dame 1986) I 199–213, esp. 205 n.17, 211ff. I believe that the approach and attitude of Favorinus has indeed considerably influenced Gellius, but that there is no sign of Favorinus' special concern with Platonic philosophy in spite of his professed Academic allegiance. Further, I believe that there is very little indication that Favorinus was interested in exegetical matters. The case of Taurus is quite different.

II. Gellius on the *Laws* and Inebriation

Among the passages that I have in mind, one (*NA* 15.2) criticizes an alcoholic would-be Platonist from Crete who sought out young men's company; there he is alleged to have claimed that Plato spoke in favour of drunkenness in his *Laws*, seeing it as beneficial for those of strong constitution. It is obvious that this view does violence to the text of the first two books of the *Laws*. Interpretation of these books, however, is given at some length by Gellius' standards (15.2.4–8), and it is a legitimate expectation that Gellius has benefited from discussion of the issue with Taurus, who would not have appreciated the appearance at Athens of a rival 'Platonist' who sought influence over the young by flattery.⁷ Throughout the passage runs the seemingly counterintuitive theme that moderate intoxication is being allowed for the mature individual *in the interests of temperance*. Three separate reasons can be detected: (a) this harmless relaxation will refresh the mind for renewed application to its sober duties (*ad instauranda sobrietatis officia*); (b) moderate intoxication will encourage the cathartic confession of deep-seated passions and desires, whose disclosure makes them easier to cure; (c) moderate inebriation will provide an appropriate opportunity for practice at resisting the lure of pleasures: in effect, you cannot be self-controlled without being tempted. This last reason is treated at greater length and involves the analogy with conventional courage, which needs to be tested on the battlefield.⁸

These justifications for the use of alcohol can all be related to the later pages of *Laws* I (e.g. 647C–50B), but they are distinguished and spelt out with precision and clarity—something that we have good reason to connect with Taurus in particular.⁹

⁷ The flatterer (*kolax*) was of course a well-known figure in the popular morality of the time, and Plutarch had written an essay on how to distinguish him from the friend; Platonism had associated flattery with the attempt to win over others by aiming to promote their pleasure ever since the arguments with Polus at *Grg.* 462C–65D.

⁸ For a contemporary view that makes pleasure the enemy of the Cynic campaign, see Lucian *Vit. Auct.* 8.

⁹ (a) Taurus is best known for his discussion of the various senses in which the world might be called 'generated' at *Ti.* 28B, Philop. *De aet. mundi* 6.8, pp.145ff Rabe=T22B Lakmann; (b) he lists three separate reasons for punishment in his interpretation of the *Gorgias*: Gellius 7.14.1–5=T20. Notice also the principle of clarity rather than (obscure) erudition, 12.5.6=T12, which is followed again by a very clear exposition of Stoic theory of the affections.

We also know that he was capable of distinguishing between the mind's giving way to some incontinent affection and controlled engagement in the kind of activity that might normally be associated with that affection. This can be seen in relation to anger (*NA* 1.26.8–11=τ5 Lakmann), and in relation to pain (12.5.9–13=τ12). Although the principle of seeking 'moderation of affection' or *metriopatheia* was of course not unusual in Middle Platonism,¹⁰ it is an important theme in Taurus' scant remains. He could have been expected both to sanction non-indulgent use of alcohol and to employ Plato in a systematic manner to support his judgment; the appearance of the Cretan among the youth of Athens gave him the right occasion.

Assuming, then, that the teacher has expressed his views on the subject, these views were likely to have coloured Gellius' treatment. He had no need to mention Taurus, as his main purpose had of course been to expose the sham philosopher and to call for fair and honest interpretation of Plato—a purpose to which the exact source of Gellius' interpretation was of no relevance. One cannot argue that *NA* 15.2.4–8 should be included in Taurus' testimonia, but it is a passage that probably reflects his views and certainly adds to the picture of the kind of Platonic scholarship with which Gellius was familiar.

III. Gellius on Callicles

At 10.22, an even more impressive discussion of a Platonic passage, Gellius gives an interpretation of parts of Callicles' attack on philosophizing in old age (*Grg.* 484C–85E), quoting the text at length (10.22.4–23). Clearly Gellius is reading the Greek for himself and can form his own view of its correct interpretation, but the interpretation that he offers is nevertheless fairly sophisticated. The interesting point is that he avoids the common assumption that Plato's positive messages are conveyed only through the respectable figures of Socrates, Timaeus, and the Eleatic and Athenian Strangers, as at D.L. 3.52, where it is stated that Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles in the *Gorgias*, like the sophists in other dialogues, are there to have *false* opinions tested and refuted. Gellius finds important moral messages

¹⁰ Dillon (*supra* n.1) 77, 151, 196, 241, 302f; Lakmann 43ff; S. R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford 1971) 99–106.

even in the words of Callicles; this has a partial parallel in the traditions of interpretation of the *Gorgias*, in that Olympiodorus can find a message in Gorgias' own words;¹¹ and another partial parallel in the Plutarchan *On Chance* (*Mor.* 98D), where Protagoras' account of the creation of humans is taken as Plato's own (κατὰ τὸν Πλάτωνα; cf. *Prt.* 321C).

The most important parallel, however, is Gellius 17.20.4ff, where Taurus finds much to commend in the speech of Pausanias at *Symp.* 180E. Although the ancients, like ourselves, often supposed that the distinction here between two Aphrodites and two Erotes is of some wider importance for Plato,¹² Pausanias is clearly not intended to have the same authority as Socrates in this work. Not surprisingly, Taurus finds much to admire in the literary and rhetorical artistry of the passage, but also much to commend in Pausanias' technique of argument (17.20.4). And the injunction at 17.20.6 that Gellius should proceed to the inner recesses of Plato and to the considerable worth of the matters discussed (*ipsa Platonis penetralia ipsarumque rerum pondera et dignitates*) is surely meant to imply that much value and seriousness lie beneath the surface *in this passage too*, even though *gravitas* and *dignitas* are not qualities easily detected in Pausanias. Taurus' own method, then, looks for depth of meaning in the words of a wide variety of Plato's characters—a surprisingly modern technique. What else suggests the influence of Taurus behind this passage?

For Gellius, Callicles' invective against mature persons studying philosophy is a valid criticism when applied to a certain type of intellectual pursuits: he has a skewed idea of what philosophy is, but he correctly identifies a problem concerning what he supposes philosophy to be. Gellius acknowledges that Callicles is not to be imitated or taken seriously (*persona ... non gravis neque idonea*, 1), indeed is a man of unsound character (*non proba*, 24), but describes him as having *sensus ... intelligentiae*—

¹¹ In *Grg.* 8.12 (cf. 8.7), but the lesson is not very deep; moreover, there is a strong tendency to see Callicles as the interlocutor furthest removed from the 'common notions' and hence from the truth (e.g. 25.1); and Olympiodorus passes over the entire long rhesis of Callicles (one twentieth or more of the *Grg.*) in just one (no. 26) of his fifty lectures of the work, thus betraying a lack of respect for all that our interlocutor is saying.

¹² A good example from a second-century Platonist is Apul. *Apol.* 12: *mitto enim dicere alta illa et divina Platonica, rarissimo cuique piorum ignara, ceterum omnibus profanis incognita: geminam esse Venerem deam, proprio quamque amore et diversis amatoribus pollentis; earum alteram vulgariam ... alteram vero caelitem.*

que communis fides and an *indissimulabilis veritas*. The first phrase marks Callicles as being close to the related concepts of (a) the 'common notions' and (b) 'what is evident to mankind's senses and intellect'.¹³ Unlike J. C. Rolfe (Loeb edition, 1927), I do not understand the phrase as "a reputation for common sense and understanding," but rather as "a trust in common perceptions and understanding." This would in fact entail his having the surest available epistemological foundations in the eyes of many second-century philosophical and scientific thinkers,¹⁴ and give an explanation of why, in their view, Plato's Socrates should credit Callicles with *episteme* at *Grg.* 487A. The second phrase again relates to the attributions afforded Callicles by the text of 487A–B, this time to the suggestion that Callicles is outspoken and not afraid to say what he believes. We see then that what Gellius says about the *Gorgias* owes something to (a) a close reading of the text, (b) the application of contemporary epistemology to that text, and (c) a willingness to find truth behind the words of morally dubious interlocutors.

These three indications of an interpretation that seeks greater depth than one might expect appear to confirm that Gellius has not come to his conclusions independently. As Taurus was his mentor in Platonic philosophy, it would be natural to suspect that he is responsible for the reading preserved in Gellius' notes. Taurus' willingness to search for depth in Pausanias' words in the *Symposium* adds to this impression. But when one also bears in mind that Gellius consulted Taurus' *commentaria* on the *Gorgias*,¹⁵ indeed that this is the only work of Taurus to which he refers, it seems probable that he did read the *Gorgias* with Taurus and that his reading has been shaped by Taurus'.

There are two general objections to seeing Taurus' view behind those of Gellius here. First, one cannot fail to note that the practical Gellius will naturally consider many philosophical

¹³ On these concepts see H. Tarrant, "Agreement and the Self-Evident in Plato of Larissa," *Dionysus* 5 (1981) 66–97, 9 (1985) 49–53.

¹⁴ Although Sextus Empiricus appears to use the concept of self-evidence to intellect and senses at *Math.* 7.141–44 in discussing Plato, it is used most regularly by Galen, including *PHP* 2.5.5.2, 5.76.2; 3.8.35.11; 9.1.22.2, 7.4.1 and elsewhere (Kuehn's edition): 1.47.20, 50.7; 5.90.5; 5.94.8; 6.454.12; 10.39.8; 11.448.16; 18b.665.10.

¹⁵ Whether in Athens or later when publishing is not clear; *NA* 7.14.5=τ20 Lakmann.

issues not worthy of attention¹⁶ and be dismissive of those whom he does not consider genuine philosophers.¹⁷ One would thus expect him to be suspicious of the *inutile otium* of fake philosophers, who thrive even at an advanced age on a *futtillis atque puerilis meditatio argutiarum*. Taurus, in contrast, seems less ready to reject debate about issues that have no practical outcome: at *NA* 7.13.7 Gellius' fellow pupils are actually rebuked by their master for dismissing problems of no immediate practical relevance. But the difference between them might easily be overstated. Gellius is approving of Taurus' attitude at 7.13.7, and Taurus too is conscious of the need for standards in the conduct of philosophy (7.10.5=T12 Lakmann; 1.9.5=T4); he could be presumed to disagree with nothing in 10.22. Indeed the sentiments of 10.22, though inevitably coloured by Gellius' choice of Latin, are entirely compatible with Plato's *Euthydemus*, where the two sophist brothers spend their aging days (not to mention the youth of their hapless pupils) in trivial, indeed juvenile, sophisms without any

¹⁶ Gellius is worried about getting too far into logic—it becomes like the sirens' rocks (16.8.15ff)—but this is not outright criticism. Although (a) it seems a dreadful bore at first, and (c) it can become a ridiculous obsession if one does not control one's later enthusiasm for it, nevertheless (b) *ubi aliquantum processeris, tum denique et emolumentum eius in animo tuo dilucebit et sequitur quaedam discendi voluptas insatiabilis, cui sane nisi modum feceris, periculum...* Thus even logic is accepted in appropriate doses.

¹⁷ E.g. 1.2; 9.2; 13.8.5; 15.2. At 9.2 he tactfully puts his criticism of sham philosophers into the mouth of *Macedo philosophus, vir bonus, familiaris meus*. The sham philosopher here cannot avoid in practice the vices he decries, or the transposition of the *mores et emolumenta philosophiae* into linguistic cleverness. Gellius goes one step further, using Afranius to support the notion that one should come to *sapere atque consulere* from the lessons of *pericula ipsa rerum* rather than from the isolated teaching of *libri aut magistri*—compared with the empty images of words and pictures from a mime or dream. Here are the strong practical leanings of a man who believes that philosophy is only valuable when combined with the serious management of affairs. Holford-Strevens (*supra* n.2: 192f) exaggerates the anti-philosophical content in Gellius: e.g. 2.29.18f does no more than favourably compare the way that a fable can convey the same message as the *sanctiores libri philosophorum*; cf. 13.24.2, where he praises M. Cato for his justification of going without things in terms of others being unable to do without them. This, he says, has more effect in inducing thrift than *Graecae* (or *Graecorum*) *istorum praestigiae, philosophari sese dicentium umbrasque verborum inanes fingentium, qui se nihil habere et nihil tamen egere ac nihil cupere dicunt, cum et habendo et egendo et cupiendo ardeant*. This passage is comparing not so much philosophers with non-philosophers, as Greek professional philosophers with a Roman non-professional philosopher, and those who do not practice what they preach with one who does.

potential for improving their lives. Any astute Platonist, willing to search for truth behind Callicles' words and asking himself what experience Plato had of those who grew old in philosophical trifles, would immediately think of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in Plato's tragicomic work, and it is of special relevance that the conclusion of the *Euthydemus* calls their pursuit "philosophy" (304E7-307B7), encouraging Crito to distinguish their brand of it from that of any proper practitioner.

It would be well to consider the final part of 10.22.2: *proinde tamen accipienda sunt quae dicuntur, ut nos sensim moneri intellegamus, ne ipsi quoque culpationes huiuscemodi mereamur neve inerti inanique desidia cultum et studium philosophiae mentiamur*.¹⁸ The hidden purpose that Gellius finds behind Callicles' speech might equally be found behind the whole *Euthydemus*, which exposes, little by little, the futility of preoccupation with arguments that have no relation to fact.¹⁹ That work was written by a philosopher anxious to set his own discipline apart from what he considered to be a cheap imitation. This sentence too has its origin *within* philosophy, for it is 'we who pursue philosophy' who are being warned to avoid an effortless but purposeless substitute. One can envisage the ancient Platonist drawing attention in class to just such a warning in Plato's text, using a similar first person plural. Again the description of true philosophy at 10.22.24 is made from within the discipline: *quae virtutum omnium disciplina est quaeque in publicis simul et privatis officiis excellit civitatesque et rempublicam, si nihil prohibeat, constanter <et> fortiter et perite administrat*. There is nothing here for which Gellius could not be responsible, even the allusion to Zeno's views in the phrase *si nihil prohibeat*,²⁰ and yet if this is Gellius, it is remarkable for its trust in philosophy's powers to improve human life.

¹⁸ "It is just because of this that we should take these words to heart, so that we gradually realise that we are being warned that we too must not deserve reproof of this kind, and not to mimic the educational discipline of philosophy in idle and pointless apathy."

¹⁹ The critic who is introduced at 304D finally chastizes the 'philosophers' for their "worthless enthusiasm for things of no worth" (304E4f) and for being unconcerned with the impossibility of what they are maintaining (305A4). This critic is of course another who can be viewed as giving a valuable warning without being presented as a wholly unblemished character.

²⁰ Zeno *ap. Sen. De otio* 3.2=SVF I 271; Diogenes Laertius asserts (7.121=SVF III 697) that the wise man's willingness to engage in politics *if nothing obstructs him* was expressed in the third book of Chrysippus' *On Lives*.

The second objection to finding Taurus' views here is that even in 7.14, where Taurus' commentary is mentioned, Gellius' reading is not dependent upon it, for he is able to contrast Pl. *Grg.* 525B, where only two reasons for punishment are mentioned (improvement of the offender and setting an example to others), with the three reasons given by Taurus, who adds the need for the victim's dignity to be upheld. Rather, however, this passage confirms Gellius' own interpretative inadequacies. He leaves us with the question of whether Plato omitted the upholding of dignity because he thought it was insignificant or because it did not apply to punishment after this life.²¹ But it had been clear during the argument with Polus at 477E-79E that Socrates assumed that the improvement of the offender was always the proper reason for punishment, and we are not talking about punishment in another existence. Elsewhere Plato's 'Protagoras' speaks eloquently against punishment for the satisfaction of the victim, assuming that in a civilized society one punishes for the future: so that the individual may not repeat the crime, and so that others will be deterred.²² It should be abundantly clear to the sophisticated reader of the *Gorgias* that the writer does not regard the restoration of the dignity of the victim as any reason for punishment whatsoever.

In that case, one might ask, why did Taurus not notice that Plato was working with only two reasons for punishment, not three? Here we must observe that Gellius is reading, or had once read, of the three reasons in the *first* book of Taurus' *commentaria*; the passage of Plato that he has in mind comes right at the end of the *Gorgias*. Taurus cannot be commenting on that passage there, nor indeed is it necessary that he is commenting on any lemma of the *Gorgias*. His discussion of the reasons for punishment was probably part of his introductory material,²³ perhaps relating to the object of forensic oratory

²¹ Lakmann (94) is cautious about assuming that Gellius is entirely independent of Taurus here, but we may be assured that Taurus would have postponed a discussion of Plato's true reason for omitting revenge-motives in rather different terms.

²² *Prt.* 324A6-B5. Cf. *Leg.* 682E1-83A2, which, although it may give three reasons for punishment, passes over upholding the victim's dignity and includes instead freeing of the city from such criminal individuals.

²³ The discrepancy between the location of the citation and the part of the commentary utilized has been noted by Dillon (*supra* n.1: 247), who places Taurus' discussion either in the prefatory remarks or in relation to 477E, and by Lakmann (89), who rather thinks of 472D (the first occurrence of *τιμωρία*)

of securing or avoiding the punishment of the offender. There is no suggestion that these are the reasons Plato would give, nor even those of Taurus.²⁴ Gellius represents these three as examples of reasons traditionally offered by philosophers,²⁵ and one would assume that Taurus set out to give the traditional reason too, probably with some foreshadowing of Plato's disagreement. Accepted Platonic reasons could wait until the appropriate point of the commentary, but Gellius seems to have employed the traditional short cut and consulted the beginning of the book only.²⁶ We do not even know that he had ever possessed or even consulted the later books of the *commentaria*. Whatever the case, it seems clear that in the one instance where Gellius claims a discrepancy between Taurus and Plato, his own reading of Plato is not deep.²⁷ Thus my preliminary conclusion will be that *sophisticated* interpretation of Plato in Gellius may be regarded, where possible, as evidence for at least the general trust of Taurus' own interpretation.

IV. Gellius, Taurus, and Platonic Interpretation

As a result of these observations, I consider it sounder to assume some link between Gellius' more sophisticated interpreta-

or shortly after. I believe that for Gellius to have so misunderstood a discussion of τιμωρία in Plato would, if anything, make him look even more foolish—though one must concede that terminology must have been an important issue in Taurus' discussion, wherever it occurred, being relevant to NA 7.14.2ff and 8.

²⁴ Lakmann (89) correctly draws attention to *tres esse debere causas existimatum est*, but believes that Taurus engages earlier critics of Plato who had thought an important reason was missing from his treatment. She claims that "In diesem Fall hätte Gellius lediglich das Referat der drei gegnerischen Gründe aus Taurus' Gorgiascommentar übernommen, ohne näher auf den Zusammenhang einzugehen." Even if the suggestion that one ought to recognize three reasons is Taurus' own, this need mean no more than that we should see human beings as *giving* three reasons; it would not commit him to the view that there were three *legitimate* reasons.

²⁵ *a philosophis* (heading), *et philosophi alii plurifariam* (5).

²⁶ Note too that the citation of Plato is from the end of the work, another easily consulted part.

²⁷ For a similar conclusion on this question see Lakmann (88–92): "Was für Taurus nur eine Vorbereitung auf das sich anschließende Eindringen in die eigentlich philosophischen Gedanken Platons sein sollte, hat sich bei Gellius—trotz der Warnung des Taurus—vollkommen verselbständigt." The warning of Taurus that she has in mind is that of NA 17.20.6.

tion of Plato and that of his mentor than to confine religiously treatment of Taurus to passages that sport his name in the text. Two other significant passages in which the influence of Taurus, though not acknowledged, might be suspected are as follows:

(a) At 2.8.9 the main subject has been Plutarch's criticism of the presentation of Epicurean logic. Gellius now adds the observation that Plato did not present arguments according to the mechanical rules of his successors. The observation could easily be made by Gellius, but Plutarch's philosophy was probably known to Gellius chiefly through Taurus.²⁸

(b) At 14.3 a discussion of the rivalry between Plato and Xenophon and their alleged attempt to outdo each other's works derives from *qui de Xenophontis Platonisque vita et moribus pleraque omnia exquisitissime scripsere*. An immediate source might be either Favorinus (*cf.* 17.12.3) or Taurus.

I do not intend to argue further for Taurus' influence in either of these locations, as neither contributes to the picture of contemporary interpretation of Plato. What 10.22 and 15.2 achieve is to show that some thought was currently being given to matters of Platonic interpretation. Taurus is known from elsewhere to have given close attention to the *Timaeus*,²⁹ and his discussion of the possibility of interpreting the creation non-temporally was still important for Philoponus four centuries later. In the course of that discussion he utilized the opinions of Aristotle and Theophrastus,³⁰ and in fact contrasts their views with a series of apparently later theories of how one might understand the creation non-literally. The comments are at times extensive, but at times briefer (T23B5-9; possibly also T26.30-39), which may reflect the division of the commentary into a series of *theoria* and *lexis* units. In his *Commentary on the Republic* he evidently included a detailed general discussion of epistemology, to which a doxography concerning the definitions of a particular kind of knowledge given by Plato, Aristotle, and Zeno belongs.³¹ There are slight indications that Taurus

²⁸ Gellius would call him *Plutarchus noster*: 1.26.4=T5 Lakmann.

²⁹ See Philop. *De aet. mundi* 6.8, 21-22, 27; 13.15 (=T22-26 Lakmann), and perhaps Stob. *Ecl.* 1.378.25-379.6=T27.

³⁰ T22, 24, 26 Lakmann. Note the *lexis*-like nature of the former, and the preceding phrase ἐπὶ λέξεως.

³¹ [Hero] *Def.* 137.4=SVF I 70=T21 Lakmann. The doxography duplicates that given by anon. *Tht.* col. 15, so offers nothing likely to be original. See H. Tarrant, "Zeno on Knowledge or on Geometry: The Evidence of Anon *In*

interpreted the *Republic* more as an ethical than as a political work.³²

Taurus' ability to study such high profile works in depth is less impressive than his deep thought about a range of other dialogues. We have seen above that these are likely to have included the opening books of the *Laws*, the *Symposium*, the *Gorgias*, and probably the *Euthydemus*. We also know that he could utilize *impromptu* parts of the *Parmenides* when the occasion arose (*NA* 7.13.10f=T8 Lakmann), and that he included the *Phaedrus* in his repertoire (*NA* 1.9.9=T4). He knew the *Statesman* and *Critias* well enough to say what could *not* be found in them (Philop. *De aet. mundi* 6.21= T23B). He also knew the *Meno*, which is seen as giving Plato's positive teaching on epistemology.³³ Thus his expertise covered early, middle, and late dialogues of Plato, and those that were less obviously 'teaching' as well as those that were. Above all, he was prepared to look beneath the surface of the text and to interpret at a deeper level—a tendency that enabled him to extract fuller positive teaching from the so-called 'zetetic' dialogues,³⁴ including *Euthydemus*, *Gorgias*, and *Meno*. Hence he can take aspects of the dialogues figuratively and believes that Plato describes how things come to be in order to show better how things are: not just in relation to the *Timaeus*, but also in relation

Theaetetus," *Phronesis* 29 (1984) 96–99. It is interesting that the Taurus doxography has been correctly linked by J. Mansfeld with *Resp.* 510c–e: "Intuitionism and Formalism: Zeno's Definition of Geometry in a Fragment of L. Calvenus Taurus," *Phronesis* 28 (1983) 59–74 at 61; the parallel in anon. *Thi.* comments on γεωμετρίας ἅττα (145c8) and distinguishes items of geometrical knowledge from the craft as a whole; an occasion for just such a comment is found at *Resp.* 510c2, where the *accusative plural* γεωμετρίας occurs. The passage (c2–d3) is concerned with individual geometrical problems, and with how agreed conclusions (ὁμολογουμένως) follow from the postulation of certain data (ὑποθέμενοι, ὑποθέσεις) with the addition of some reasoning process (τὰ λοιπὰ ἤδη διεξιόντες). The definitions of 'simple knowledge' given by anon. (with special reference to geometry), and apparently given by Taurus in relation to the epistemic status of geometry in the *Republic* (see Mansfeld), seem chosen to reflect the pattern of hypothesis + reasoning (assent + reasoning in Zeno). The implication would then be that, as in *Resp.* VI, a *superior* knowledge has dispensed with the need for unproven premises and is presumably identical with what anon. calls *systematic* knowledge.

³² Philop. *De aet. mundi* 6.21, 27=T23B, 24 Lakmann; the depiction of the generation of the state is an expository device designed to uncover justice.

³³ [Hero] *Def.* 137.4=T21 Lakmann=SVF I 70, on which see above.

³⁴ See D.L. 3.49; Albinus *Prologus* 3; Tarrant (*supra* n.3 [1993]) 46–57.

to the description of how the state comes to be in the *Republic*, whose purpose is to reveal justice (Philop. *De aet. mundi* 6.21.27=TT23B, 24). Inclusion of Gellius' treatment of drunkenness in the *Laws* and of Callicles in the *Gorgias* helps to flesh out the picture of Taurus as an interpreter in important ways even of lower profile texts.

V. Gellius and Taurus on Pleasure

One should also observe that the mention of Taurus as a part of one of Gellius' miniatures does not mean that his influence can be presumed in the remainder. I have to doubt that the doxography on pleasure before the reference to him at 9.5.8 contains significant input from Taurus. Lakmann (110–13), though agreeing that the doxography is a separate section of Gellius 9.5, emphasizes the focus on the Academy and an alleged anti-hedonist tendency throughout, which agrees with the attitude of Taurus.

In fact no anti-hedonist attitude is made clear in the presentation of the doxography, given that most philosophers with original views on pleasure were in any case anti-hedonists. Though there had been a Cyrenaic hedonism, Epicurus is here a sufficient representative of the hedonist cause, particularly in a doxography confined to the five major surviving schools: Epicurean, Cynic, Academic, Stoic, and Peripatetic. Separate opinions are presented bluntly and without comment, leaving little opportunity for any bias to emerge. The Stoic attitude towards pleasure is more simplified,³⁵ and Zeno is credited with a neutral view of its value, when it would have been *entirely possible* to highlight the Stoic view of pleasure as a *pathos* or excessive impulse, something linked with mistaken judgment and alien to the sage. Such a *pathos* would go hand in hand with vice, which alone is genuinely bad, and is the reason for the strong Stoic position in resisting hedonism. It is significant, then, that of two different Stoic conceptions of pleasure—one that would give it neutral value (or even to be preferred when in accordance with nature) and one that associates it with error

³⁵ This may be seen even from the partially parallel doxography at Sext. Emp. *Math.* 11.73=SVF III 155, where pleasure seems to be given different values within the wider 'indifferent' class by different Stoics, or in accordance with whether or not it accords with nature.

and vice³⁶—our passage chooses to emphasize the former. It does so for essentially rhetorical, almost satirical, reasons, so as to emphasize the great range of opinions that philosophers have held; in the debate over the value of pleasure Stoic neutrality was distinctive: this alone would therefore be what is highlighted.

After initially contrasting the extreme positions (those of Epicurus and Antisthenes: *cf.* Sext. Emp. *Math.* 11.73), Gellius gives Old Academic, Stoic, and Peripatetic opinions, thus introducing the three schools to which Cicero's teacher Antiochus of Ascalon considered himself indebted.³⁷ The Old Academic is Speusippus, Plato's first successor; the Stoic is Zeno, the founder of Stoicism whom Antiochus was much more inclined to see as a predecessor than Chrysippus; and the Peripatetic is Critolaus, a very minor figure, rarely mentioned in doxographies but a contemporary of Carneades and thus a figure whose views the Academy seem to have considered in relevant contexts. At any event he is mentioned by Cicero (*Fin.* 5.14; *Tusc.* 5.51). His presence here strongly suggests some kind of post-Carneadean Academic influence, possibly Antiochan.

Next Gellius implausibly labels Plato the father of *all* these views—implausibly, because he cannot reasonably be linked with Epicurus' 'stable state of the flesh' or with Antisthenes' pleasure-phobia, even though he does seem to take broadly pro- and anti-hedonistic stances in different dialogues. Perhaps Gellius' ultimate source had done what *could* plausibly be done: labeling Plato the father of *the latter three* views only. This would be natural for an Antiochian sympathizer, for it would show how Academy, Lyceum, and Stoa might all find their roots in Platonic philosophy, which is the principal dogma of his history of philosophy. But this more modest claim cannot really explain the totality of 9.5.7—a picture of Plato's extremely varied treatment of pleasure. Not one representative of the Academy, Stoa, and Lyceum is accredited with any good word for pleasure, and thus it is clear that Gellius' *immediate* source must have associated Plato's variety with influence over extreme pro- and anti-hedonistic views as well, if not quite in the form set out by Gellius above.

³⁶ See A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge 1987) I 421, II 405. Principal passages to be considered are *SVF* III 378, 391, 394, 431 (pleasure as a *pathos*), I 190, III 117, 136, 156, 178 (pleasure as indifferent).

³⁷ Cic. *Fin.* 5.7; *Leg.* 1.38, 55; *Ac.* 1.18, 34-42.

The difficulties in reconciling apparently contradictory statements in Plato had been well appreciated since at least the first century B.C., when Eudorus of Alexandria had drawn attention to what he saw as *polyphonia* rather than *polydoxia* (Stob. *Ecl.* 2.49.25, 55.6). Diogenes Laertius (3.63f) paints a picture of a Plato who varies his terminology and changes the meaning of particular terms to conceal his meaning from the uninitiated. It might have been expected that Taurus would have believed that apparent contradictions can be reconciled through deep interpretation, but the picture here in Gellius emphasizes rather the different purposes that Plato had in mind, and the multi-faceted nature of pleasure. Taurus would hardly have characterized Plato as one who allows the occasion to dictate what he says—like an orator—and give no indication in his uncompromising attitude at 9.5.8 that legitimate attitudes to pleasure and the value of pleasure itself are as varied as 9.5.7 suggests.

Thus Gellius does not write as if the doxography comes from Taurus at all. There are two additional reasons why this is not so. First (a) what Taurus says appears to be *contrasted* with what his predecessors had said. Linguistically (a_1), it is relevant that he is introduced with an *autem*, as *Taurus noster*. Taurus is winning approval in a way that others including Plato had failed to do. Why? The answer depends upon the methodological contrast (a_2): Taurus is prepared to dismiss Epicureanism out of hand, not as an unarguable philosophic thesis, but because it is morally unsound. He is demonstrating the kind of no-nonsense attitude that would appeal to Gellius. Second (b), Gellius is not following any source of Taurus from which he could be taking the doxography, because he states what Taurus would regularly say when others mentioned Epicurus. He is writing from general experience of Taurus, and Taurus' tactic is not one specially designed to tackle Epicurean hedonism, but rather it is a general dismissal of Epicurus as a philosopher whose views were worth considering. If Gellius is not following a text of Taurus at 9.5.8, then there is nothing in favor of his following one at 9.5.1–7. Furthermore, if Taurus' attitude is so extremely anti-hedonist as to concur with Hierocles in thinking that the very identity of pleasure with Good is the doctrine of a prostitute, as 9.5.8 strongly suggests, then Taurus is most unlikely to have sanctioned the idea that Plato could have inspired, wittingly or unwittingly, any pro-hedonist stance.

We have established that Taurus is not a likely source of this doxography, in so far as it seems to take a view of Plato to

which he could not have subscribed, and it is designed by Gellius to contrast with Taurus' attitude. It should also be noted that it is at odds with what little we know of Taurus' doxographic techniques. His *Commentary on the Republic* gives a doxography of knowledge that follows the normal doxographic practice of treating thinkers in roughly doxographic order, concentrating on major figures and others who contributed on this particular issue.³⁸ The passage in Philoponus where Taurus *introduces* the opposing views on the interpretation of Plato's creation begins with Aristotle's temporal view of creation in the *Timaeus*, followed by Theophrastus', then mentions others who concurred; after this the atemporal view is given (*De aet. mundi* 6.8=T22B Lakmann). Chronology seems less important here, but the approach is very methodical. Thus it also contrasts with that of *NA* 9.5, which treats thinkers in an order designed to highlight the variety of views rather than to organize them.

Taurus, then, is not the origin of this doxography. So whence could it come? In structure (though not in importance)³⁹ *NA* 9.5 is reminiscent of 5.15f. It consists of a brief and possibly satirical outline of opposing views on a question of philosophy, followed by a reaction of partial hostility to the very debate that appeals to some respected figure. Of the concluding paragraphs, 5.15.9 and 5.16.5 appeal to Ennius, 9.5.8 to Taurus. One imagines that this form would have suited, above all, Skeptics, who engaged in the balancing of rival dogmata in order to achieve suspension of judgment along with the dismissal of their rivals. Gellius, of course, is influenced by Favorinus, who adheres to that Academic skepticism, which is a little readier than the Pyrrhonist variety to affirm that it perceives nothing. His adherence to this brand of skepticism may have significance, for according to Augustine (*C.Acad.* 2.11) Carneades' main area of doubt lay in the matters debated by the philosophers, not matters of everyday knowledge (*cf.* Numenius *fr.* 26.107ff, 27.58f *des Places*). What could illustrate the problems of philosophical debate better than a satirical contrast of opposing views, followed by some crowning words of conventional wisdom, which appeared to suggest that the debate had been

³⁸ Here Plato-Aristotle-Zeno, [*Hero*] *Def.* 137.4=SVF I 70=T21 Lakmann.

³⁹ To us there is the important difference that although 5.15f discuss a subject of admittedly slender practical relevance, 9.5 discusses, in this somewhat satirical fashion, the supreme ethical question (that of the identity of the *telos*) and dismisses the protagonist of one of the opposing views out of hand.

unnecessary? Favorinus is mentioned with respect in Gellius' discussion of the difference between Academic and Pyrrhonian skepticism at 11.5; he may well be the inspiration behind the *structure* of 5.15f and 9.5.

Could the doxography come from Favorinus, with the conclusion alone being changed to suit Gellius' own views better? That is not, I think, unlikely. One might see Skeptic influence already in the first sentence with the words *diversas sententias*, with which one may compare *perpetua quaestio* (5.15.1) and *diversas opiniones* (5.16.1); it could conclude in the discussion of Plato in 9.5.7:

Plato ante hos omnis ita varie et multiformiter de voluptate disseruit, ut cunctae istae sententiae quas exposui videantur ex sermonum eius fontibus profluxisse; nam proinde unaquaque[m] [sc. sententia] utitur, ut et ipsius voluptatis natura fert, quae est multiplex, et causarum quas tractat, rerumque quas efficere vult ratio desiderat.

Note here suggestions of the *pros ti*, of relativity, creeping into the last sentence: Plato's treatment of pleasure differs in accordance with differences within pleasure itself, differences in the argument being conducted, and differences in his basic purposes. The theme of relativity is one of the most powerful weapons that the Skeptic possesses,⁴⁰ though it need not always have Skeptic associations.

If one did not feel obliged to offer a source for an unusual doxography such as 9.5.1-7, then one might be content to see Gellius acting entirely alone, as one might at 5.15f. But as things are, the doxography must have derived from somewhere. We saw that it had certain oddities, including probable Academic connexions. Favorinus was perhaps the only philosopher of note still to call himself an Academic. There is, of course, an obvious objection to postulating Favorinus as Gellius' source. He was an Academic in the sense of a follower of New Academic 'Skepticism', and would thus not have the same reason as an Antiochene 'Old Academic' for constructing the doxography according to the rationale I have proposed. It is not of concern to him that the positions of Speusippus, Zeno, and Critolaus should all be included, nor that they should all lead back to Plato. Yet Antiochus' doxographies influenced both sides of the Academic debate as it had flourished in Cicero's day; and subsequent Skeptics, particularly concerned with

⁴⁰ Sext. Emp. Pyr. 1.135-40, 167; anon. *Th.* 63.

refuting Antiochus, were prepared to include the same figures as Antiochus. It is a Skeptic, Sextus Empiricus, who explicitly mentions Antiochus qua historian of philosophy in his own most lavish doxography at *Math.* 7.162, 201; Antiochus no doubt had a wider influence on this doxography, at least on the basis of *Math.* 7.141.⁴¹ Favorinus was at least as likely to use Antiochus' doxography as Sextus.

Hence we could do worse than claim that Favorinus is the source here. Gersh's reason for preferring Favorinus as a source of Platonist material in Gellius begins with his apparent preference for the rhetorical qualities in Plato rather than underlying meanings (*NA* 17.20.7ff).⁴² The present paper argues that in at least two passages, where underlying meaning is found in Plato according to Gellius' treatment, Taurus is the likely source. In the doxography of the value of pleasure, however, there is no deep penetration; and the material is presented in such a way as to score, with strong ironical overtones, an essentially rhetorical point—as when choosing a particular Stoic position with a view to achieving contrast. Rhetorical presentation sounds more characteristic of Favorinus, as much a sophist as philosopher,⁴³ who probably had a more extensive *general* influence on Gellius than Taurus. Irony is also not foreign to Favorinus.⁴⁴

We ought also to be cautious of denying *any* originality to Gellius at 9.5. His hostility to unnecessary philosophical intricacies appears regularly, and the final shape of 9.5, as of 5.15f, has much of Gellius' own character. It is important for present purposes to dispel the idea that it could derive from Taurus. If

⁴¹ Tarrant (*supra* n.3 [1985]) 89–114.

⁴² Gersh (*supra* n.6) 211f. The second reason that there is no great interest in Platonic metaphysics in Gellius—as one would expect if his approach had been learnt from Taurus—is probably misconceived: the Neoplatonist sources, by virtue of their own interest in metaphysics, have distorted the picture they give of the balance of Middle Platonist interests. If Taurus taught Gellius the *Gorgias*, then he surely taught him much of principally ethical and social relevance.

⁴³ On Favorinus' stress on the importance of argument *in utramque partem*, and the resultant similarities between him and a sophist, see Ioppolo (*supra* n.5) esp. 208–12.

⁴⁴ M. W. Gleeson, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton 1995) 151: "Here Favorinus appears to advocate an attitude of fundamental irony towards all the parts one plays." It may be that even the part of philosophy need not be played without a certain irony, according to the exile speech.

there had been any effort to use careful distinction and in-depth interpretation to show why Plato had apparently inspired different views on pleasure, then Taurus would be a likelier source. As things are, Plato emerges as a far from venerable figure; his overall anti-hedonistic stance is not even suggested; and the contrast with Taurus' instant dismissal of hedonistic ethics is marked.

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