



PHILOSOPHY IN DIO CHRYSOSTOM, *ON ANACHÔRÊSIS* (ORATION 20)

ABSTRACT

This article uncovers the intellectual traditions behind Dio Chrysostom's *Oration 20: On Anachôrêsis*. The examination reveals a variety of subtexts and traditions with which Dio engages, and shows that at its core the text inspects three types of lives promoted by three philosophical schools: Epicurean, Stoic and Peripatetic. They are never referred to directly, however, which raises questions concerning Dio's strategy of not acknowledging the sources of the ideas with which he engages. The article also develops our understanding of *anachôrêsis* and the controversies surrounding it in pagan antiquity.

Keywords: Dio Chrysostom; *anachôrêsis*; solitude; contemplative life; active life; Stoicism; Epicureanism; Peripatetics

INTRODUCTION

Dio Chrysostom's *Oration 20* (Περὶ ἀναχωρήσεως) is a philosophical text dedicated to the problem of *anachôrêsis*, that is, a 'retirement' or 'retreat'. This brief work, written in a popular style without philosophical jargon or explicit references to philosophical authorities or adversaries, nevertheless engages in an important ancient debate about the parameters of the intellectual life. This article contextualizes Dio's thought, identifies the traditions with which he interacts, and investigates the philosophical influences that inform the text. The examination uncovers an abundance of influences, including the Socratic and pseudo-Platonic tradition as well as literary criticism and interpretation of myth, and shows that at its core *Oration 20* inspects three types of lives promoted by three ancient philosophical schools: Epicurean, Stoic, and Peripatetic. These philosophical traditions are never referred to directly, however, which raises questions concerning the purpose of Dio's strategy of not acknowledging the philosophical sources of the ideas with which he engages—a strategy which is omnipresent in his corpus and constitutes an idiosyncratic feature of his philosophizing.

GENERIC AND LITERARY INFLUENCES

Oration 20 begins with a question: τί γάρ ποτε τὸ τῆς ἀναχωρήσεως ἐστὶ καὶ τίνας χρῆ τιθέναι τοὺς ἀναχωροῦντας, 'What is "retirement", and whom should we describe as "retiring"?' The text consists of a series of sections, in which different understandings of *anachôrêsis* are examined. First, Dio rejects *anachôrêsis* conceived of as the physical abandonment of a city and community for the sake of a leisurely and tranquil life, free of civic obligations (20.1–4). This is followed by a discussion of how people waste time, in spite of its being one of the most valuable resources (20.4–6). Next, Dio delineates the proper understanding of *anachôrêsis*: he argues that the best type of retirement is a mental 'turning inwards' (20.7–8) and cites examples from everyday life that demonstrate that internal concentration and indifference to external disturbances are possible (20.8–16). He then argues against practising *anachôrêsis* understood as a retirement

into solitude (20.17–18), and supports his point with an example concerning Alexander/Paris (20.19–23). He adds a few thoughts about the difference between regular people and powerful men (20.24–5), and ends with a conclusion which recapitulates the main argument, namely that the soul must get used to doing and thinking what is proper to it, both in the greatest turmoil and in the greatest quiet (20.26).

Several generic traditions underlie this brief text. The first one is the Socratic–Platonic dialogue, even though *Oration 20* is written in a continuous mode. The connection is established by the text’s Athenocentricity, a feature characteristic of this genre, which seeped into the popular philosophical literature of later periods. In the examples which Dio provides in the opening paragraphs we find mentions of Athenian citizens, and Spartan and Macedonian invasions of Attica, as well as of Megara and Aegina, both in the neighbourhood of Athens, which are identified as places of potential retirement (20.1). The far-removed world of classical Athens serves as a universal, default background for the Bithynian philosopher and his imperial audience. In addition, the opening question ‘What is “retirement”, and whom should we describe as “retiring”?’ is reminiscent of Socrates’ ‘what is X?’ questions, around which Plato’s so-called ‘dialogues of definition’ are organized. Unlike in Dio’s text, Plato’s ‘what is X?’ questions appear during the dialogue, after introductory exchanges which lead Socrates to formulate them, rather than at the very beginning. This pattern changes in a few pseudo-Platonic dialogues—*Minos*, *On Justice* and *Hipparchus*—which open with a question. In fact, there is a particular resemblance between the openings of *Oration 20* and *Hipparchus*. The pseudo-Platonic dialogue starts with the question τί γάρ τὸ φιλοκερδές; τί ποτέ ἐστιν, καὶ τίνες οἱ φιλοκερδεῖς; (225a: ‘What is greed? What is it, and who are greedy people?’), to which Dio’s τί γάρ ποτε τὸ τῆς ἀναχωρήσεως ἐστι καὶ τίνας χρῆ τιθέναι τοὺς ἀναχωροῦντας; bears a remarkable similarity; Dio is probably alluding to *Hipparchus*. The pseudo-Platonic dialogue was composed probably in the mid-fourth century B.C.E. and was included in the Thrasyllan canon in the first century C.E., though it was not unanimously considered a genuine work of Plato (Ael. *VH* 8.2). Although we cannot tell what Dio’s view on its authorship was, an allusion to a marginal text from the Platonic corpus, and one of disputed authorship, would fit Dio’s recurrent references to pseudo-Platonica.¹

Apart from the placing of the question, there is also a difference between Plato’s dialogues, *Hipparchus*, and *Oration 20* in terms of what the questions ask about. The Socratic ‘what is X?’ questions typically centre around virtues, but sometimes also around aesthetic values,² and while they are notoriously difficult to interpret, there is widespread agreement that ‘the definitions Socrates seeks ... are supposed to be definitions not of words or concepts but of “things” that are real or, let us say, extramental’.³

¹ On Dio’s interaction with the pseudo-Platonic *Sisyphus* (in *Or.* 27) and *Axiochus* (in *Or.* 30), see M. Menchelli, ‘Discorso, dialexis, dialogos. Variazioni sul tema e generi letterari in Dione di Prusa (e Dione lettore dell’*Appendix Platonica*)’, in E. Amato et al., *Dion de Pruse: L’homme, son œuvre et sa postérité* (Hildesheim, 2016), 277–93.

² Piety: *Euthphr.* 5cd, courage: *La.* 190de, temperance: *Chrm.* 159b, justice: *Resp.* 331c, virtue: *Meno* 71d; beauty: *Hp. mai.* 286d. Cf. Xen. *Mem.* 1.1.16: Socrates enquired τί εὐσεβές, τί ἀσεβές, τί καλόν, τί αἰσχρόν, τί δίκαιον, τί ἄδικον, τί σωφροσύνη, τί μανία, τί ἀνδρεία, τί δειλία, τί πόλις, τί πολιτικός, τί ἀρχὴ ἀνθρώπων, τί ἀρχικός ἀνθρώπων (‘what is godly, what is ungodly; what is beautiful, what is ugly; what is just, what is unjust; what is prudence, what is madness; what is courage, what is cowardice; what is a state, what is a statesman; what is government, and what is a governor’).

³ L.P. Gerson, ‘Definition and essence in the Platonic dialogues’, *Méthexis* 19 (2006), 21–39, at 21.

The pseudo-Platonic *Hipparchus* differs here, first, because, unlike genuine Platonic dialogues, it asks about a term which has negative connotations rather than about virtues. Second, the opening question in *Hipparchus* explicitly asks both about greed and about people who possess this trait, and, contrary to Plato's genuine dialogues, the interest of the conversation that follows is focussed on the latter. Dio's question is about something different, namely a human practice and the people who engage in it. Therefore, the association with the Socratic 'what is X?' questions both signals the importance of the problem of the *anachôrêsis* and advocates a shift in focus from attempts to define virtues or vices to discussion of behaviours and practices—a shift indicative of the practical spirit of Dio's philosophizing. As Dio notes in *Oration* 17—in stark divergence from the Socratic tradition—it is not human ignorance of what is good and evil that is the major problem, but the fact that although people have correct opinions, they do not act in agreement with them (17.2).

The opening question of *Oration* 20 also communicates that there is a phenomenon or practice of *anachôrêsis* with which the reader was supposed to be familiar.⁴ Today we tend to associate the term *anachôrêsis* with the Christian solitary monasticism that developed in the fourth century C.E. Dio's text documents its earlier use, reminding that the concept had a philosophical pre-history.⁵ The opening question also implies either that there is an ambivalence about how the term is used, or that, in the author's opinion, it is used improperly. *χρή* in the opening sentence and *χρή φάσκειν* in the next indicate that the text is aiming to outline the proper use of the term. This normative aspect is also underscored by *ῥητέον* in the phrases *ἄρα τούτους ἀναχωρεῖν ῥητέον* ('should one call such people "withdrawing"?', 20.2) and *ῥητέον <ῆ> ὡς ἀναχωροῦντας* ('one should call them "withdrawing"', 20.3).

These connections with the Socratic-Platonic and pseudo-Platonic traditions are not out of character for Dio. Similarly, the inclusion of the lengthy mythical example of Alexander/Paris in chapters 19–23 is recognizably Dionian, consonant with his interest in literary criticism and in the interpretation of myth. Dio argues that Paris, with nothing to do on Mount Ida, started daydreaming and imagined how nice it would be to marry the most beautiful woman in the world. Captivated by this desire, he invented the story about the contest between the goddesses, his judgement of them and Aphrodite offering him Helen as a wife. In this bold recasting of the myth, Dio remains in dialogue with ancient mythological criticism. The judgement episode, described in the lost *Cypria* (*arg.* 1 West), was a problematic piece of the Trojan story. Isocrates had earlier proposed a revised version in which Paris chose Aphrodite to become, via Helen, Zeus's son-in-law rather than for the sake of pleasure, and Dio himself notes in the *Trojan Oration* that it would be strange if Hera wished to enter a beauty contest with a shepherd acting as a jury, or if Aphrodite offered Paris someone else's wife as a gift: an outrageous prize, and one eventually destructive to him, his family and his city.⁶

⁴ On philosophical tradition of retirement, see A.-J. Festugière, *Personal Religion Among the Greeks* (Berkeley, 1954), 53–67.

⁵ The examination of the relationship between the philosophical and the monastic use, and potential influence of the former on the latter, requires a separate study, which would take into account the intervening adaptation of the philosophical discourse of retirement by early Christian authors, from Origen to the Cappadocian Fathers. The importance of the pagan philosophical background for the Christian anachoretism is emphasized by Festugière (n. 4), 57–8, 66 and A. Guillaumont, 'Anachoresis', in A.S. Atiya (ed.), *The Coptic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1991), 1.119–20.

⁶ Isoc. 10.41–4; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 11.11–14. Cf. also Dio Chrys. *Or.* 17.14 where responsibility for the outbreak of the Trojan war is assigned solely to Paris. A. Gangloff, *Dion Chrysostome et les*

In this context, the revised version in *Oration 20* in which the judgement ‘is reduced to the daydream of an underemployed herdsman’,⁷ addresses these defects, as it disposes of the immorality of Aphrodite’s gift and relieves the goddess of responsibility for the outbreak of the Trojan war. The alternative version of the myth, whose aim is to illustrate the risks posed by isolation and idleness to an untrained soul, is reminiscent of Dio’s (more famous) retellings of Homeric epics in the *Trojan Oration* (11) and in the *Chryseis* (61), where he revels in ‘Homeric revisionism’ and introduces his own, controversial and surprising reinterpretations of mythical stories.⁸ The aim of this game is moralizing: by offering extravagant retellings of traditional mythical stories, Dio sets his audience’s imagination in motion, thereby increasing the persuasive power of the moral message. I will return to Dio’s choice of the example of Paris and its resonance with the main preoccupation of the work.

THREE TYPES OF *ANACHÔRÊSIS* AND THEIR PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

Dio distinguishes three understandings of *anachôrêsis*: 1) leaving one’s community to escape obligations, to lead a leisurely and untroubled life, 2) a mental ‘turn inwards’, 3) a retreat into solitude. He rejects the first and third options, and embraces the second. In what follows I examine these three conceptualizations and the philosophical traditions underlying them.

When discussing the first type of retirement—leaving one’s community to escape obligations—Dio describes four situations: (1) when an Athenian citizen who is obliged to defend his country (δέον αὐτὸν στρατεύεσθαι ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος) leaves the city so that he will not have to fight and risk his life (ἔνεκα τοῦ μὴ στρατεύεσθαι μηδὲ κινδυνεύειν), (2) when a rich person leaves the city to escape liturgies, (3) when a physician whose friends are sick leaves the city not to be troubled by them, (4) when someone does not want to hold office or undertake civic service, and therefore moves somewhere else. Dio’s repeated use of δέον, ‘when one should’ (1, 2), characterises these situations as ones in which people are obliged by duty—whether towards their city or their friends—to share their resources, or to sacrifice their comfort or safety. The situations that he describes exemplify four types of obligations: military, financial, professional and civic. He refers to these obligations as ‘proper deeds and actions’ (τὰ προσήκοντα ἔργα ... καὶ πράξεις, 20.1), and denounces people who evade them. This emphasis on serving the community and fulfilling one’s civic duties resonates with the Stoic commendation of civic engagement⁹ and is congruent with the general principles that Dio expressed elsewhere, for instance in *Oration 49*, where he maintains that the philosopher should hold office, or in *Oration 47*, where he quotes the (Stoic) tenet

mythes. Hellénisme, communication et philosophie politique (Grenoble, 2006), 244 connects Dio’s subversions of myths with the Cynic tradition.

⁷ G. Anderson, ‘Some uses of storytelling in Dio’, in S. Swain (ed.), *Dio Chrysostom. Politics, Letters, and Philosophy* (Oxford, 2000), 143–60, at 154.

⁸ L. Kim, ‘Dio of Prusa, *Or.* 61, *Chryseis*, or reading Homeric silence’, *CQ* 58 (2008), 601–21, at 601.

⁹ Cf. the maxim ‘the wise man will take part in politics, if nothing prevents him’ in Diogenes Laertius 7.121; also Plut. *Stoic. rep.* 1033C–E. For different adaptations of this principle within Stoicism, see J. Wildberger, *The Stoics and the State. Theory – Practice – Context* (Baden-Baden, 2018), 148–63.

that being active as a citizen is in accordance with nature (πολιτεύεσθαι τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ κατὰ φύσιν ἐστίν, 47.2). Behind the stories of individuals leaving their cities in search of an untroubled life, on the other hand, we can recognize the (unfavourably misrepresented) Epicurean withdrawal from the life of the city and cultivation of a quiet life. In fact, Epicurus and his first-century B.C.E. follower Philodemus, when referring to such a withdrawal, use the words ἐκχώρησις and ἀναχώρησις, which suggests that the term *anachôrêsis* could have an Epicurean resonance.¹⁰ We find confirmation that the Epicurean doctrine looms in the background of these paragraphs in a passage in which Dio insinuates that the people he is criticizing leave the city because they do not want to be hindered ‘from drinking and sleeping and loafing’ (πίνοντα καὶ καθεύδοντα καὶ ῥαθυμοῦντα, 20.2). This denunciation comes from the usual repertoire of anti-Epicurean polemicists, who misrepresent Epicurean hedonism as intemperance and debauchery, and who like to suggest that the withdrawal of Epicureans from public life and its scrutiny leads to a lifestyle characterized by a lack of restraint and uncurbed indulgence.¹¹

In the background of the opening paragraphs, then, there looms the opposition between the Stoic and Epicurean approaches to civic engagement and public life.¹² Dio, predictably, upholds the Stoic principles and exposes the Epicurean withdrawal as being motivated by the pursuit of lowly pleasures and sluggish idleness, τό τε ἀργεῖν καὶ τὸ ῥαθυμεῖν (20.7). After rejecting such *anachôrêsis*, Dio proposes an alternative understanding and practice of retreat, namely as a mental, internal withdrawal: ‘a retirement into oneself’, ἡ εἰς αὐτὸν ἀναχώρησις (20.8). This notion goes back to Plato, who first metaphorically applied ἀναχωρεῖν to mental processes; before him, it was used mostly in reference to a physical retreat from a battlefield.¹³ In the *Phaedo* we find the first metaphorical application of ἀναχωρεῖν to the mental sphere, when Socrates says that philosophy teaches the soul that ‘investigation through the eyes is full of deceit, as is that through the ears and other senses’ (ἀπάτης μὲν μεστὴ ἢ διὰ τῶν ὀμμάτων σκέψις, ἀπάτης δὲ ἢ διὰ τῶν ὠτῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων αἰσθήσεων, 83a).¹⁴ Therefore, the soul should ‘withdraw from them in so far as it is not compelled to use them’ and ‘gather and collect itself by itself’ (πεῖθουσα δὲ ἐκ τούτων μὲν

¹⁰ In the *Kuriai doxai*, Epicurus recommends ‘a quiet life and withdrawing’ (ἡσυχία, ἐκχώρησις) (RS 14; for interpretative difficulties, see C. Bailey, *Epicurus. The Extant Remains* [Oxford, 1926], 356–7). Philodemus speaks of ‘a pleasant existence and a leisured withdrawing with friends’ in *On Property Management* (δικαγωγὴν ἐπιτερπὴ καὶ μετὰ φίλων ἀναχώρησιν εὐσχολον, col. xiii.14–16 Tsouna).

¹¹ For more on such misrepresentation, which appears to go back to Epicurus’ lifetime, see D. Sedley, ‘Epicurus and his professional rivals’, in J. Bollack and A. Laks (edd.), *Études sur l’épicurisme antique* (Lille, 1976), 121–59, at 128–33; cf. Sen. *Ben.* 4.13.1 (Epicureans retreat to their gardens to enjoy a sluggish life resembling sleep and spend time eating and drinking); Plut. *Non posse* 1098C–D, *Adv. Col.* 1125D. On the temptation of a life of indulgence and unrestraint, away from public scrutiny, see Plut. *An recte* 1129A–B.

¹² See G. Roskam, *A Commentary on Plutarch’s De latenter vivendo* (Leuven, 2007), 69–84 on Stoic arguments against the Epicurean recommendation to withdraw from society.

¹³ Before Plato, from Homer onwards, ἀναχωρεῖν referred mostly to a retreat from the battlefield, from a confrontation or a difficult situation, and this is also the chief meaning of the derived noun from Herodotus onwards. The term referred to physical movement from one place to another, safer one; relevant spatial specificities may be indicated by the prepositional phrases (ἐκ, ἀπό ‘from’; εἰς, ἐπὶ ‘to’).

¹⁴ For the key significance of metaphors when speaking about the soul, see D. Cairns, ‘ψυχή, θυμός, and metaphor in Homer and Plato’, *EPlaton* 11 (2014), online at <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesplatoniciennes.566>.

ἀναχωρεῖν, ὅσον μὴ ἀνάγκη αὐτοῖς χρῆσθαι, αὐτὴν δὲ εἰς αὐτὴν συλλέγεσθαι καὶ ἀθροίζεσθαι παρακελευομένη, 83a). Socrates retains the military connotations of ἀναχωρεῖν by using παρακελεύεσθαι ('order', frequently of leaders and generals) and the pair συλλέγειν and ἀθροίζειν ('gather', which can be employed in reference to soldiers); as a result, the passage communicates a sense of danger threatening the soul if it does not make an effort to withdraw from untrustworthy senses, and conveys through the underlying image of a mustered army a promise that a retreat will strengthen it.

In addition, the *Phaedo* passage resonates with the famous scene in the *Symposium* where Aristodemus loses Socrates on the way to Agathon's house. A slave sent to find him reports that 'Socrates has withdrawn to a neighbour's porch and stands there' (Σωκράτης οὗτος ἀναχωρήσας ἐν τῷ τῶν γειτόνων προθύρῳ ἔστηκεν, 175a), and does not want to come even though the slave has called him. The scene depicts Socrates in deep mental concentration (as indicated later by Agathon, who suspects that Socrates found wisdom while standing at the porch, 175cd) and reminds the reader of Socrates' call to 'withdraw from the senses' intellectually, associated in the *Phaedo* with philosophical practice. Another example of such withdrawal is offered later by Alcibiades, when he describes how Socrates, while in a military camp, stood dawn-to-dawn immersed in thought, examining some problem (συννοήσας ... αὐτόθι ἔωθὲν τι εἰστήκει σκοπῶν ... εἰστήκει ζητῶν), indifferent to the summer heat and the advent of night (220cd). Socrates, Alcibiades says, stood there 'until dawn and until the sun came out; afterwards he left, having prayed to the sun' (ὁ δὲ εἰστήκει μέχρι ἔως ἐγένετο καὶ ἥλιος ἀνέσχεν· ἔπειτα ὄχετ' ἀπὼν προσευξάμενος τῷ ἡλίῳ, 220d); the sunrise imagery represents the intellectual illumination resulting from Socrates' prolonged intellectual concentration. ἀναχωρεῖν constitutes a subtle link between the description of the soul's withdrawing from the senses in *Phaedo* 83a (where it is used as a metaphor for mental activity) and the porch episode in *Symposium* 175a (where it refers to Socrates' physical movement, the purpose of which, however, is to facilitate mental focus).

Dio's understanding of *anachôrêsis* as a mental retirement into oneself, ἢ εἰς αὐτὸν ἀναχώρησις, is rooted in these Platonic passages. He argues that such a practice is possible regardless of circumstances, even when a person is in a military camp or alone on a small island (ἐάν τ' ἐν στρατοπέδῳ ἐάν τ' ἐν νήσῳ μικρᾷ καὶ μόνος, 8). The mention of the military camp alludes to Socrates' deep immersion in thought during the Athenian campaign against Potidaea (*Symp.* 220cd). The notion of an isolated existence on a small island reminds readers of Philoctetes,¹⁵ and also brings to mind the punishment of 'banishment to an island', which developed in the Roman world—it may even allude to the banishment of Musonius Rufus, the Stoic philosopher who exerted philosophical influence on Dio, and who, according to Philostratus, was exiled to the island of Gyarus by Nero.¹⁶

However, while Dio's notion of *anachôrêsis* as an internal retirement goes back to Plato, there is a shift of emphasis. In Plato, the act of internal retreat, understood as a withdrawal from the deceitfulness of the senses, allows a person to acquire true understanding. When Socrates gets immersed in his thoughts in the military camp, he

¹⁵ The myth was clearly of some interest to Dio, who devoted to it *Orations* 52 and 59, though Philoctetes, who did not handle isolation well, is not the best model.

¹⁶ Philostr. *V A* 7.16. For the development of deportation *ad insulam*, see S.T. Cohen, 'Augustus, Julia and the development of exile *ad insulam*', *CQ* 58 (2008), 206–17. Plutarch dedicates much space to islands as a banishment destination in *On Exile*.

is represented as inspecting some problem (συννοήσας, σκοπῶν, ζητῶν, *Symp.* 220c). Dio is not interested in an intellectual contemplation of the mind that could lead to the discovery of a hidden, elusive truth. Rather, the retreat into oneself is to enable one ‘to focus attention on one’s own concerns’ (τὸ προσέχειν τοῖς αὐτοῦ πράγμασιν) and ‘to do what one should’ (τὸ πράττειν τὰ δέοντα, 8; cf. 3 τὰ προσήκοντα ποιεῖν, 10 προσέχειν αὐτῷ καὶ τὸ προκειμενον πράττειν, 14 διαπράττεσθαι τὰ προσήκοντα, 26 τὰ δέοντα πράττειν); it also accustoms the soul to following the mind (τὸ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐθίζειν ἔπεσθαι τῷ λόγῳ, 13). The notions of focussing on one’s own concerns and of doing ‘what one should do’ and ‘what belongs to one’ (τὰ δέοντα, τὰ προσήκοντα) are vague, and probably deliberately so; part of the task is to identify what one’s concerns are and define what one ought to do, but this can be achieved only after one stops being distracted by trivial preoccupations.¹⁷ Dio contrasts retirement into oneself with having one’s soul ‘whirl this way and that’, depending on external circumstances, chance meetings and idle conversations (4), with time-wasting and idleness (ἀργεῖν, ῥαθυμεῖν, 7). While in the first paragraphs the verbs δεῖν and προσήκειν are used in reference to specific civic obligations imposed from outside, such as defence of the country or liturgies (1–3), they now acquire a different dimension as they are applied not to external burdens, but to a sense of duty rooted in human disposition. The repeated use of ποιεῖν and πράττειν emphasizes the active aspect of the life that Dio envisions here, in which internal retirement does not hinder engagement with the surrounding world.

The second difference between the Socratic internal retreat in Plato and Dio’s retirement into oneself is that the former presents the ability to retreat into oneself and shut off the outside world as an extraordinary, unique ability of Socrates. Dio, however, suggests that mental focus, a state in which one pays no attention to the crowd and its turmoil, is relatively more attainable, and gives examples of people of different professions wholly engrossed in their activities despite external disturbances; in fact, he observes, teachers without much difficulty can teach children while sitting with them on the street, in the midst of the crowd (8–10). And although an anonymous polemicist argues that philosophy and *paideia* differ from other occupations and require special conditions—in particular isolation and tranquillity (11)—Dio remains unpersuaded.

While the idea of the internal retreat ultimately goes back to Plato’s Socrates, its embrace by Dio is congruent with the Stoic tradition. Seneca repeatedly advises the practice of withdrawing into oneself (*recedere*), as in *Epistle* 7, where he urges Lucilius: ‘Withdraw into yourself as much as you can’ (*recede in te ipse quantum potes*, 7.8). In *On Tranquillity*, he describes the act of internal retreat when the mind is recalled from all things external and ‘retires into itself as far as possible from concerns of the others and focusses on itself’ (*animus ab omnibus externis in se reuocandus est ... recedat quantum potest ab alienis, et se sibi applicet*, 14.2). Marcus Aurelius, who admits to longing for retreat into the country, to the coast or to the mountains, reminds himself that tranquillity can be achieved at any time through internal retreat (εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἀναχωρεῖν, *Med.* 4.3) and that withdrawal into one’s own soul (ἀναχωρεῖ ... εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ψυχὴν, 4.3) brings peace and frees one from troubles. These congruences

¹⁷ This is in line with the Stoic approach. As B. Inwood, ‘Rules and reasoning in Stoic ethics’, in K. Ierodiakonou (ed.), *Topics in Stoic Philosophy* (Oxford, 1999), 95–127, at 127 argues, ‘the Stoics advocated a situationally fluid, heuristic process of choice’ in ethics (at 98); the necessary act of rational choice ‘exercises the practical reason, cultivation of which leads towards virtue’.

suggest that in *Oration 20*, Dio draws from earlier Stoic reformulations of the Socratic internal retreat, envisioned as a complement to the active life which the Stoics recommended.

In 20.11, there is an intervention of an anonymous polemicist, who argues that unlike other occupations, education and philosophy (παιδεία, φιλοσοφία) require ‘solitude and retirement’ (ἐρημίας τε καὶ ἀναχωρήσεως), and that a man of study (φιλόλογος) needs silence and a lack of visual and audial distractions. This paragraph introduces the third understanding of *anachôrêsis*. It is associated now with a life devoted to philosophical inquiry and, more broadly, intellectual studies, which require solitude and tranquillity (ἐρημία and ἡσυχία). The difference between this understanding and the first one is that while in the first case we were dealing with an escape from something (duties and obligations) with an eye towards pleasure, here emphasis falls on the choice of tranquillity for the sake of intellectual occupations. This alludes to the Peripatetics’ preference for the contemplative life, famously expressed by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1177a–1178a). Cicero observes of Aristotle and Theophrastus: ‘The way of life that they most commended was one spent in quiet contemplation and study’ (*vitae autem degendae ratio maxime illis quidem placuit quieta, in contemplatione et cognitione posita rerum, Fin. 5.11*, transl. R. Woolf), and notes that Theophrastus not only recommended leisure, but found it reproachable if one did not pursue it at all times (*Att. 2.16.3*).¹⁸ To be sure, as in the case of the Epicurean doctrine, Dio merely gestures towards the Peripatetic position and stays in the indefinite realm of approximations rather than engaging in a full-on philosophical polemic.

The anonymous polemicist’s argument allows Dio to scrutinize the issue of solitude, and argue not only that it is not necessary, but that an untrained soul will not benefit from it (20.14); on the contrary, it can inflict harm. In this section, which also allows us to catch a glimpse of the ancient awareness of the damaging psychological effects of prolonged social isolation, Dio writes that in seclusion and stillness (ἐν ταῖς ἐρημίαις καὶ ἡσυχίαις, 17), without external stimuli providing diversion, people create all sorts of strange phantasies (πολλὰ καὶ ἄτοπα διανοήματα). He discusses this phenomenon within a moralizing framework, arguing that such phantasies happen to people who lack reason (οἱ ἀνόητοι ἄνθρωποι) and reflect their uncurbed desires—this is why such phantasies typically involve wealth, absolute power, as well as sex and lavish feasting. Again, parallels with other authors show that in his conviction that solitary withdrawal may be harmful to the soul, Dio is following an earlier tradition. Seneca,

¹⁸ On Theophrastus’ conception of the contemplative life, see T. Bénatouïl, ‘Théophraste: les limites éthiques, psychologiques et cosmologiques de la contemplation’, in T. Bénatouïl and M. Bonazzi (edd.), *Theoria, Praxis, and the Contemplative Life after Plato and Aristotle* (Leiden, 2012), 17–39; S. McConnell, *Philosophical Life in Cicero’s Letters* (Cambridge, 2014), 118–23. The Peripatetics appear to have differed in their approach in this regard; in particular, according to Cicero (*Att. 2.16.3*) there was a difference between Theophrastus and Dicaearchus (see McConnell [this note], 115–60 for a reconstruction of this controversy; cf. also the skeptical approaches to Cicero’s evidence in P.M. Huby, ‘The controversia between Dicaearchus and Theophrastus about the best life’, in W.W. Fortenbaugh and E. Schütrumpf [edd.], *Dicaearchus of Messana. Text, Translation, and Discussion* [Abingdon and New York, 2001], 311–28 and W.W. Fortenbaugh, ‘Cicero’s Letter to Atticus 2.16: “a great controversy”’, *CW* 106 [2013], 483–6). Hieronymus of Rhodes (third century B.C.E.), according to later sources, advocated an untroubled life (τὸ ἀσκλητῶς ζῆν, Clem. Al. *Strom.* 2.21.127) and a life of tranquility (ἡσυχία, Plut. *Stoic. rep.* 1033C); see S.A. White, ‘Lyco and Hieronymus on the good life’, in W.W. Fortenbaugh and S.A. White, *Lyco of Troas and Hieronymus of Rhodes. Text, Translation, and Discussion* (New Brunswick and London, 2004), 389–409, at 395–403.

who, as we have seen, recommended retirement into oneself, adds a note of caution: one can profit from one's own company only when one is a good person (*si bonus uir <es>, si quietus, si temperans*), otherwise, one should withdraw away from oneself and into the crowd so as not to be harmed by one's own company (*in turbam tibi a te recedendum est: istic malo uiro propius es, Ep. 25.7*). Philo of Alexandria, in his allegorical interpretation of *Genesis*, also writes about the risks posed by solitude, claiming that he is drawing from his own experience (*Alleg. 2.85*):

καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ πολλάκις καταλιπὼν μὲν ἀνθρώπους συγγενεῖς καὶ φίλους καὶ πατρίδα καὶ εἰς ἐρημίαν ἐλθὼν, ἵνα τι τὼν θεᾶς ἀξίων κατανοήσω, οὐδὲν ᾤνησα, ἀλλὰ σκορπισθεὶς ὁ νοῦς ἢ πάθει δηχθεὶς ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς τάναντία· ἔστι δὲ ὅτε καὶ ἐν πλήθει μυριάνδρῳ ἡρεμῶ τὴν διάνοιαν, τὸν ψυχικὸν ὄχλον σκεδάσαντος θεοῦ καὶ διδάξαντός με, ὅτι οὐ τόπων διαφοραὶ τὸ τε εὖ καὶ χεῖρον ἐργάζονται, ἀλλ' ὁ κινῶν θεὸς καὶ ἄγων ἢ ἄν προαιρήται τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ὄχημα.

For many a time have I myself forsaken friends and kinsfolk and country and come into an isolated place, to give my attention to some subject demanding contemplation, and derived no advantage from doing so, but my mind scattered or bitten by passion has gone off to matters of the contrary kind. Sometimes, on the other hand, amid a vast throng I have a collected mind. God has dispersed the crowd that besets the soul and taught me that a favourable and unfavourable condition are not brought about by differences of place, but by God who moves and leads the car of the soul in whatever way He pleases. (transl. G.H. Whitaker, modified)

Despite the context—Philo is focussed here on Biblical exegesis—this passage, which is infused with recognizably Platonic imagery (the phrase ‘the car of the soul’, τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ὄχημα, alludes to the description of the soul in *Phdr.* 246a–247c), contains several themes present in Dio's *Oration 20*. Philo refers to leaving his family, friends and fatherland (the list resonates with Dio's opening examples of people abandoning their communities) to devote himself to intellectual contemplation. He observes that the isolation did not bring the expected and desired focus, but instead caused the mind to be affected by passion, πάθος (identified by Philo with pleasure in a passage immediately preceding this one), and to experience mental diffusion.¹⁹ This resonates with Dio's treatment of *anachôrêsis* conceived of as solitude in 20.17–18, while Philo's sententious οὐ τόπων διαφοραὶ τὸ τε εὖ καὶ χεῖρον ἐργάζονται is reminiscent of Dio's οὐ τόπος ἐστὶν ὁ παρέχων οὐδὲ τὸ ἀποδημῆσαι τὸ μὴ φαῦλ' ἄττα πράττειν (7). There is an essential difference, as Philo inserts the philosophical discourse on the merits and harms of retirement into a religious framework and explains the fluctuating states of the soul by referring to God's agency—unlike Dio, for whom they indicate the soul's inadequate training.

It is in the section on solitude that Dio rewrites the myth of Paris, the aim of which was to justify marrying the most beautiful woman on earth. As noted above, Dio interacts here with the tradition of ancient criticism and revises the episode in a way

¹⁹ Philo is also influenced by the Septuagint, where the notion of ‘the isolated place’ (ἡ ἐρημία or ἡ ἐρήμιος) is a recurrent one and in which isolation is associated with revelation and close association with God—but also with danger and destruction. For ἡ ἐρημία or ἡ ἐρήμιος in the Bible and early Christianity, see A. Guillaumont, ‘La conception du désert chez les moines d’Egypte’, *RHR* 188 (1975), 3–21; R.B. Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible. Towards a Theology of Wilderness* (New York, 2004). On the desert as the anti-thesis of the city in Philo, see D.T. Runia, ‘The idea and the reality of the city in the thought of Philo of Alexandria’, *JHI* 61 (2000), 361–97, at 371–2; on the negative connotations of the desert in *Alleg. 2.85*, F. Calabi, *God's Acting, Man's Acting. Tradition and Philosophy in Philo of Alexandria* (Leiden, 2008), 170.

that removes an immoral aspect: Aphrodite never promised Helen to Paris and therefore did not cause the Trojan war. But there is more to Dio's inclusion of this particular myth. The judgement of Paris has been long interpreted allegorically as a story about choices in life, with the three goddesses and their gifts representing different life paths.²⁰ Sophocles, for instance, in his satyr play *Judgement* (Κρίσις), represented Aphrodite as Pleasure and Athena as Intelligence, Reason and Virtue (Φρόνησις, Νοῦς and Ἀρετή),²¹ while the Stoic Chrysippus interpreted the judgement as the choice between a life of war, love or royal power (πολεμικῆς ἀσκήσεως ἢ ἐρωτικῆς ἢ βασιλείας).²² Dio alludes to such readings when he notes that 'a reflection and desire occurred in Paris' that it would be 'a happy and blissful thing' (εὐδαμόν τε καὶ μακάριον) if he could have the most beautiful woman, and that it would be more valuable than royal power, wealth and military conquest of the world (βασιλεία, πλοῦτος, κρατεῖν μαχόμενον ὅπαντων ἀνθρώπων, 19). He therefore represents Paris as reflecting on different values and life paths and wondering which will bring him happiness: εὐδαμον evokes εὐδαμονία, the goal of human life in ancient philosophy. The judgement of Paris in this retelling is akin to Prodicus' choice of Heracles in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, and the contest of the goddesses concocted by the prince provides an allegorical robe in which the myth clothes tales of human experience.²³

The example of Paris and of other people who, while living in solitude, end up engrossed in wild phantasies, allows Dio to argue that unless one is able to control one's impulses and follow the mind, a solitary life will eventually lead to someone becoming a slave to their desires. Despite their different motivations, the contemplative life risks proving to be not so much different from the life of pleasure: in both one ends up at the mercy of one's passions and irrational inclinations. In this thought, Dio appears to develop a Stoic criticism of the proponents of the contemplative life: Plutarch relates that Chrysippus in his *On Lives* observed that the life of learned leisure (ὁ σχολαστικὸς βίος) does not differ from the life of pleasure (τοῦ ἡδονικοῦ, *sc.* βίου, *Stoic. rep.* 1033C), implying that pleasure is a hidden motive for the Peripatetics' choice of the contemplative life. Dio shifts the focus, emphasizing the similarity of the outcome (rather than of the intention), namely an unordered life, in which one fails to follow the mind and act properly.

Oratio 20, then, is essentially—like the myth of the judgement of Paris—about how to live, about the Socratic πῶς βιωτέον (Pl. *Grg.* 492d). The three understandings of *anachôrêsis* are loose approximations of the three paths proposed by different sects of philosophers: the life of pleasure away from one's city and its demands (the Epicureans), the active life in the midst of people which manages to follow the reason without avoiding civic involvement (the Stoics), and the life devoted to study, led in contemplative tranquillity and solitude (the Peripatetics). Starting obliquely with the question 'What is *anachôrêsis*?', Dio takes a stance in the ancient debate on the active versus contemplative life, arguing that internal withdrawal is a way to combine the two. To return to the judgement of Paris once more, the mythographer Fulgentius (fifth–sixth

²⁰ K. Reinhardt, 'Das Parisurteil', in K. Reinhardt, *Tradition und Geist: gesammelte Essays zur Dichtung*. Herausgegeben von C. Becker (Göttingen, 1960 [1938]), 16–36, at 17; T.C.W. Stinton, *Euripides and the Judgement of Paris* (London, 1965), 5, 8–10.

²¹ Fr. 361 Radt.

²² *SVF* 3.197. Cf. Ath. *Deipn.* 12.510b–c, where the poets of old are said to have represented the judgement of Paris as choice between virtue and pleasure.

²³ Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.20–33. For the association between the judgement of Paris and Xenophon's Heracles story, see Ath. *Deipn.* 12.510b–c; Reinhardt (n. 20), 17; Stinton (n. 20), 8.

century C.E.) interprets the three goddesses judged by Paris as representing specifically these three types of lives propounded by philosophers: Athena stands for the contemplative, Hera for the active, and Aphrodite for the life of pleasure which Fulgentius explicitly associates with the Epicureans (*Myth.* 2.1). We cannot say how far back this interpretation goes and whether Dio was familiar with it, but it would certainly provide an additional rationale for his evoking the judgement and would fit Dio's tendency to establish connections between layers and segments, between narratives and arguments.

DIO'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

The examination of the philosophical background and intertextual connections in *Oration* 20 uncovered a variety of subtexts and intellectual traditions with which Dio engages. While the three types of *anachôrêsis* are associated with the three modes of life proposed by ancient philosophical schools, and the position favoured in the text is congruent with the Stoicism, Dio takes pains to ensure that the text does not read like a philosopher's polemic with rival schools by eschewing jargon and abstract theorizing, omitting school-names and avoiding references to and quotations from authorities. Instead, he converts philosophical positions and controversies—handled with liberty and in a casual manner—into suggestive examples and imaginative storylines. This feature of *Oration* 20 is consistent with Dio's manner of philosophizing elsewhere in the corpus, in which references to named philosophers and schools are rare. For instance, although Dio's affinity with Stoicism is manifest—for example in the *Olympian Oration* (*Or.* 12) and in the *Borysthenitic Oration* (*Or.* 36)—as is his dislike for Epicurean philosophy, he never once explicitly refers to 'the Stoics' or 'the Epicureans'. Nor does he ever mention Epicurus by name, while the founder of the Stoic school, Zeno of Citium, is named in only two of his works: in *Oration* 53 for his contribution to Homeric criticism (4–5), and in *Oration* 47, where he is mentioned (together with Cleanthes and Chrysippus, who are referred to nowhere else in the corpus) as a philosopher who lived away from his country, despite his positive valuation of the political engagement of a citizen (47.2). Apart from the passage in which Dio acknowledges Zeno's work on Homer, the only other mention of the Stoic founder (and his two successors) is in a passage highlighting a significant inconsistency between his life and his teachings.²⁴ The only two philosophers who reappear in Dio are Socrates and Diogenes the Cynic, whom Dio uses above all as malleable examples of a philosophical life.²⁵ There are also a few references to Plato (mostly in connection with Homer, cf. *Or.* 2.47, 53.2, 53.5) and Aristotle (mostly in connection with his role as Alexander the Great's teacher, as in *Or.* 2.15, 2.78, 49.4) and isolated mentions of other philosophers; but in general, the philosophical background, including the Hellenistic one which set the coordinates for the imperial period's philosophical milieu, is pushed beneath the surface.

In the early empire many philosophical ideas floated around as part of a broader intellectual culture, and to some extent Dio's lack of acknowledgement of their

²⁴ In fact, this inconsistency was criticized by philosophers from other schools. It is the first accusation that Plutarch makes against the Stoics in *Stoic. rep.* 1033A–C, and is mentioned by Serenus in Seneca, *Tranq.* 1.10.

²⁵ For Socrates and Diogenes in Dio, see A. Brancacci, 'Dio, Socrates, and Cynicism', in S. Swain (ed.), *Dio Chrysostom. Politics, Letters, and Philosophy* (Oxford, 2000), 240–60.

provenance mirrors this absorption of philosophy in the general *paideia*. His persistent disinclination to name the philosophers and philosophical traditions with which he engages is however idiosyncratic in comparison with the practices of other contemporary philosophically-minded authors. We may leave aside Plutarch, as his extraordinary profusion of quotations and direct references situates him on the opposite side of the spectrum; but Dio's radical reticence also sets him apart from figures such as the philosophical orator Maximus of Tyre or Arrian/Epictetus, who frequently refer to individual philosophers or schools.²⁶ Even Marcus Aurelius, despite the meditative and personal character of his notes, refers to several post-classical philosophers, including Epicurus. The example of Dio's contemporaries shows that direct mention of philosophical authorities and schools was an expected gesture in philosophically-oriented prose, a gesture Dio declined to make.

Dio's practice points towards a strategy of dissociating ideas, themes and motifs from their philosophical backgrounds and origins. This appears to be linked to ancient techniques of learned concealment and veiled allusions, which require the audience to activate their erudition and uncover the subtext, thus engaging them in interactive play with the text. Dio certainly reaches for such techniques of covert interaction with philosophical sources and authorities elsewhere in the corpus, for instance in the *Euboean Oration*, which on multiple levels interacts with the *Republic* of Plato—whose name never appears in the work, but who is alluded to or indirectly referred to in a few places (e.g. 7.107, 125, 130)—and invites the reader to consider Dio's social program against the background of Plato's political philosophy. However, *Oration 20* does not seem to share the interdiscursive complexity of the *Euboean Oration* (though we may not be able to discover its subtexts due to the loss of the Hellenistic philosophical texts); it appears a relatively straightforward enterprise which, while juxtaposing positions affiliated with different philosophical traditions, exhorts the audience to combine active political participation with moral self-improvement and the cultivation of moral reflection. As Dio dissociates ideas from their original philosophical backgrounds, his aim appears to be to move them into the sphere of everyday experience of a reflective, though not necessarily philosophically educated, human being. This shift is also manifest in Dio's string of examples and images which support his argument, such as the life of a busy street (20.9), a crowded hippodrome (10) and a sea-side neighbourhood (12). The only mention of philosophy appears in a passage which relates the intervention of an anonymous polemicist, who argues that philosophy and *paideia* differ from other occupations and require special conditions, and that *philologoi* need tranquillity to pursue their studies (11). It is the only 'dialogic moment' in the text in which—in a manner characteristic of the simplified dialogized mode which developed in ancient philosophy under the influence of the Socratic tradition—it remains unclear whether it is the speaker who points out a difficulty, or an anonymous interlocutor who disagrees with him.²⁷ This technique, with its built-in ambiguity, allows for a subtle

²⁶ Maximus of Tyre, for instance, besides mentioning multiple times Socrates and Plato, refers also frequently (sixteen times) to Epicurus. Stoic philosophers—Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus—as well as Epicurus appear recurrently in *Discourses of Epictetus*.

²⁷ The modern reader frequently finds such a seamless transition between different arguments and positions confusing and awkward; Cohoon in his translation of 20.11 adds 'you will object' (which has no equivalent in the Greek) to encompass the counterargument within the main speaker's discourse. Yet such partial, simplified dialogization is a recurrent feature in Hellenistic and imperial 'popular' philosophy, in particular in the Cynic and Stoic moralizing tradition with which Dio was particularly close: in this type of speech representation, the personality of the secondary speaker

authorial distancing from the perspective expressed by it—in this case, not only from the opinion that one needs tranquillity to practice philosophy, but also from the very preoccupation with intellectual pursuits (philosophy and education). If Socrates ‘brought philosophy down from the heavens’ and put it in cities and homes (Cic. *Tusc.* 5.10), then Dio, faithful to the Socratic legacy, removes it from the grounds of philosophical schools, deprofessionalizes and descolarizes it, and returns it to its proper territory and mission: to make people good. As he says in *Or.* 13.28: ‘if a man strives earnestly to be good and honourable, that is nothing but being a philosopher’ (τὸ γὰρ ζητεῖν καὶ φιλοτιμεῖσθαι ὅπως τις ἔσται καλὸς καὶ ἀγαθὸς οὐκ ἄλλο τι εἶναι ἢ [τὸ] φιλοσοφεῖν).

It is tempting to characterize Dio’s manner of philosophizing as ‘popular philosophy’. The term suggests a simplification of philosophical concepts and ideas for the non-initiated, a sort of translation of the technical and esoteric into relatable language. But in Dio this translation appears to be not so much complementary to scholarly or ‘professional’ philosophy as polemical and antithetical to it. Pelling once asked: ‘What is popular about Plutarch’s “popular philosophy”?’²⁸ and some of his insight into Plutarch is relevant also for Dio. Pelling observes that in Plutarch’s ‘popular’ philosophical texts, there is an underlying notion that ‘ordinary people’ (though not ‘totally ordinary’, to be sure, as ‘popular philosophy is not demotic philosophy’, Pelling notes) ‘may grasp more instinctively than the great and prominent, for the latter may find their greatness and prominence a barrier to understanding. The same may even be true of the great and wise: abstract philosophical wisdom does not always transpose into good practical sense.’²⁹ We find these sentiments omnipresent in Dio’s corpus, both the positive appraisal of an unschooled good practical sense when it comes to morality (consider, for instance, the figure of the noble hunter in the *Euboean Oration* or Dio’s account of his own path to philosophy in *Or.* 13: *On Exile*) and the misgivings towards ‘the great and prominent’, be they rulers, prominent politicians or renowned philosophers. Dio’s misgivings toward the latter, in particular, reflect his Socratic and Cynic legacy: both Socrates and Diogenes were distrustful of those who were regarded and celebrated as authorities or sources of knowledge, either by themselves or others. In *Oration 8: Diogenes or On Virtue*, Dio narrates that Diogenes the Cynic, upon meeting philosophers in Athens (Plato, Aristippus, Aeschines, Antisthenes and Euclides of Megara) soon started to spurn them all besides Antisthenes, whose teachings (but not life) he found admirable (8.1–2). Diogenes acts here as Dio’s double and embodies his reservations toward the philosophical tradition. Although he is freely drawing from it, Dio insists on ‘casting off the filters’ (to use Pelling’s phrase) of professional philosophical schools and affiliations, and it is this backdrop that allows for a better understanding of Dio’s strategies of non-citation, downplaying the theoretical and scholarly, and taking liberties in the reformulation of the philosophical ideas found in *Oration 20* and his other works.

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gradually vanishes and his individuality is obliterated. Cf. the simplified dialogization in the extant fragments of Teles, a Hellenistic Cynic philosopher: K. Jażdżewska, *Greek Dialogue in Antiquity: Post-Platonic Transformations* (Oxford, 2022), 210–12. B. Wehner, *Die Funktion Der Dialogstruktur in Epiktets Diatriben* (Stuttgart, 2000) examines different dialogic modes in Arrian’s *Diatribes of Epictetus*.

²⁸ C. Pelling, ‘What is popular about Plutarch’s “popular philosophy”?’ in G. Roskam and L. Van der Stockt (edd.), *Virtues for the People. Aspects of Plutarchan Ethics* (Leuven, 2011), 41–58.

²⁹ Pelling (n. 28), 57.