Sceptical Paths

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by Giuseppe Veltri

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Sceptical Paths

Enquiry and Doubt from Antiquity to the Present

Edited by
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Stephan Schmid, and Emidio Spinelli

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Introduction

The following book of collected essays is the main result of the First International Conference on Scepticism held from 8 to 11 May 2017 at Universität Hamburg and organised by the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies (MCAS) in close cooperation with the Department of Philosophy at the Sapienza University of Rome. It addresses the main elements, strategies, and definitions of scepticism. The book is divided according to a historical framework with special foci on ancient, medieval, and early modern philosophy: Emidio Spinelli (the Sapienza University of Rome) was responsible for the ancient period, Racheli Haliva (MCAS, Universität Hamburg) was responsible for the Middle Ages, and Stephan Schmid (MCAS, Universität Hamburg) was responsible for the early modern period. The redaction of the book was undertaken by Yoav Meyrav (MCAS, Universität Hamburg), and the following contains an overview of all the essays included in the present volume, looking into the topics discussed in the conference and elaborated upon for publication.

In his paper "Philo of Alexandria vs. Descartes: An Ignored Jewish Premonitory Critic of the *Cogito*," Carlos Lévy argues that Philo of Alexandria foresaw and refuted the Cartesian cogito as the solution to the problem of absolute knowledge. After locating the main tenets of Philo's attitude to the Pyrrhonian tradition, which is illuminated by a comparison with Cicero's respective attitude, Lévy shows how Philo's attitude to knowledge precludes the possibility of Descartes's cogito. Philo would probably have dismissed Descartes's cogito as absurd, as it involves an artificial disconnection between the human self and its metaphysical rootedness in God, only to re-establish it later. For Philo, as for Augustine after him, the problem of knowledge is intertwined with the ethical question of the relationship between God and the human being, at which the human being arrives through grasping the shortcoming of reason and the priority of faith.

In "Sextus Empiricus's use of *dunamis*," Stéphane Marchand embarks upon a terminological exploration of the word *dunamis* in Sextus's corpus. Although not frequent in Sextus's writings, *dunamis* is explicitly connected to the sceptical praxis and its application is telling regarding Sextus's understanding of sceptical discourse, which avoids the dogmatic meaning of *dunamis* as found, for example, in the Aristotelian tradition. Through a careful examination of the instances of *dunamis* in Sextus's corpus, Marchand shows that it can express sceptics' observable ability to carry out their activity, and also function as a lexical tool to uncover semantic equivalence or logical entailment, which may mask weaknesses in dogmatic arguments. Finally, Marchand argues that whenever one finds an instance of *dunamis* that can be understood as if its employment reflects a certain theory, this is in fact part of Sextus's strategy of arguing according to the usage norms of the field within which he argues, without committing to the theory behind this usage.

In his paper "Does Pyrrhonism Have Practical or Epistemic Value?", Diego Machuca examines the Pyrrhonian notions of suspension and undisturbedness and

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asks whether they are in fact valuable with regard to morality and knowledge. In other words, can these notions really contribute to behaviour that is morally right or wrong, and can they really allow one to attain truth and avoid error? It seems that if this is not the case, then Pyrrhonism is fundamentally useless and perhaps even harmful. In the course of his argument, Machuca argues against this negative assessment, most notably responding to Martha Nussbaum's critique and exhibiting its shortcomings. Machuca argues in favour of Pyrrhonism's value according to the basic Pyrrhonian principle of appearance: it is sufficient to show that Pyrrhonism appears valuable to the Pyrrhonist in order to defend its value.

In "*endoxa* and the *Theology of Aristotle* in Avicenna's 'Flying Man': Contexts for Similarities with Sceptical and Cartesian Arguments in Avicenna," Heidrun Eichner offers a fresh analysis of Avicenna's famous "flying man" thought experiment, which is frequently compared to Descartes's argument for the existence of the metaphysical cogito. Eichner argues that instead of a single argument, in Avicenna we find a cluster of "flying man" arguments, which, when discussed side by side, reflect a continuous development in Avicenna's philosophy. This development consists of two contributing factors: Avicenna's attitude towards *endoxa* type arguments and the legacy of arguments for the immortality of the soul which stem from the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* (in reality a medieval Arabic adaptation of Plotinus's *Enneads*). Equipped with these fresh analytical tools, Eichner shows that Avicenna's "flying man" can be understood as a logical inversion of Descartes's cogito; for Avicenna, thinking correctly about a "flying man" is enough to secure his existence as a distinct mental entity.

In "The Problem of Many Gods in al-Ghazālī, Averroes, Maimonides, Crescas, and Sforno," Warren Zev Harvey uncovers a narrative of argumentation and counter-argumentation regarding reason's ability to defend monotheism. In the Muslim tradition, Averroes employed an Aristotelian argument based on the claim that the universe is a unified whole to counter al-Ghazālī's sceptical claim that reason alone cannot prevent the possibility of a plurality of Gods and hence is an insufficient foundation for the theological principle of God's unity. Harvey shows that subsequent argumentations in the Jewish tradition—here reflected in Maimonides, Moses Narboni, Hasdai Crescas, and Obadiah Sforno—are variations on this theme, which is refined, enriched, and opens avenues for philosophical and theological novelties.

In "What is Maimonidean Scepticism?", Josef Stern delves into one of the most heated scholarly debates surrounding Maimonides's philosophy; namely, the place of scepticism in his thought. Stern argues that there are two ways in which Maimonides can in fact be regarded as a sceptic: first, his argumentative method is similar to the Pyrrhonian method for generating equipollence, and second, he finds a practical value in the suspension of judgment. Regarding the first way, Stern shows that Maimonides thinks that the mere possibility of doubt is insufficient to challenge a knowledge claim; Maimonides prefers to present, in many contexts, two opposing arguments of equal strength between which there is no criterion to decide. Regarding the second way, Stern shows that in Maimonides, suspension of judgment can lead to

a state of tranquillity, a kind of happiness, and/or awe and dazzlement that is akin to the kind of divine worship that the dogmatist holds can be achieved through the acquisition of positive knowledge about God.

In "Medieval Scepticism and Divine Deception," Henrik Lagerlund outlines the Greek and Latin sources of scepticism available in medieval times, tracing the roots of an original form of sceptical argumentation in the Latin tradition; namely, divine deception. Even though there were some influences from earlier forms of scepticism during this time, Lagerlund shows that scepticism was largely reinvented in the Middle Ages according to a new set of considerations that are independent of the ancient tradition. Unlike the Pyrrhonian view, which aims at the suspension of judgment and tranquillity, and is therefore a practical consideration, medieval sceptical arguments revolve around epistemological debates. In other words, it was in medieval philosophy that scepticism became intertwined with epistemology, as it is to this day.

In his paper "Spinoza on Global Doubt," José María Sánchez de León Serrano proposes a reassessment of Spinoza's strategy against the radical scepticism adopted by Descartes in his *Meditations*. Whereas scholars tend to see Spinoza's monism as his main defence against the sceptical threat, Sánchez de León Serrano argues that monism is in fact liable to generate scepticism. Spinoza can only resolve this internal difficulty by showing how the finite human mind can adequately grasp the whole of Nature that contains it.

In "Scepticism in Early Modern Times," Sébastien Charles challenges the attempt to reduce the phenomenon of scepticism in the early modern period to an appropriation of Sextus Empiricus's version of Pyrrhonism. Arguing against the univocal meaning of scepticism in early modernity, Charles discusses three authors whose respective forms of scepticism differ from each other with respect to motivation, employment, and argumentation. First, Pierre-Daniel Huet—who is often the subject of debates as to whether he was a Pyrrhonian or an Academic sceptic—is primarily a Christian philosopher who uses sceptical strategies as part of his apologetic project to safeguard the Christian religion from attacks from early modern rationalism. Second, Simon Foucher actually opposes Pyrrhonism, which he interprets as a form of negative dogmatism. Instead, he adopts what he believes to be the Academic sceptical approach; scientific progress is possible as long as it is granted that scientific claims are revocable and that they are not apodictic truths. Finally, despite being usually regarded as a radical sceptic, Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville conceived scepticism primarily in a propaedeutic role, as a foundation for the natural philosophy of its time.

In "Three Varieties of Early Modern Scepticism," Stephen Schmid also argues against understanding early modern scepticism as a species of Pyrrhonism. Instead, Schmid proposes a distinction between Pyrrhonian, Cartesian, and Humean scepticism, which represent different stages in the historical development of sceptical ideas. Each stage differs from the others in extent and scope, constructing an argumentative succession which increases in gravity. The object of Pyrrhonian scepticism

is the ability to know the nature of things, leaving the question of the fact of their existence untouched; Cartesian scepticism is directed against the very existence of things outside us, but leaves untouched the question of whether we have thoughts with a determinate content in the first place; Humean scepticism takes up this final problem, doubting not only the truth of our thoughts, but also whether what we take to be thoughts about certain things are proper thoughts about these things at all.

In "Narrowing of 'Know' as a Contextualist Strategy against Cartesian Sceptical Conclusions," Nancy Abigail Nuñez Hernandez tackles epistemic contextualism, a contemporary response to scepticism. Epistemic contextualism claims that Cartesian-style sceptical arguments set extremely high standards for knowledge that we do not have to meet in ordinary or scientific contexts. Nuñez Hernandez develops an original proposal to address the main criticisms of this position, arguing that in Cartesian-style sceptical arguments, the meaning of "know" is narrowed down to such an extent that it does not apply to the vast majority of the instances to which "knowledge" is actually attributed.

My thanks go to all my colleagues for their cooperation, to the MCAS team, and primarily to Yoav Meyrav for his professional redaction of every article and his help in summarising the content of the contributions. Special thanks are due to Rachel Aumiller for her involvement in the early stages of the preparation of this volume. Thanks are also due to Maria Wazinski and Mikheil Kakabadze for their valuable editorial help. This is also the appropriate place to thank the German Research Council (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) for the generous financial support that made the creation of the Maimonides Centre and the open access of this publication possible.

Hamburg, May 2019 Giuseppe Veltri

Carlos Lévy

Philo of Alexandria vs. Descartes: An Ignored Jewish Premonitory Critic of the *Cogito*

The starting-point of this paper is a double statement of fact. First, in the transmission of the sorts of tablets of the sceptic law that are the tropes of Aenesidemus, our initial witness is neither a philosopher in the narrow sense, nor a doxographer, nor an encyclopaedist, but someone who was and remains an atypical character in the world of philosophy: a Jew born in Alexandria, raised in the *paideia*, who never abandoned the principles of his faith. Philo thought that there could exist a kind of complex compatibility between the Jewish Torah and Greek philosophy. Nowadays, scholars generally dismiss the Philonian version of the tropes.[1] In my opinion—but it seems that I am almost the only one to think so currently—it is an error, since Philo was, from a chronological, geographical, historical, and linguistic point of view, the closest to Aenesidemus. H. von Arnim expressed the same opinion at the beginning of the twentieth century that was, but it was shaken by Janáček's (to my mind) unconvincing criticism, whose authority played an important role in devaluing Philo's version of the tropes.[2] Certainly there would be much to say about this question, but the main fact is that Philo, who lived in a city brimming with philosophers, quickly identified Aenesidemus's tropes as something very important to his own reflections on Jewish law.

On this matter, there is a sharp contrast between the attitudes of Cicero and Philo. Cicero was himself a disciple of the sceptic Academy and a good friend of Tubero, to whom Aenesidemus dedicated his Pyrrhonian books, yet Cicero never mentions Aenesidemus.[3] In his opinion the tradition of doubt was represented by the Academy of Arcesilaus and Carneades. Scepticism, a term that had no precise equivalent in his vocabulary, was for Cicero essentially an aspect of Platonism. Unlike Ae-

1 On this question, see Carlos Lévy, "Philon d'Alexandrie est-il inutilisable pour connaître Énésidème? Étude méthodologique," *Philosophie antique* 15 (2015): 7–26.

2 Hans von Arnim, *Quellenstudien zu Philo von Alexandria* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1889); Karel Janáček, "Philon von Alexandreia und skeptische Tropen," *Eirene* (1982): 83–97.

3 Photius says that Aenesidemus's book was dedicated to Lucius Tubero, who was his *sunairesiōtē*s ("classmate") in the Academy. This Tubero is commonly identified with Lucius Aelius Tubero, who was a legate of Quintus Cicero during his pro-consulate in Asia from 63 to 58 BCE. On Tubero, see John Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 118. On the debate about the Academic identity of Aenesidemus, see the contradictory positions of Fernanda Decleva Caizzi, "Aenesidemus and the Academy," *Classical Quarterly* 42 (1992): 176–89, who denies that Aenesidemus was a student in the Academy, and Jaap Mansfeld, "Aenesidemus and the Academics," in *The passionate intellect. Essays on the transformation of Classical Literature,* ed. Lewis Ayres (New Brunswick-London: Transactions, 1996), 235–48, who affirms that he was.

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nesidemus, he never intended to remove scepticism from the family of the Socratic doctrines. For him Pyrrho was a dogmatic indifferentist.[4]

Further in this paper, in a comparative perspective, we shall deal with Augustine's intellectual and spiritual itinerary. It is well-known that, after a very long and complex evolution, he had an illumination in the garden of Milan, in July 386. It was a crucial moment for his conversion.[5] One could think that, at this time of his life, he would have isolated himself in order to write some fresh theological meditation. But it was not the case. He retired with his mother and some friends in Cassiciacum, in order to tackle a great number of philosophical themes, the first of which was the refutation of the New Academy. This seems even stranger as in *Confessions* 5.25,[6] when he speaks about his own sceptical crisis (in 384–85), he seems to consider it as a minor episode, in the context of his liberation from a long-lasting Manichaean influence.

In the case of Augustine, as in that of Philo, dealing with scepticism seems to have been more than an intellectual challenge, but an actual kind of emergency. Here again, the contrast with Cicero is telling. Cicero wrote his *Academica* when he was sixty, an age roughly equivalent to today's eighty, given differences in life expectancy. One would perhaps object that the link between Philo and Augustine is mere coincidence. But the paradoxical relation between faith and scepticism is a line which runs through the history of Western thought. The names of Montaigne and Pascal can be mentioned here, among so many others, as carefully studied by Charles Schmitt.[7] The presence of this relation, however, does not mean that it would be unidimensional. By exploring the cases of Philo and Augustine, we will try to determine what, if anything, they have in common.

In principle, things look quite simple; Philo adopts and adapts the tropes of Aenesidemus, while Augustine wants to triumph over the scepticism of the New Academy. In fact, this contrast between the former, who seems to feel some attraction towards scepticism, and the latter, who treats it as an adversary, is fallacious. In both

4 See Carlos Lévy, "Un problème doxographique chez Cicéron, les indifférentistes," *Revue des Études Latines* 58 (1980): 238–51.

5 On the Augustinian intellectual and spiritual itinerary, see Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

6 Augustine, *Confessions* 5.25: "Accordingly, after the manner of the Academics, as popularly understood, I doubted everything, and in the fluctuating state of total suspense of judgement I decided I must leave the Manichees, thinking at that period of my scepticism that I should not remain a member of a sect to which I was now preferring certain philosophers. But to these philosophers, who were without Christ's saving name, I altogether refused to entrust the healing of my soul's sickness" (*itaque Academicorum more, sicut existimantur, dubitans de omnibus atque inter omnia fluctuans, manichaeos quidem relinquendos esse decrevi, non arbitrans eo ipso tempore dubitationis meae in illa secta mihi permanendum esse cui iam nonnullos philosophos praeponebam. quibus tamen philosophis, quod sine salutari nomine Christi essent, curationem languoris animae meae committere omnino recusabam*). Henry Chadwick, trans., *Saint Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

7 Charles B. Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus* (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

cases, things are far more complex. In the background of both cases is a question to which Descartes gave an answer he considered to be definitive: is there something that I can know with absolute certainty? I will try to demonstrate that Philo had foreseen and refuted the Cartesian solution, while Augustine in a certain sense anticipated it.

1 Prolegomena

Before dealing with Philo, I will say something about the pagan attitude towards religion, and more specifically that of the Hellenistic schools. In the Pyrrhonian tradition, passive observance of the religious tradition of the city is recommended in order to avoid the disturbance of religious dissension.[8] We find something quite opposite to this indifferentism in Cicero's treatise *On the Nature of the Gods* (*De natura deorum*). The main purpose of this treatise, in the tradition of the New Academy, is to demonstrate that the dogmatic explanations of the nature of the gods offered by Stoics and Epicureans were disappointing and contradictory. I shall not insist on the arguments used by Cotta against his dogmatic adversaries, since they have been explored at length.[9] Here I prefer to evoke a passage of the third book, rarely analysed in commentaries on this treatise. At sections 11–12 of the third book, Cotta, the exponent of the Academic refutation of Stoicism, refuses to grant that gods or dead heroes could appear among mortals and be seen in some exceptional occasions, let us say in miracles. He adds that he prefers to believe something more probable, namely that the souls of the great men are divine and immortal.[10] In the case of Cotta, the

8 See Carlos Lévy, "La question du pouvoir dans le pyrrhonisme," in *Fondements et crises du pouvoir*, eds. Sylvie Franchet d'Esperey, Valérie Fromentin, Sophie Gotteland, and Jean-Michel Roddaz (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2003), 47–56; Richard Bett, *Pyrrho: his Antecedents and his Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. chap. 2; Emidio Spinelli, "Sextus Empiricus, l'expérience sceptique et l'horizon de l'éthique," *Cahiers philosophiques* 115, no. 3 (2008): 29–45.

9 See Daniel Babut, *La religion des philosophes grecs*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2019); Jean-Louis Girard, "Probabilisme, théologie et religion: le catalogue des dieux homonymes dans le *De natura deorum* de Cicéron (3, 42 et 53–60)," in *Hommages à R. Schilling*, eds. Hubert Zehnacker and Gustave Hentz (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1983), 117–26; Jaap Mansfeld, "Aspects of Epicurean Theology," *Mnemosyne* 46 (1993): 172–210; Jordi Pia, "De la *Nature des dieux* de Cicéron à l'abrégé de Cornutus: une nouvelle représentation des élites dans la réflexion théologique," *Camenae* 10 (February 2012), http://saprat.ephe.sorbonne.fr/media/282f1da6517e2ba6025880dd887c8682/camenae-10-varia-jordi-pia-derniere.pdf.

10 Cicero, *De Natura deorum* 3.12: "Would you not prefer to believe the perfectly credible doctrine that the souls of famous men, like the sons of Tyndareus you speak of, are divine and live for ever, rather than that men who had been once for all burnt on a funeral pyre could ride and fight in a battle ; and if you maintain that this was possible, then you have got to explain how it was possible, and not merely bring forward old wives' tales" (*nonne mavis illud credere, quod probari potest, animos praeclarorum hominum, quales isti Tyndaridae fuerunt, divinos esse et aeternos, quam eos qui semel cremati essent equitare et in acie pugnare potuisse; aut si hoc fieri potuisse dicis, doceas oportet*

Academic argumentation has a double function: first, to demonstrate that human reason is incapable of elaborating a non-contradictory doctrine about the gods; and second, to consider the possibility of a less naïve, more persuasive, and more intellectual discourse about them. There is a kind of subtle connexion between Cotta's critical attitude and a form of transcendence. His critique aims at demonstrating that the inability of reason to find what is absolutely *true* does not necessarily imply its incapacity to detect what is *false* or to have an intuition of what is *probable*. Cotta, as an Academic, is essentially an evaluator. He advances arguments in order to demonstrate that the theory of the immortality of the best human souls is more plausible than the naïve belief of the visible presence of gods. Implicitly, it is an extension of the *The Dream of Scipio* (*Somnium Scipionis*, from book 6 *of De republica*) written by Cicero ten years before. It is quite difficult to decide if this connexion between the Academic *contra omnia dicere* and a transcendent perspective had antecedents in the school of Arcesilaus and Carneades or if it was Cicero's innovation.[11] At no moment, however, does he presume to understand what could be the nature of this *ego* who, though not pretending to reach truth, thinks that it is qualified to express a qualified opinion on opposite propositions. It can be asserted that, even when he deals with philosophical themes, Cotta is unable to define his subjectivity otherwise than through his own position in the Roman tradition.[12]

2 The Main Features of Philo's Scepticism

I will not enter into details regarding Philo's version of the tropes. It must be noted that Philo's sceptical aspects are not limited to the tropes that we find in his *On Drunkenness* (*De ebrietate*). There are many other places where he uses sceptic arguments in different ways.[13] My purpose is to try to provide an answer to these two questions: why Philo and why scepticism? Why does Philo frequently use sceptic items, while he considers the sceptics themselves to be sophists? Here my method will be to revisit some concepts of the confrontation between sceptics and Stoics, trying to see what they become when they are used by Philo.

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quo modo, nec fabellas aniles proferas). Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods. Academics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1933.

11 On the relation between the New Academy and the Platonic legacy, see Carlos Lévy, "La Nouvelle Académie a-t-elle été antiplatonicienne?", in *Contre Platon I. Le platonisme dévoilé*, ed. Monique Dixsaut (Paris: Vrin, 1993), 139–56.

12 Cicero, *De Natura deorum* 3.9: "For my part a single argument would have sufficed, namely that it has beed handed down to us by our forefathers" (*mihi enim unum sat erat, ita nobis maiores nostros tradidisse*).

13 On this point see Carlos Lévy, "La conversion du scepticisme chez Philon d'Alexandrie," in *Philo of Alexandria and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy*, ed. Francesca Alesse (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 103–20.

2.1 Philo and Stoic Epistemological Concepts

First *sunkatathesis* (assent), *katalēpsis* (perception of reality), and *epochē* (suspension of assent). Briefly, since for the Stoics *logos*-nature is both God and Providence, it generously offers true representations of the world to human beings. They are said to be free to accept or to refuse them, since assent depends on us. They can also suspend this assent. At the core of the confrontation between Stoics and sceptics is the fact that for the former, it is normal to give assent to natural representations, while for the latter no representation is adequately clear and unambiguous to be believed. Both schools agree, however, that the relation (or the absence of relation) between representations and assent is the central concern of the philosophy of knowledge.

Philo's originality was chiefly due to his refusal to admit even the terms of the problem. Within his corpus, only twice does he use *sunkatathesis*, a term which was specifically Stoic, since it was coined from an electoral metaphor by Zeno, the founder of the school.[14] For the Stoics, human life is a kind of permanent electoral process, in which representations are the candidates and the subject a tireless voter. Sensory representations are almost sure to be elected, since most of them are *phantasiai katalēptikai* ("cognitive representations"), whereas intellectual propositions need a more accurate examination. In Philo's huge corpus, the near-absence of one of the main concepts of Stoic vocabulary—and more generally of the philosophic *lingua franca* of this time—can hardly be considered a mere coincidence. It would be tempting to provide a stylistic explanation, since Philo generally avoids neologisms and non-classical concepts too narrowly connected to a precise philosophical context. But, at the same time, he often uses *katalēpsis*, another central concept of Stoic epistemology. In Stoic doctrine, *katalēpsis* is a kataleptic, i.e., naturally evident representation, to which assent has been given.[15] We know that Philo was familiar with these kinds of scholastic definitions, since in the *De congressu*, he gives several Stoic definitions with great accuracy, among them the concept of *katalēpsis* which he includes in the more general concept of science, *epistēmē*.[16] It is true that Philo's vocabulary is often much more exegetical than philosophical and generally not particularly inclined towards terminological innovations. At the same time, it is quite probable that he did not want to accept a concept so clearly belonging to the Stoic system, which expressed the autonomy of the human subject inside a perfectly

14 See Carlos Lévy, "Breaking the Stoic Language: Philo's Attitude towards Assent (*sunkatathesis)* and Comprehension (*katalêpsis*)," *Henoch* 32 (2010): 33–44.

15 Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* (*Adversus mathematicos*) 8.396 (= *SVF* 2.91).

16 Philo, *On the Preliminary Studies* (*De Congressu eruditionis gratia*) 141: "Knowledge on the other hand is defined as a sure and certain apprehension which cannot be shaken by argument" (ἐπιστήμης δέ· κατάληψις ἀσφαλὴς καὶ βέβαιος, ἀμετάπτωτος ὑπὸ λόγου). Philo, *On the Preliminary Studies*, in *On the Confusion of Tongues. On the Migration of Abraham. Who Is the Heir of Divine Things? On Mating with the Preliminary Studies* (Philo vol. 4), trans. F.H. Colson, G.H. Whitaker (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1932.

determined nature. By contrast, *katalēpsis* had Platonic and Aristotelian antecedents.[17]

I hope that the process of Philo's terminological preferences will become clearer by examining one of the two occurrences of *sunkatathesis* in his corpus. *On the Life of Moses* (*De vita Mosis*) shows Moses in a state of great perplexity about the date of Passover, a very complex religious problem.[18] On one hand, the date of the festival was set at the fourteenth day of the first month, but on the other hand, certain members of the group were plunged into mourning by the death of relatives. Due to their ensuing state of ritual impurity, they could not attend the ceremonies of Passover and were quite disappointed. For this reason, they asked the prophet to change the date. Philo reports that Moses was torn between contradictory sentiments, between admitting or rejecting these protests. The inclination of a Stoic philosopher probably would have been to reject them, since grief was one of the four fundamental negative passions. An Academic belonging to the Carneadean tradition would have suspended his assent, while trying to see which of the two solutions would be the most persuasive. A Pyrrhonian would have said that they were perfectly equivalent. But when Moses does not know what to do, he asks God to give him a solution. Subsequently, God emits an oracle preserving both the Law and loyalty to family. We suggest, therefore, that Philo refused to use the concept of *sunkatathesis* because it was a self-sufficient concept, namely a concept without any opening to transcendence. The Stoic conception of assent was the most elaborate expression of confidence in the sovereignty of the reason, both individual and universal, a doctrine that Philo could not accept. That is why he prefers to use the term *boulē* (deliberation and decision), much less connected to an immanentist context.

2.2 The transcendent *epochē*

The decision to forego the term *sunkatathesis* may be thought to imply the same attitude towards *epochē*, defined as suspension of assent. However, things are perhaps a little more complex. Actually, *epochē* is used only once in the whole of Philon's corpus.[19] This seems to create an almost perfect symmetry with the treatment of *sunkatathesis*. At the same time, it is worth noting that in the abstract of Aenesidemus's book *Pyrrhoneioi logoi*, written by the Patriarch Photius, the term *epochē*, which

17 Plato, *Gorgias*, 445c; *Republic* 526d; *Laws* 830c; Aristotle, *Sleep and Waking* (*De somno et vigilia)* 458a29; Pseudo-Aristotle, *De spiritu* 484b33.

18 Philo, *On the Life of Moses* (*De vita Mosis*) 2.225–32.

19 Philo, *On Flight and Finding* (*De fuga et invetione*) 136: "For the best offering is quietness and suspense of judgement, in matters that absolutely lack proofs" (ἄριστον γὰρ ἱερεῖον ἡσυχία καὶ ἐποχὴ περὶ ὧν πάντως οὐκ εἰσι πίστεις). Philo, *On Flight and Finding*, in *On Flight and Finding. On the Change of Names. On Dreams* (Philo vol. 5), trans. F.H. Colson, G.H. Whitaker (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1934.

will become so frequent in Neopyrrhonist philosophy, especially in Sextus Empiricus, is never used.[20] Like Philo, Aenesidemus (at least in Photius's report), frequently uses *katalēpsis*, *katalēptos*, *akatalēptos*, but he carefully avoids *sunkatathesis*. Instead of *epochē*, he prefers to use *aporia*. Of course, Photius's report is too brief to allow for a perfectly clear conclusion. The reliability of a report written so many centuries after the book in question can be contested. But it cannot be excluded that one of the characteristics of Aenesidemus's innovations would have been to relinquish the traditional problematic *sunkatatheis*/*epochē* and emphasise instead the Pyrrhonian idea of *isostheneia*, the equal strength of opposite realities, leading to *aporia*.[21] Therefore, it is not impossible that what we see in the Philonian corpus, namely the almost complete rejection of the terms s*unkatathesis* and *epochē*, originated in Aenesidemus himself.

When Sextus gives his own version of Pyrrhonian modes, he says in his introduction that "the usual tradition amongst the older sceptics is that the 'modes' by which suspension (*epochē*) is supposed to be brought about are ten in number."[22] In Philo's version of these modes, we find the verb *epechein* three times. The use of the term *epochē* expressed something stronger than the verb *epechein*. The verb had a functional meaning, while the noun had become the keystone, the motto of Academic thought, from which Aenesidemus tried to depart.

In any case, the only Philonian occurrence of *epochē* deserves consideration. It refers to one of the most famous episodes in the Bible, the sacrifice of Isaac. When Isaac asks his father where the lamb for the holocaust is, Abraham answers that God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering. In his allegorical commentary, Philo explains that the victim is the suspension of our judgement on points where evidence cannot be found.[23] God accepts the *epochē* as the sacrificial offering, in the place of Isaac. *epochē* is not only the recognition of the limits of the human mind, but also the expression of the Patriarch's faith in the infinite capacities of God Almighty, able to surpass the limits of nature, for example by bringing up *ex nihilo* a lamb in a desert. In Philo's exegesis, the lamb is both a historical reality, since he never excluded the literal sense of the sacred word, and the metaphor of the *epochē*, which in his perspective is meaningless if not referred to God.

20 Photius, *Bibliotheca* 212.

21 On these concepts, see Jacques Brunschwig, "L'aphasie pyrrhonienne," in *Dire l'évidence*, eds. Carlos Lévy and Laurent Pernot (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), 297–320; Bett, *Pyrrho*, 14–59; Harold Thorsrud, "Arcesilaus and Carneades," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, ed. Richard Bett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 58–81.

22 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. R.G. Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 1.14.

23 Philo, *On Flight and Finding* 136.

If we exclude the dubious testimony of Epiphanius,[24] no pagan Sceptic had suggested this kind of interpretation. For a Sceptic or a Stoic, the understanding of the meaning of *epochē* needed a thorough comprehension of main intellectual processes. For Philo, it was necessarily based on the hermeneutic of the divine Word, in a passage apparently without relation to the suspension of judgement.

Here we must stress a crucial point. The main difference between Pyrrhonian and Academic philosophers was that for the former all presentations and opinions were basically equivalent, while for the latter the impossibility of reaching certain truth did not prevent the world from offering some semblance of plausibility. For Arcesilaus, the first scholarch of the New Academy, the *eulogon*, though produced by a fallible reason, was the best mean to act in a non-undifferentiated way. For Carneades, his most brilliant successor, the *pithanon*, the impression of plausibility produced by certain representations, allowed limited progress in knowledge and action.[25] Usually Philo shows great hostility towards the *pithanon*, perhaps because in his Platonic culture it had too many sophistic associations. He has a somewhat more nuanced attitude towards *eulogon*, but also some negative views. In *Allegorical Interpretation* (*Legum allegoriae*) 3.229, he says that it is unreasonable to believe in *logismois pithanois*, an expression which means here something like sophisms.[26] At 3.233 it is said that the *pithanon* involves no firm knowledge with regard to the truth.

We find one of the most eloquent instances of this rejection in *On the Life of Moses* 1.174. When the prophet saw that the Hebrews hesitated to follow him and to fight the Egyptian army, he asked them: "why do you trust in the specious and plausible and that only?" (τί μόνοις τοῖς εὐλόγοις καὶ πιθανοῖς προπιστεύετε;). At the same time, in *On the Special Laws* (*De specialibus legibus*) 1.36–38 he develops the hierarchy in which the *eulogon* and the *pithanon* can find a sense different from the one they had in Arcesilaus's or Carneades's philosophies. Even if it is not possible to have perfect knowledge of the truth of God, Philo says, the research in itself is a source of joy: "For nothing is better than to search for the true God, even if the discovery of Him eludes human capacity, since the very wish to learn, if earnestly entertained, produces untold joys." Actually, even if God is unknowable, it is possible to act "like the athlete who strives for the second prize since he has been disappointed of the first. Now second to the true vision stands conjecture and theorising and all that can be brought into the category of the reasonable."

24 Epiphanius, *Panarion*, *De fide* 9.33–34; fragment 132 in Simone Vezzoli, Arcesilao di Pitane (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016).

25 On these concepts see the opposite interpretations of Pierre Couissin, "Le stoïcisme de la Nouvelle Académie," *Revue d'Histoire de la Philosophie* 3 (1929): 241–76; Anna Maria Ioppolo, *Opinione e Scienza* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1986), esp. 121–217.

26 In Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* (*Legum allegoriae*) 3.41, *pithanotēs* is evoked within the *logoi sophistikoi*.

Like the Academics and the followers of Aenesidemus, Philo emphasises the continuity of research. For example, just before describing the sceptic modes at *On Drunkenness* 162, he says that the worse kind of ignorance is that which accentuates the lack of science, the belief of having reached science. The best way to avoid this kind of ignorance is to indefatigably pursue inquiry, a point on which Philo agrees with all the sceptics. There is, however, an essential and paradoxical difference. In his case, the research is not the pursuit of a wholly or almost wholly unknown truth, but of the one that God Himself revealed to human beings.

2.3 The Status of Scepticism in Philo: The Essential Role of Decency and Shame

How, then, to explain the rather heavy presence of scepticism in Philo's corpus? Is his aim to merely dissipate the false illusion of knowledge, in order to make the path towards the revealed truth easier? In my opinion, there is a much deeper connexion between theology and philosophy. To understand it, let us go back to the primitive scene, i.e., the meeting of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, a scene for which Philo gives two interpretations.

In the *On the Creation of the World* (*De opificio mundi*) Philo takes some distance with respect to the biblical verse. He stresses *aidōs* (respect, decency), a transcendental virtue in his axiology, since it is the only one that is mentioned in the Paradise. The version is somewhat different in the *Allegorical Interpretation* where he gives his own interpretation of the biblical "and they were not ashamed." There he distinguishes three concepts: *anaischuntia*, shamelessness, which is the sign of evil; *aidōs*, decency, characteristic of virtuous people; and the lack both of decency and of shamelessness.[27] The sage is here characterised by his *aidōs*, an idea which is absent from our Stoic testimonies. Of course, in Stoicism *aidōs* is a subdivision of *eulabeia*, one of the three *eupatheiai* (positive passions), but Stoics never stressed *aidōs* as a fundamental virtue of the sage.[28] As if he felt himself how surprising

27 Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 2.65: "The words suggest three points for consideration: shameless, and shamefastness, and absence of both shamelessness and shamefastness. Shamelessness, then is peculiar to the worthless man, shamefastness to the man of worth, to feel neither shamefastness nor shamelessness to the man who is incapable of right apprehension and of due assent thereto and this is at this moment the prophet's subject. For he who has not yet attained to the apprehension of good and evil can not possibly be either shameless or shamefast" (τρία κατὰ τὸν τόπον ἐστίν· ἀναισχυντία, αἰδώς, τὸ μήτε ἀναισχυντεῖν μήτε αἰδεῖσθαι·ἀναισχυντία μὲν οὖν ἴδιον φαύλου, αἰδὼς δὲ σπουδαίου, τὸ δὲ μήτε αἰδεῖσθαι μήτε ἀναισχυντεῖν τοῦ ἀκαταλήπτως ἔχοντος καὶ ἀσυγκαταθέτως, περὶ οὗ νῦν ἐστιν ὁ λόγος· ὁ γὰρ μηδέπω κατάληψιν ἀγαθοῦ ἢ κακοῦ λαβὼν οὔτε ἀναισχυντεῖν οὔτε αἰδεῖσθαι δύναται).

28 Diogenes Laertius 7.116: "And accordingly, as under the primary passions are classed certain others subordinate to them, so too is it with the primary eupathies or good emotional states. Thus under wishing they bring well-wishing or benevolence, friendliness, respect, affection; under caution, reverence

this promotion of decency was, as an essential virtue, and of shamelessness as the strongest expression of evil, Philo asks:

> Why then, seeing that results of wickedness are many, has he mentioned only one, that which attends on conduct that is disgraceful, saying "they were not shamed," but not saying "they did not commit injustice," or "they did not sin" or "they did not err"? The reason is not far to seek. *By the only true God, I deem nothing so shameful as supposing that I think and that I feel. My own mind the author of its exertion? How can it be?* (μὰ τὸν ἀληθῆ μόνον θεὸν οὐδὲν οὕτως αἰσχρὸν ἡγοῦμαι ὡς τὸ ὑπολαμβάνειν ὅτι νοῶ ἢ ὅτι αἰσθάνομαι. ὁ ἐμὸς νοῦς αἴτιος τοῦ νοεῖν; πόθεν;) Does it know as to itself, what it is or how it came into existence? Sense-perception the origin of perceiving by sense? How could it be said to be so, seeing that it is beyond the ken either of itself or of the mind? Do you not observe that the mind which thinks that it exercises itself is often found to be without mental power, in scenes of gluttony, drunkenness, folly? Where does the exercise of mind show itself then? And is not perceptive sense often robbed of the power of perceiving?[29]

This text is in my opinion essential to understand Philo's attitude towards scepticism. We must first notice the extreme solemnity of the affirmation, since he swears by God: "By the only true God." The most shameful thing one can imagine is to think that one is the subject of one's thoughts and sensations.

In the most common perception of the history of philosophy, the *cogito* is the one assertion that even the most radical sceptic cannot ruin. Philo seems to have anticipated the Cartesian response to scepticism and to have *avant la lettre* elaborated an objection which is much more ethical than epistemological. To affirm that it is me who thinks is to discard the only virtue evoked about human beings in Paradise, the virtue of decency, to ignore and to betray the content of Revelation. But it also raises a problem of philosophical methodology: what kind of truth can we access by isolating knowledge from ethics? In so many Philonian texts, *aidōs* is the capacity to control the desire for absolute independence and superiority. For Philo, the *cogito* is not the solution of the problem of knowledge, but the supreme fallacy, since it artificially separates knowledge from ethics and metaphysics. More exactly, it supposes that the problem of truth is only epistemological.

In Philo, as, many centuries later in another Jewish thinker, Emmanuel Levinas, the main route to transcendence is ethics, not epistemology. What is essential is my relation to others, not my relation to the representations of the world. Sceptical arguments display the permanent fallibility of the human mind and sensations, but in Philo's thought epistemological arguments are only means to assert something far more essential: the impossibility of considering a human being as the autonomous

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and modesty; under joy, delight, mirth, cheerfulness" (καθάπερ οὖν ὑπὸ τὰ πρῶτα πάθη πίπτει τινά, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον καὶ ὑπὸ τὰς πρώτας εὐπαθείας· καὶ ὑπὸ μὲν τὴν βούλησιν εὔνοιαν, εὐμένειαν, ἀσπασμόν, ἀγάπησιν· ὑπὸ δὲ τὴν εὐλάβειαναἰδῶ, ἀγνείαν· ὑπὸ δὲ τὴν χαρὰν τέρψιν, εὐφροσύνην, εὐθυμίαν). Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Volume II: Books 6–10*, trans. R.D. Hicks, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925.

29 Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 2.68–69, emphasis added.

subject of his or her thoughts. Philo's position is exactly the contrary of Descartes's. Descartes's refutation of the sceptic arguments provides him access to the *cogito*. God is then called upon for help, in order to reconnect the thinking subject with the world. Philo's itinerary is exactly the reverse. He first absolutely rejects the *cogito* as an absurd pretension that ignores the metaphysical situation of the human being. It is precisely this rejection that legitimatises the use of the sceptic tropes. Philo would have probably considered Descartes's method as an artificial manipulation. To disconnect the human mind from intersubjectivity and from a relation to God was, for him, simply impossible.

2.4 From the Negation of the Self to an Ethic of Responsibility

This transfer of the problem from knowledge to ethics and metaphysics implies a difficulty. If I am not the author of my thoughts, how could I be considered responsible for my acts? This is something close to the objection expressed by the Stoics in order to refute their sceptic adversaries. How could I be responsible for my actions if I do not give my assent? Philo's solution to this difficulty is ingenious and original. When God tells him to go and see the Pharaoh, Moses, the most perfect man in Philo's opinion, initially tries to evade this obligation. He pretends that he is not gifted in speech and he suggests that God could choose somebody else. But God, who however understands the process of Moses's *aidōs*, answers:

> Dost thou not know who it is that gave man a mouth, and formed his tongue and throat and all the organism of reasonable speech? It is I Myself (*autos eimi egō*): therefore, fear not, for at a sign from Me all will become articulate and be brought over to method and order, so that none can hinder the stream of words from flowing easily and smoothly from a fountain undefiled. And, if thou shouldst have need of an interpreter, thou wilt have in thy brother a mouth to assist thy service, to report to the people thy words, as thou reportest those of God to him.[30]

Philo wants to make clear that *aidōs*, of which in his opinion scepticism is but a shadowy and perverse figure, cannot be an argument to avoid responsibilities. The human being is not the subject of his or her thoughts and actions, but he or she *is* responsible for them. That is the central paradox of Philo's thought, something close to what will be expressed by Levinas through the expression *difficile liberté*.

A final remark on Philo. If it is an error to think that the human being is the real subject of his or her thoughts, the logical consequence is that the sceptic, in order to be coherent with himself, must disappear as author of his scepticism. In an entirely different philosophical context, it is the conclusion at which Pyrrho arrived, though

30 Philo, *On the Life of Moses*, in *On Abraham. On Joseph. On Moses* (Philo vol. 6), trans. F.H. Colson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 1.84.

he could not prevent his main disciple Timon from creating a fervent cult of personality.[31] Philo never mentions the philosophers or the rabbis whose work he followed. He rarely quotes philosophers, and those he does cite are not always those you might expect. But he is especially harsh with sceptics, whom he faults for their arrogance and aggressiveness. In *Questions and Answers on Genesis* (*Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesin*) 3.33 they are compared to professional warriors, for they believe that philosophy is a permanent attack against other doctrines, without having any idea of the causes and consequences of these fights. His main explanation of that aggressiveness is that it gives them real pleasure. Ismael is both a sceptic and a sophist in his allegorical explanation, since it is said about him in Genesis 16.12 that "'His hands shall be against all men, and all men's hands against him'; for this is just the Sophist's way, with his pretence of excessive open-mindedness, and his love of arguing for the sake of arguing. This character aims his arrows at all the representatives of the sciences, opposing each individually and in common. He is also their common target since they naturally fight back, as though in defence of their own offspring, that is, of the doctrines to which their soul has given birth." Neither is the function of scepticism to allow intellectual victories through a systematic critical attitude. In Philo's opinion, if it is used correctly, i.e., in a way quite different from that of the sceptics themselves, its main aim is to lead one toward metaphysical humility, of which the first and definitive expression must be found in Genesis.

3 From Philo to Augustine

3.1 The Problem of the Self in the *Contra Academicos*

Is it legitimate to say that Philo opened the way to a monotheistic refutation of the *cogito*, an attitude founded on the idea of the impossibility of isolating knowledge from ethics and transcendence? It would be arrogant to presume to provide a complete answer to such a complex question, but it can be of some interest to examine if the transition from Judaism to Christianity entailed a deep modification of Philo's intuition. Here we will tackle only one case, but a very weighty one, that of Augustine, a choice that can seem somewhat paradoxical, since he did not know enough Greek to read Philo and probably felt little empathy for Philo's exegetical method. On the other hand, he could not ignore his existence, since he certainly heard his master Ambrose speak about a thinker whom he plagiarised so frequently. For all these reasons, the confrontation between Augustine and Philo can perhaps help to differentiate what is structural in the monotheistic relation to scepticism and what depends on the cultural and the personal characteristics of the different thinkers.

31 See Diogenes Laertius 9.64; fragment 60 in Fernanda Decleva Caizzi, *Pirrone. Testimonianze* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1981).

It is impossible here to enter into the very complex details of these three books of dialogue. Our aim is rather to try to understand how Augustine himself presented this strange anti-sceptic emergency, apparently more philosophical than theological, that led him from Milan to Cassiciacum. Actually, Augustine evolved in his successive presentations of the *Contra Academicos*. His first letter to Hermogenianus offers many explanations in a quite surprising and somewhat confused way. He says nothing about his conversion, but he uses many philosophical items. Like Cicero who, in a letter to Atticus paradoxically recognised that his refutation of the Stoic gnoseological doctrine was less persuasive than the defence of that doctrine proposed by Antiochus,[32] he admits that he was unable to succeed in overcoming doubt.[33] At the same time, he seems proud of having acted against the New Academy, since he says that in the search for truth, people were paralysed by the idea that a man as subtle as Carneades had been unable to locate it. Last but not least, he again expresses his theory of an esoteric teaching of a dogmatic Platonism in the Academy. He recognises that there was no certainty there, but asserts that it was riskier to let people think that the philosophers of the New Academy were really sceptics, a belief that he presents as a cause for philosophical apathy. He says that to affirm that the Academics were secretly dogmatists was a way, perhaps not entirely convincing, to create a desire to seek out the truth.[34] In this letter, scepticism has an ambiguous status. It is an adversary but also an object of admiration and even of imitation. *Imitatus sum*, he says, since like them he reacted to a situation: they tried to fight naturalist dogmatisms, while he wanted to break the intellectual inertia of his contemporaries.

Fighting scepticism is presented by Augustine as an unavoidable mission if he had any hope of inciting the *inquisitio veri* in them again. It must be noted that for him scepticism is also represented by the Academy, and in fact, solely by the Academy. The easiest explanation of the omission of neo-Pyrrhonism would be to say that Cicero, his main source, had himself ignored Aenesidemus and his followers. But it can be objected that Aulus Gellius, Favorinus, and probably many others had tackled the neo-Pyrrhonist innovations. That Augustine never heard about them is rather improbable. It seems more plausible that he limited himself to the New Academy because he was interested less in scepticism itself than in the strange connection between transcendentalist Platonism and Academic philosophy that he presents as

32 Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 13.19.5: *sunt enim vehementer* πιθανὰ *Antiochia* ("For the views of Antiochus are strongly persuasive"; my translation).

33 Augustine, *Letters* 1.3: "my chief delight is not your having said—with more affection than truth—that I have outdone the Academics, but the fact that I have broken a most hateful bond by which I was held back from tasting the sweetness of philosophy by despair of attaining to truth. And truth is the food of the soul" (*non tam me delectat, ut scribis, quod Academicos uicerim, scribis enim hoc amantius forte quam verius, quam quod mihi abruperim odiosissimum retinaculum, quo a philosophiae ubere desperatione ueri, quod est enim animi pabulum refrenabar*). Augustine, *Letters: Volume 1 (1–82)*, trans. Wilfrid Parsons (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1951).

34 On the Augustinian myth of the secret dogmatism of Arcesilas, see Carlos Lévy, "Scepticisme et dogmatisme dans l'Académie: 'l'ésotérisme' d'Arcésilas," *Revue des Études Latines* 56 (1978): 335–48.

the expression of the *desperatio ueri* that created a distance between himself and philosophy.

Many elements here differ from what we found in Philo. First of all, Augustine is really concerned by the problem of the *auctoritas* of the Platonic school, a problem that for Philo is meaningless. This major Latin concept is present from the beginning of the letter, where Augustine expresses his reverence towards the Platonic school, without excluding the sceptic Academy. But it is also interesting to notice that for him these philosophers were not people in permanent search of truth but people who discouraged others from finding it. On this point Augustine at least unconsciously agrees with neo-Pyrrhonists, who accused the philosophers of the New Academy of practising a negative dogmatism while themselves pretended to be seekers of truth. But Augustine, as the great reader of the Ciceronian *Academica* that he was, could not ignore that Cicero had refuted this charge in advance in the *Lucullus* 109–10. Antipater the Stoic said that "Carneades should at least allow that this principle itself is apprehended, that the wise person holds that nothing is apprehensible." And the Ciceronian answer is: "but just as he holds those as persuasive rather than apprehended principles, so with this one, that nothing is apprehensible."[35] There was no negative dogmatism in the Academy, at least in his Ciceronian version. In order however to fight his own *desperatio ueri*, Augustine needs to counterbalance the negative dogmatism he attributes to the Academics by his assertion of an esoteric dogmatism. Augustine presents himself both as someone who wants to make the most of philosophy and someone who feels responsible for the fate of philosophy among his contemporaries. It was a sort of pastoral function inside the field of philosophy before the religious pastoral functions. Here we are very far from Philo. The similarity between the two thinkers is, however, that in a different way, both hold that the sceptics were not really people in search of the truth.

3.2 From Augustine to Philo?

Things become still more divergent in the *Enchiridion*, written in 422. There is no mention of this kind of pastoral function. Now Augustine essentially speaks about himself. Retrospectively, the *Contra Academicos* becomes the means for fighting the doubts which assailed him, at the moment when he was, he says, *tamquam in ostio*, hesitating in embracing faith. There is no more mention of an uncertain hypothesis about the sceptical Academy, but he stresses the obligation of removing the *desperatio veri*, of which the Academics are said to have been the champions, by all means (*utique*). The strength of this word proves that he passed the stage

35 Cicero, *Lucullus* 110: *sed ut illa habet probabilia non percepta, sic hoc ipsum nihil posse percipi. nam si in hoc haberet cognitionis notam, eadem uteretur in ceteris.* Cicero, *On Academic Scepticism*, trans. Charles Brittain (Indianapolis/Cambrige: Hackett, 2006).

where he believed himself obliged to furnish a justification of his attitude towards the Academy. Now he presents himself as the one who will find a solution to the problem for which the Academics were unable to find a solution. And perhaps most important in the *Enchiridion* is the assertion that if there is no assent, there is no faith: *At si tollatur assensio, fides tollitur; quia sine assensione nihil creditur.*[36] The opposition is now radical, between scepticism—founded on the *desperatio ueri*—and faith, which is truth and hope. No more mention of the *auctoritas* of the Platonic school. In letter 118, written in 410, Augustine says that if Stoics and Epicureans were clearly wrong, the Academics could not assume the role of embodying true reason, since they were lacking humility, *humilitas*, an equivalent of *aidōs* and a bridge between Philo and Cicero. At the end of his life, in the *Retractationes*, Augustine will say that he wasted much time in refuting philosophers who were but impious pagans.[37]

Actually, Augustine seems to have moved from a pre-Cartesian attitude to a post-Philonian one. In *Against the Academics* (*Contra Academicos*), he is in search of the proposition that will escape the sceptic systematic criticism and, as has been

36 Augustine, *Enchiridion* 20.7: "Nor do I propose to solve a very knotty question which perplexed the subtle thinkers of the Academy: whether a wise man should give his assent to anything at all, confronted as he is by error, should he approve what is false; for according to these men all things are obscure or uncertain. That is why during the early days of my conversion, I wrote three volumes, that my progress might not be hindered by objections blocking, so to speak, the doorway. Certainly it was necessary to remove that sense of the hopelessness of attaining to truth which apparently finds support in the arguments of the Academics. Now, among them every error is considered to be a sin, and this they contend can be avoided only by withholding assent altogether. In fact, they say, whosoever assents to things uncertain commits an error. Nothing is certain in human experience because of the impossibility of seeing through the sham that falsehood puts on. And even if one's assumption should happen to be true, they will dispute its truth by arguments extremely subtle but at the same time shameless. However, among us *the just man liveth by faith*. But take away assent, and you take away faith, since without assent one can believe nothing. And there are truths which may not be understood, but unless they are believed, it will be impossible for us to attain to the happy life, which is no other tant life eternal. But I do not know whether we should argue with people who are unaware not only that they are to live forever, but that they are alive now" (*Nec quaestio nodosissima, quae homines acutissimos, Academicos torsit, nunc mihi enodanda suscepta est; utrum aliquid debeat sapiens approbare, ne incidat in errorem, si pro veris approbaverit falsa, cum omnia, sicut affirmant, vel occulta sint, vel incerta. Unde tria confeci volumina in initio conversionis meae, ne impedimento nobis essent, quae tanquam in ostio contradicebant. Et utique fuerat removenda inveniendae desperatio veritatis, quae illorum videtur argumentationibus roborari. Apud illos ergo error omnis putatur esse peccatum, quod vitari non posse contendunt, nisi omnis suspendatur assensio. Errare quippe dicunt eum quisquis assentitur incertis: nihilque certum esse in hominum visis propter indiscretam similitudinem falsi, etiamsi quod videtur, forte sit verum, acutissimis quidem, sed impudentissimis conflictationibus disputant. Apud nos autem, Justus ex fide vivit [Rom. I, 17]. At si tollatur assensio, fides tollitur; quia sine assensione nihil creditur. Et sunt vera quamvis non videantur, quae nisi credantur, ad vitam beatam, quae non nisi aeterna est, non potest perveniri. Cum istis vero utrum loqui debeamus ignoro, qui, non victuros in aeternum, sed in praesentia se vivere nesciunt*). Albert C. Outler, trans., *Augustine: Confessions and Enchiridion* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1955).

37 Augustine, *Retractationes* 13.

stressed by many scholars, he approaches the *cogito*.[38] In the following years, he discovers the autonomy of theological thought in relation to philosophy. Gradually, he realised that the main aim for a Christian was not to achieve an ego with a perfect certitude but to give, through the concept of *humilitas* (a concept rather rare in Ciceronian philosophy), a merely less imperfect evaluation of the human being's ontological situation. It is a task of which Philo would not have disapproved, since he would have interpreted *humilitas* as the Latin equivalent of *aidōs*.

To conclude. Augustine uses the word *moles* to describe scepticism.[39] A *moles* is a huge block, something massive, impressive, that you cannot avoid. At the same time, if you break the *moles* you can make many things with its fragments. The monotheistic Revelation changed everything in the frame of the debate established by Academics and Stoics: truth was no more an object of research, but a concrete text transmitting the word of God. Faith, *pistis*, deprived rational logic of its primacy. But at the same time, monotheism, at least in its principle, does not allow faith to be only a passive orthopraxy. On the contrary, it implies a crucial interrogation of the status of the subject him- or herself. Philo and Augustine—the Augustine of the works later than *Against the Academics*—evidently disagree on many things, but they agree on one point: the epistemological problem cannot be the central one; it cannot have a perfectly autonomous existence. Actually, the main problem is that of *humilitas*/*aidōs*, that is to say the attitude of the individual in front of God and in relation with other human beings.

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38 See Emmanuel Bermon, *Le* cogito *dans la pensée de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Vrin, 2001), 405: "Si l'on ressaisit les principaux traits de cette pensée, le *cogito* revêt trois significations fondamentales: la prise de conscience de *l'ego cogito*, le retour de l'homme intérieur et enfin ce que l'on peut appeler l''orientation transcendantale.'"

39 Augustine, *Against the Academics* 3.30: "It is enough for me to cross this huge obstacle by all the means" (*mihi satis est quoquo modo molem istam transcendere*).

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Stéphane Marchand

Sextus Empiricus's use of *dunamis*

Introduction

The main aim of my previous work on ancient scepticism has been to clarify the nature of the sceptical discourse, namely to show its peculiarity in contrast with the dogmatic discourse. My contention is that there is, at least in Sextus, a systematic approach of sceptical discourse that involves both a theoretical definition and practical applications in his writings.[1]

My purpose in this paper is to focus on the use of a very special word, that is nonetheless very common in Greek literature: *dunamis* ("power," "ability," etc.). The reason for focusing on this word is that, as a noun—or in its adverbial usage *dunamei* ("implicitly," "virtually," "potentially")—it is frequently connected, in Sextus's works, with the *logos skeptikos,* the sceptical discourse. For that reason, even though Sextus does not use the word extensively, its instances are worth examining.

Thanks to the statistical data given by the TLG, we know that the word *dunamis* is slightly under-represented in Sextus's works.[2] The Greek texts of the 2nd century CE are among those that use the word frequently (second only to texts in the 4th century CE), probably due to Galen's work. By comparison, Sextus's usage seems parsimonious. This does not mean that *dunamis* is unimportant to Sextus's work, but on the contrary; he uses it cautiously, choosing it only when it is necessary or significant.

Obviously, *dunamis* is a very common word in Greek, which cannot be reduced to an unequivocal meaning. Thus, not all the instances of *dunamis* in Sextus can be

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1 Stéphane Marchand, "Sextus Empiricus' Style of Writing," in *New Essays on Ancient Pyrrhonism*, ed. Diego E. Machuca (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011), 113–41.

2 By TLG I am referring to the online database *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, directed by Maria Pantella: http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/. The TLG counts 209 instances of the word in Sextus; relatively to the global use of the word in the TLG and the size of Sextus's corpus, 221 instances were expected, and if Sextus had used the term as his contemporaries, he would have used it 263 times.

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connected to a sceptical move. For instance, in grammar *dunamis* means the "phonetic value of sounds of letters," and Sextus mainly refers to this meaning in AM 1.[3]

Similarly, Sextus sometimes uses the word in reference to the Aristotelian conception of *dunamis*, in opposition to *energeia* (activity),[4] although he does not endorse any of the Aristotelian theses. It would be problematic if he did endorse them, since the Aristotelian conception of *dunamis* is roughly dogmatic: it grants existence to something which is not self-evident and is instead the product of dogmatic reasoning. According to this use, something is said to be *dunamei* ("potentially") when "it is capable of being actually" (δυνάμει γάρ ἐστιν ὃ οἷόν τέ ἐστιν ἐνεργείᾳ ὑποστῆναι; PH 2.226). But as Sextus shows in the case of the genus, nothing can exist without being actually something: the potentiality of something is anything but evident, as long as this potentiality has not been actualised.[5]

For the sake of my demonstration, I will call this last sense of *dunamis* the "potentiality-*dunamis*." It derives from the idea that a power can exist without being currently active. It seems clear that this sense rests on the opposition between *dunamis* and *energeia*, which is extraneous to the sceptical project to avoid the endorsement of a philosophical theory. *Prima facie*, it seems coherent that Sextus avoids such a conception, preferring a conception of *dunamis* as a visible and evident power. However, my aim is to question this assumption and to examine whether Sextus in fact totally abandoned the use of a "potentiality-*dunamis*." More precisely, can we find in Sextus something like a *sceptical* conception of *dunamis* as a potentiality?

In order to answer this question, I will focus on three kinds of sceptical uses of the word *dunamis:* (1) to make reference to the activity of scepticism; (2) to indicate the "implicit" or "virtual" content of some expressions or positions; and (3) to express something like a sceptical idea of potentiality.

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3 See Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* 1 (= *Against the Grammarians*), sections 99, 107, 110, 115, 116, 117, 125. In most cases, references to Sextus's works appear in parentheses in the body of the text, abbreviated, respectively, as AM (*Adversus Mathematicos*) and PH (*Pyrrhoniae Hypotyposes*).

4 One of the various changes Aristotle introduced to the philosophical conception of *dunamis* is to connect it clearly with *energeia*. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaph*. 5.7.1017a35: "Again, 'to be' means that some of these statements can be made in virtue of a potentiality and others in virtue of an actuality. For we say that both that which sees potentially and that which sees actually is 'a seeing thing.' And in the same way we call 'understanding' both that which can use the understanding, and that which does; and we call 'tranquil' both that in which tranquillity is already present, and that which is potentially tranquil." Aristotle, *Metaphysics, Volume I: Books 1–9*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933). See, for example, Joseph Souilhé, *Étude sur le terme ΔΥΝΑΜΙΣ dans les dialogues de Platon* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1919), 183; Gwenaëlle Aubry, *Dieu sans la puissance: "dunamis" et "energeia" chez Aristote et chez Plotin* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2006), 92. For a comprehensive analysis of the word, see now David Lefebvre, *Dynamis: sens et genèse de la notion aristotélicienne de puissance* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2018).

5 For this use in PH, see 2.27, 81 (with a distinction between *ousiai*, *sustasei*, *dunamei*; cf. also AM 7.38), 83.

1 The Sceptical Ability

As is well-known, Sextus does not usually refer to scepticism as a philosophy. Instead, he frequently uses the word *agōgē* ("way of life," "conduct") to describe his own stance. Since the sceptical activity mostly consists of the refutation of dogmatic philosophy, or the "so-called philosophy,"[6] it seems quite natural that Sextus avoids the term "philosophy," which carries dogmatic implications.[7] However, we should not expect absolute coherence from Sextus in his usage of the word "philosophy"; such absolute coherence cannot be found in any philosopher or any natural language. However, in the case of Sextus, this lack of coherence is also grounded philosophically: the sceptic should not "fight over phrases" (PH 1.207). For Sextus, the point is that, overall, we understand each other, even if we use words loosely or improperly. For that reason, sometimes Sextus uses the expression "sceptical philosophy."[8] Be that as it may, Sextus's use of *philosophia* to refer to scepticism remains marginal, and he clearly prefers to speak of a *skeptikē agōgē* ("sceptical persuasion"). Roberta Ioli has outlined the reasons why Sextus preferred the word *agōgē* to *hairesis* ("choice," "school"), concluding that scepticism "is a philosophical 'choice' not because of its doctrines or its adherence to a founder, but because of its dialectical attitude leading to *epochē* and *apatheia*,"[9] that is, respectively, to suspension of judgment and impassibility.

Now, the study about the way Sextus describes his own stance should be completed by his definition of scepticism as a *dunamis:* a "faculty," a "capacity," or an "ability." Compared to Sextus's widespread use of *agōgē*, *dunamis* is not frequent, but it appears at two key moments linked to the "general account" of scepticism, where a definition of scepticism and its method is being carried out, without giving attention to the particular theses of the dogmatic philosophy. At AM 7.1, Sextus makes distinguishes between the account of "the general character of the skeptical ability" (Bett's translation of ὁ μὲν καθόλου τῆς σκεπτικῆς δυνάμεως χαρακτὴρ),[10] and its particular application in the specific part of dogmatic philosophy. In PH

6 *hē kaloumenē philosophia* (PH 1.6; 2.1, 12, 205; 3.278); see also the expression *hē legomenē philosophia* ("what they call philosophy"; PH 1.18; 3.1)

7 For the discussion of the relation between philosophy and scepticism with an interpretation of Pyrrhonian scepticism as an anti-rationalism, see primarily Gisela Striker, "Scepticism as a Kind of Philosophy," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 83, no. 2 (August 2001): 113–29.

8 Scepticism is presented in PH 1.4 as one of the "most fundamental kinds of philosophy" (*hai anōtatō philosophiai*), and Sextus can refer to it as *hē skeptikē philosophia* (PH 1.5, 236; 2.6) or *ephektikē philosophia* (i.e., the philosophy of suspension, PH 2.9).

9 Roberta Ioli, "*Agōgē* and Related Concepts in Sextus Empiricus," *Siculorum Gymnasium* N.S. 56, no. 2 (July–December 2003): 422. See also John Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1978), 165–66 and 180–82.

10 Richard Bett, trans., *Sextus Empiricus: Against the Logicians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

1.11, as well, Sextus defines the Pyrrhonian philosopher as "someone who possesses this ability" (ἔστι γὰρ ὁ μετέχων ταύτης τῆς δυνάμεως). The ability in question is described a few lines earlier as "an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all" (δύναμις ἀντιθετικὴ φαινομένων τε καὶ νοουμένων καθ' οἱονδήποτε τρόπον; PH 1.8, in Annas and Barnes's translation).[11] This definition of scepticism describes the real activity of a sceptical philosopher: to set out an opposition of impressions or theses in order to produce the equipollence that leads to the suspension of judgment. This is the work of scepticism, the main activity of Sextus when he engages in philosophy: to show the "opposition of things" (τῆς ἀντιθέσεως τῶν πραγμάτων; PH 1.31).[12]

Why should we understand this activity as a *dunamis?* In PH 1.9, Sextus explains that "we call it an ability not in any fancy sense, but simply in the sense of 'to be able to'" (δύναμιν᾽ μὲν οὖν αὐτὴν καλοῦμεν οὐ κατὰ τὸ περίεργον ἀλλ᾽ ἁπλῶς κατὰ τὸ δύνασθαι). What exactly is a "fancy sense" of *dunamis?* When describing language or style, *periergos* means "sophisticated" or "elaborate."[13] Here, by *kata to periergon*, Sextus refers to a sense of *dunamis* which is tricky or complicated to understand, because it seems to entail a theory of what a capacity is.[14] Hence, for Sextus the sceptical ability does not entail such a dogmatic conception of *dunamis*; it only means that the sceptic is able to have this kind of activity, namely to show the opposition among things and appearances.

Let us turn our attention to the question of my introduction: does this capacity have something to do with the potentiality-*dunamis?* It may be tempting to bridge this use with the idea of potentiality (because a faculty is a kind of potentiality which is not necessarily at work at all times, in the same way as the grammarian is not a grammarian in action at every moment of his life). Nevertheless, we should resist this temptation, considering that the sceptical *dunamis* is more obvious or evident; it merely refers to the fact that someone can do something, just because he has already done it once, without any further claim about the nature or epistemological status of this capacity. In the potentiality-*dunamis* there is, indeed, the idea that a thing has a plurality of possible effects which can be realised under certain conditions, and it does not seem that Sextus implies such an idea with his sceptical *dunamis*.

11 Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes, trans., *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Scepticism* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

12 The main activity and not the unique one, because this description does not fit with what Sextus is doing when he is writing the general account of the scepticism, that is, when he gives an account of his own method.

13 Cf. LSJ, s.v. περίεργος.

14 As has been noted by Fabricius, for Sextus *dunamis* does not carry any distinction with *technēn*, *hikanotēta*, *hexin*...not even with *energeia*. Johann Albert Fabricius, ed., *Sexti Empirici opera: graece et latine* (Leipzig: sumptu librariae Kuehnianae, 1840), 1:9, note r.

This interpretation is confirmed by PH 1.240, where Sextus draws a parallel between the sceptic's use of certain expressions "without holding opinions" (*adoxastōs*) and the Methodics' use of *aperiergōs* (translated by Annas and Barnes as "in a straightforward way").[15] For Sextus, saying something *adoxastōs* means saying something without attaching dogmatic certainty to it; one is not asserting something with assent, but is merely stating what appears to him to be the case (cf., for example, PH 1.15). Hence, in the case of the sceptical ability, we should not understand Sextus as saying that the sceptic possesses something like a "faculty" which would imply a knowledge of hidden things (for example, the nature of the soul, or of the intellect); he is rather stating that we can observe that the sceptic is able to set out oppositions, just because we saw that he has already done such things.

Finally, this meaning seems to be confirmed by the following sentences of PH 1.9, where Sextus explains the meaning of the definition of the sceptical ability ("an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all"). Sextus notes that the final part of this definition, namely "in any way at all" (*kath' oiondēpote tropon*), "can be taken either with 'an ability' (to show that we are to understand the word 'ability' in its straightforward sense, as we said), or else with 'to set out oppositions etc...'."[16] I will say something later about that subtle strategy; for now, it is sufficient to note that there is no accurate or defined realisation of the sceptical capacity—there is no clear definition of what might be a right way or a wrong way to oppose things. Thus, there is also no distinction between what could be a real or an accidental capacity of doing so. This sceptical ability can be realised "in any way at all," and that means that we should consider this term in his loose and non-technical sense, without narrowly defining what a capacity is. Once again, the fact that one has provided oppositions of things in order to provoke *epochē* is the only criterion to decide that one has the capacity to do so.

This first use of *dunamis* shows two important aspects of the scepticism of Sextus Empiricus:

1. The peculiar nature of scepticism as a philosophical stance. Scepticism is a philosophical position, but this position is shaped against more or less all the classical definitions of the philosophy, or at least the theoretical aspects of philosophy. By choosing the word *dunamis* to refer to the sceptical activity, Sextus expresses this very special relationship with philosophy.
2. The concepts used by Sextus are neutral, and he refers to them in a deflationist way. Here the point of interest is not that he uses concepts merely in order to be understood (in a pragmatic way, which is also for Sextus one of the main rules of the sceptical use of language), but that he uses concepts to denote something

15 Ἀδοξάστως is not in the manuscript but comes from the *traditio latina*; the insertion is justified by the previous sentence, πρὸς τῷ καὶ τὸ ἀδόξαστόν τε καὶ ἀδιάφορον τῆς χρήσεως τῶν ὀνομάτων κοινὸν εἶναι τῶν ἀγωγῶν, and by the next sentence as well.

16 τὸ δὲ 'καθ' οἱονδήποτε τρόπον' δύναται προσαρμόζεσθαι καὶ τῇ δυνάμει, ἵνα ἁπλῶς τὸ τῆς δυνάμεως ὄνομα, ὡς εἰρήκαμεν, παραλαμβάνωμεν, καὶ τῷ 'ἀντιθετικὴ φαινομένων τε καὶ νοουμένων'.

evident, facts or *phainomena*, without making dogmatic assertions about things that are not evident.

As we have seen, this use of the word *dunamis* shows that the idea of a sceptical ability is shaped by a rejection of the dogmatic idea of a faculty that could possess some potentialities. Contrary to the dogmatic conception of faculty, the sceptical *dunamis* seems to be the result of a more economic method, based on fact, without any commitment to the structure or the nature of the mind.

2 From implicit to virtual: *dunamis* and the sceptical use of language

We can now switch to another use of *dunamis* by Sextus, which appears mainly in a linguistic context, under the form *dunamei* + saying verbs (*phēmi*, *kaleō*, *legō*, *phaskō*, *apophainō*).[17] This use appears when Sextus aims to explain, clarify, or reformulate an expression *A* by a new formulation *B*, claiming that "by *A* we say *dunamei* —i. e., implicitly or virtually—*B*." Regarding this use, translators hesitated between "implicitly" and "virtually," and we should wonder if this hesitation points towards a more complex interpretation of Sextus's *dunamis*.[18] As I said, the main occurrences of this use of the word is in linguistic contexts with saying verbs. However, we will see that it can be expanded to verbs expressing all kinds of reasoning.[19] It concerns either dogmatic statements or sceptical expressions.

2.1 To explain or refute a statement

2.1.1 The implicit-*dunamis*

The "implicit-*dunamis*" refers to cases where Sextus shows that an expression *A* can be replaced by an expression *B*. This use is not necessarily negative or critical. In AM 11.8–10, for instance, Sextus uses *dunamei* or *kata dunamin* also to express semantic equivalences: in that case it is the contention that for the Stoics the definition is the

17 There are 14 instances of this construction with saying verbs (of the 209 occurrences of *dunamis* in Sextus).

18 Annas and Barnes choose to render it systematically by "implicitly"; Pellegrin and Bury seem to hesitate between both. See Pierre Pellegrin, trans., *Sextus Empiricus. Esquisses pyrrhoniennes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1997); R.G. Bury, trans., *Sextus Empiricus. Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933).

19 Cf. all the instances where Sextus uses verbs like *logizomai* (PH 1.69), *antilegō* (PH 2.155, 193), *tithēmi* (PH 1.195, AM 7.399, 8.40), etc.

same thing as a universal proposition: there is a difference between both solely in the syntax (*psilēi tēi suntaxei*), or in the words (*tēi phōnēi*).[20]

This kind of usage does not entail the idea of any potentiality. A potential meaning implies that a word can have an additional meaning beyond that which is being used. However, Sextus is not arguing that the dogmatic expression in question can have another meaning, nor even that it does have a plurality of meanings; he is merely saying that the new formulation is only a reformulation of a dogmatic thesis. This move does not even necessarily entail a critical purpose, as it can be a simple reformulation of a thesis, as for example in the case of Protagoras (PH 1.216), when Sextus explains that saying that man is the measure of things is implicitly saying (that is, is equivalent to saying) that man is a criterion of all things, which can be seen (falsely) as a common feature with the sceptics.[21]

2.1.2 The virtual-*dunamis*

The second case, which I will call "virtual-*dunamis*," is used to show the logical consequence of a position. Sextus points out the virtual consequence of an assumption, mainly in order to show a problem or a contradiction in the thesis discussed. In the previous case, the *dunamis* was semantic, whereas in this case, it is a logical consequence, or an argumentative consequence. There is no big difference between those two cases, and we can say that the meaning of *dunamis* is the same in both, but that Sextus uses the word in two different contexts.

The virtual-*dunamis* is linked to logical context: this use is a kind of tool which allows to show the implication of a position, mainly in order to show a problem or a contradiction in the thesis discussed. That is the case, for instance, concerning the notion of place in AM 10.13 when Sextus shows that the person who says that a part of place exists implicitly means (δυνάμει ὁ λέγων…τοῦτό φησιν) that the place exists.[22] In that case, the expression with *dunamei* is a polemical tool to display the theoretical implications of formulations which could appear unproblematic. It is mainly used in order to realise the sceptic economical strategy which does not aim to expose detailed arguments or to be exhaustive in argumentation, but to settle for arguments sufficient to provoke suspension of judgment, which is part of a strategy of providing an outline. Thus, Sextus frequently shows that an argument or a definition can be used to attain several aims, because it refutes *dunamei* a given argument. For

20 See also AM 8.236, where *kata men tēn dunamin* is opposed to *kata de tēn prophoran* ("regarding the explicit statement").

21 See also, again on Protagoras, AM 8.393.

22 See also AM 2.81, where Sextus shows the circular definition of the *telos* of the rhetoric.

instance, the arguments against the difference between conclusive and inconclusive arguments "implicitly argued" against deficient arguments (PH 2.155).[23]

In a similar fashion, Sextus reports the fact that, for Chrysippus, the dog "is virtually reasoning" by using the "fifth unprovable." Although in those passages Annas and Barnes translate *dunamis* by "implicitly," we can understand why certain translators choose "virtually." Here, *dunamis* seems to be a little more complex than in pure semantic cases because the problem is not only establishing a semantic equivalence, but also determining if the positions taken involve certain consequences or effects that are not clearly involved in the explicit position. In those cases, "virtuality" is involved in so far as the subject is not really conscious that he is doing what he is really doing or saying. That is clearly the case for Chrysippus's dog—which is reasoning, even though it is not conscious that it is reasoning—or for Carneades, who is using *dunamei* as a criterion because he is seeking happiness (AM 7.166).

Although both uses of the of *dunamis* (the linguistic "implicitly" and the logical "virtually") are very close, we still need to differentiate between them, because in the virtual-*dunamis* Sextus seems to be aware that the expression *A* is not strictly equivalent to *B*, but that the fact of claiming *A* has also the effect of claiming *B*. In any case, neither of these uses implies the potentiality-*dunamis*, because the potentiality-*dunamis* entails the fact that under certain conditions *A can* be *B*, whereas in the implicit-*dunamis* or the virtual-*dunamis*, one who admits *A* necessarily admits *B*.

2.2 In Sceptical Contexts

2.2.1 To Explain Sceptical Expressions

Most of the instances of *dunamis* appear in sceptical contexts, in which Sextus presents the meaning of the sceptical stance in PH 1, and especially in the part devoted to the sceptical expressions (PH 1.188–thrice; 195, 199, 203, 208). In such a usage, Sextus explains the meaning of a sceptical expression (*phōnē*) which is "elliptical" (*ellipēs*; 1.188), and therefore requires an explanation in order to ensure the reader's nuanced and non-dogmatic understanding. Since the sceptical use of language has renounced to the myth of a perfect *akribeia*, namely to say things exactly as they are, and promotes a pragmatic use of language where mutual comprehension or understanding is the only rule, the sceptic can use expressions which can be seen as incomplete and even ambiguous, provided that the reader understands his

23 Also PH 2.112, 193; 3.37; AM 7.91, 399; AM 1.96. See also, in a sceptical context, PH 1.11, where Sextus says that the concept of sceptical persuasion virtually defines "the Pyrrhonian philosopher."

intention. All the sceptical utterances can be seen as a form of *katachrēsis*, a loose form of expression with an implicit content that can be elucidated.[24]

In those cases, the formula *dunamei* + saying verbs is used to explicate what was implicit in the expression. For example, in PH 1.188 Sextus affirms that "when we say *ou mallon* ('no more'), we implicitly say 'no more this than that'."[25] Regarding the expression *ou mallon*, one can perfectly see how incomplete it is, since it introduces a comparison which is not explicit in the expression. In order to avoid a dogmatic interpretation of *ou mallon* which could denote an absolute indetermination of things—as is (maybe?) the case in Pyrrho's thinking—Sextus's explanation gives sense to the expression in the context of *isostheneia* where two propositions or theses are opposed and have the same power of persuasion, which leads to *epochē*.[26]

In the same fashion, Sextus presents sceptical assertions under the seal of relativisation or subjectivisation: if one can believe that the sceptic is making objective assertions, we need to assume that he is saying *implicitly* "relatively to me," as in PH 1.199 or PH 1.135.[27] Besides, one can wonder if all the sceptical discourse, not merely the sceptical expressions, are to be interpreted as a *katachrēsis*, that is an approximation, carrying that kind of *dunamis* which is not systematically expressed for the reason that, once again, the main aim of the sceptical discourse is not to be accurate or precise but to be understood. Now, if Sextus had written his work trying to express exactly all his positions without leaving any room for approximation, aside from the fact that this project would have been impossible, it would have been unreadable, or at least more difficult to read. We have an example of an effort to completely express the *dunamis* of the expression *panti logōi logos isos antikeitai* ("opposed to every account there is an equal account") in PH 1.203, and it includes a pretty weighty sentence: "to every account I have scrutinised which purports to establish something in dogmatic fashion, there appears to me to be opposed another account, purporting to establish something in dogmatic fashion, equal to it in convincingness or lack of convincingness."[28] One can say that all the procedure of ren-

24 See PH 1.135.

25 ὅταν εἴπωμεν 'οὐ μᾶλλον,' δυνάμει φαμὲν 'οὐ μᾶλλον τόδε ἢ τόδε'.

26 In AM 1.315 Sextus mentions several senses (*dunamis*) of the *ou mallon:* "How will they [*sc.* the sceptic] understand what force the phrase 'no more' has among sceptics, whether it is interrogative or declaratory, and for what it is used, for the external object or the feeling we have?" (ἢ ποῦ συνήσουσι τίνα δύναμιν ἔχει παρὰ σκεπτικοῖς ἡ 'οὐδὲν μᾶλλον' φωνή, πότερον πυσματική ἐστιν ἢ ἀξιωματική, καὶ ἐπὶ τίνος τάσσεται, ἆρά γε τοῦ ἐκτὸς ὑποκειμένου ἢ τοῦ περὶ ἡμᾶς πάθους;). English in D.L. Blank, trans., *Sextus Empiricus*, *Against the Grammarians* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998), 65.

27 PH 1.199: "someone who says 'every thing is undetermined' also signifies according to us 'relatively to me' or 'as it appears to me'" (οὕτως ὁ λέγων 'πάντα ἐστὶν ἀόριστα' συσσημαίνει 'καθ' ἡμᾶς' ἢ 'ὡς πρὸς ἐμὲ' ἢ 'ὡς ἐμοὶ φαίνεται'); PH 1.135: "we use 'is' loosely, in the sense of 'appears', implicitly saying 'everything appears relative'" (τῷ 'ἔστι' καταχρώμεθα ἀντὶ τοῦ 'φαίνεται', δυνάμει τοῦτο λέγοντες 'πρός τι πάντα φαίνεται').

28 δυνάμει τοῦτό φημι 'παντὶ τῷ ὑπ' ἐμοῦ <ἐξητασμένῳ> λόγῳ, ὃς κατασκευάζει τι δογματικῶς, ἕτερος λόγος κατασκευάζων τι δογματικῶς, ἴσος αὐτῷ κατὰ πίστιν καὶ ἀπιστίαν, ἀντικεῖσθαι φαίνεταί

dering the sceptical discourse explicit is in reality a process of relativisation: for the expression *panti logōi logos isos antikeitai*, the relativisation consists of reminding that:

1. This principle—which is the "chief constitutive of scepticism" (cf. PH 1.12)—should not be interpreted as an assertion about all possible *logoi*—that would be a dogmatic assertion comparable with the position of Protagoras—but as an experimental principle grounded on the observation that *for now* the *logoi* examined are equal in convincingness.[29]
2. Furthermore, this principle is not relevant for all *logoi,* but only for the dogmatic *logoi*, and in this case the *logos hos kataskeuazei ti dogmatikōs*, that is the *logos* which establishes something dogmatically. Hence, not all *logoi* are dogmatic, or as Sextus says, "posit as real the things they hold beliefs about"; the sceptical expression, and more generally the sceptical *logos* is just an avowal, or a subjective expression of what is apparent to the sceptic (cf. PH 1.15).
3. This opposition constitutes the third point of explicitation: the expression of the equipollence of the *logoi* does not claim that in reality, or objectively, the *logoi* are equal, but just that they seem or appear to be equal, which is sufficient for the suspension of judgment.
4. Finally, to elucidate the expression, we must recall that the equality in question has a scope; it is not an absolute equality, but an equality in persuasion, which is necessary and sufficient to the suspension of assent, because the assent is given relative to the convincingness of one's *logos* or proposition.

Once again, let us turn now to the question of the potentiality-*dunamis:* are those instances cases of potentiality? Admittedly, one could say that this use is very common and that we encounter instances of it in non-philosophical contexts which have nothing to do with the Aristotelian conception of *dunamis*. But this answer would be a lazy one; we can imagine that—even in non-philosophical contexts—one can use both a sophisticated conception of *dunamis* and of the idea of potentiality. The essential argument is that, if any potentiality were involved, it would mean that a sceptical expression would not necessarily have a sceptical meaning. However, that is not what Sextus says. Rather, he claims that those expressions have a constant meaning for a sceptic, even if it is possible that those expressions have several sceptical meanings. It seems, then, that in this case the *dunamis* has nothing to do with potentiality,

μοι', ὡς εἶναι τὴν τοῦ λόγου προφορὰν οὐ δογματικὴν ἀλλ' ἀνθρωπείου πάθους ἀπαγγελίαν, ὅ ἐστι φαινόμενον τῷ πάσχοντι.

29 Following the reading of Annas and Barnes, who print ἐξητασμένῳ instead of the ζητουμένῳ in Mutschmann and Mau's 1958 Teubner edition.

and is rather to be connected to the previous linguistic meaning of *dunamis* as "a meaning" of word, that is the "implicit-*dunamis*."[30]

Thus, this usage of *dunamis* remains neutral, and does not carry anything like a potentiality. It is just a way to express two facts: the fact that the expression or the sentence does not express explicitly or verbatim something which it implicitly contains, and the fact that the implicit formulation is equivalent to the explicit one.

However, it retains two problematic elements.

2.2.2 Two Apparently Problematic Instances

2.2.2.1 PH 1.22

> We say, then, that the standard of the Sceptical persuasion (*tēs skeptikēs agōgēs*) is what is apparent (*to phainomenon*), implicitly (*dunamei*) meaning by this the appearances; because, since the *phantasia* depends on passive and unwilled feelings, it is not an object of investigation.[31]

Annas and Barnes's translation, quoted here (slightly modified), has "implicitly." Pellegrin's French translation reads "virtuellement," and Rachel Barney in her paper on Sextean appearances likewise translates "virtually."[32]

Formally speaking, the expression is the same as in the previous instances. However, its meaning is not exactly the same: Sextus does not say that *to phainomenon* is an elliptical expression whose complete meaning should be *tēn phantasian*; neither does he explain (like in the dogmatic contexts above) a theoretical implication of *phainomenon*. If we want to connect it to some of the previous instances, it is nearer to the passage where Sextus uses *dunamis* to provide a reformulation semantically equivalent to the expression, without any polemic intention.

Yet it seems to me that this use is quite different: Sextus offers a reformulation of a crucial term in the sceptical vocabulary, using a term that is very common in dogmatic philosophy: *phantasia*. Thus, to explain the sceptical concept of *phainomenon,* he translates it using a dogmatic term. For that reason, he has to clarify his own position by specifying what he has in mind with this comparison. Hence, we should understand the end of the sentence ἐν πείσει γὰρ καὶ ἀβουλήτῳ πάθει κειμένη ἀζήτητός ἐστιν, as a reformulation: "because, since the *phantasia* depends on passive and unwilled feelings, it is not an object of investigation."

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30 See LSJ, s.v. δύναμις (III): "force or meaning of a word"; or *Diccionario Griego-Español* (http://dge.cchs.csic.es/xdge/), s.v. δύναμις (III): "c. sent. de valor y equivalencia. 1. ref. conceptos y palabras: *valor, significado, sentido;* τὴν δύναμιν ἔχειν *tener el valor de, equivaler, significar* Th. 5.20."

31 κριτήριον τοίνυν φαμὲν εἶναι τῆς σκεπτικῆς ἀγωγῆς τὸ φαινόμενον, δυνάμει τὴν φαντασίαν οὕτω καλοῦντες· ἐν πείσει γὰρ καὶ ἀβουλήτῳ πάθει κειμένη ἀζήτητός ἐστιν.

32 Cf. Rachel Barney, "Appearances and Impressions," *Phronesis* 37, no. 3 (January 1992): 301n25, 303. See also Bury's translation: "giving this name to what is virtually the sense-presentation."

What about *dunamei* in this case? Sextus does not say that the word *phainomenon* can have this meaning under certain conditions. Rather, he claims that *phainomenon* does contain the sense of *phantasia*, if we agree to conceive the *phantasia* as a pure passive process. For Barney, this *dunamei* means "virtually": that *phainomenon* would not be identical to *phantasia*, but would signify a restriction "to the assent-compelling content of *phantasia*." Thus, Barney believes that *dunamei* implies in this context that not every *phantasia* is identical to *phainomenon*, but only some kind of *phantasia*. By contrast, I think that *dunamei* here is the expression of the fact that for Sextus we can establish a relation between the sceptic *phainomenon* and the dogmatic *phantasia*, yet with the proviso that we should understand the *phantasia* without embedding any kind of activity.

Thus, despite the apparent peculiarity of this instance, PH 1.22 is a case of "implicit-*dunamis*."

2.2.2.2 PH 1.195

Let us turn to PH 1.195:

> Now it is, I think, clear that these phrases (*sc.* "perhaps," "maybe," and "possibly") are indicative of non-assertion (*aphasias*). For instance, someone who says "perhaps it is" implicitly (*dunamei*) posits what is thought to conflict with it, namely "perhaps it is not," insofar as he does not make an affirmation about its being so.[33]

Annas and Barnes, in their choice of one single translation of *dunamei*, use "implicitly." It is true that Sextus explained at the beginning of the chapter that "we take 'perhaps' and 'perhaps not' in the sense of 'perhaps it is and perhaps it is not'" (PH 1.194), in order to indicate the state of non-assertion (*aphasia*) of the sceptic. But, at present, it seems that we are not facing a simple case of semantic equivalence. As a matter of fact, if this instance of *dunamis* meant "implicitly," it would signify that the meaning of "perhaps" for a sceptic is equivalent to "perhaps not." Yet, this is in no way what Sextus is saying. Rather, his purpose is to explain that by saying "perhaps" he is also saying *at the same time* "perhaps not," in the very fact that by writing "perhaps" he is not making any dogmatic claim about the nature of reality. Thus, in this case to posit *dunamei B* is to posit *B at the same time* as saying *A*. The last sentence cannot replace the former sentence: to properly understand Sextus, we have to understand at the same time *A* and *B*, since the sceptic neither posits nor rejects any dogmatic thesis (cf. PH 1.193). This seems to be a case of virtuality, in a certain manner similar to the logical implication. But once again, the difference between those two uses of *dunamei*, "virtually" and "implicitly," is thin, and we must

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33 ὅτι μέντοι αὗται αἱ φωναὶ ἀφασίας εἰσὶ δηλωτικαί, πρόδηλον, οἶμαι. ὁ γοῦν λέγων 'τάχα ἔστιν' δυνάμει τίθησι καὶ τὸ μάχεσθαι δοκοῦν αὐτῷ, τὸ 'τάχα μὴ εἶναι', τῷ μὴ διαβεβαιοῦσθαι περὶ τοῦ εἶναι αὐτό.

acknowledge that it does not entail the idea of potentiality, because the potentiality entails the idea of a power which can be inefficient at least at a given time.

3 Toward a Sceptical-Potentiality?

3.1 The potentiality of the sceptical expressions

So far, it seems that *dunamis* is never used by Sextus in order to express some sceptical potentiality. Yet, my contention is that in the idea of potentiality within the notion of δύναμις there is something that can be worthwhile for a sceptical approach.

To introduce this use, we can return for a while to PH 1.9, where Sextus explains that the expression "in any way at all" (*kath' oiondēpote tropon*) "can be taken" (*dunatai prosarmozesthai*) either with one word or with another. Sextus points out that such an expression has the potential to be interpreted or understood under both constructions, without mentioning which one is wrong or true; they are both true, or better, both are efficient depending on the argumentative situation.

Admittedly, here Sextus does not use *dunamis* or *dunamei* but the verb *dunatai* (to be able). Nevertheless, this meaning of *dunamis* is precisely connected to the verb, in order to express the idea of possibility or potentiality carried by such a verb. Thus, in that case, we are faced with a potentiality-*dunamis*. Sextus contends that *both* constructions are possible but not necessary: "in any way at all" (*kath' oiondēpote tropon*) can be constructed either with "an ability" (*tēi dunamei*), or with "to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of" (τῷ 'ἀντιθετικὴ φαινομένων τε καὶ νοουμένων'). There is no primacy of one construction over the other; both are right. Moreover, proposing one construction does not prevent him from proposing the other construction. Thanks to the potentiality-*dunamis*, the sceptic has a very efficient and economical tool that allows him to state phrases with a plurality of effects, granting that a given interpretation of a phrase does not necessarily exclude another interpretation. Thus, a phrase or an object *A* which is *potentially B* can be both *A* and *B* at the same time, or can have only the effect of *A* or *B* under certain conditions.

This sense of *dunamis* appears at the key passage PH 1.15:

> But then, if someone who holds beliefs posits what he believes as being the case, while the Sceptic utters his own expressions in such a way that potentially (*dunamei*) they are bracketed by themselves, then he cannot be said to hold beliefs in uttering them.[34]

34 πλὴν ἀλλ' εἰ ὁ δογματίζων τίθησιν ὡς ὑπάρχον τοῦτο ὃ δογματίζει, ὁ δὲ σκεπτικὸς τὰς φωνὰς αὐτοῦ προφέρεται ὡς δυνάμει ὑφ' ἑαυτῶν περιγράφεσθαι, οὐκ ἂν ἐν τῇ προφορᾷ τούτων δογματίζειν λεχθείη. English translation in Luca Castagnoli, *Ancient Self-Refutation: The Logic and History of the Self-Refutation Argument from Democritus to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), T98 (p. 271).

I have deliberately switched to Luca Castagnoli's translation because Annas and Barnes rendered the term once again with "implicitly." But, Castagnoli's subtle interpretation shows that here *dunamei* has a different sense from the other passages. By *dunamei* Sextus is not saying that the sceptical expressions are always self-referential (that would be the case if *dunamis* meant "implicitly" or "virtually"), but that they *can* be self-referential, if they are interpreted dogmatically, that is as "absolutely true."[35] This interpretation is central to Castagnoli's position, since his aim is to show that Sextus does not promote the virtue of self-reversal or self-consumption of the sceptical arguments; so the so-called self-reversal function of the sceptical arguments is only a potentiality of the sceptical expressions, when they are interpreted in a dogmatic way. It is thus a potentiality of those expressions, but not a stable virtue, a quality, or a capacity of those expressions.

Besides, Castagnoli emphasises that there are, in the same context, two uses of *dunamai* in PH 2.188 and AM 8.480 that share the same idea of potentiality regarding the idea that some *logoi* can cancel themselves in certain conditions.[36] In both cases, as Castagnoli rightly emphasises,[37] Sextus uses the verb *dunamai* to express a potentiality or a possibility, whereas he does not use it concerning the simile of the fire or the purgative drugs: the fact that they operate against themselves is not a mere possibility, but a stable or constant capacity. This is also the case in PH 1.206, where Sextus says that sceptical expressions can be cancelled by themselves (ὅπου γε καὶ ὑφ' ἑαυτῶν αὐτὰς ἀναιρεῖσθαι λέγομεν δύνασθαι).

Even if one does not agree with Castagnoli's powerful and sophisticated interpretation, we can notice that this interpretation of the sense of *dunamei* is also shared by McPherran—with a totally different aim—but with the same idea that here *dunamei* has a peculiar meaning.[38] This meaning cannot be reduced to the implicit-*dunamis* or the virtual-*dunamis* because the self-cancellation of the sceptical utterance is linked to the interpretation of this utterance. If someone takes a sceptical

35 Castagnoli, 274.

36 AM 8.480 explains how the argument against demonstration can cancel itself: "so too the argument against demonstration, after doing away with all demonstration, can cancel itself as well" (οὕτω δύναται καὶ ὁ κατὰ τῆς ἀπόδειξιν λόγος μετὰ τὸ πᾶσαν ἀπόδειξιν ἀνελεῖν καὶ ἑαυτὸν συμπεριγράφειν); PH 2.188 gives the same idea: "Arguments, like purgative drugs which evacuate themselves along with the matters present in the body, can actually cancel themselves along with the other arguments which are said to be probative" (δύνανται δὲ οἱ λόγοι, καθάπερ καὶ τὰ καθαρτικὰ φάρμακα ταῖς ἐν τῷ σώματι ὑποκειμέναις ὕλαις ἑαυτὰ συνεξάγει, οὕτω καὶ αὐτοὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις λόγοις τοῖς ἀποδεικτικοῖς εἶναι λεγομένοις καὶ ἑαυτοὺς συμπεριγράφειν).

37 Castagnoli, *Ancient Self-Refutation*, 291n129.

38 Mark L. McPherran, "Skeptical Homeopathy and Self-Refutation," *Phronesis* 32, no. 3 (1987): 295n14: "By *hōs dunamei* Sextus simply means that—unlike the Dogmatist—he utters his maxim in full awareness and acceptance of the fact that if his claims should happen to represent true propositions they would be *capable of* entailing their own falsehood." Pierre Pellegrin translates in the same fashion by "elles portent en elles-mêmes en puissance leur propre limitation."

utterance as it should be, that is as a subjective avowal, there is no need of a self-cancellation for the very reason that such an avowal does not entail any belief.

These interpretations reveal the sense in which a *dunamis*-potentiality can be worthwhile to the sceptical stance. Scepticism is not a philosophical system—even if it can appear as somewhat systematic; it has no dogmatic principle, nor any fixed criterion to determine what is true or false. Moreover, scepticism is shaped against all kinds of dogmatism, not only the kind of dogmatism that prevailed in Sextus's time. Thus, this kind of *dunamis*-potentiality seems to be an interesting adaptable tool, a means to show what an argument or an interpretation can do without asserting that it always has such a power.

3.2 The *dunamis* of the *logos*

So far, it might seem that this sense of *dunamis* remains scarce and exotic. However, my purpose is now to show that one can connect this sense with another use of *dunamis*, which shares the same sense and the same link with *dunamis* and the verb *dunamai* in order to express the polymorphic power of the sceptical argumentation.

This use can be seen in the well-known text of PH 3.280–81, which is a crucial text since it describes precisely the sceptical use of the *logos:*

> Sceptics are philanthropic and wish to cure by argument, as far as they can (*kata dunamin*), the conceit and rashness of the Dogmatists. Just as doctors for bodily afflictions have remedies which differ in potency, and apply severe remedies to patients who are severely afflicted and milder remedies to those mildly afflicted, so Sceptics propound arguments which differ in strength (*kata ischun logous*). They employ weighty arguments, capable of vigorously rebutting (*kai eutonōs anaskeuazein dunamenois*) the dogmatic affliction of conceit, against those who are distressed by a severe rashness, and they employ milder arguments against those who are afflicted by a conceit which is superficial and easily cured and which can be rebutted by a milder degree of plausibility. This is why those with a Sceptical impulse do not hesitate sometimes to propound arguments which are sometimes weighty in their plausibility, and sometimes apparently rather weak. They do this deliberately, since often a weaker argument is sufficient for them to achieve their purpose.[39]

39 Ὁ σκεπτικὸς διὰ τὸ φιλάνθρωπος εἶναι τὴν τῶν δογματικῶν οἴησίν τε καὶ προπέτειαν κατὰ δύναμιν ἰᾶσθαι λόγῳ βούλεται. καθάπερ οὖν οἱ τῶν σωματικῶν παθῶν ἰατροὶ διάφορα κατὰ μέγεθος ἔχουσι βοηθήματα, καὶ τοῖς μὲν σφοδρῶς πεπονθόσι τὰ σφοδρὰ τούτων προσάγουσι, τοῖς δὲ κούφως τὰ κουφότερα, καὶ ὁ σκεπτικὸς οὕτως διαφόρους ἐρωτᾷ [καὶ] κατὰ ἰσχὺν λόγους, καὶ τοῖς μὲν ἐμβριθέσι καὶ εὐτόνως ἀνασκευάζειν δυναμένοις τὸ τῆς οἰήσεως τῶν δογματικῶν πάθος ἐπὶ τῶν σφοδρᾷ τῇ προπετείᾳ κεκακωμένων χρῆται, τοῖς δὲ κουφοτέροις ἐπὶ τῶν ἐπιπόλαιον καὶ εὐίατον ἐχόντων τὸ τῆς οἰήσεως πάθος καὶ ὑπὸ κουφοτέρων πιθανοτήτων ἀνασκευάζεσθαι δυναμένων. διόπερ ὁτὲ μὲν ἐμβριθεῖς ταῖς πιθανότησιν, ὁτὲ δὲ καὶ ἀμαυροτέρους φαινομένους οὐκ ὀκνεῖ λόγους συνερωτᾶν ὁ ἀπὸ τῆς σκέψεως ὁρμώμενος, ἐπίτηδες, ὡς ἀρκοῦντας αὐτῷ πολλάκις πρὸς τὸ ἀνύειν τὸ προκείμενον.

The crucial expression here is *kata dunamin*, translated by Annas and Barnes as "as far as they can." This translation understands this expression as a *caveat*, a manner to express a "cautious attitude towards his therapeutic arguments".[40] My contention is that another understanding of this expression is possible, where *dunamis* is linked with the sceptic potentiality.[41]

To tell the truth, this expression is rather complex. At first sight, it seems obvious to me that it establishes a relation between the *dunamis* and the idea of the power of argumentation, in the same way than Sextus, in this text, speaks of "remedies which differ in potency" (*kata megethos echousi boēthēmata*) or arguments "which differ in strength" (*kata ischun logous*). We may find this meaning of *dunamis* in Sextus's works, in particular passages about power of argumentation as in PH 1.35 and 39. This interpretation prevails in Pellegrin's translation "le sceptique… veut guérir par la puissance de l'argumentation."[42] On such interpretation, the meaning of the passage is that the sceptic wishes to cure by argument *according to its power*. Such an interpretation assumes that λογοῦ ("of the argument") is implied with κατὰ δύναμιν, in order to express a measure of the power of the argument, which is certainly one of the purposes of this passage. If so, it should be a quite different use from what we call the potentiality-*dunamis*.

Let us dig deeper into the power in question. One can wonder from which point of view this power is determined: is Sextus thinking about an objective measure of the argument, namely the fact that an argument is sound or unsound, valid or invalid? If that is the case, it means that Sextus does accept the fact that certain arguments are objectively good and others bad, which seems incompatible with the sceptical stance. For that reason, it seems preferable to consider that here Sextus is not speaking about the logical validity of the argument he uses in order to produce equipollence, but rather about the psychological effect an argument can have on the dogmatist to whom he is speaking.[43] This interpretation is confirmed by the very fact that

40 Diego E. Machuca, "Argumentative Persuasiveness in Ancient Pyrrhonism," *Méthexis* 22 (2009): 107.

41 Indeed, this expression is an old one: it can be tracked back to Hesiod (*Works and Days* 336) with this sense; for the history of this expression, see Lefebvre, *Dynamis*, 37–176. However, the other instances of the expression in Sextus (AM 10.340 and 342) do not have this sense, and are opposed to *kat' entelecheian* in an Aristotelian fashion. Obviously, this is not an impediment that the expression has in PH 3.280 the sense "as far as he can," it just underlines that, if it does, it should be a *hapax*. There is also another instance in AM 11.10, cf. above, sec. 2.1.1.

42 See the similar construction in Rafael Sartorio Maulini: "el escéptico, porque es filántropo, desea curar por medio del discurso la arrogancia y precipitación de los dogmáticos con arreglo a su intensidad." Rafael Sartorio Maulini, trans., *Sexto Empírico: Hipotiposis Pirrónicas* (Madrid: Akal, 1996).

43 For this position, see the central paper of Machuca, "Argumentative Persuasiveness." See also Svavar Hrafn Svavarsson, "Sextus Empiricus on Persuasiveness and Equipollence," in *Strategies of Argument: Essays in Ancient Ethics, Epistemology, and Logic*, ed. Mi-Kyoung Lee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 356–73; Diego E. Machuca, "Again on Sextus on Persuasiveness and Equipollence," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 99, no. 2 (June 2017): 212–28.

Sextus is primarily interested by the definition of the power of an argument in terms of plausibility (*pithanotēs*), since the equipollence or *istostheneia* is expressed in terms of "equality with regard to being convincing or unconvincing" (PH 1.10).[44] It seems, then, that an argument does not have any objective and stable power, but a variety of powers.

If I return to my distinction, I should say that these powers are not implicit (they are not the same power), nor are they virtual (they cannot be effective at the same time); they are potentialities which depend greatly on the context of the argumentation and the beliefs of the person to whom such argument is given. Thus, it seems that the fact that a weighty argument can vigorously rebut (*eutonēs anaskeuazein dunamenois*) the dogmatic affliction of conceit can be understood as a potentiality of this argument. And the *kata dunamin* can express the fact that the sceptic use of *logos* is an attempt to use the argument according to those potentialities.

Perhaps this interpretation is grounded in a fundamental equivocality of the word *dunamis* and its cognates. It is true that we can also find in Sextus instances of *dunamis* which express the objective power of something, like the power of the syllogism (PH 2.235; see also 2.143, concerning the power of the assumptions), of nourishment (1.53; also 1.131), the power of changing external objects (1.103), the medicinal powers (1.133), and so on.[45] But it seems that in those cases, Sextus is referring to dogmatic theory, and often to a medical theory of power. However, when he speaks about the *dunamis* of the sceptical arguments, we are dealing with—according to my interpretation—a different appreciation of power, where potentiality is involved.

To conclude, I would like to consider briefly two passages where Sextus speaks about the *dunamis* of the sceptical arguments, and more precisely of the ten modes of Aenesidemus. While introducing them, he expresses doubts about their number (*peri tou plēthous*) and power (*peri tou dunameōs*): "they may be unsound (*sathrous*), and there may be more than those I shall describe" (PH 1.35). Admittedly, the word *sathros* seems to refer to a kind of objective appreciation of the validity of the argument. Yet, the exposition of the tropes does not actually contain any objective evaluation of this kind. Rather, Sextus introduces the whole exposition of the ten tropes as a description of their *dunamis* (*peri de tēs dunameōs tade*). By the way, Sextus is often ambiguous regarding the position of Aenesidemus from whom he borrows many arguments, underlining that they should be abbreviated or completed and criticising his Heraclitean affiliation.[46] As far as the *dunamis* of the tropes is concerned, one can consider that he is offering an overview of the potentiality of this

44 Ἰσοσθένειαν δὲ λέγομεν τὴν κατὰ πίστιν καὶ ἀπιστίαν ἰσότητα, ὡς μηδένα μηδενὸς προκεῖσθαι τῶν μαχομένων λόγων ὡς πιστότερον.

45 See also PH 3.15, 60.

46 Carlos Lévy, "Pyrrhon, Énésidème et Sextus Empiricus: La question de la légitimation historique dans le scepticisme," in *Antichi et Moderni Nella Filosofia Di Età Imperiale*, ed. A. Brancacci (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2001), 299–329.

stock of arguments, without considering that they are always sufficient. Once again, the power of an argument is relative to a context or a situation of argumentation; it is a potentiality that *might* lead to equipollence rather than an effective way to certainly produce it.

Conclusion

Two remarks to conclude.

1. Firstly, this study of Sextus's *dunamis* points out that there is no sceptical theory of *dunamis*, but a plurality of usages which are connected to the common (philosophical) use of this polysemic term. This fact is coherent with Sextus's own theory of the norms of language, since in *Against the Grammarians* he underlines the fact that a sceptic should follow the usage of the people he is talking to; then, in philosophy he follows the "usage of the philosophers, and in medicine the medical usage" (AM 1.233–34). Even if it could be deceptive, there is nothing like a sceptical theory of *dunamis*.
2. However, in his use of the term, some interesting features have emerged. To sum up, I should say that we are facing three sceptical functions of the *dunamis*, even if they are not consciously connected by Sextus.
    a. To denote the sceptical activity, that is the ability to set out oppositions (the capacity-*dunamis*).
    b. To express an equivalence of a term. This is what I called the "implicit-*dunamis*" in the linguistic field, in order to express a semantic clarification of an expression—where the term *A* has to be substituted by *B*, every time and under no condition: *B* is the real or true sense of *A*. And it is the same meaning which prevails in the logical field to express a logical consequence of a proposition (the virtual-*dunamis)*—where the proposition *A* entails a proposition *B* as an implication. In this relationship, both *A* and *B* are effective at the same time, even though only *A* is uttered.
    c. In the meta-argumentative field: to express the potentialities of an argument (the potentiality-*dunamis*) where *B* is a possibility or a potentiality of *A*. In this relationship, an argument *A* has a wide-range of potentialities depending on the situation of enunciation or the beliefs of the interlocutors.

These functions show that even in a sceptical or empiricist context, one can talk and make reference to "events" or "effects" (to tell the truth, I am not really sure that there is a word which can express the object of that reference without providing the false impression that the sceptical have a belief on the nature of that object) that are not currently in action.

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Diego E. Machuca

Does Pyrrhonism Have Practical or Epistemic Value?

1 Introduction

My purpose in this paper is to examine whether Pyrrhonian scepticism, as this stance is described in Sextus Empiricus's extant works, has practical or epistemic value. More precisely, I would like to consider whether the Pyrrhonist's suspension of judgment (*epochē*) and undisturbedness (*ataraxia*) can be deemed to be of practical or epistemic value. By "practical" value I mean both moral value and prudential value. Moral value refers to moral rightness and wrongness; prudential value to personal or social well-being. Hence, when I ask whether the Pyrrhonist's suspension and undisturbedness have practical value, I mean whether they make us behave in a manner that is morally right or wrong, and whether they allow us to attain those goals that would make it possible to live well. As for "epistemic" value, it basically refers to the values of attaining truth and avoiding error. Hence, when I ask whether the Pyrrhonist's suspension has epistemic value, I mean whether it allows us to attain truth and avoid error. My main focus will be the practical value of both suspension and undisturbedness, because this is the value that scholars of ancient philosophy critical of Pyrrhonism have emphasised. The reason for examining the epistemic value of suspension is that doing so will enable a fuller assessment of the significance of Pyrrhonism as a kind of philosophy, which is my primary concern.

I will begin by briefly describing the states of suspension and undisturbedness and their connection, and by succinctly considering some objections to the effect that, despite claiming to suspend judgment across the board, Pyrrhonists actually hold a number of beliefs. This will provide the necessary framework for the subsequent discussions. I will then critically engage with interpreters who have called into question the practical value of undisturbedness and suspension. Next, I will examine what the epistemic value of suspension might be. I will end by considering whether, from a contemporary vantage point, one must conclude that Pyrrhonism has no practical or epistemic value, and hence that it is of no philosophical interest.[1]

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1 Sextus employs "sceptic" and "Pyrrhonist" (and their respective cognates) interchangeably. I will do the same. I will also follow him in using the term "dogmatist" to refer to anyone who makes as-

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2 Suspension and Undisturbedness

When someone with even a slight familiarity with ancient Pyrrhonism thinks of it, two notions invariably come to mind, namely, *epochē* and *ataraxia*. This is perfectly reasonable. Consider, for instance, the definition of scepticism that Sextus offers at the beginning of his best-known work, the *Pyrrhonian Outlines*:

> The sceptical [way] is an ability to set up oppositions among things that appear and things that are thought in any way whatsoever, an ability from which we come, through the equipollence in the opposed objects and arguments, first to suspension of judgment and after that to undisturbedness (PH 1.8).[2]

At PH 1.10, Sextus defines equipollence or equal force (*isostheneia*) as "equality in respect of credibility and lack of credibility, so that none of the conflicting arguments takes precedence over any other as more credible" (cf. PH 1.190, 196, 202); suspension as "a standstill of the intellect owing to which we neither deny nor affirm anything" (cf. PH 1.192, 196); and undisturbedness as "lack of perturbation and calmness of soul." Undisturbedness is not only the mental state at which the Pyrrhonist has arrived after suspending judgment, but the goal that prompted the Pyrrhonist-to-be to engage in philosophical inquiry in the first place. Indeed, Sextus tells us that the hope of becoming undisturbed is the "causal principle" (i.e., the initial motivation) of the sceptical philosophy (PH 1.12), and that so far the Pyrrhonist's aim is both undisturbedness in matters of opinion and moderation of affection (*metriopatheia*) in those things that are unavoidable (PH 1.25, 30; cf. PH 1.18, 215; 3.235). According to Sextus's description of the Pyrrhonist's philosophical itinerary (PH 1.12, 26, 29; cf. AM 1.6), the Pyrrhonist-to-be was disturbed by the variation (*anōmalia*) he found in both perceptual and intellectual appearances and was in a state of *aporia* as to which of them he should assent to. For instance, the same object appeared to him to have conflicting perceptual properties depending on different spatial and quantitative variables, or the same moral view appeared to him to be both convincing and unconvincing depending on the vantage point from which it was considered. To remove that state of disturbance, the Pyrrhonist undertook philosophical investigation in order to determine which appearances are true and which are false. However, he was unable to do this owing to the seeming equipollence of the conflicting appearances, and so he suspended judgment. To his surprise, by suspending judgment he attained the state of undisturbedness that he was seeking all along—there being thus a contrast between the way undisturbedness was initially expected to be at-

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sertions about how things really are on the basis of what they regard as objective evidence and sound arguments.

2 References to Sextus's works are supplied in parenthesis in the body of the text, using the following abbreviations: PH (*Pyrrhoniae Hypotyposes*), AM (*Adversus Mathematicos*), and AD (*Adversus Dogmaticos* = AM 7–11). All translations are my own.

tained and the way it was in fact finally attained. Sextus emphasises that undisturbedness has closely followed suspension of judgment by chance (PH 1.26, 29) and as a shadow follows a body (PH 1.29).

Sextus does not limit himself to reporting that undisturbedness has in fact followed suspension. In the first and third books of PH, and above all in *Against the Ethicists* (AD 5 = AM 11), he also explains why holding beliefs about how things really are prevents one from becoming undisturbed, offering at the same time an account of how suspension leads to undisturbedness, and also to happiness. His explanation focuses exclusively on evaluative beliefs: the presence of the things one believes to be good and of those one believes to be bad produces perturbation. For when a person lacks what he regards as good, on the one hand he intensely desires to obtain it and, on the other, he thinks he is persecuted by things naturally bad and restlessly tries to escape them. If he acquires what he considers to be good, he is nonetheless troubled both because he is irrationally and immoderately elated and because he is afraid of losing it (PH 1.27, 3.237, 277; AD 5.116–17, 146). For this reason, even when he is not directly disturbed by the presence of those things he deems to be bad, he continues to be troubled by his constantly guarding against them (AD 5.117, 129). In addition, those who believe that things are by nature good or bad are unhappy or can never attain happiness (AD 5.111, 113, 118, 130, 144) inasmuch as "all unhappiness occurs because of some disturbance" (AD 5.112; cf. 141). Unlike the belief that things are by nature good or bad, suspension of judgment on the matter makes it possible to attain undisturbedness and happiness, and hence to lead a satisfactory life (PH 1.28; AD 5.111, 144, 160, 168; see also PH 3.235; AD 5.147, 150), for those who suspend judgment "neither avoid nor pursue anything intensely" (PH 1.28). It should be noted that Sextus remarks that undisturbedness supervenes upon suspension of judgment about all things (PH 1.31, 205; AD 5.144; cf. AD 5.160, 168), which means that the attainment of undisturbedness has so far occurred only when the sceptic has suspended judgment about all the matters he has investigated—both those that concern values and those that do not. The sceptic cannot of course rule out the possibility that others will attain undisturbedness by suspending judgment only about some beliefs, but given his past experience, it appears to him that undisturbedness will be attained only when complete suspension is adopted.[3]

Despite what Sextus says in some of the passages just referred to, the Pyrrhonist is not free from all disturbance and hence cannot attain complete happiness, since not all disturbance is due to the intense pursuit of the things considered as good and the intense avoidance of the things considered as bad. For the Pyrrhonist is disturbed by certain things that impose themselves upon him, such as thirst and hunger (PH

3 I have elsewhere argued that, in Sextus's account of Pyrrhonism, one can identify three distinct causes of disturbance concerning matters of opinion and that the holding of evaluative beliefs is the ultimate source of doxastic disturbance by reference to which the other two can be explained. See Diego Machuca, "Sources of Doxastic Disturbance in Sextus Empiricus," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 56 (2019).

1.29; AD 5.143, 148–50, 156–58; cf. PH 1.13, 24). Yet he is better off with regard to these unpleasant affections (*pathē*) than the dogmatist, since he does not experience the additional disturbance induced by the belief that such affections are by nature bad; it is precisely the absence of that belief that renders them moderate and more easily borne (PH 1.30, 3.235–36; AD 5.118, 150–55, 161; see also AD 5.128–29, 145, 156–60). The existence of those involuntary affections is the reason why Sextus says that moderation of affection in things unavoidable is, along with undisturbedness in matters of opinion, the sceptical aim.

It might be objected that, despite claiming to suspend judgment across the board, Sextus holds a number of beliefs about the nature of certain mental states as well as about the means for, and the hindrance to, the attainment of suspension and undisturbedness. First, undisturbedness is presented as the core component of human happiness and is hence deemed to be good or worthy of pursuit. Second, the state of disturbance, caused by the holding of beliefs, is considered as something bad or to be avoided. Third, there exists a causal link between undisturbedness and suspension, which makes the latter a desirable state. Fourth, the Pyrrhonist believes that the opposing arguments he uses are, because of their objective equipollence, an effective means to induce suspension.

For reasons of space, I will limit myself to making a few remarks in response to that general objection. First, the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment or makes no determinations about the intrinsic value of anything (PH 1.28, 163; 3.178, 182, 235), and hence he does not believe that undisturbedness is objectively good or worthy of pursuit, and that disturbance is objectively bad or to be avoided. Rather, these two states appear to him to be, respectively, good and bad for himself and others, and hence when talking about them he is merely reporting on how things have so far appeared to him. At one point, Sextus explicitly observes that, whenever the Pyrrhonist says that some things are good and others bad, he is simply reporting on how they appear to him (AD 5.19–20).

Secondly, by saying that undisturbedness followed suspension by chance, Sextus intends to express his characteristic caution, which prevents him from asserting that things are by nature such that undisturbedness can only be reached by suspending judgment. Of course, he does not deny a necessary connection between them either. He is simply restricting himself to describing what has hitherto occurred to him and others, without making any assertions about the causal connection between those states. By likening the connection between suspension and undisturbedness to that of a body and its shadow, he is not being inconsistent. For one must not put the emphasis on the fact that a shadow *always* and *necessarily* follows a body when the body blocks light, but on the fact that in this situation there is a *close* connection between them. Sextus's intention is only to emphasise that up until now the

sceptic's suspension has been *closely* accompanied by the state of undisturbedness.[4] Although the sceptic does not assert that suspension causes undisturbedness, given his past experience he has the expectation that undisturbedness will continue to follow upon his suspension of judgment about everything. And if undisturbedness remains an aim he hopes to achieve, this will be a motivation for suspending judgment. The same considerations apply to the connection between the holding of beliefs and the state of disturbance: the sceptic only reports on his own experience.

Thirdly, Sextus does not believe that the arguments he has so far examined are objectively equipollent or equally credible, but only reports that they appear so to him (PH 1.196, 203). He employs certain types of arguments not because he can assure us that there is a necessary connection between them and suspension, but simply because those arguments have thus far been successful in inducing this state in himself and others. But this would be only a part of his response, given that, at PH 3.280–81, he tells us that the Pyrrhonist employs any therapeutic argument that makes it possible to induce suspension in his dogmatic patients.[5] This shows that the Pyrrhonist does not restrict himself to utilising the arguments that have induced suspension in himself and his past patients, but may also use other arguments that have not proven similarly successful. Or—to put it another way—it shows that the arguments that have induced suspension in the Pyrrhonist and his past patients may not achieve the same results with future patients.

A final and related point concerns the following question: when the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment in the face of disagreements between equipollent positions, is the connection between equipollence and suspension to be interpreted as a requirement of rationality or as a merely psychological constraint? Some scholars have defended a rationalist interpretation according to which by suspending judgment the Pyrrhonist is abiding by the following principle or norm of rationality: one is rationally required to suspend judgment about *p* in the face of a disagreement between views on *p* that strike one as equipollent. Others have defended the psychological interpretation according to which suspension is the involuntary psychological effect of being confronted with rival views that appear to one to be equipollent. Given that the Pyrrhonist is a thinking being (PH 1.24) who is hardwired to respond in specific ways, he is affected by the consideration of arguments pro and con *p* and automatically reacts in a given way, even though he refrains from making assertions about both whether those arguments are sound and whether they are objectively equipollent. I will not enter here into the debate between the two interpretations, limiting

4 See Diego Machuca, "The Pyrrhonist's ἀταραξία and φιλανθρωπία," *Ancient Philosophy* 26 (2006): 116.

5 On the Pyrrhonist's argumentative therapy, see Machuca, "The Pyrrhonist's ἀταραξία and φιλανθρωπία," 129–34; Machuca, "Argumentative Persuasiveness in Ancient Pyrrhonism," *Méthexis* 22 (2009): 102, 112; Machuca, "Pyrrhonian Argumentation: Therapy, Dialectic, and Inquiry," *Apeiron* 52 (2019): 199–221.

myself to saying that I side with the psychological interpretation.[6] As we will see in Section 4, the assessment of the epistemic value of suspension seems to partially depend on which interpretation is correct.

3 The Practical Value of Suspension and Undisturbedness

Whereas Sextus's explanation of how holding value beliefs produces disturbance may to a certain extent sound plausible from a contemporary vantage point, the references to undisturbedness and happiness sound alien to those who are today in the business of philosophy. The reason is that, in general, philosophy does not have much to do with our well-being anymore. Moreover, the claim that undisturbedness follows upon suspension may sound strange because we do not believe that we could ever get rid of much of what disturbs us in our lives by suspending judgment across the board. These and similar reasons no doubt explain why systematic discussions of Pyrrhonian scepticism in contemporary analytic philosophy have entirely ignored what Sextus says about undisturbedness, focusing for the most part on the epistemological implications of the so-called "Five Modes of Agrippa" and, to a lesser degree, on whether it is possible to eschew all beliefs and to act accordingly. It is nonetheless worthwhile to examine what practical value there may be in Pyrrhonian suspension and undisturbedness, because some scholars of ancient philosophy have called into question both their prudential and their moral value. I will review their criticisms and attempt to address them—at least in part.

One of the strongest and most common charges levelled in antiquity against both Academic and Pyrrhonian scepticism is the inactivity (*apraxia*) objection, of which there were various versions. According to that objection, the denial of all knowledge and the suspension of all judgment should be rejected because they make it impossible either to perform any action at all, or to act in certain ways (morally, sensibly, or rationally).[7] Similar pragmatic responses to scepticism are found among interpreters of Pyrrhonism, some of whom have contested the prudential value of both suspension of judgment and undisturbedness.[8] For instance, it has been argued that most

6 See Diego Machuca, "Pyrrhonism and the Law of Non-Contradiction," in *Pyrrhonism in Ancient, Modern, and Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Diego Machuca (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), sec. 5; Machuca, "Pyrrhonism, Inquiry, and Rationality," *Elenchos* 34 (2013): sec. 4.

7 I examine the various versions of the objection and the replies offered by Arcesilaus and Sextus in Machuca, "Scepticisme, *apraxia* et rationalité," in *Les raisons du doute: études sur le scepticisme antique*, eds. Diego Machuca and Stéphane Marchand (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019), 53–87.

8 The attempt to refute scepticism (of one kind or another) by focusing on its practical consequences is still today a common manoeuvre among both philosophers and ordinary people, who usually discard scepticism because its implications are disastrous, depressing, or immoral. Even in current discussions of the epistemic significance of disagreement, suspension of judgment is sometimes rejected

theoretical puzzles, difficulties, or disagreements do not bring about anxiety but are rather exciting and enthralling[9]; that it is unreasonable or ridiculous to think that suspension can eliminate or mitigate the disturbance a person experiences or that suspension is a reliable recipe for tranquillity[10]; that belief in objective values produces a sense of security, not anxiety[11]; and that it is highly doubtful that the attainment of undisturbedness is either desirable or psychologically possible.[12] If any of this were true, then the prudential value of suspension and undisturbedness would be undermined. For in those cases in which unresolved disagreements do not cause anxiety, there is nothing to be removed through suspension, while in those cases in which there is indeed anxiety concerning matters of belief, suspension is useless either because it is not efficacious in removing that anxiety or because it is simply impossible to achieve that goal given human beings' psychological makeup. And even if it were psychologically possible to attain the state of undisturbedness by suspending judgment, living an undisturbed life is not appealing or desirable because it would deprive us of all excitement.

In response, let me first note that the above criticisms overlook the fact that it seems to be one's own psychological makeup and one's personal history that determine to a considerable extent what causes anxiety in an individual, whether one regards an undisturbed life as liberating or depressing, and whether one is able to attain undisturbedness by suspending judgment or in any other way.[13] For instance, some logicians and mathematicians seem to be distressed by their failure to find solutions to certain logical and mathematical paradoxes while others do not, even

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because of its allegedly damaging practical effects. See Diego Machuca, "Conciliationism and the Menace of Scepticism," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review* 54, no. 3 (September 2015): sec. 3. This shows—*pace* Suzanne Obdrzalek, "From Skepticism to Paralysis: The *Apraxia* Argument in Cicero's *Academica*," *Ancient Philosophy* 32 (2012): 388–90—that to reply to scepticism by pointing to its practical consequences is not foreign to contemporary epistemological discussions.

9 See Benson Mates, *The Skeptic Way: Sextus Empiricus's* Outlines of Pyrrhonism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 63, 75–76; Jonathan Barnes, Introduction to *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Scepticism*, trans. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), xxx–xxxi.

10 See Mates, *The Skeptic Way*, 63, 76–77; Barnes, Introduction, xxxi; Richard Bett, "Le scepticisme ancien est-il viable aujourd'hui?" in *Les raisons du doute: études sur le scepticisme antique*, eds. Diego Machuca and Stéphane Marchand (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019), 172.

11 See Julia Annas, "Doing without Objective Values: Ancient and Modern Strategies," in *Companions to Ancient Thought IV: Ethics*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 208, 213.

12 See Gisela Striker, "Historical Reflections on Classical Pyrrhonism and Neo-Pyrrhonism," in *Pyrrhonian Skepticism*, ed. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 22; Striker, "Academics versus Pyrrhonists, Reconsidered," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, ed. Richard Bett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 196.

13 See Machuca, "The Pyrrhonist's ἀταραξία and φιλανθρωπία," 124. Cf. Mark McPherran, "*Ataraxia* and *Eudaimonia* in Ancient Pyrrhonism: Is the Skeptic Really Happy?" *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 5 (1989): 150.

though all of them care about their research and believe that it has epistemic value, and perhaps even prudential value. Similarly, some people want to live a life of constant excitement, vertigo, and risk, and their heart would therefore sink at the prospects of a life characterised by the Pyrrhonist's undisturbedness; but others do prefer an undisturbed life. Moreover, some might even regard an undisturbed life as exciting. Finally, the person taking up the Pyrrhonian attitude may either enjoy a laidback and indifferent state of mind—being aware as he is of the unavoidable complexity of things and having, as it were, seen it all before—or else experience profound angst—due to the uncertainty caused by unresolved disagreements and the hesitation about what he is supposed to do in the absence of an epistemic criterion that would allow us to determine what is true and what is false. For instance, the realisation that one cannot establish whether there exist objective moral values might spare a person the anguish suffered by those who believe that an action they have performed is morally wrong, or else might lead that person to depression or distress. Whether, being a Pyrrhonist, one finds oneself in one or the other of these states seems to depend on one's personality or temperament. Consider the indisputable, albeit often overlooked, fact that people react in strikingly distinct ways both while and after facing extremely harsh situations. For example, while some people have been able to survive concentration camps or civil wars and then to rebuild their lives in remote countries after losing literally everything and without seeking revenge, many of us find their reactions extremely hard to understand and would most probably have been incapable of behaving in the same way. Consider also how some religious believers lead an anguished life despite their belief in the existence of a benevolent and provident god, while some agnostics lead a fulfilling life despite their suspension of judgment on the matter. I therefore do not think that there are sufficient grounds for regarding Sextus's report that some people were able to become undisturbed after suspending judgment as ridiculous or false, unless one believes that one is entitled to generalise one's own experience and dismiss a person's report of his experience when it is radically different. Suspension may or may not continue to work for the Pyrrhonist in the future and it may or may not work for other people; it is up to each individual to try it and see, so that there is no room for prejudices about its possible success. I do not mean to suggest that one must accept as true every testimony one hears, but only that one should be extremely cautious when discarding someone's report on his own experience.[14] We should keep in mind that Sextus does not intend to provide a recipe for becoming undisturbed or for attaining happiness, but only reports on what has so far occurred to him and others, and offers what appears to him as a tentative explanation of that experience. In sum, it does not seem possible to determine *a priori* whether suspen-

14 See Machuca, "The Pyrrhonist's ἀταραξία and φιλανθρωπία," 124. Cf. McPherran, "*Ataraxia* and *Eudaimonia* in Ancient Pyrrhonism," 150, 171.

sion and undisturbedness have any prudential value, i.e., whether they either contribute to or make possible the attainment of those goals we seek in order to live well.

Martha Nussbaum is the interpreter who has most vehemently criticised Pyrrhonism on account of its practical consequences, focusing on the moral and political value of suspension and undisturbedness. Her attack on Pyrrhonism in "Equilibrium: Scepticism and Immersion in Political Deliberation" is conducted by contrasting it with John Rawls's moral and political philosophy.[15] Although she does not distinguish between them, Nussbaum in fact follows two different lines of argument: (1) one that calls attention to the supposedly harmful practical implications of Pyrrhonism[16]; and (2) one that calls attention either (a) to the Pyrrhonist's alleged inconsistency in believing in the value of undisturbedness and in being confident in the efficacy of his means to attain it,[17] or (b) to his alleged failure to show the impossibility of the kind of justification that Rawls provided for our moral and political choices.[18] These two lines of argument can be labelled, respectively, "pragmatic" and "epistemic." Note that, were the epistemic line of argument successful, there would be no need for the pragmatic: if the Pyrrhonist were inconsistent or did not succeed in undermining the epistemic justification of our moral and political beliefs and practices, then there would be no reason for worrying about the pragmatic consequences of adopting his sceptical outlook. The primary purpose of Nussbaum's essay, though, is to develop the pragmatic line of argument, most probably because she is shocked by what she takes to be the deeply damaging effects of Pyrrhonism and because she thinks there is a threatening revival of Pyrrhonism in certain postmodernist thinkers and in the popular part of our public culture.[19] I will refrain from addressing here the epistemic line of argument mainly because I am particularly interested in Nussbaum's pragmatic line of argument, but also because I have dealt with the kind of inconsistency she ascribes to the Pyrrhonist in the previous section and elsewhere[20] and because I think she simply underestimates the sceptical challenge that disagree-

15 Martha Nussbaum, "Equilibrium: Scepticism and Immersion in Political Deliberation," in *Ancient Scepticism and the Sceptical Tradition* (*Acta Philosophica Fennica* 66), ed. Juha Sihvola (Helsinki: Societas Philosophica Fennica, 2000), 171–97.

16 Nussbaum, 191–94.

17 Nussbaum, 189–92.

18 Nussbaum, 183–87.

19 In previous work, Nussbaum focused at greater length on the epistemic line of argument. See Martha Nussbaum, "Skeptic Purgatives: Disturbance and the Life without Belief," in *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 300–306; Nussbaum, "Skepticism about Practical Reason in Literature and the Law," *Harvard Law Review* 107 (1994): 733–36. Although Nussbaum also developed the pragmatic line of argument (see "Skeptic Purgatives," 313–15; "Skepticism about Practical Reason," 737–39, 742), she nonetheless saw some practical benefits in adopting the Pyrrhonian outlook (see "Skeptic Purgatives," 313; "Skepticism about Practical Reason," 738, 742). In "Skepticism about Practical Reason," she discusses at greater length the views of those she regards as the contemporary counterparts of ancient Pyrrhonism.

20 See Machuca, "The Pyrrhonist's ἀταραξία and φιλανθρωπία," 115–23, 132–33.

ment poses to the task of epistemically justifying our moral and political beliefs and practices.

Nussbaum claims that Pyrrhonism is both "morally and politically pernicious."[21] The Pyrrhonist's denial of the possibility of reaching a consensus among rival positions and his loss of commitment to normative beliefs are the sort of views that made the rise of Nazism possible and that could enable the recurrence of something similar. The reason is that, for the Pyrrhonist, the choice of a political regime cannot be based on reason, but only on the play of forces. She expresses a worry common among anti-sceptics:

> [A] person who sees himself and his political life as simply a space in which forces play themselves out cannot be relied on for the same committed behaviour we can demand from a person who sees justice as possible and worthy of profound commitment and sacrifice. A person who views every claim as having its equally powerful counterclaim and his inclination to one side as mere antiquated habit is not likely to stick up for those habits in the way that someone will who believes that they are justifiable by a rational procedure.[22]

In addition, undisturbedness is not always desirable, for

> the world in which we live is disturbing; disturbance is a rational response to it. And the person who is with good reason disturbed, and who sees her disturbance as well grounded, will not be satisfied, like the sceptic, by the removal of disturbance within her own person.[23]

She even goes as far as to affirm that Pyrrhonism is

> profoundly selfish, indeed solipsistic ... seen as a program for philosophy in a needy and troubled world containing urgent human problems. ... If philosophy is only capable of making the individual practitioner feel calm, then Socrates's enemies would be right: philosophy is a dangerous form of self-indulgence, subversive of democracy, and its teachers are corrupters of the young. Fortunately, philosophy is capable of much more than that.[24]

Nussbaum also thinks that Pyrrhonism deprives us of part of what makes us human. For by suspending judgment, motivated by his desire for undisturbedness, the Pyrrhonist loses his normative commitments, and when these go, "something fundamental to humanity goes out with them, something that is integral to our ability to care for another and act on another's behalf."[25] She adds that

> human beings are not only instinctual but also ethical creatures, who do care about getting things right and do commit themselves to views of the good, modifying their animal behavior accordingly. This means that the sceptic cannot straightforwardly claim to be allowing us to fol-

21 Nussbaum, "Equilibrium," 171.
22 Nussbaum, 192–93. Cf. Annas, "Doing without Objective Values," 211–12.
23 Nussbaum, "Equilibrium," 193.
24 Nussbaum, 194.
25 Nussbaum, 173.

> low our nature: he must admit that he is removing or curtailing something that is fundamental in the natures of most human beings.[26]

Thus, Nussbaum believes that the Pyrrhonist (i) is immoral, (ii) is unreliable, (iii) does not care about others, and (iv) removes something essential to our human nature. I will make six sets of remarks in reply to Nussbaum's four criticisms.

The first thing to be noted is that Nussbaum commits a *petitio principii* inasmuch as she takes for granted that about which the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment, namely, the existence of something that is objectively right or wrong. Instead of establishing the truth of the belief, called into question by the Pyrrhonist, that certain things are morally good or bad, Nussbaum begs the question by assuming the truth of that belief in her attack on Pyrrhonism. In her view, the world in which we live is disturbing because there are morally bad things that occur that cause indignation and disapproval—such as the rise of certain political regimes responsible for mass murder—and so looking for personal undisturbedness is objectively wrong. This is why the Pyrrhonist is portrayed as selfish, solipsistic, politically subversive, and corruptive. These claims, even if they were true, have force only for those who are already moral realists; and I think it is acceptable to criticise the Pyrrhonist if one adopts such a point of view. But it should be borne in mind that, in doing so, one has not engaged the Pyrrhonist in philosophical debate, nor has one shown that he is mistaken in suspending judgment in the moral domain. Insofar as she does not discuss the Pyrrhonist's metaethical arguments, Nussbaum's pragmatic line of argument is dialectically ineffective.

Secondly, it is a mistake to claim that the Pyrrhonist is *necessarily* selfish, solipsistic,[27] politically subversive, or corruptive, just as it is a mistake to claim that he is *necessarily* philanthropic (despite what Sextus says at PH 3.280–81), politically con-

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26 Nussbaum, 191. Richard Bett makes a similar point when claiming that the Pyrrhonist's lack of moral commitments and the passivity shown in his practical decisions reveal that he is not an ethically engaged agent. See "How Ethical Can an Ancient Skeptic Be?" in *Pyrrhonism in Ancient, Modern, and Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Diego Machuca (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 3–17. For this reason, he maintains, the sceptical life is not a life that people could reasonably welcome or to which they could aspire. It is also worth noting that a related objection has recently been raised by some interpreters on the basis of a version of the inactivity charge levelled by the Stoics against the Academic sceptics: even if the Pyrrhonist's scepticism does not condemn him to remain utterly inactive, his actions are not those of a rational agent, for he does not believe he can offer any epistemic reasons for his desires and his decisions, and so Pyrrhonism deprives us of the rationality distinctive of human beings. Proponents of this objection include Casey Perin, *The Demands of Reason: An Essay on Pyrrhonian Scepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Katja Vogt, "Scepticism and Action," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, ed. Richard Bett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 165–80; and Jan Willem Wieland, "Can Pyrrhonists Act Normally?" *Philosophical Explorations* 15, no. 3 (September 2012): 277–89. I have critically dealt with this objection in "Pyrrhonism, Inquiry, and Rationality," sec. 5, and in "Scepticisme, *apraxia* et rationalité," sec. 4.

27 Or individualistic, as Luciano Floridi has called him in *Sextus Empiricus: The Transmission and Recovery of Pyrrhonism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 32.

servative or conformist (despite following the laws and customs of his community, PH 1.23–24),[28] or tolerant (despite the fact that he is unable to resolve disagreements and hence cannot reject any view on epistemic grounds). For whether the Pyrrhonist adopts one or the other of these attitudes depends on circumstantial factors, such as his psychological makeup, his upbringing, his education, his life experiences, and his socio-cultural context.[29] None of these attitudes is necessarily entailed by the suspension of judgment or the adoption of what appears (*to phainomenon*) as the criterion of action (PH 1.21–24; AD 1.30 [= AM 7.30]). Insofar as he continues to suspend judgment across the board, the Pyrrhonist has no epistemic reasons either to embrace or to reject a given attitude, and so he will, as Nussbaum points out, let the play of forces drive him—a play of forces that nonetheless is not totally passive as it includes the exercise of the natural capability of thinking (PH 1.24).[30] But this means that nothing rules out the possibility that the Pyrrhonist may, for example, have been raised in a familial and social context in which philanthropy is deemed to be morally correct, and that the way things non-doxastically appear to him now is shaped by such a conception. By the same token, nothing rules out the possibility that he may be selfish and individualistic because of the upbringing he received or because of his life experiences. The same goes for the Pyrrhonist's alleged conservatism or conformism, for he may have been raised so as to oppose authority and the accepted ways of conducting oneself.[31] Similarly, the fact that he cannot reject a given position on the basis of its being incorrect or epistemically unjustified does not entail that he must be tolerant. For his suspension does not of course require that he respects all the views held in his community because such respect is the morally correct attitude. He may resist certain positions simply because they constitute a practical hindrance to the way in which he lives or simply because they are emotionally disruptive. Now, Nussbaum herself recognises my point when she talks about the Pyrrhonist having an inclination towards a given attitude out of habit. She thinks that this makes him unreliable (a claim I address next), but the point is that she should accept that this does not make him *necessarily* selfish, solipsistic, politically subversive, or corruptive. It is clear that, from the point of view of moral realists, the Pyrrhonist's suspension does not have moral value insofar as it does not entail the

28 Bett writes about "the more general conformism of the skeptic," which he regards as an "unattractive feature" of the sceptic's stance ("How Ethical Can an Ancient Skeptic Be?" 11).

29 See Diego Machuca, Review of Luciano Floridi *Sextus Empiricus: The Transmission and Recovery of Pyrrhonism*, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 12, no. 2 (2004): 338–39; Machuca, "The Pyrrhonist's ἀταραξία and φιλανθρωπία," 134–36.

30 On the Pyrrhonist's extensive but non-normative use of reason, see Diego Machuca, "Argumentative Persuasiveness," 116–23; Machuca, "Pyrrhonism and the Law of Non-Contradiction," secs. 4 and 5; Machuca, "Pyrrhonism, Inquiry, and Rationality," sec. 4; Machuca, "Agrippan Pyrrhonism and the Challenge of Disagreement," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 40 (2015): sec. 3; Machuca, "Scepticisme, *apraxia* et rationalité," sec. 5.

31 Here I disagree with Bett, who claims that it is "unlikely that the skeptic will step far outside the status quo if ... that would be difficult or unpopular" ("How Ethical Can an Ancient Skeptic Be?" 12).

adoption of those attitudes they regard as morally correct. But, once again, this is entirely different from claiming that he *inevitably* takes up attitudes that moral realists regard as morally incorrect. Someone might object that the Pyrrhonist's suspension lacks moral value all the same because, even though it does not preclude the adoption of an attitude of philanthropy, tolerance, or respect for accepted modes of conduct, such an adoption would not be based on the belief that these attitudes are morally correct. This may be so from the point of view of moral realists, but such an objection grants that the Pyrrhonist *can* conduct himself in a way that is not selfish, individualistic, politically subversive, or corruptive.

Thirdly, from a descriptive point of view, I am not sure that people with strong commitments are in general reliable, nor that they are more reliable than those who lack such commitments and let the play of forces drive them. This is so even in those few cases in which people have reflected on their commitments and believe that they are epistemically justified. Of all the religious believers and moral realists you know, how many are reliable *because of* their religious and moral commitments? It may be the case that someone is reliable precisely because he has strong commitments to certain principles and rules. But it seems clear that certain patterns of behaviour may be stronger when they have been unreflectively acquired in childhood than when they are the result of reflection, and in the former case they may be much harder to dislodge even if one came to the conclusion that they have no rational basis. It is no doubt possible that such patterns of behaviour are strengthened by a process of reflection and justification, but the important point is that this does not mean that they are not strong enough to confer reliability on the person in whom they have been inculcated independently of such a process.

Fourthly, as regards the claim that, by suspending judgment about moral commitments, the Pyrrhonist deprives us of part of our human nature, two remarks are in order. The first is that, *pace* Nussbaum,[32] the Pyrrhonist does not completely deprive us of our emotions, for it does not appear to be the case that desiderative attitudes such as "anger, fear, jealousy, grief, envy, passionate love … all rest … upon belief"[33] and that "love, fear, grief" are based on "beliefs about worth."[34] To be more precise, I do not think that such emotions depend *necessarily* on belief. For instance, do animals, which do seem to experience anger, fear, grief, and affection, hold beliefs? Also, granting that a two-year-old is capable of loving his mother, does he hold the belief that his mother is worth love? And even if he does, does he love his mother because he holds that belief? Someone could object that, even if one granted that emotions can be experienced in the absence of beliefs, Sextus's ascription of the state of undisturbedness to the Pyrrhonist indicates that he seeks to remove all emotions. One could reply by noting that, as we saw in the previous section,

32 Nussbaum, "Skeptic Purgatives," 313–14; Nussbaum, "Skepticism about Practical Reason," 737.
33 Nussbaum, "Skeptic Purgatives," 313.
34 Nussbaum, "Skepticism about Practical Reason," 737.

one part of the twofold goal of scepticism is the moderation of affection in things that are unavoidable, and by arguing that, among the affections in question, Sextus includes certain emotions. However, the examples he gives of unavoidable affections are always of a perceptual and physical kind: the feelings of cold and heat, thirst and hunger (PH 1.13, 24, 29, 238; AD 5.143, 149, 152), pain and pleasure (AD 5.143, 150, 159)—where these seem to be understood exclusively in a physical way—and the fact of having a fever (AD 5.156); he also speaks more generally of the way one is affected perceptually (PH 3.236; AD 5.148). I nonetheless think that, when Sextus speaks of the Pyrrhonist acting without opinions in accordance with the laws and customs of his community (PH 1.17, 23–24, 231, 237; AD 3.49, 5.166), there is an emotional component in the non-doxastic appearances he has by virtue of those social norms. Note that Sextus points out that the Pyrrhonist, proceeding in accordance with traditional laws and customs, accepts that piety is good and impiety bad (PH 1.24), and that he will choose one course of action and avoid the other if compelled by a tyrant to do some unspeakable deed (AD 5.166). It seems clear to me that this implies that impious actions induce a negative emotion and corresponding reaction in a Pyrrhonist who belongs to a given socio-cultural context. Similarly, if that Pyrrhonist witnessed what moral realists regard as an unspeakable or forbidden deed, he might automatically experience a negative emotion that would trigger a gut reaction: for instance, if faced with an act of rape, murder, or torture, he might experience a visceral response of repulsion and might do something to counter that act, even though he suspends judgment about whether such an act is objectively bad or to be avoided. If my interpretation is on the right track, then even after suspending judgment about whether anything is objectively good or bad, the Pyrrhonist still experiences positive or negative emotions when confronted with certain situations.[35] Now, having moral emotions may be sufficient for us to be moral creatures. In this regard, note that, based on a number of studies in psychology, some moral psychologists have called into question the rationalist view that moral judgment is caused by a process of conscious reasoning or reflection, claiming instead that it is primarily and directly caused by moral intuitions and emotions. For example, according to the social intuitionist model defended by Jonathan Haidt, moral judgment is in general the result of intuitions—i.e., quick, automatic, effortless, and affectively laden evaluations—and moral action co-varies more with moral emotion than with moral reasoning. In his view, moral reasoning is usually nothing but an *ex post facto* process in which one seeks arguments that will justify an already-made judgment with the aim of influencing the intuitions and actions of others.[36]

35 For more on this issue, see McPherran, "*Ataraxia* and *Eudaimonia* in Ancient Pyrrhonism," 144, 154–56; Machuca, "The Pyrrhonist's ἀταραξία and φιλανθρωπία," 131–32; Machuca, "Argumentative Persuasiveness," 123; Machuca, "Scepticisme, *apraxia* et rationalité," sec. 4.

36 See Jonathan Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment," *Psychological Review* 108, no. 4 (October 2001): 814–34; Thalia Wheatley and Jon-

My second remark regarding Nussbaum's claim that the Pyrrhonist removes something that is fundamental in the nature of most human beings is that this would be a problem only provided that the thing removed is unquestionably good. Given that it is clear that Nussbaum thinks that the item removed is morally good, I should repeat here my remark that Nussbaum assumes what she should prove when arguing against the Pyrrhonist: removing something that is deemed to be good by the moral realist is not a problem for the Pyrrhonist inasmuch as he suspends judgment about whether anything is objectively good or bad. But setting the question of moral goodness aside, a present-day Pyrrhonist could point out that not everyone agrees on the instrumental goodness or usefulness of morality, as is shown, for instance, by the contemporary metaethical disagreement on this issue. Moral error theorists maintain either that all positive moral judgments are false because there are no objective moral properties,[37] or that they are all neither true nor false because the moral facts they presuppose do not exist.[38] However, among them there is a disagreement between moral fictionalists and moral abolitionists. The former claim that morality produces practical benefits (for example, personal happiness or political stability), and so that we should continue to make moral utterances and have moral thoughts, while at the same time refraining from asserting such utterances and believing such thoughts. That is, even though moral realism is false, we should maintain the fiction that it is true.[39] One could argue that moral fictionalists think that morality is instrumentally good in that it is an effective means to attain certain goals we seek. Moral abolitionists, by contrast, contend that morality causes more suffering than it prevents, and that it is therefore desirable and useful to abandon moral language and thinking altogether.[40]

Fifthly, and in connection with my previous remarks on the Pyrrhonist's emotions, the claim that his suspension prevents him from properly caring about others overlooks the fact that whether one cares about someone or something seems to depend to a considerable extent on one's emotions rather than on one's beliefs. A mother who instinctively reacts to save her child from danger does not say to herself that she takes it to be true that she is morally obliged to save her child or that her child is worth saving; in fact, she may not have formed those beliefs at all and might never form them. You likely care about the well-being of your parents, your siblings, your children, your friends, or your spouse without having acquired the belief that you have the moral obligation to care about them or the belief that they are worth your care. Moreover, even though in some cases one concludes that one should

athan Haidt, "Hypnotic Disgust Makes Moral Judgments More Severe," *Psychological Science* 16, no. 10 (October 2005): 780–84.

37 See John Leslie Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).

38 See Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

39 See Joyce, *The Myth of Morality.*

40 See Richard Garner, "Abolishing Morality," in *A World without Values: Essays on John Mackie's Moral Error Theory*, eds. Richard Joyce and Simon Kirchin (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 217–33.

not be concerned about what might befall them, one will very likely be concerned all the same. Hence, the holding of beliefs does not seem to be a *conditio sine qua non* for loving your child, being concerned about your dog's well-being, or caring about the result of a soccer match. As I argued above, it seems clear that the Pyrrhonist's suspension does not do away with such emotions. Hence, I think that Julia Annas is mistaken when she claims that the Pyrrhonist cannot be concerned about others' physical and emotional problems,[41] i.e., their "mundane problems like toothache, poverty or unrequited love," because "these could only bother him if he believed that these were bad things, which of course he does not."[42] In her view, the Pyrrhonist can only be bothered by others' intellectual problems, i.e., by their holding of beliefs, because that is what he seeks to cure by means of his argumentative therapy, which is motivated by a philanthropic attitude (PH 3.280–81). If so, he could not be concerned about the well-being of another full-blown Pyrrhonist. According to the deflationary interpretation[43] to which I referred in my second set of remarks, neither philanthropy nor the therapeutic use of arguments should be viewed as defining features of Pyrrhonism: whether the Pyrrhonist is philanthropic or seeks to cure others of their dogmatism by means of argument will depend on circumstantial factors. But then one can likewise argue that nothing rules out the possibility that a Pyrrhonist may be emotionally troubled by the unavoidable problems of others. A Pyrrhonist who happens to be philanthropic may seek, by inducing suspension, to remove the disturbance apparently caused in the dogmatists by their holding of beliefs, but he may also seek to mitigate their unavoidable physical and emotional disturbances because he may be emotionally distressed by the unavoidable suffering of anyone—whether a dogmatist, a newly converted Pyrrhonist, or a veteran Pyrrhonist. Again, such distress will not be the result of the holding of beliefs, but part of the emotions that impose themselves on the Pyrrhonist to the extent that he is affected by those psychological and social factors that happen to influence him. Someone will no doubt complain, once more, that this does not make the Pyrrhonist very reliable given that his concern about others' problems of one kind or another will always be fortuitous or contingent. But I am not sure that this is different from the case of those who claim to care about others due to their beliefs or even reflective beliefs. For their holding the beliefs they hold seems to be dependent to a considerable extent on circumstantial factors. In addition, we see on a daily basis how many who claim to be moral realists or religious believers and to reject inequality and unfair suffering are entirely indifferent to those in need. Therefore, we should conclude ei-

41 Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 246–48, 353.
42 Annas, 246.
43 The reason I call my interpretation of certain aspects of Sextus's account of Pyrrhonism "deflationary" is simply that I do not take such aspects to be essential to this form of scepticism. My interpretation of the practical and epistemic value of Pyrrhonism is also deflationary inasmuch as, in my view, the Pyrrhonist does not think that his stance has either kind of value in an objective sense.

ther that they are being disingenuous in expressing their normative commitments, or that belief does not ensure genuine concern for others.

Finally, I think it is important to make the probably obvious remark that, even if we grant that Pyrrhonism has no prudential or moral value, we should guard against mistaking pragmatic reasons for rejecting Pyrrhonism (or other forms of scepticism) for epistemic reasons. The fact that Pyrrhonism represents a hindrance to the attainment of certain goals one takes to be crucial to one's personal or social life does not prove that Pyrrhonism is incoherent or false. To do so, one has to examine whether there are epistemic reasons for rejecting Pyrrhonism, and if one cannot find any, then one should be prepared to accept the pragmatic consequences of our inability to refute it, even if they are appalling. At least those who are in the business of philosophy should swallow their fear and follow where the arguments lead.

I should emphasise that my aim has not been to defend the Pyrrhonist from the charge of immorality in the sense of showing that he necessarily conducts himself in a moral way, for whether he behaves morally or immorally from the point of view of non-Pyrrhonists depends on a number of fortuitous factors. Nor have I attempted to show that Pyrrhonism is a desirable or attractive philosophy inasmuch as it would contribute to our well-being, for whether one finds it so will depend, to a considerable extent, on contingent psychological factors. My aim has instead been to dispel certain serious misunderstandings regarding the Pyrrhonian stance.[44]

4 The Epistemic Value of Suspension

What about the epistemic value of the Pyrrhonist's suspension of judgment? What is its value concerning the goals of attaining truth and avoiding error? The answer seems to depend in part on whose vantage point one adopts and in part on how one interprets the connection between equipollence and suspension.

Let me address the second point first. As we saw in Section 2, such a connection can be interpreted either as a requirement of rationality or as a merely psychological constraint. If the Pyrrhonist's reason for withholding assent whenever confronted with conflicting views on p that strike him as equipollent were a commitment on his part to investigating truth by applying the requirements of rationality, then the

44 For other replies to the charge that Pyrrhonism lacks practical value that somewhat complement the arguments advanced in the present section, see John Christian Laursen, "Yes, Skeptics Can Live Their Skepticism and Cope with Tyranny as Well as Anyone," in *Skepticism in Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Thought*, eds. José Maia Neto and Richard Popkin (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2004), 201–23; Laursen, "The Moral Life of the Ancient Skeptics: Living in Accordance with Nature and Freedom from Disturbance," *Bolletino della Società Filosofica Italiana* 219 (2016): 5–22; and Emidio Spinelli, "Neither Philosophy nor Politics? The Ancient Pyrrhonian Approach to Everyday Life," in *Skepticism and Political Thought in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, eds. John Christian Laursen and Gianni Paganini (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2015), 17–35.

epistemic value of his suspension would be clear. For, first, by refraining from adopting a view on *p* in favour of which he does not have compelling evidence, the Pyrrhonist seeks to avoid error. Second, by remaining engaged in rationally driven inquiry, he keeps searching for further evidence that could tip the balance in favour of one of the rival views on *p*, which would bring him closer to the truth. If, by contrast, the psychological interpretation of the connection between equipollence and suspension were correct, it could be argued that Pyrrhonism does not have much to offer in terms of epistemic value. For although the Pyrrhonist is a thinking being who is hardwired to suspend judgment when confronted with arguments pro and con *p* that strike him as equipollent, he refrains from making assertions about whether those arguments are sound, whether they are equipollent, and whether suspension is the correct rational response in the face of equipollent disagreement. The Pyrrhonist does suspend judgment, he does refrain from affirming that investigation of truth is doomed to failure, and he does keep on inquiring into the various subjects about which people hold beliefs. But although his suspension might make it possible to avoid error, he does not affirm that this is indeed the case and that the avoidance of error is therefore one of his reasons for suspending judgment. And although his ongoing inquiry might make it possible to find the truth, he makes no assertions about whether his inquiry is the correct means to search for truth. In line with my deflationary interpretation of Pyrrhonism, I think that the Pyrrhonist's continuing engagement in philosophical inquiry is to be explained by the influence of psychological and social factors, and that his suspension only entails that he cannot affirm or deny that truth can be found.

I think, however, that it is a mistake to claim that Pyrrhonism is of no epistemic value if the psychological interpretation is correct, a mistake that brings me to the first point mentioned above. For even if the Pyrrhonist himself refrains from affirming (or denying) the epistemic value of his suspension, this does not mean that the suspension he exercises lacks epistemic value from the vantage point of those non-Pyrrhonists who are committed to the requirement of rationality according to which one should suspend judgment when confronted with a dispute one is unable to settle. From that vantage point, it could also be argued that the epistemic value of Pyrrhonian suspension consists in that it encourages or promotes the intellectual virtues of caution and humility, in two respects. First, the Pyrrhonist's suspension is a recognition of his inability to give his assent to any one of the parties to a given dispute, i.e., a recognition that he has so far been unable to settle the disagreements he has examined. He describes as arrogance, rashness, and self-satisfaction the attitudes of his rivals[45] inasmuch as they hold fast to their views on *p* without taking careful account of rival views on *p* or even despite acknowledging the existence of widespread and entrenched disagreement over *p*. One could take the Pyrrhonian attitude to be a good antidote to jumping to conclusions and performing hasty actions. He lacks his

45 See, for example, PH 1.20, 90, 177, 3.235, 280–81.

rivals' overconfidence in the correctness of their own opinions and the reliability of their cognitive powers. In this regard, it is perhaps worth mentioning some recent studies in psychology that show that unskilled people tend to suffer from "illusory superiority," rating their cognitive abilities as above average, whereas skilled people tend to suffer from "illusory inferiority," underestimating or underrating their cognitive abilities.[46] One could argue that Pyrrhonian suspension would protect us from this kind of epistemic bias, faced as we are with the difficulty of determining from which sort of illusion we might be suffering. Second, Pyrrhonian investigation is characterised by open-mindedness inasmuch as the Pyrrhonist does not affirm (or deny) that the disagreements he has so far inspected are unresolvable in themselves, but carries on his philosophical inquiry into the disputed matters. In other words, the Pyrrhonist's past failure to discover the truth in those matters (if there is any) does not lead him to claim that the search for truth is doomed to failure. For he cannot rule out the possibility that, through further investigation, he might discover new evidence and arguments bearing on the disputed matters that will make it possible to adjudicate the disagreements.

Some people—probably most—might nonetheless regard the Pyrrhonist's across-the-board suspension as lacking any real epistemic value in that it pushes intellectual caution and humility to the extreme. They would argue that the Pyrrhonist actually manifests the vices of intellectual cowardice and of undue timidity in one's intellectual life. For although there are cases in which suspension is indeed rationally required by the equal force of the evidence and arguments in favour of each of the conflicting views, in most cases we do have strong epistemic reasons for preferring one of the views to the other(s). For this reason, they would also argue that the Pyrrhonist is intellectually dishonest when he claims that, in all the disagreements he has considered, the rival views strike him as equipollent. In response, it should be remarked that, aside from the fact that the objectors' own experience is different from the Pyrrhonist's, there seems to be no reason for suspecting that the latter is not sincere or truthful when reporting on what has happened to him up to this point. For it may indeed be the case that the Pyrrhonist has found himself in the state of being at a loss how to resolve all those disagreements he has examined up to this point. Hence, I do not think that the objectors can easily maintain that the Pyrrhonist is disingenuous, although they could perhaps still hold that, from their own non-sceptical point of view, he is intellectually cowardly and unduly timid in his philosophical investigations.

46 See, for example, Justin Kruger and David Dunning, "Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77, no. 6 (December 1999): 1121–34; Joyce Ehrlinger, Kerri Johnson, Matthew Banner, David Dunning, and Justin Kruger, "Why the Unskilled Are Unaware: Further Explorations of (Absent) Self-Insight among the Incompetent," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 105, no. 1 (January 2008): 98–121.

5 Concluding Remarks

Does the Pyrrhonist promise us that, if we suspend judgment across the board, we will become undisturbed regarding matters of opinion? No, he does not because he cannot. Does he promise us that, if we attain such a mental state, we will find it enjoyable and will even achieve a considerable degree of happiness or well-being? No, he does not because he cannot. Does he promise us that the person who suspends judgment across the board will act morally? No, he does not because he cannot. Does he affirm that suspension has epistemic value in that it allows us to attain truth and avoid error? No, he does not because he cannot. Does this all mean that suspension and undisturbedness have no practical or epistemic value for us and that reading Sextus is of no philosophical interest to us? I have already partially addressed this last question at the end of the previous section, but I would like to examine it further to conclude.

Someone might indeed argue that, if the Pyrrhonist has no doxastic commitment to the practical and the epistemic value of suspension and undisturbedness but only reports on the way things have appeared to him up to this point, then his whole enterprise will look pointless and he will hardly win new supporters.[47] Moreover, one might wonder whether Sextus's writings are of any philosophical interest insofar as throughout them he is merely offering a personal testimony on what has so far happened to him (e.g., PH 1.4, 187–209). In reply, let me make two sets of remarks.

To begin with, even though the absence of assertions may lead many to reject Sextus's writings out of hand, nothing necessarily precludes one from finding them philosophically challenging and intriguing. For it is one thing how Sextus intends what he writes to be interpreted, and quite another how his readers react to his writings or what use they can make of his writings. For example, someone may believe that some of Sextus's arguments are sound and have significant philosophical implications. Also, even if one rejects his stance as too radical, one may still find it philosophically stimulating in that it challenges one to ponder more carefully problems concerning knowledge, justification, inquiry, disagreement, and action.[48] This in fact explains why quite a number of contemporary epistemologists have engaged with the justificatory challenges posed by the Modes of Agrippa. To better illustrate my point, let me refer to Henri Estienne's experience with Pyrrhonism as described in the preface to his Latin rendering of PH published in 1562.[49] In an autobiographical story of the genesis of the translation, he tells us that while afflicted by a quartan

47 Cf. Nussbaum "Skeptic Purgatives," 303; Nussbaum, "Equilibrium," 189; and McPherran, "*Ataraxia* and *Eudaimonia* in Ancient Pyrrhonism," 139–40.

48 See Machuca, "Pyrrhonism, Inquiry, and Rationality," 210n14.

49 I have used the complete French translation of the preface provided by Emmanuel Naya in "Traduire les *Hypotyposes pyrrhoniennes:* Henri Estienne entre la fièvre quarte et la folie chrétienne," in *Le scepticisme au XVI^e^ et au XVII^e^*, ed. Pierre-François Moreau (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001), 48–101.

fever that was caused by an immoderate study of letters and that made him hate the very sight of books, he stumbled upon an incomplete and hasty translation of the main principles of the Pyrrhonian sect that he had made some time before. Its first reading immediately made him laugh—subsequent readings having the same effect—which in turn allowed him to overcome his exhaustion and reconciled him with the letters. By ridiculing the doctrines of the dogmatic authors the reading of whose works required so much intellectual effort, Sextus's work had a therapeutic effect on Estienne, who therefore found Pyrrhonism of practical value. But, in Estienne's view, it may also be of both practical and epistemic value to the dogmatists themselves inasmuch as it can render them humble by attacking the impudence and rashness of their assertions, and by allowing them to recognise their cognitive limitations and to accept that the only truth is that of Revelation. By adopting such a fideistic stance, Estienne took Pyrrhonism to be a remedy not only for the aversion to the study of letters people may experience after reading the dogmatists' works, but also for the disease of impiety that affects the latter. Given such a twofold therapeutic efficaciousness, Estienne decided to make PH available to those with no knowledge of Greek. Even though he recognises such a curative effect, he cautions us against abusing the sceptical critical attitude by calling into question not only the erroneous things said by the dogmatists but also those that are valuable, and despite observing at the outset that he has metamorphosed into a sceptic, he later remarks that he is not himself one and does not intend others to become sceptics. Although Estienne makes clear the fictive character of his autobiographical story, the benefits he found in a certain application of Pyrrhonism are to be taken seriously. Sextus would of course reject a fideistic use of Pyrrhonism on the grounds that those who made such a use would be doxastically committed to certain metaphysical and religious views. But the issue under consideration is whether Pyrrhonism could be of practical or epistemic value to someone who is not a Pyrrhonist, and hence who eschews some of his beliefs while retaining others. In general, the fideistic use made of Pyrrhonism in Renaissance and modern philosophy is a clear example of the practical and epistemic value it may have for non-sceptics.

Secondly, it might well occur that some will identify with Sextus's account of his own experience or will be deeply influenced by it. For it does not seem possible to establish *a priori* that Pyrrhonism is utterly unappealing as a philosophy.[50] Whether that is the case depends on whether one values such attitudes as caution, open-mindedness, questioning, and intellectual modesty; and, if one does, on whether one thinks those attitudes should be adopted across the board and on whether one thinks they are to be preferred to the sense of comfort or reassurance one may experience when confidently espousing, say, moral or religious beliefs. For instance, I know a scholar for whom the reading of Sextus's writings prompts the experience of "being blissful," in much the same way as does the reading of certain

50 See Machuca, "The Pyrrhonist's ἀταραξία and φιλανθρωπία," 138.

Buddhist texts. Also, if you may forgive my being self-referential, I should point out that I have been reading Sextus and been interested in Pyrrhonism as a philosophy for almost twenty years. Despite the deflationary interpretation of the epistemic and practical value of Pyrrhonism that I have defended in this essay, I still find that form of scepticism captivating and thought-provoking. This is due to the fact that I identify both with the Pyrrhonist's experience of being at a loss how to resolve the entrenched and longstanding disagreements we encounter in philosophy, morality, politics, religion, and economics, and with his experience of finding oneself, whenever one carries the application of the logical and epistemological principles dictated by reason to the limit, in a situation of *aporia* in which such principles end up undermining themselves.

You may still think that Sextus is not offering much, and you are of course free to think so. But just keep in mind that others may disagree: the brand of Pyrrhonism presented in his writings played an important part in the philosophical scene of the Imperial age, had a tremendous impact on Renaissance and modern philosophy thanks to the rediscovery of those writings, and continues to be a topic of lively discussion among both ancient philosophy scholars and analytic epistemologists.

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Heidrun Eichner

endoxa and the *Theology of Aristotle* in Avicenna's "Flying Man": Contexts for Similarities with Sceptical and Cartesian Arguments in Avicenna

Starting with the publication of a 1927 article by Giuseppe Furlani, Avicenna's thought experiment of a flying man (known as the "flying man argument," the abbreviation is FMA) has been investigated as a potential precursor of the Cartesian *cogito*.[1] The FMA refers to a thought experiment that occurs in multiple forms with varied emphases in several Avicennian texts.[2] A recent summary of the FMA-complex runs as follows:

> We are asked to imagine that a mature, fully functioning human is created by God out of nothing. The human is in mid-air, his sight veiled and his limbs splayed so that he is not touching his own body. There is no sound or smell. In other words, this person is in a state of total sensory deprivation. Furthermore, he has just been created, so he has no memories of prior sensory experience. Avicenna asked what a person in this situation could know. [...] Avicenna thought that the flying man would be aware of his own existence. [...] After all, Avicenna reasoned, the flying man's soul is aware of itself, but not of its body. How could this be, if the soul and body were the same thing?[3]

Avicenna's FMA evokes some reminiscence of certain sceptical attitudes, but these are difficult to pinpoint in the texts presented below and seem to be restricted to

1 Giuseppe Furlani, "Avicenna e il 'Cogito, ergo sum' di Cartesio," *Islamica* 3 (1927): 53–72. For a list and discussion of research articles up to the year 2000, see Dag Nikolaus Hasse, *Avicenna's "De anima" in the Latin West: The Formation of a Peripatetic Philosophy of the Soul 1160–1300* (London: Warburg Institute, 2000), 80n5.

2 For a list of references, see Hasse, *Avicenna's* "*De Anima*," 80–6. In my contribution, I label these texts as *De Anima*-type FMA (i.e., *al-Šifāʾ, De Anima* 1.1 and 5.7; *al-Išārāt*, *Namaṭ* 3, *al-Risāla al-Aḍḥawīya*, chapter 4). By *endoxa*-type FMA I am referring to passages contained in sections on non-demonstrative premises, i.e., mostly discussions of *endoxa* (in various Arabic equivalents) versus primary conceptions. I have not been able to use Ahmet Özcan's edition of the *al-Ḥikma al-Mašriqīya*, in his "İbn Sīnaʾnın el-Hikmetuʾl-meşrikiyye adlı eseri ve tabiat felsefesi" (PhD thesis, Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Istanbul, 1993). The references in Hasse, *Avicenna's* "*De Anima*" suggest that the text runs parallel to the version contained in the *Kitāb al-Šifāʾ*.

3 Peter Adamson, *Philosophy in the Islamic World. A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 84. While this account, and many others, is presented as a kind of digest of the argument's core, some analyses include longer translations of the original texts. See for example Michael Marmura, "Avicenna's 'Flying Man' in Context," *The Monist* 69, no. 3 (July 1986): 383–95; Hasse, *Avicenna's* "*De anima*," 80–87; *Šifāʾ (De Anima)* 1.1 is translated into English in Jon McGinnis and David C. Reisman, eds., *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 178–79.

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the vague phenomenon of "doubting." Scholars have become increasingly cautious about the comparison to Descartes (first made by Furlani) and have observed that the apparent similarities are rather superficial. Dag Hasse's emphasises the historical connections: no direct or indirect connection between Avicenna's and Descartes's respective texts could be established so far.[4] Ahmed Hasnaoui carries out a profound analysis and comparison of the two philosophical projects, identifying three areas of difference: (1) while both philosophers systematically use doubt as a method, Descartes's doubt is general and metaphysical, whereas Avicenna's doubt concerns particular propositions. (2) For Descartes, doubting, thinking, and being form a triad; knowledge of one's existence is constituted as a result of doubt. This is not the case with Avicenna. (3) While Descartes seeks to find an Archimedean point in order to establish a stable base for certainty, Hasnaoui suggests that Avicenna seeks to establish an Eastern philosophy that transcends the philosophy of the *Corpus Aristotelicum*.[5] Based on the arguments' goals, Peter Adamson spells out the difference between the two philosophers along the following lines: Descartes is concerned with radical doubt, while Avicenna is concerned with soul and body, that is, with self-awareness.[6]

In this essay, I would like to suggest an interpretation of the FMA's development that helps to strengthen our understanding of how elements that have been frequently perceived as the argument's sceptical undertone can be contextualised historically. Contrary to most studies on this subject, which analyse the FMA with reference to Avicennian philosophy as a system, my analysis emphasises that the argument's various forms should be interpreted independently from each other, as documents of a continuous development of Avicenna's philosophy.[7] In other words, we are dealing with a "cluster of flying men," who are not always flying, and are perhaps even not always men. This single thought experiment evolves, varies, and shifts in emphasis throughout Avicenna's writings.

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4 Hasse, *Avicenna's "De Anima,"* 80. For a more detailed discussion of the Latin versions see Juhana Toivanen, "The Fate of the Flying Man," in *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy, Volume* 3, ed. Robert Pasnau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 64–98.

5 Cf. Ahmed Hasnaoui, "La conscience de soi chez Avicenne et Descartes," in *Descartes et le Moyen Âge*, ed. Joel Biard and Roshdi Rashed (Paris: Vrin, 1997), 290–91.

6 Peter Adamson, "Peter Adamson on Avicenna's Flying Man Thought Experiment," *Philosophy Bites* (Podcast audio), November 26, 2012, https://philosophybites.com/2012/11/peter-adamson-on-avicennas-flying-man-thought-experiment.html: "Descartes is about radical doubt, Avicenna on soul and body." On *cogito* versus self-awareness see Adamson, *Philosophy in the Islamic World. A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps, Vol. 3* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 134.

7 Ahmed Alwishah is one of the few contributors who tries to trace a chronological development of the argument. See Alwishah, "Ibn Sīnā on Floating Man Arguments," *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 9 (2013): 49–71. Unfortunately, Alwishah does not discuss the chronology along the lines established by Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works*, second edition (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

The argument is fed by two major source-contexts, which are clearly discernible in a very early stage of the arguments' development in *al-Muḫtaṣar al-Awsaṭ* (on this new text, see the appendix below). These two source-contexts are a discussion of *endoxa* in treatises on logic on the one hand, and the Neoplatonist exhortation to strip off one's body on the other. Moreover, the FMA is used and further elaborated by Avicenna in his various writings in two contexts: (1) the discussion of non-demonstrative premises (this is roughly identical to the first source-context, namely the discussion of *endoxa*); and (2) the immateriality of the soul. The degree to which each of the two source-contexts influences the various versions of the FMA differs depending on systematic philosophical concerns that were driving the elaboration of the details of the argument in a given context. Sometimes, but not always, the variations depict a chronological evolution of Avicenna's philosophy.

For the purpose of my argument, it is important that we deal with a single cluster of arguments elaborated in two contexts. As I am going to show in closer detail, the sceptical undertone can be traced directly to the discussion of widespread opinions (Greek *endoxa*; in Arabic the term varies—in this case *ḏā'iʿāt*).[8]

In his logical writings, Avicenna devotes much attention to the role of demonstrative and non-demonstrative premises. There, probing widespread assumptions by making oneself doubt them is described as a tool for distinguishing between notions that are based on unshakable intuitive knowledge and notions that we accept because of what we hear about them from others. A hitherto unstudied passage from *al-Muḫtaṣar al-Awsaṭ* can show that in this quite early Avicennian text, the discussion of *endoxa* is combined with a reference to a passage from the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*.[9] Thus, *al-Muḫtaṣar al-Awsaṭ* can show that the Neoplatonist exhortation to strip off one's body, which is present in one way or another in each of the well-

8 Avicenna's terminology is quite complex and presumably not fully consistent, which we have to understand as a reaction to his sources. The *Glossarium Græco-Arabicum* (http://telota.bbaw.de/glossga/) lists the following counterparts for *endoxon* just in the translations of works by Aristotle: *mašūr* and *maqbūl* for the *Posterior Analytics*, *maḥmūd* for the *Rhetoric*, and the term *ḏā'iʿ* is regularly used in the translation of Aristotle's *Topics*. This variety in translations of Aristotle's works is potentially to be supplemented by the Arabic translations of commentaries on them. For the terminological variety see the lists in Deborah Black, "Certitude, Justification, and the Principles of Knowledge in Avicenna's Epistemology," in *Interpreting Avicenna*, ed. Peter Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 124; Hasnaoui, "La conscience," 287–88. For a description of an instance in which Avicenna amalgamates conflicting translations of terminology in the context of physics (i.e., different types of moisture), see Heidrun Eichner, *Averroes' Mittlerer Kommentar zu Aristoteles' De generatione et corruption* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001), 204–15.

9 The *Theology of Aristotle* is an adaptation of selections from Plotinus's *Enneads* 4–6. It was very popular in the Arabic-Islamic tradition. Its textual history is quite complex, and its relation to the Greek Plotinian texts has been studied intensively albeit not exhaustively; for a first orientation on this see Maroun Aouad, "La *Theologie d'Aristote* et Autres Textes du Plotinus Arabus," in *Dictionnaire des Philosophes Antiques*, ed. Richard Goulet (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1989), 541–90. The Arabic text is published in ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī, *Aflūṭīn ʿinda al-ʿArab* (Kuwait: Wikālat al-Maṭbūʿāt, 1977).

studied *De Anima*-type FMAs, is added to the discussion of the *endoxa* at quite an early stage in the development of Avicenna's philosophy. This discussion in *al-Muḫtaṣar al-Awsaṭ* alludes to a passage at the beginning of chapter 2 of the *Theology of Aristotle*, which contains the exhortation to strip off one's body in order to become pure intellect and thus climb up to the divine world and become placed there and become suspended within it (see below).

By taking a developmental attitude towards the evolution of Avicenna's writings seriously, textual source-contexts from which Avicenna takes his starting point can be distinguished from systematic philosophical concerns that were driving the elaboration of his argument. Within such a framework, instead of trying to develop an essentialised standard account of *the* FMA, it might be easier to accommodate the competing interpretations as referring to two distinct branches of a complex argument in the making.

1 The Discussion of *endoxa: Al-Muḫtaṣar al-Awsaṭ*

As noticed by Ahmed Hasnaoui and Deborah Black, we encounter several versions of thought experiments that bear some similarity to the FMA in Avicenna's discussions of non-demonstrative premises. Both authors account for this similarity by pointing to Avicenna's general predilection for such a type of thought experiment.[10] In contrast to Hasnaoui and Black, I argue that we are dealing with one single argument and its variants; I also argue that the discussion of *endoxa* in Avicenna's writings on logic actually provides the context from which the FMA evolves later on. A presumably early version of the Avicennian discussion of *endoxa* which has passed hitherto unnoticed is contained in the *Burhān* (the section on the *Posterior Analytics*) of *al-Muḫtaṣar al-Awsaṭ*.[11] The main part of this discussion, which is very much like later versions of the *De Anima*-type FMA, is introduced with an emphasis on its special status as a legacy and recommendation.[12]

10 Cf. Hasnaoui, "La conscience," 288–89: *l'hypothèse de l'homme créé d'un coup est un procédé habituel—en tout cas, il ne s'agit pas d'un hapax—auquel Avicenne recourt quand il veut mettre entre parenthèses certaines croyances naturelles*; cf. Black, "Certitude," 138: "this introspective technique is one of which Avicenna is fond" (part of a general discussion at 137–39).

11 For a translation of the relevant passage, see the Appendix below. On *al-Muḫtaṣar al-Awsaṭ* see Gutas, *Avicenna*, 433. The *Kitāb al-Burhān* of *al-Muḫtaṣar al-Awsaṭ* is being edited by Orainab Mashayekhi as part of her M.A. thesis. I would like to thank her for allowing me to access her edition.

12 *fa-innī uwaṣṣī tawṣiʾatan*, cf. Appendix below. Ibn Sīnā, *Šifāʾ* (*De Anima*), in *Psychologie d'Ibn Sina (Avicenne) d'après son oeuvre Aš-Šifa' = Psychologie v jeho dile Aš-Sifa'*, ed. Ján Bakoš (Prague: Éd. de l'Acad. Tchécolovaque des Sciences, 1956), 18.7: *ʿalā sabīl al-tanbīh wa-l-taḏkīr išāratan šadīdatan*, in the case of the passage in *al-Išārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, the work's title alludes to this. A discussion of this is found in Peter Adamson and Fedor Benevich, "The Thought Experimental Method: Avicenna's flying man argument," *Journal of the Americal Philosophical Association* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 150,

Other than later (shorter) versions of discussing the probing of *endoxa*,[13] the passage in *al-Muḫtaṣar al-Awsaṭ* hints at an immediate connection to the *Theology of Aristotle*. Turning to oneself, stripping off one's habits and becoming intellect in the wording of *al-Muḫtaṣar al-Awsaṭ* parallels exactly the wording at the beginning of chapter (*mīmar*) 2 of the *Theology of Aristotle*. This *mīmar* parallels Plotinus's *Enneads* 4.4.1–4 and 4.3.18–20,[14] adding comprehensive independent material on *docta ignorantia*.[15] *Mīmar* 2 is devoted to the soul's knowledge of the higher world, its recollection of the higher world after its descent to the body, and to explain how ignorance of some details of the bodily world constitutes a superior type of knowledge. In this context,[16] the beginning of the chapter contains an exhortation to be alone with oneself and turn to one's self by stripping off one's body and becoming an immaterial substance:

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with more details in Tommaso Alpina, "The *Soul of*, the Soul *in itself*, and the *Flying Man* Experiment," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 28, no. 2 (September 2018): 207–8.

13 Here I will not deal systematically with these later versions of the *endoxa*, which are contained in virtually all comprehensive *summae* by Avicenna. On the chronology of the major works see Gutas, *Avicenna*, 165. Within this framework, the chronology of the texts is as follows: (early) middle period: *ʿUyūn al-Ḥikma*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Kuwait: Wikālat al-Maṭbūʿāt, 1980), 12.5–12; *Kitāb al-Hidāya*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbduh (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira al-Ḥadīṯa, 1968), 110.6–112.9; later middle period: *Kitāb al-Šifāʾ: Kitāb al-Burhān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣrīyah, 1954), 65.17–66.4 and so forth; *Kitāb al-Naǧāt fī al-Ḥikma al-Manṭiqīya wa-l-Ṭabīʿīya wa-l-Ilāhīyat*, ed. Māǧid Faḫrī (Beirut: Dār al-Ǧīl, 1985), 80.6–81.3 and 82.1–83.1 (partial translation in Hasnaoui, "La conscience," 288); late period: *Kitāb al-Išārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, ed. Jacques Forget (Leiden: Brill, 1892). In *al-Naǧāt*, the section on the primary notions contains an extensive discussion on the internal senses, most notably on *wahm*. In *al-Išārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, the discussion of non-demonstrative premises is extensive, given this work's general brevity.

14 For a brief survey of the correspondences between the chapters of the *Theology of Aristotle* and the *Enneads* as well as on its contents, see Rotraud Hansberger, "Die Theologie des Aristoteles," in *Islamische Philosophie im Mittelalter*, ed. Heidrun Eichner, Mathias Perkams, and Christian Schäfer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2013), 166–67.

15 Cf. Peter Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus* (London: Duckworth, 2002), 140–47.

16 The importance of this passage in the *Theology of Aristotle* has been discussed repeatedly with reference to Avicenna's theory of abstraction. Note that the focus of my analysis is different, though some elements are related. For a recent reassessment of how Neoplatonic and Aristotelian elements merge in Avicenna's theory see Dag Nikolaus Hasse, "Avicenna's Epistemological Optimism," in *Interpreting Avicenna. Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1–38. Cristina d'Ancona emphasises the importance of Neoplatonic elements, including the beginning of *mīmar* 2. See d'Ancona, "Degrees of Abstraction in Avicenna," in *Theories of Perception in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Pekka Kärkkäinen and Simo Knuuttila (Berlin: Springer, 2008), 47–71. Dimitri Gutas criticises an earlier version of d'Ancona's approach, including a reference to FMA, in his "Intuition and Thinking: The Evolving Structure of Avicenna's Epistemology," in *Aspects of Avicenna*, ed. Robert Wisnovsky (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001), 1–38. For a more balanced evaluation of d'Ancona's insistence on Neoplatonic elements see Hasse, "Avicenna's Epistemological Optimism," 110–12.

Theology of Aristotle, *mīmar* 2		*Al-Muḫtaṣar al-Awsaṭ*	
innī *rubbamā* ***ḫalawtu bi-nafsī***		*wa-law* ***innā raǧaʿnā ilā anfusinā***	
	I might stay alone with myself		If we were to turn to ourselves
wa-ḫalaʿtu		***wa-ḫalaʿnā***	
	and slough off		and slough off
badanī ǧāniban		*al-ʿādāt*	
	my body, drawn away		the habits
wa-ṣirtu ka-annī		***wa-ṣirnā ka-annā***	
	and become as if I were		and become as if we were
		lam nasmaʿ šayʾan wa-lam naʿtaqid wa-innamā haṣalnā fī al-dunyā dufʿatan	not hearing anything and not having convictions and being there in the world all of a sudden as
ǧawhar muǧarrad		***ʿaqlan***	
	an immaterial substance		an intellect
bi-lā badan	without body		
fa-akūnu dāḫilan fī ḏāti ***rāǧiʿan*** *ilayhā*	and I would be inside myself, turning to it.		

Such close parallelism as is found in *al-Muḫtaṣar al-Awsaṭ* (which comes close to an actual paraphrase of the *Theology of Aristotle*) does not reappear in discussions of *endoxa* contained in Avicenna's later writings.[17] Among the texts in the *logica*, only this passage in *al-Muḫtaṣar al-Awsaṭ* uses the notion of "sloughing off habits" (*ḫalʿ al-ʿādāt*) while others use more neutral expressions for disregarding reported opinions. This early version speaks of "becoming intellect," a concept that corre-

17 Among the *De Anima*-type FMA, the passage in *al-Išārāt* combines the thought experiment with the exhortation to turn to oneself: *irǧaʿ ilā nafsika* [...] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Išārāt*, 119,2. In *Kitāb al-Hidāya,* the element of "coming down to the world" from an elevated position is alluded to in the *endoxa*-type FMA: *ka-annaka waradta ʿalā al-ʿālam dufʿatan* (110.10). In the *Theology of Aristotle*, the pure intellect is suspended and attached (*mutaʿalliq*) to the higher world, whereas the flying man in *al-Išārāt* is splayed and suspended in free air for a moment (*munfariǧa wa-muʿallaqa laḥẓa mā fī hawāʾ ṭalq*; 119.9).

sponds to the *Theology of Aristotle* and is not present in later versions.[18] An element that remains stable throughout the various FMA versions is the notion of "[being there] all of a sudden." It is present in nearly all versions of the discussions of *endoxa*, as well as in the *De Anima*-type versions of the FMA in *al-Aḍḥawīya*, *al-Šifāʾ*, and *al-Išārāt*. In the context of the discussion of *endoxa*, this feature is clearly linked to not basing one's judgement on old habits or, most notably, opinions that we have heard from others. In the *De Anima*-type this should be interpreted as a reference to memory of past sensations.

The element of "hearing" deserves attention: while in the *De Anima*-type accounts in *al-Šifāʾ* and *al-Išārāt*, "hearing" appears to be an example of the activity of the senses, in the *endoxa*-type versions and in *al-Aḍḥawīya*, "hearing" is the way to have access to the opinion of others. In *al-Muḫtaṣar al-Awsaṭ*, the way to have access to information is described as the extraction of a meaning (*maʿnā*) from its expression (*lafẓ*)—sensation is not an issue here. The state of the abstract intellect is compared to sleep.[19]

Thus, among the discussions in the logical writings, *al-Muḫtaṣar al-Awsaṭ* plays an important role for my argument of a continuous evolution of the FMA as one thought experiment modified and adapted repeatedly. In this very early writing, the concern for freeing one's intuitive understanding from opinions deeply rooted in custom and habit (i.e., the discussion of *endoxa*) in fact can be linked to the *Theology of Aristotle's* exhortation to stripping off one's body.

2 *Al-Risāla al-Aḍḥawīya*

Al-Risāla al-Aḍḥawīya is a treatise stemming from the (early) middle period of Avicenna's activity; thus, it predates *al-Šifāʾ*.[20] It is devoted to the fate of the soul, and the FMA is embedded in a chapter that argues that even in this world the *ego* is not to be identified with body. Hence, after death, when the body is stripped from its soul, the permanence of personal identity does not require a transformation of the soul. The FMA occupies roughly the first half of chapter 4. The second half of the chapter focuses on good and evil—good and evil pertaining to the body affect the soul in a way comparable to the way it reacts if friends are affected.

In the context of my argument here, *al-Risāla al-Aḍḥawīya* plays an important role for showing how the two types of FMA (*endoxa*-type and *De Anima*-type) relate

18 Only a few among the other passages on the *endoxa* make any reference to *ʿaql:* Closest comes *ʿUyūn al-Ḥikma:* "if a human being were to imagine himself created for the first time *as intellecting*" (*law tawahhama al-insān nafsahū ḫuliqa fī al-ḫulqa al-ūlā ʿāqilan*; Ibn Sīnā, *ʿUyūn al-Ḥikma*, 12.11–12).

19 This might strengthen al-Ṭūsī's interpretation of the reference to sleep in *al-Išārāt* as a reference to a state where the senses are blocked and the operation of intellect is pure and undisturbed. On this see below.

20 Cf. Gutas, *Avicenna*, 472–77.

to each other: Among the "classical" *De Anima*-type FMA, *al-Risāla al-Aḍḥawīya* dwells most extensively on how we can step-by-step eliminate various parts of the body from being the foundation of personal identity. *Al-Risāla al-Aḍḥawīya* places its emphasis on the epistemological component of identifying several distinct parts of the body. While some organs in (actual) existence (*fī al-wuǧūd*) can be taken away completely, others can only be taken away in part (i.e., the brain). The heart can be taken away only in imagination (*tawahhum*). It is clear that the heart is not the self-evident core of personal identity because it is less well-known than this self-evident core:

> As to the brain: One can assume that one part of it is separated from it while this item [i.e., guarantying personal identity] remains.
> As to the heart: This is not possible for it in existence (*wuǧūd*) but in imagination (*tawahhum*). This is so because a human being can know that his that-ness about which he talks is existent while it is possible that at the same time he does not know that he has a heart and how it is, what it is and where it is. Many people who do not see the heart affirm it and are convinced about [its existence] *based on what they hear, not intuitively* (*samāʿan lā bidāhatan*), and they think that it is the stomach. It is impossible that a thing is one while it is being known and unknown together at one time.[21]

The fact that we have no intuitive knowledge of the heart and have to rely on what we hear from others means that we have only imprecise and perhaps even false information about it. Thus, in this discussion of how we know about the heart as part of our body, the connection to the discussion of *endoxa* is still preserved in a quite explicit way. Among the various versions of the FMA, in *al-Aḍḥawīya*, the motive for taking away various layers of our body is spelled out most explicitly. One part of this process is carried out in actual existence, the other solely in imagination.

Beyond the other *De Anima*-type versions, *al-Aḍḥawīya* does not draw on the concept of cutting off the individual from external information (be it opinions heard from others or sensory perception). In *al-Aḍḥawīya*, "doubting" does not at all appear as an epistemic strategy. The focus is rather on taking away parts of the body and thus identifying them as distinct from each other. Some parts can be identified by taking them away in actual existence (external limbs, parts of the brain), while some can be taken away in imagination. In the case of the heart (in order to distinguish from the true self), *al-Aḍḥawīya* operates with a distinction between intuitive knowledge and knowledge based on hearsay or even false opinions, but it does not refer to doubt. Instead of doubtable versus undoubtable knowledge,

21 Ibn Sīnā, *Al-Aḍḥawīya fī al-Maʿād*, ed. Ḥasan ʿĀṣī (Beirut: al-Muʾassasa al-Ǧāmiʿīya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Našr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 1987), 127.13–128.5. Unless noted otherwise, all translations into English are my own.

there is the distinction between what is known (the soul) and what is not known or at least not known to all (the heart).[22]

In the second half of the chapter after the thought experiment, Avicenna elaborates on his conception of the relation between soul and body as a relation that is comparable to how we become accustomed to friends and companions: when the body suffers, the soul is affected in the same way as we are affected when friends have to suffer evil:

> If someone imagines that from this entity these bodily concomitants are taken away, and that he loses some type of comfort and pain which he has because he shares in body, then he is like someone who loses comfort and pain which exist in his brethren and companions. And if then he obtains comfort and pain which are specific for him, then he is truly comfortable or suffering pain.[23]

3 *Kitāb al-Šifā''s De Anima* 1.1 and 5.7[24]

As the versions of the FMA in *al-Šifā''*s *De Anima*-part have been discussed quite frequently, in the present context I will emphasise only some minor details that have received little attention so far and which may assist in identifying and reassessing the context of elements of scepticism in Avicenna's text.[25]

Both passages in *al-Šifā''*s *De Anima*-part draw on *al-Aḍḥawīya* argument's core structure of identifying known and unknown parts of the human being and its body.

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22 Adamson and Benevich's analysis of the FMA in the *De Anima* part of *al-Šifā''*s points out that the statement "what is affirmed is distinct from what is not affirmed" is the weak spot of the argument. The argument should not be saved by understanding it as saying "that these two things are possibly distinct," but rather this is "stated confidently and with no caveat." There is no "reference to a demonstration to be given later on that might show that they really are distinct" (Adamson and Benevich, "Thought Experimental Method," 151–52). In view of Adamson and Benevich's analysis, it should be noted that the *al-Aḍḥawīya* in fact addresses the problem; it even stands at the core of this FMA version.

23 Ibn Sīnā, *Al-Aḍḥawīya*, 129.10–14.

24 Respectively, Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Šifā'* (*De Anima*), 18.4–19.2; 252.1–254.4 and following.

25 The classic exposition is Marmura, "Avicenna's 'Flying Man' in Context." There are several recent contributions: Adamson and Benevich center on *al-Šifā''*s *De Anima*. According to them, the FMA serves to "determine whether it belongs to the soul's essence that the soul be related to a body… The answer to this question is no" ("Thought Experimental Method," 148). The soul's essence can grasped by identifying its essential attributes (155–60). Marwan Rashed argues that "Avicenna borrows arguments developed originally by Abū Hāšim in order to demonstrate that a definite mode belongs to the living being as a whole (*ǧumla*)." Rashed, "Chose, *item* et distinction: L'"homme volant" d'Avicenne avec et contre Abū Hāšim al-Ǧubbā'ī," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 28, no. 2 (September 2018): 167. Tommaso Alpina contextualises the FMA within the overall structure of *al-Šifā''*s *De Anima* and analyses it as a "transition from the inquiry into the existence of the soul as a *relational* entity to that into the essence is marked by the *Flying Man* argument at the end of I, 1" (Alpina, "The *Soul of*," 202).

The passage in *De Anima* 1.1 refers twice to the old remedy for dealing with obstinate sceptics (beating them): at the beginning, Avicenna points out that we talk to a person who is able to see the truth, who is not in need of being educated and beaten, and who does not require guidance away from sophistries (*min ġayr iḥtiyāǧ ilā taṭqīfihī wa-qarʿi ʿaṣāhu wa-ṣarfihī ʿan al-muġālaṭāt*).[26] Towards the end he stresses again that, in the case of a person who is unaware of his self, this person must be beaten (*wa-in kāna ḏāhilan ʿanhu yuḥtāǧu ilā yuqraʿu ʿaṣāhū*).[27]

In *De Anima* 1.1, the context of sensory deprivation is new as compared to earlier versions: In the discussion of *endoxa*, the thought-experiment is primarily about making sure that the person has not heard from others about their opinions. In other words, the argument is primary concerned with moral and ethical implications. In *De Anima* 1.1, however, vision and touch are ruled out as sources of information due to the fact that there exist parts of the body to which these senses correspond.[28] In addition, the role of imagination (here, *taḫayyul*) is emphasised: a three-dimensional extension of the incorporeal part of the self cannot be conceived and, even if imagination were to conceive an additional hand, it would not conceive it as part of the immaterial.[29] The concept of doubting—familiar from the *endoxa* and missing in *al-Aḍḥawīya*—is reintroduced and combined with the concept of affirmation (*iṯbāt*): the flying man does not doubt the affirmation of his self.

In the *De Anima* 5.7 the focus has somewhat shifted. The argument is embedded in a discussion of how the various levels of the soul's faculties and powers are united, most notably as regards sensation (*iḥsās*) and appetitive powers (*quwwā šahwānīya*) (as it turns out, according to Avicenna's psychology these two are located in the animal and vegetative part of the soul).[30] The FMA provides the third argument for this principle's immateriality.[31] The FMA is introduced as a reference to what has

26 Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Šifāʾ* (*De Anima*), 18.8

27 Ibn Sīnā, 19.2

28 Only in *De Anima* 5.7 (Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Šifāʾ* [*De Anima*], 252.3: *lam yasmaʿ ṣawtan*) is the flying man also blocked from hearing. When touch and vision are being blocked, in all accounts, this seems to primarily serve the aim of preventing the flying man from having any notion of his parts.

29 It is not easy to discern precisely what the argumentative context for this remark is. One context might be the elaboration of the role of the internal senses in Avicenna's theory of mental existence: the thought experiment's man can conduct more thought experiments—this does not weaken the ontological status of what he is thinking. Moreover, I would like to suggest that this should be linked to discussions on the role of imagination when doubting conclusions. The term Avicenna prefers for this in his discussions of *endoxa* and non-demonstrative premises, however, is *wahm*. The activity of *wahm* leads to correct results only if it relies solely on sensation, not if it relies on more abstract notions.

30 This unifying principle is to be construed by analogy to the common sense that unites the activities of the five senses (Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Šifāʾ* [*De Anima*], 249.9–11). It coordinates various layers of activity: "Because of this it is true when we say: 'When we feel something we have a desire.' Or: 'When we see this we become angry.' This one thing in which these powers are united is what everyone estimates to be his self (*ḏāt*)." Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Šifāʾ* (*De Anima*), 250.6–8.

31 Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Šifāʾ* (*De Anima*), 251.10, and so forth.

been said earlier, and in fact this version in *De Anima* 5.7 stands closer to *al-Aḍḥawīya* than *De Anima* 1.1: the structure of its argument revolves around the "What is known is not identical to what is not known."[32] The (Plotinian) theme of taking off one's body like garments is emphasised:

> In reality, these parts of the body are nothing else but garments which become for us like parts of us because they have been attached to us for such a long time. When we imagine ourselves we don't imagine ourselves as naked but with bodies as cover. The reason for this is the long attachment. In the case of garments, we are used to taking them off and throwing them away, other than it is the case with the parts of body. Our opinion (*ẓannunā*) that the parts of our body are parts of us is more deeply rooted than our opinion that garments are a part of us.[33]

These parts of the body are not known intuitively, i. e. "because I know that I am myself."[34] Rather I know that I have a heart and a brain "by sensation, by hearing [what others say], by experience (*bi-l-iḥsās wa-l-samāʿ wa-l-taǧārub*)." Here, we can discern how *De Anima* 5.7 relates to *al-Aḍḥawīya's* reference to the distinction between intuitive knowledge and questionable knowledge: in *al-Aḍḥawīya*, knowledge about the heart is based on hearsay (*samāʿ*); in *De Anima* 5.7 this is amplified to knowledge based on these three sources. In this account, we can discern an immediate connection to Avicenna's elaboration of the theory of sensation, most notably the internal senses. In addition to sensation in a stricter sense, this includes experience that rests on memory, which is one of the five internal senses.

4 *Al-Išārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*

When describing the evolution of the FMA as a continuum of modifications in the arguments' scope, an element of continuity between *al-Išārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt* and *De Anima* 5.7 exists in their shared interest in just what constitutes personal identity and also coordinates the various powers. However, *al-Išārāt*'s version introduces a completely new level of "sceptical" attitude to the argument by questioning the very possibility of intuitive introspective access to the self—albeit very tentatively and, ultimately, dismissively. While in all other versions of the FMA this was not presented as a problem, the reference to mental states that might question this ability garners *al-Išārāt*'s discussion a specific quality. We may try to explain this feature by the fact that the theory of self-awareness, of feeling (*šuʿūr*) one's self, becomes increasingly important in the later works of Avicenna. In *De Anima* 1.1, the obstinate sceptic who questions intuitive self-awareness is to be treated by being beaten: he cannot be reached by the argument. *Al-Išārāt* is somewhat more careful when stip-

32 Ibn Sīnā, 252.4.
33 Ibn Sīnā, 252,4–8.
34 Ibn Sīnā, 252.15.

ulating the conditions for the thought experiment. The person should be "sound" (*ṣaḥīḥ*) or in some other state in such a way that they have sound intuition (*bal wa-ʿalā baʿḍ aḥwālika ġayrihā bi-ḥayṯu tufaṭṭinu li-l-shayʾ fiṭnatan ṣaḥīḥatan*)[35]: "I think (*ʿindī*) that this is something which [every] person has who carries out this introspection (*al-mustabṣir*), in a way that even in the case of a sleeper during his sleep and a drinker in his drunkenness his self does not escape him, even if no representation of the self exists in memory (*ḏikr*)."[36] "Soundness" as a precondition for carrying out the thought experiment extends not only to intellect (*ʿaql*) but also to the (bodily) condition (*hayʾa*).[37] Sensation is blocked from the flying person; more precisely, as in *De Anima* 1.1, seeing and touch are blocked in a way that prevents the flying person from perceiving parts of the body.

The version of the argument in *al-Išārāt* has become quite influential for many interpretative approaches. In particular, the interpretation which has been made popular by al-Ṭūsī's commentary has influenced its later reception. Al-Ṭūsī's commentary has the tendency to understand the text as systematically covering all options of a scenario. He understands the reference to the one who sleeps as an allusion to someone whose *external* senses are blocked, while the reference to the one who is drunk would refer to both *external and internal* senses.[38] This implication is not really present in Avicenna's text, and one might as well think of sleep and drunkenness as states where the mind is not functioning completely soundly. Likewise, al-Ṭūsī interprets the condition that the person should not see the parts of the body as an allusion to the *whole* (*ǧumla*); he interprets the condition that the person's limbs should not touch each other as a precaution against feeling the *parts*. Other texts (the arguments in *al-Aḍḥawīya* and *De Anima* 1.1) suggest that for Avicenna himself the emphasis is only on the parts. Al-Ṭūsī interprets *hawā' ṭalq* as "tepid air," and thinks that Avicenna suggests that sensation of heat and cold is also blocked. If we understand *hawā' ṭalq* as just referring to "free air" (a lexicalised expression), the passage in *al-Išārāt* (like the scenario in *De Anima*) takes precautions against the parts of the body touching each other.

5 Conclusion: *Cogito* Yes or No?

How can these observations on details of the development of the flying man argument help us to better understand the argument's scope as well as the presence of "sceptical" elements? Apart from showing that there is in fact a connection between the evolution of the FMA and the discussion of *endoxa* in antiquity and after, we can

35 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Išārāt*, 119.2–3.

36 Ibn Sīnā, 119.4–6.

37 Ibn Sīnā, 119.7: (*al-dhāt)* [...] *ḫuliqat* [...] *ṣaḥīḥa al-ʿaql wa-l-hayʾa*.

38 Cf. al-Ṭūsī, *Šarḥ al-Tamwīḥāt*, in Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Išārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1985), 2:343.1–344.1.

better understand how certain elements function in the overall framework of Avicenna's corpus. We can see why the role of doubt oscillates so much in our interpretations. In the *endoxa*-type of the FMA, doubt serves to evaluate information and to filter external influences: opinions we hear from others can be doubted, they do not form part of the core of certain knowledge we have in ourselves. How thinking or the formation of concepts is actually effected is not of interest in this context. In the *De Anima*-type, this feature of blocking external information is taken over by sensory deprivation: The flying man (possibly to the exclusion of the *Išārāt*'s version) does not actively *doubt* the objects of sensation or the exterior world, but *the very setting of the thought experiment* blocks him from these objects.

These two elements function in analogous ways in the two types of arguments and hence can be easily replaced by each other in our analyses when comparing Avicennian texts. In fact, even the *De Anima*-type FMA calls for this type of interpretation: When the *De Anima*-type emphasises that the flying man *does not doubt* his self, we are led to the question what would happen if we did not block the flying man from sensation. Could he systematically doubt all the information he receives from his senses? Would he then have doubts about his self? Among the Avicennian texts themselves, only *al-Išārāt*'s version seems to think along these lines and to include the option of really *questioning* sensation (during sleep and drunkenness). Even given the thought experiment's provisions for isolating him from the exterior, the flying man might encounter problems in accessing his self-evident self—when sleeping or when drunk. Avicenna thinks he does have access, but does not seem to be entirely sure about this. In contrast, the earlier texts assume that after doubting there remains something certain.

We have to keep in mind that this process is not really what we are familiar with calling "thinking" nowadays. Avicenna's theory of the internal senses and his interest in the phenomenon of self-awareness were important steps in elaborating a more "modern" medieval conception of thinking. His theories integrated contemporary medical state-of-the-art knowledge about the importance of the brain with the philosophical imperative of explaining intellectual activity as a purely immaterial process relying on external immaterial principles.

By amalgamating the two types of FMA, one might easily construct a striking parallel with Descartes. However, Avicenna keeps these two strands separate. The *De Anima*-type flying man is facing a situation which is the inverse of the Cartesian setting: His *genius malignus* would be the person who carries out the thought experiment and manipulates the flying man's small little world. This *genius malignus* would not deceive the flying man by deceiving his senses when providing them with false information, as in the Cartesian example. Rather, the *genius* would create an empty world in which all possibilities of sense-perception (or more general: any type of doubtable knowledge) appear to be a priori eliminated. The flying man knows only what is left over and what is not taken away by the all-doubt-eliminating *genius*, and what is left over is the flying man's immaterial self. As a result, Avicenna's *De Anima*-type flying man actually cannot have doubts about anything at all.

When comparing his situation to that of the Cartesian thinking *ego*, however, we must also consider the framework of Avicenna's ontology. This ontology includes a strong conception of mental existence: objects formed in the intellect and/or imagined in our minds do exist. The very existence of the doubting flying man is secured by the thought activity of the person who carries out the thought experiment—this thinking person securing his (mental) existence does not necessarily have to be the flying man himself, but could be. If Avicenna or someone else carries out this thought experiment, the doubting and flying man is made a form by the active intellect as well. Given this form of a flying man, the flying man as an entity does exist in mind and has a mental existence. Thus, for the very existence of the flying man's immaterial self it is sufficient that someone (externally or internally) creates it as a distinct entity by thinking about it correctly, an *ego cogito id est*, so to say. In Avicenna's FMAs references to the first person and the third person are used quite interchangeably—in our minds, we can isolate our own selves as well as those of other persons.

Appendix: A Text from the Section on the *Posterior Analytics* in *Al-Muḫtaṣar al-Awsaṭ*

Ms. Istanbul Nuruosmaniye 2763, folio 102*r*: If we were to turn to ourselves and slough off the habits, and if we were to become as if we do not hear anything and do not have convictions and as if we were there in the world all of a sudden as an intellect, and if we were to make ourselves doubt them [i.e., the *ḏaʾiʿāt*, "widespread opinions" mentioned earlier]—then this is possible for us, and this is not possible in the case of the intelligibles and objects of imagination mentioned earlier. For example, if we place ourselves in this position, and if then we present to ourselves that justice is good and lying is base, and if we then make ourselves doubt about this, this is possible for us. Or rather, it is not necessary for us to think this is true. If we present to ourselves that the whole is larger than the part, then it is not possible for us to have doubts about this. If we were to present to ourselves that behind the universe there is either something or vacuum it would not be possible for us to have doubts about this, while this [in fact] is false.

folio 102*v*: Widespread [views (*ḏāʾiʿāt*)] and the accepted [views (*maqbūlāt*)] which take their rank are the principles of dialectics (*ǧadal*). When they are taken in a demonstration, this is sophistry (*muġālaṭa*). Opinions (*maẓnūnāt*) are the principles of rhetoric (*ḫiṭāba*), and the ambiguous [views (*mušabbahāt*)] are the principles of sophistry (*muġālaṭa*). Here we are only talking about what is good for demonstration, how it is, what its signs are, and how it is used in demonstration. Before this I shall give you a recommendation (*fa-innī uwaṣṣī tawṣiʾatan*).

I say: If you wish to consider whether a premise is primary, then take it as if you were refuting what is familiar and the customs and what you have heard people say.

Rather think that this is the first day you hear something or that intellecting it is sleep. Then make present the premise as a meaning (*maʿnā*) without its wording (*lafẓ*) in your mind. See if it is possible that you have doubts about it, and whether you find for yourself that its opposite is possible. If you do not find something like this, see whether there is no way for what calls you to believe it is true that its opposite enters your imagination (*wahm*) and leaves what is in the custom of your senses (*ḥiss*). [And see] whether the impossibility of forming its concept in your imagination is because your imagination calls you in it to one of the states of sensibles. If this is the case, have doubts about it, and if this is not the case, then it is self-evident.

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Warren Zev Harvey

The Problem of Many Gods in al-Ghazālī, Averroes, Maimonides, Crescas, and Sforno

Medieval philosophers usually held that monotheism can be proved by reason. They had good authority for this opinion, since the Philosopher himself had concluded his *Metaphysics* 12.1076a5, with a felicitous quotation from Homer: "a plurality of sovereigns is not good. Let there be one sovereign!" (*Iliad* 2:204). Nonetheless, there were some medieval sceptics who denied that reason can prove monotheism. Two such sceptics were al-Ghazālī and Hasdai Crescas. In my following remarks, I shall discuss the views of al-Ghazālī and Crescas, as well as those of two staunch defenders of Aristotelian monotheism, Averroes and Maimonides. The story I wish to tell begins with al-Ghazālī, moves on to Averroes and Maimonides, and concludes with Crescas. Crescas may be seen as taking up the cudgels for al-Ghazālī against Averroes and Maimonides. My story will also include a section on Moses Narboni, who was the first to perceive the relationship of Maimonides's view to Averroes's. In addition, it will include a postscript on Obadiah Sforno's discussion of the problem.

Al-Ghazālī (1058–1111)

In his *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, Discussions 5–7, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī maintains that God's unity is not known by reason but by prophecy alone. According to reason, he argues, there can be more than one God. He held that Aristotelian philosophers, like al-Fārābī and Avicenna, were thus necessarily unsuccessful in their attempts to establish God's unity philosophically.

In Discussion 5, al-Ghazālī challenges the Aristotelian view that Necessary Existence entails unity. Why, he asks, could there not be two Necessary Existents, both uncaused (in accordance with the definition of necessary existence), and thus neither the cause of the other? Why, in other words, could there not be two independent Gods?[1]

In Discussion 7, al-Ghazālī returns to the problem of many Gods, and again speaks about the possibility of two separate uncaused beings who were both "creating Gods." He asks, "Why should it be impossible for the causal series to end in two causes, one the cause of the heavens and the other the cause of the [four] elements, or one the cause of the intellects and the other the cause of all bodies? [...] [The phi-

1 Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, ed. and trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2000), 85. The passage is found also in Averroes, *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, trans. Simon van den Bergh (London: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial, 1969), 1:170–71. Arabic text: Averroes, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, ed. Maurice Bouyges (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1930), 288.

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losophers'] inability to deny two creating Gods [*ilāhayn ṣāniʿayn*] has become clear."[2] Al-Ghazālī's challenge is plain and simple: Why not posit two independent creating Gods, each necessarily existent, each the first cause of His own causal chain? After all, Aristotelian philosophers had emphasised the essential difference between the celestial realm, made of the "fifth element," or ether, and the terrestrial realm, made of earth, water, air, and fire. They had also emphasised the essential difference between the intellects, which are incorporeal, and the corporeal beings, whether made of the four elements or of the fifth element. Why not, then, suppose that part of the universe was created by one God, and another part by a second God? Why not? Shouldn't the Aristotelians be able to agree with such a supposition?

Averroes (1126–98)

Abū l-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Rušd (Averroes) responds to al-Ghazālī's challenge in Discussions 5–7 of his *Incoherence of the Incoherence*.

In Discussion 7, Averroes presents a particularly interesting argument. One world entails one God. Heaven and earth, incorporeal beings and corporeal beings—all are one and interconnected. The world is a cohesive and coherent whole. Everything fits. It has no loose parts. Its oneness points to its One cause:

> Now, this proposition [i.e., al-Ghazālī's conjecture that one God could rule one part of the world, and a second God another part] is not true [...] The Creator of the heavens is [also] the Creator of the cause that created the [four] elements. This is the theory of the philosophers [...] For it is evident that the worlds [e.g., the celestial and terrestrial worlds or incorporeal and corporeal worlds] exist through cause and effect, and it is the inquiry concerning these causes which leads us to a first cause [*ʿilla ūlā*] for everything. And if some of these different principles were wholly independent of others—that is, if some were not the cause of others—then the world could not be a single [*wāḥid*] and interconnected [*murtabiṭ*] whole. To the impossibility of this the divine words refer, "Had there been in [heaven and earth] Gods besides God, both [heaven and earth] surely would have been destroyed" (Quran 21 [The Prophets]:22).[3]

Al-Ghazālī had alluded to the putatively absolute Aristotelian divisions between the celestial and terrestrial realms or the incorporeal and corporeal realms. Averroes now denies that these divisions are absolute.[4] The world, he insists, is one (*wāḥid*) and interconnected (*murtabiṭ*), and thus can have only one first cause, who is God.

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2 Al-Ghazālī, *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, 113; Averroes, *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, 1:226 (Arabic 375).

3 Averroes, *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, 1:228–29 (Arabic 379–80). Averroes argues against the possibility of many Gods also in his Long Commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. See below, "Postscript: Obadiah Sforno (1475–1550)."

4 Averroes holds that the celestial and terrestrial realms have several factors in common. See his *De Substantia Orbis*, ed. and trans. Arthur Hyman (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1986), chapter 2, 87–98 (Hebrew 30–36).

To be sure, it is not clear what force Averroes attributed to the argument for God's unity based on the unity of the world. Did he consider it an apodictic proof (*burhān*) or only a good dialectical response to al-Ghazālī? This question shall not concern us here.

Maimonides (1138–1204)

Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides) raises the problem of many Gods in the course of presenting his philosophic proofs for the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God in *Guide of the Perplexed* 2:1. The problem is found in two of three proofs which appear as a sort of addendum after the conclusion of his discourse on the four philosophic demonstrations of God based on the premise of the eternity of the world. In the second of these three addended proofs, Maimonides writes:

> It has already been established as true by means of a demonstration [*bi-l-burhān*; ibn Tibbon: *ba-mofet*] [in *Guide* 1:72] that all that exists is like one [*wāḥid*; ibn Tibbon: *eḥad*] individual with interconnected [*murtabiṭ*; ibn Tibbon: *niqšar*] parts, and that the forces of the sphere pervade this lowly matter and fashion it. Thus, it is impossible [...] that one God should be exclusively concerned with one part of what exists, and another God with another part, for one part is interconnected [*murtabiṭ*; ibn Tibbon: *niqšar*] with the other [...] [T]he substrate of the action [of the supposed two Gods] is one [*wāḥid*; ibn Tibbon: *eḥad*], and its parts interconnected [*murtabiṭ*; ibn Tibbon: *niqšar*] [...]
>
> In the case of any complex composed of parts, [...] [its] first cause [*al-sabbab al-awwal*; ibn Tibbon: *ha-sibba ha-riʾšona*] is [that which causes] the coming-together of [those] parts [...] If the agent that causes the parts of the complex to come together [...] is one, He is indubitably God [...] [T]he fact that all that exists is one indicates to us that He who caused it to exist is One.[5]

The argument that Maimonides brings here against the conjecture that there are many Gods is precisely Averroes's argument against al-Ghazālī: if the world is one and interconnected, it must have only one first cause. Maimonides does not mention here al-Ghazālī or Averroes, but it is clear he has in mind the exchange between them. The description of the world as "one" and "interconnected," together with the use of the concept of "first cause," reflects *prima facie* the direct influence of Averroes's *Incoherence of the Incoherence*.[6] The triple use of the word *murtabiṭ* ("in-

5 Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 1:250–51. Arabic text: *Dalālat al-Ḥāʾirīn*, ed. Shlomo Munk and Isaschar Joel (Jerusalem: Junovitch, 1931), 174–75. When citing Arabic terms from the *Guide*, I have also given the renderings in Rabbi Samuel ibn Tibbon's medieval Hebrew translation, which was used by Narboni, Crescas, and Sforno.

6 Averroes's *Incoherence of the Incoherence* was written in 1179/80, about a decade before the completion of Maimonides's *Guide* in 1190. In a letter to his pupil Joseph ben Judah ibn Simeon written in 1191, Maimonides stated that he had just received all of Averroes's commentaries on Aristotle except the *Parva Naturalia*, and praised them. See *Iggerot ha-Rambam*, ed. Isaac Shailat (Maaleh Adummim:

terconnected") is particularly significant. Moreover, Maimonides's previous proof, i.e., the first of the three addended proofs, which similarly raised the problem of many Gods, may also be indebted to the al-Ghazālī–Averroes debate.[7]

Maimonides begins the present proof of divine unity by alluding to his discussion of the world as a *macroanthropos* in *Guide* 1:72. In this long and provocative chapter, he presents much empirical evidence supporting the unity and interconnectedness of the world. The influence of Averroes's *Incoherence of the Incoherence* may also be seen in this chapter. Maimonides writes, "just as in the single human being there is a force that connects [*quwwa tarbiṭu*; ibn Tibbon: *koaḥ yiqšor*] the parts of the body one with the other [...] so there subsists in the world as a whole a force that connects [*quwwa tarbiṭu*; ibn Tibbon: *koakh yiqšor*] its parts one with the other."[8] This very same comparison is found in Averroes's *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, Discussion 10: "there must exist a [...] force diffused in all the parts of the universe in the same way as there is a force in all the parts of a single animal which connects them [*quwwa tarbiṭu*] one with the other."[9] *Guide* 1:72 contains also the statements that the oneness of the world is very "necessary" (*ḍarūrī*; ibn Tibbon: *hekhraḥi*) or very "useful" (*mufīd*; *moʿil*) for the proof of God's unity, and that "the One has created one being."[10] In addition, it is written there: "it is impossible that the parts of the world should exist [...] without one another such that [...] the heavens could exist without the earth or the earth without the heaven."[11] *Guide* 1:72 and 2:1 complement each other and both chapters reflect the influence of Averroes's *Incoherence of the Incoherence*.

Maʿaliyyot, 1987), 313; cf. 552–53. The books received presumably included Averroes' long commentaries on Aristotle. Now, Averroes' long commentaries on the *Physics*, *De Caelo*, *De Anima*, and *Metaphysics* were written between 1186 and 1191, and Maimonides's acquiring them already in 1191 indicates his great interest in Averroes's work. It is plausible that he had previously read some of Averroes's Aristotelian epitomes, begun in 1159, and middle commentaries, begun in 1168. Maimonides's *Guide* alludes in at least one passage to Averroes's *Decisive Treatise*, written in about 1178; see my "Averroes and Maimonides on the Duty of Philosophical Contemplation (*iʿtibār*)," [in Hebrew,] *Tarbiz* 58, no. 1 (1989): 122–30. There is also evidence that the *Guide* was influenced by Averroes's *Exposition of the Methods of Proof*, written in 1179/80; see Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 73–76. The *Decisive Treatise* and the *Exposition*, together with the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, comprise Averroes's three main theological treatises.

7 Maimonides, *Guide* 2:1, p. 249–50 (Arabic 173–74). Maimonides, like Averroes, presumes here that if there were a second God, He would be similar to the first God in one respect and different in another. See Averroes, *Incoherence*, 1:228 (Arabic 378).

8 Maimonides, *Guide* 1:72, p. 187–88 (Arabic 130).

9 Averroes, *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, 1:253–54 (Arabic 420). Averroes attributes this view to Alexander of Aphrodisias. Van den Bergh (*Incoherence*, 2:143) notes that this precise view is not found in Alexander's known writings, although similar views are found in them.

10 Maimonides, *Guide* 1:72, p. 187 (Arabic 129)

11 Maimonides, *Guide* 1:72, p. 187 (Arabic 129–130).

The notion of the interconnectedness of the world also appears in *Guide* 1:54. Moses is said in that chapter to have contemplated the entire world and the interconnectedness (*irtibāṭ*; *hiqqašram*) of its parts.[12]

As with Averroes, it is not clear what force Maimonides attributed to the proof of God's unity based on the unity of the world. He refers to it as "necessary" or "useful," which may indicate that it is dialectical, not demonstrative. However, as we have seen, he writes in *Guide* 2:1, that it has been proven "by means of a demonstration [*bi-l-burhān*; ibn Tibbon: *ba-mofet*]" in *Guide* 1:72 that "all that exists is like one individual with interconnected parts."

Narboni (c. 1300–c. 1362)

The relationship between Maimonides's abovementioned proof of God's oneness in the *Guide of the Perplexed* 2:1, and Averroes's critique of al-Ghazālī in the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, was astutely noticed by Rabbi Moses ben Joshua of Narbonne, known as Narboni, in his Commentary on the *Guide*. Narboni writes:

> "It has already been established as true by means of a demonstration [in *Guide* 1:72] that all that exists is like one individual," etc. [Maimonides's] words here are self-evident. However, it might seem on the basis of what we have said [in commenting on Maimonides's previous proofs] [...] that "it is not impossible that there be two Gods, one the cause of the heavens and the other the cause of the earth, or one the cause of the intelligible and the other the cause of the sensible [...] Now, this proposition is not true [...] [Rather,] the Creator of the heavens is the Creator of the cause that created the [four] elements. This is," as Averroes said [in the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, Discussion 7], "the theory of the philosophers. For it is evident that the worlds [e. g., the celestial and terrestrial worlds or the incorporeal and corporeal worlds] exist through cause and effect, and it is the inquiry concerning these causes which leads us to a first cause for everything. And if some of these different principles were wholly independent of others—that is, if some were not the cause of others—then the world could not be a single and interconnected whole [*davar eḥad we-niqšar*]." The sensible would not be connected to the intelligible, one part of the world would not be connected to the other. The world would fall apart and be destroyed. The Master [Maimonides] pointed to this, saying [in *Guide* 1:72]: "the fact that all that exists is one indicates to us that He who caused it to exist is One."[13]

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12 Maimonides, *Guide* 1:54, p. 124 (Arabic 84). Cf. my "Maimonides' Critical Epistemology and *Guide* 2:24," *Aleph* 8 (2008): 216–18.

13 Moses Narboni, *Beʾur le-Sefer More ha-Nevukhim*, ed. Jakob Goldenthal (Vienna: Imperial and Royal State Press, 1852), 2.1.26a–b (my translation). The passage begins with a quotation of Maimonides (from the text of the *Guide* cited above), continues with a quotation of al-Ghazālī (from the text of the *Incoherence of the Philosophers* cited above, but as paraphrased by Averroes in his *Incoherence of the Incoherence*), and follows with a quotation of Averroes (from the text of the *Incoherence of the Incoherence* cited above). The words quoted from Maimonides's and Averroes's books are placed here in quotation marks. On Narboni's Commentary on the *Guide*, see Gitit Holzman, "Narboni's Commentary to Maimonides' *Guide*," [in Hebrew,] *Daat* 74/75 (2013): 197–236.

One of the most important medieval commentators on the *Guide*, Narboni also wrote commentaries on at least five works by Averroes.[14] He read Averroes's books, as he read Maimonides's *Guide*, in Hebrew translation, and is sometimes considered to be more an Averroist than a Maimonidean.[15]

In the text under discussion, Narboni does not mention al-Ghazālī by name and mentions Averroes only obliquely, even though the whole passage is to a large extent copied verbatim from *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, which Narboni read in Rabbi Qalonymus ben David ben Ṭodros's Hebrew translation (c. 1328). Although Narboni's etiquette of quotation leaves much to be desired, it is safe to say that he was not trying to hide the influence of al-Ghazālī and Averroes on his comments. His discussions of Maimonides's previous proofs of God refer the reader to the views of al-Ghazālī and Averroes in the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*; he clearly expects the reader to read Maimonides's discussion of divine unity together with Averroes's discussion. It is Narboni's style to weave quotations into his own comments.

Narboni did not add anything new to the debate about many Gods between al-Ghazālī, Averroes, and Maimonides. However, he deserves credit as a commentator for perceptively documenting the relationship of Maimonides's proof of the oneness of God to Averroes's critique of al-Ghazālī.

Hasdai Crescas (c. 1340–1410/11)

Rabbi Hasdai ben Judah, known as Hasdai Crescas, agreed with al-Ghazālī that Reason cannot prove the existence of the one God. He embraced al-Ghazālī's sceptical argument for many Gods, but also conceded the counterargument brought by Averroes and Maimonides. In effect, he revised al-Ghazālī's argument in order to meet the common objection of Averroes and Maimonides. His discussion of the subject is found in his *Light of the Lord* 1:3.4—a chapter treating the dogma of God's unity:

> This root [of the unity of God] comprises two notions: first, that God is One in Himself in perfect simplicity; and second, the denial of plurality. For after it has been posited that He is One in Himself and simple, it is still open to doubt [*safeq*] whether there is more than one God.
> As for [...] the [question of a] plurality [of Gods], it arises if we posit that there is a God, one and simple, but that there is more than one. It is inescapable that the other [God] either occupies Himself with the government of the universe or a part thereof, or does not.
> It is false that He occupies Himself with a part thereof, for the entire universe is interconnected [*niqšar*] and "like one individual" [*eḥad*] [see Maimonides, *Guide* 1:72; 2:1], and it is fitting that it

14 Gitit Holzman, "The Theory of the Intellect and the Soul in the Thought of Moses Narboni" [in Hebrew] (PhD diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1996), 14–24.

15 For example, "Moses Narboni [...] was the most accomplished Jewish philosopher of the Averroist school," and considered it "a pious duty to mold Maimonides' words so that they agree with Averroes's version of Aristotle's philosophy." Herbert A. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 391–92.

> comes from one Agent.
> As for the case in which [the other God] does not occupy Himself with the government of this universe, an objector can claim that there is a God who governs a different world from this one, for the possibility of other worlds will be demonstrated [in *Light of the Lord* 4:2; cf. 1:2.1]. Here the doors of speculation are locked.
> In order to remove this perplexity and this doubt, and to annul every objection to this great root [i.e., the unity of God], the Law has enlightened our eyes, we the community of believers, by its dictum, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One" [Deuteronomy 6:4].[16]

Although Crescas does not cite al-Ghazālī, Averroes, Maimonides, or Narboni, his discussion of the problem of many Gods manifestly continues their conversation. He surely had Maimonides's *Guide* open on his desk, and his mention of the world's being interconnected "like one individual" clearly alludes to it. He may not have had before him al-Ghazālī's *Incoherence of the Philosophers* or Averroes's *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, but, as Harry Wolfson has observed, he could have been adequately informed on the al-Ghazālī–Averroes debate simply by reading Narboni's Commentary on the *Guide*, which he used extensively.[17] He may also have consulted al-Ghazālī and Averroes more directly: his student Rabbi Zeraḥiah ha-Levi Saladin authored the Hebrew translation of al-Ghazālī's *Incoherence*.

In agreement with Averroes and Maimonides, Crescas holds that reason proves that this world has only one God: the empirically observed oneness of the world points to the oneness of God. However, he does not conclude that al-Ghazālī's argument cannot be salvaged. It is still possible, according to him, to argue that one God governs one part of creation and other Gods govern other parts. Our world may indeed be one and interconnected and therefore have only one God, but there may be many worlds—each of them coherent and cohesive, and each having its own one and simple God.

Crescas argues in *Light* 4:2 and elsewhere that there exists a plurality of worlds: since space is an infinite expanse and an infinite number of magnitudes is possible, it may be inferred that there could be an infinite number of worlds.[18] Twice he cites a midrash according to which God "travels about in 18,000 worlds" (*b. Avodah Zarah*

16 Crescas, *Light*, 1.3.4, p. 115–16 (English 114). Cf. *Light*, 1.1.31, p. 60; 1.2.19, p. 93 (English 68–69, 96). Page references to the *Light* are to *Or Adonai*, ed. Shlomo Fisher (Jerusalem: Ramot, 1990), followed by references in parentheses to the English translation: *Light of the Lord*, trans. Roslyn Weiss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). I have omitted the text beginning with *omnam ke-še-yitba'er* and ending with *bilti manhig le-davar*, since it almost certainly was not written by Crescas. See below, "An Interpolation in Crescas' Text."

17 Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 14. Cf. 729, s.v. Narboni, Moses.

18 Crescas, *Light*, 4:2, p. 388–92 (English 334–37); cf. 1:2.1, p. 75; 1:2.15, p. 89; 1:2.19, p, 93 (English 82, 93, 96). See Wolfson, *Crescas*, 117–18. See also my *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1998), 8–13, 23–29, 31–40.Cf. Ari Ackerman, "Hasdai Crescas and the Scholastic Philosophers on the Possible Existence of Multiple Simultaneous Worlds," *Aleph* 17 (2017): 139–54.

3b).[19] If there are 18,000 worlds, there could be 18,000 Gods. If there is an infinite number of worlds, there could be an infinite number of Gods. Crescas does not draw this mind-boggling conclusion explicitly, but it is implicit in his arguments.

Much like al-Ghazālī, Crescas concludes: Reason cannot establish monotheism. The belief that God is One is based not on Reason but on Scripture: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

Crescas's anti-Aristotelian theory of many worlds gives dramatic support to al-Ghazālī's argument that reason cannot establish monotheism. Reason may be able to establish that there is one God for our closed little world, but it cannot establish that there is one God for the infinite universe. Crescas successfully provided a new and improved version of al-Ghazālī's argument—a version that reflected the "new physics" which was taking its first steps in his day.

In the quoted passage, Crescas uses the word "doubt" (*safeq*) twice: "it is still open to *doubt* whether there is more than one God"; "to remove [...] this *doubt* [...] the Law has enlightened our eyes." Similarly, he writes in *Light* 1:3.6: "although [Abraham] had an inclination toward the truth, he did not escape all *doubt* until [God] caused His light to overflow upon him, which is prophecy."[20] Reason cannot dispel doubt regarding God. It cannot dispel scepticism. Only prophecy can do that.

An Interpolation in Crescas's Text

The passage under discussion from Crescas's *Light of the Lord* 1:3.4 contains two additional sentences in the printed editions of the book. On the basis of manuscript evidence, it is clear that these sentences are an interpolation added sometime between the early 1405 recension and the final 1410 recension. There are many such interpolations in the *Light*, some inserted by Crescas and some by students and colleagues who helped him edit the book in his last years.[21] In the present case, the interpolation is anti-climactic, confused, and so preposterous that it may be concluded with a

19 Crescas, *Light*, 1:3.4, p. 116 (English 115); 4:2, p. 388 (English 337).

20 Crescas, *Light*, 1:3.6, p. 122 (English 119). See my "Maimonides, Crescas, and the Parable of the Castle," in *Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism in Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Thought*, ed. Racheli Haliva (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 167–76.

21 In the superior Florence ms. of the *Light*, written in Saragossa in 1405 by a scribe in Crescas's circle and revised there in 1410, the words *omnam ke-še-yitbaʾer* through *bilti manhig le-davar* are added in the margin. See my *Physics and Metaphysics*, 12; 34–25. In the introduction to the *Light*, Crescas mentions "associates" (*ḥaverim*) who helped him edit the book (p. 7; English 24). Regarding problematic interpolations inserted by the "associates," see my "The Authorship of the Reservations concerning Determinism in Crescas' *Light of the Lord*," [in Hebrew,] *Kiryat Sefer* 55, no. 4 (1980): 794–801. The problem of divine power occupied Crescas in his last years. The discussion of divine omnipotence (*Light*, 2:3) was a late addition to the book. In the uncorrected 1405 text of the Florence ms., it is omitted in the list of topics given in the preface of *Light* 2. See my *Rabbi Hasdai Crescas* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2010), 48–50.

high degree of confidence that Crescas could not have written it. The paragraph containing the interpolation reads as follows (with the interpolation italicised):

> As for the case in which [the other God] does not occupy Himself with the government of this universe, an objector can claim that there is a God who governs a different world other than this one, for the possibility of other worlds will be demonstrated [in *Light* 4:2; cf. 1:2.1]. *However, since it will be proved in Books 2 and 3* [i. e., in 2:3, and 3a:1] *that God's power is infinite in intensity, it is clear that the One has power for them all. As for the case in which one* [*God*] *governs and the other* [*God*] *does not govern anything,*] here the doors of speculation are locked.

The interpolation begins with a response to the sceptical argument from many worlds: even if there are many worlds, the one God has sufficient power to govern them all, for His power is infinite. This argument seems to have been framed by someone who did not understand the original Averroist-Maimonidean proof. The argument deviates from the logic of that proof, which was based on the empirically observed interconnectedness of the world and had nothing to do with the metaphysical question of God's power. The expected rationalistic response to the argument that many worlds might entail many Gods would be the counterargument that the entire infinite universe with all its multiple worlds is one and interconnected and so reflects the work of one God.

In the continuation of the interpolation, it is argued, in favour of the sceptical thesis, that, according to Reason, it is possible that there might be two Gods—one governing the many worlds and another who does not govern them. This is curious. What does it mean to imagine a God who governs nothing? If divinity is defined as implying omnipotence, does it make sense to speak of an idle God? Meyer Waxman, who generally lauds Crescas's theology, derided this argument:

> It must be admitted that Crescas in this point is not only weak, but prejudiced. His polemical nature overmastered the philosophical. What does he mean by a passive God? If God possesses infinite potence, what then is that other being? [...] It is evident that this absurd argument was only advanced [...] as a shot at the philosophers, though it fell short of the mark.[22]

Waxman is right that the argument is "weak" and "absurd." However, he did not know of the manuscript evidence that the argument is an interpolation and almost certainly not authored by Crescas.

22 Meyer Waxman, *The Philosophy of Don Hasdai Crescas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1920), 70.

Conclusion: Al-Ghazālī and Crescas vs Averroes and Maimonides

The debate between al-Ghazālī, Averroes, Maimonides, and Crescas about the possibility of many Gods concerns the epistemological foundations of monotheism. Does monotheism depend on Reason or on Faith? Is Reason, left on its own, powerful enough to overcome scepticism and prove monotheism? With regard to the fundamental theological principle of God's unity, Averroes and Maimonides made a valiant effort to defend Reason, while al-Ghazālī and Crescas were hard-nosed sceptics.

Postscript: Obadiah Sforno (1475–1550)[23]

The problem of many Gods was revisited about a century after Crescas by the famed biblical exegete Rabbi Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno of Cesena, who endorsed the Averroist-Maimonidean approach. His discussion appears in his philosophic treatise, *Light of the Nations*, Question 8 (cf. Question 6). Sforno wrote two recensions of this work, one in Hebrew (*Or ʿAmmim*, 1537) and one in Latin (*Lumen Gentium*, 1548). He knew intimately Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, which he read in Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew translation. He may not have read Crescas's *Light of the Lord*, which was not readily available in Italy until it was printed in Ferrara in 1555. Sforno's discussion of the problem of many Gods is based primarily on Averroes's Long Commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, but he also makes reference to the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*. He read Averroes's works in Latin translations. He begins his discussion of the problem of many Gods as follows:

> We shall investigate if there is only one Creator or if there are many Creators. Now, it seems at first that there are many. The support for this is the argument of many of the ancients related by Averroes in his [Long] Commentary on the *Metaphysics* 12.52 [= 12.10.1075a], saying: "Since contraries should have contrary principles, and the good and the bad we see in the world are contraries, it may be supposed that there are at least two principles or efficient causes in the world, one producing the good things and the other the bad things."
> However, the opposite proves to be the case. The Creator is One and there is no other Creator equal to Him. First, this is proved by Aristotle's argument in the *Metaphysics* 10.7 [=10.2. 1054a], namely: "In passions, qualities, quantities, and motions, there is one in number." These words of his were explained by Averroes as follows: "As for passions, qualities, quantities, and motions, there is in each of these species one thing that is the principle of the number of them." He further said: "When we join this with what has been proved in the *Physics* [8.5–6;

23 When this paper was originally presented in Hamburg in May 2017 at the conference on "Scepticism from Antiquity to Modern Times," it stopped with Crescas. Following my presentation, Dr. Giada Coppola suggested I add a discussion of Sforno. I thank her for her suggestion and her helpful advice.

> 256a–260a], i.e., that there is a pre-existent Prime Mover absolutely separate from all matter [...] it is also proved that this existent [i.e., the Prime Mover] is the principle of Substance."[24]

The argument for the existence of many Gods, here set down by Sforno in the name of "the ancients," as reported in Averroes's Long Commentary on the *Metaphysics*, is similar to the argument set down by al-Ghazālī in his *Incoherence of the Philosophers*. However, whereas al-Ghazālī argued that the existence of a plurality of Gods may seem to follow from the opposition of heaven and earth or of intellect and body, "the ancients" make the same argument with regard to the opposition of good and bad. Sforno's proof here against the existence of many Gods is based on Averroes's remarks in his Long Commentary on the *Metaphysics*, not on his remarks in the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*. All species of things have first causes, but there is one First Cause for all things in the universe.

In a subsequent passage, Sforno has recourse to the argument from the world's "interconnectedness" and "oneness" that we have seen in Averroes' *Incoherence*, Discussions 5–7, and Maimonides' *Guide* 1:72 and 2:1. Sforno writes:

> [That there is only one God] is argued in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 12.52 [= 12.10.1075a], in his saying: "There is good in the army and good in the commander, but there is more good in the commander" [...] He added: "All beings are ordered together, and directed toward a being that is one in number." Averroes explained: "It is clear this includes all beings, for they all exist for the sake of one [...] which is the First Cause [...]" It is therefore appropriate that in Scripture the Creator, who [...] orders all species of beings, is called "the Lord of Hosts [*Adonai ṣevaʾot*]" [1 Samuel 1:3, 11, etc., esp. Jeremiah 31:34]. This teaches that from the manifest order [...] in which the entire world is interconnected and one [*mequšar we-eḥad*; Lat. *unitas*], there is demonstrated the existence of an Orderer who is One, and who intended the unity of the world.[25]

Aristotle and Averroes explain that the critical good is that of the military commander who knows how to arrange his troops with an eye to one purpose. As a well-ordered army reflects the skill of its commander, so the well-ordered universe demonstrates the existence of the First Cause or God. The *unitas universi* proves the *unitas Ordinator*. In using the expression "interconnected and one," Sforno alludes to Averroes's arguments in the *Incoherence*, Discussions 5–7, and Maimonides's arguments in the *Guide* 1:72 and 2:1. Sforno's explanation of the term "Lord of Hosts" is resource-

24 Obadiah Sforno, *Kitve Rabbi Obadiah Sforno*, ed. Zev Gottlieb (Jerusalem: Mosad Ha-Rav Kook, 1983), 456; Sforno, *Lumen Gentium* (Bologna: Anselmo Giaccarelli, 1548), 45a. See Averroes, *Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois Commentariis* (Venice: Iunctas, 1562–74), 8:256a–257a; 338a. Arabic text: *Tafsīr mā baʿd al-Ṭabīʿa*, ed., Maurice Bouyges (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1938–52), 1273–77; 1715 (note the reading *ǧawāhir* instead of *ǧawhar*, i.e., "substances" not "substance"). Cf. Charles Genequand, *Ibn Rushd's Metaphysics: A Translation with Introduction of Ibn Rushd's Commentary on the Metaphysics, Book Lām* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 201.

25 Sforno, *Kitve Sforno*, 457; *Lumen Gentium*, 45b. See *Aristotelis cum Averrois*, 8:337a–338a (Arabic text, 1709–15). Cf. Genequand, *Ibn Rushd's Commentary*, 198–200.

ful, apt, and apparently original. He interprets the biblical "Lord of Hosts" in the light of Aristotle's excellent military commander, who arranges his troops skilfully and unites them. Later in the text, he repeats this explanation:

> This is what the Prophets taught, when they used the expression "The Lord of Hosts" [I Samuel 1:3, 11; Jeremiah 31:34; et al.]. For from the manifest connection [*qešer*; *unitas*] between the celestial hosts and the terrestrial hosts, with their wonderful order, like the order found in every army, whose soldiers unite according to the intention of the commander, the unity of the Creator is demonstrated.[26]

Celestial and terrestrial physics are wondrously interconnected, and reveal the unity of the Creator, the Lord of Hosts.

Although Sforno's main discussion of the problem of many Gods is found in *Light of the Nations*, Question 8, he broaches it in Question 6 in a fascinating exegetical passage:

> The Law of our God [...] gave a proof to show that the universe has a Creator who brought it into existence, when it said: "These are the generations of the heaven and the earth when they were created" [Genesis 2:4]. In other words, from the connection [*qešer*; *colligatum*] of "the heaven with the earth," their being conjoined and concurring in the activity of their "generations" [...] it is proved that "they were created" by the power of a Creator [...] as it is stated explicitly in the continuation of the verse: "in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven" [Genesis 2:4] [...]
>
> This very same proof was expounded by Moses our Teacher, may peace be upon him, saying: "Know this day and lay it to thy heart, that the Lord, He is God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath, there is none else" [Deuteronomy 4:39]. This means that from the connection [*qešer*; *colligatio*] of the higher realm with the lower realm and the arrangement of their order [...] it is demonstrated that "the Lord," who brings the universe into existence [...], is the "God," who is the Governor and *Ordinator*. Now, from this it is clear that "there is none else." For the existence of more than one Creator is not possible, as will be proved by a demonstration in what follows [i.e., in Question 8].[27]

The collaboration between heaven and earth, testified by Genesis 2:4 and Deuteronomy 4:39, proves that there is one Creator ("the Lord"), who is also the Governor ("God") who gives order to the celestial and terrestrial "generations" (i.e., the plants, animals, and other creatures).

In sum, with regard to the problem of many Gods, Sforno agreed with Averroes and Maimonides and not with al-Ghazālī and Crescas. His distinctive contribution to the debate concerning this problem was his novel Aristotelian explication of the biblical cognomen, "Lord of Hosts," and his adroit exegeses of Genesis 2:4 and Deuteronomy 4:39.

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26 Sforno, *Kitve Sforno*, 460; *Lumen Gentium*, 46b.

27 Sforno, *Kitve Sforno*, 452–53; *Lumen Gentium*, 43a–b. Cf. Sforno, *Commentary on the Pentateuch* (in standard rabbinic Bibles), Genesis, *ad loc.* and Deuteronomy, *ad loc.*

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Josef Stern

What is Maimonidean Scepticism?

Nowadays we call a philosopher a sceptic when he denies that knowledge is possible, and scepticism is a problem in epistemology, indeed a problem for its very possibility. Since Descartes, the sceptic is also prone to raise radical, hyperbolic doubts like demon deceivers or brains-in-a-vat that challenge ordinary beliefs or common knowledge like the existence of an external world or the existence of other minds. It is no surprise, then, that the contemporary sceptic is someone primarily to be rebutted, his doubts exposed as not just unjustified but even pathologically abnormal. Scepticism nowadays is a disease whose cure is refutation.

In antiquity, it was different. Faced with conflicting perceptual appearances, and the resulting anxiety and unhappiness of not knowing which one to believe, one initiated enquiry in order to discover what is true and what the real natures of things are, to reveal what to believe with security and thereby achieve some modicum of happiness. But lo and behold, scientific enquiry led to new and additional conflicts, not among appearances but between equally strong but opposing theories between which the inquirer had no clear reason to believe one rather than the other. Not yet freed from uncertainty and unhappiness, the rational reaction for the inquirer was not to *assert* that knowledge is impossible—for that would also be a claim that would raise conflict with others—but rather to suspend judgment, to refrain from assertion, i.e., from commitments about what is real and true. Unlike the dogmatist who claims to have reached his destination, the truth, the sceptic instead continues the enquiry, never terminating his search with any final determination, which would once again make him vulnerable to a conflicting assertion, and more unhappiness. This indeed was the original meaning of *skepsis:* unceasing enquiry or investigation, not doubt or the denial of knowledge. By suspending all judgment, by divesting himself of the anxious drive to achieve knowledge, thereby circumventing the source of unhappiness, the sceptic ipso facto finds himself in a state of happiness, if only tranquillity or peace of mind. In sum, for the ancients, scepticism was not the disease, but a cure to the dogmatist's unhappy condition that results from his unsatisfiable pursuit of the true natures of things in which to believe.[1]

I wish to thank Gad Freudenthal for originally suggesting to me that I write a précis of my book, *The Matter and Form of Maimonides' Guide*, as well as the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies—Jewish Scepticism for hosting me as a senior fellow in 2016–17 while I wrote this paper and presented it at the Centre's International conference on scepticism.

1 This, of course, is an oversimplified presentation of ancient scepticism that, among other things, does not distinguish between Academics and Pyrrhonians. For a more nuanced, critical presentation, see Myles Burnyeat, "Can the Skeptic Live His Skepticism?" in *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. Myles Burnyeat, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 117–48; Michael Frede, "The Skeptic's Belief," in

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According to the lore of our forefathers, after the third century CE, scepticism dropped out of sight during the Middle Ages. Over the past quarter century, this received view has now been corrected by distinguished scholars such as Dominik Perler, Robert Pasnau, and Henrik Lagerlund, who mainly draw on evidence culled either from early Christian thought, such as Augustine's *Contra Academicos*, or from late thirteenth through fourteenth century Latin philosophy, beginning with John of Salisbury, continuing through Henry of Ghent, Siger of Brabant, Scotus, Ockham, and Nicholas of Autrecourt.[2] In the Islamic world, one finds mention of al-Ghazālī, who survived a short bout of scepticism and some of whose sceptical arguments anticipate Hume and Descartes.[3] In this paper, I want to sketch in broad strokes a sceptical philosophy put forth in the Arabic philosophical world, not in the writings of a Muslim but of arguably the greatest medieval Jewish philosopher, Moses Maimonides (1138–1204).[4]

To call Maimonides a sceptic, or someone with sceptical leanings, will be a surprise for those who know him, as he has traditionally been cast, as a card-carrying

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Essays in Ancient Philosophy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 179–200; Frede, "The Skeptics's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge," in *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 201–22; Gisela Striker, "Academics versus Pyrrhonists, Reconsidered," in *Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, ed. Richard Bett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 195–207; Striker, "On the Difference between the Pyrrhonists and the Academics," in *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 135–49; Striker, "Scepticism as a Kind of Philosophy," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 83, no. 2 (August 2001): 113–29; Striker, "Sceptical Strategies," in *Doubt and Dogmatism*, ed. Malcolm Schofield, Myles Burnyeat, and Jonathan Barnes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 54–83.

2 It is noteworthy that Richard Bosley and Martin Tweedale, eds. *Basic Issues in Medieval Philosophy*, second edition (Toronto: Broadview, 2006), an "interactive" anthology of medieval philosophy, contains a topical unit on "Skepticism," including readings from Augustine, Henry of Ghent, Siger of Brabant, John Duns Scotus, and Nicholas of Autrecourt. On medieval scepticism, see Henrik Lagerlund, "A History of Skepticism in the Middle Ages," in Lagerlund, ed. *Rethinking the History of Skepticism. The Missing Medieval Background* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), 1–28; Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of* Summa Theologiae, *1a, 75–89* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Pasnau, "Science and Certainty," in *Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Robert Pasnau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 357–68; Dominik Perler, "Does God Deceive Us? Skeptical Hypotheses in Late Medieval Philosophy," in *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), 1–28; Perler, "Skepticism," in *Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy, vol. 1*, ed. Robert Pasnau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 384–96; <litr=60>Perler, "Scepticism and Metaphysics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. John Marenbon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 546–65.

3 On al-Ghazālī's scepticism, see Taneli Kukkonen, "Al-Ghazali's Skepticism, Revisited," in *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 29–60.

4 As an overview of a sceptical reading of Maimonides's *Guide* and for reasons of space, this essay does not attempt to evaluate alternative and, in particular, dogmatic readings which would be necessary to make a full case on its behalf. For such an evaluation of dogmatic readings, see Josef Stern, *The Matter and Form of Maimonides' Guide* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

Aristotelian, Neoplatonist, or Rationalist (whatever that means), or as a traditional pious rabbi. But, in fact, he was already read in the Middle Ages and either appreciated or criticised for his sceptical or agnostic views both by some of his greatest commentators—including his translator Samuel ibn Tibbon, Shem Tov b. Joseph ibn Falaquera, and Profayt Duran (Efodi)—and, among the Latin scholastics, by no less than Thomas Aquinas.[5] However, this reading of Maimonides was eclipsed by Averroism in the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and only during the last forty years has it re-emerged—indeed, as the catalyst for what I take to be the liveliest debate in contemporary Maimonidean studies.

The historical sources of Maimonides's scepticism are not known. To the best of our knowledge, none of the classical sceptical works were translated into Arabic (or Hebrew, including Philo's description of the Modes), although we have a good description of the Pyrrhonists and Academics in Saadia's *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* (probably drawn from a doxography). Galen and the medical tradition are a possible avenue of transmission, and specific sceptical arguments surface not infrequently in the Arabic literature.[6] Arabic terms like *wuqūf* or *tawaqquf* and *takāfu' al-adilla* have been identified as translations of *epochē* and *isostheneia*; sceptics were known as *šākkūn*, *ǧuhhāl*, *mutaǧāhilūn*, *ḥisbānīya*, *muʿānida*, *lā adrīya*, and *sūfisṭāʾīya*, a term by which Maimonides refers to those who doubt the senses, a view he attributes to the *kalām*.[7] At the end of the day, Maimonides's sources remain a mystery, and we

5 Based on a close reading of Aquinas' *Commentary on the Sentences*, in which we can see him working out the positions and their sources later expressed in their mature form in the *Summa*s, Richard Taylor argues that Aquinas read not only Maimonides as a sceptic about God and His attributes, but also Avicenna through a Maimonidean lens. See Richard Taylor, "Maimonides and Aquinas on Divine Attributes: The Importance of Avicenna," in *Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed in Translation: A History from the Thirteenth Century to the Twentieth*, ed. Josef Stern, James T. Robinson, and Yonatan A. Shemesh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming 2019). For further discussion of Maimonides's sceptical influence on Aquinas, see David B. Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986); Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, *Maimonides and St. Thomas on the Limits of Reason* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); and Mercedes Rubio, *Aquinas and Maimonides on the Possibility of the Knowledge of God. An Examination of the Quaestio de attributis* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008).

6 See Saadia Gaon, *Sefer Emunot we-Deʿot* [in Hebrew,] trans. Joseph Qafih (Jerusalem: Surah Press, 1969/70), 69–72. English translation in Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press), 80–83. Saadia refers to the Pyrrhonists as those who hold the doctrine of *wuqūf* and the Academics as *mutaǧāhilūn*. See also Harry A. Wolfson, *Repercussions of the Kalam in Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,1979), 160–62; Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Quest for Certainty in Saadia's Philosophy," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 33, no. 3 (January 1943): 265–313.

7 On scepticism in the Islamicate world, see Saul Horowitz, *Der Einfluss der griechischen Skepsis auf die Entwicklung der Philosophie bei den Arabern* (Breslau: Schatzky, 1915); Josef van Ess, "Skepticism in Islamic Religious Thought," *Al-Abḥāṯ* 21 (1968): 1–15; Patricia Crone, "Ungodly Cosmologies," in *Islam, the Ancient Near East and Varieties of Godlessness: Collected Studies in Three Volumes*, Volume 3, ed. Hanna Siurua, (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 124–27; Moshe Perlmann, "Ibn Hazm on the Equivalence of Proofs," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 40, no. 3 (January 1950): 279–90; Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Trium-*

also should not rule out the possibility that his scepticism was simply original to him.

We can date the beginning of the contemporary debate to an essay published in 1979 by Shlomo Pines, who argued that Maimonides adopted a position allegedly held by al-Fārābī in his lost *Commentary* on the *Nicomachean Ethics* according to which "the human intellect can only cognize objects perceived by the senses and images deriving from sense data."[8] On that basis Pines claimed that "Maimonides is of the opinion that no scientific certainty can be achieved with regard to objects that are outside the sub-lunar world,"[9] thereby ruling out human cognition of the form, or concept, of any purely immaterial being like God and, indeed, of anything beyond the sublunary realm of terrestrial physics, thereby excluding cosmology and astronomy. However, the conclusion Pines drew from these epistemic limitations was that Maimonides, anticipating Kant, was a *critical* and not a *sceptical* philosopher. Lacking certainty that there exist separate intellects, Maimonides held, to quote Pines again, "there is no point in setting oneself the aim to intellect or to achieve a conjunction with a separate intellect,"[10] and instead Maimonides gave primacy to the life of political or practical action over that of intellectual perfection.[11]

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phant (Leiden: Brill, 1970); Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Stern, *Matter and Form*, 146–47, n25.

8 Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, vol. 1, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 93. I write that al-Fārābī *allegedly* held this view because, in the absence of the lost Commentary, all our evidence are reports by ibn Bāğğa, Averroes, and others, which has been recently challenged by Hebert A. Davidson, "Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge," *Maimonidean Studies* 3 (1995): 49–103; Davidson, *Maimonides the Rationalist* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2011).

9 Pines, "Limitations," 93.

10 Pines, 94.

11 Pines claims that Maimonides should be characterised as a critical (rather than as a sceptical) philosopher. See Shlomo Pines, "The Philosophical Purport of Maimonides' Halakhic Works and the Purport of the Guide of the Perplexed," in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed. Shlomo Pines and Yirmiyahu Yovel (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1987), 11. See also Pines, "Dieu et L'Etre Selon Mamonide: Exégese d'Exode 3,14 et doctrine connexe," in *Celui Qui Est: Interprétations Juives et Chrétiennes d'Exode 3–14*, ed. Alain de Libera and Émilie Zum Brunn (Paris: Cerf, 1986), 15–24; Pines, "Les limites de la métaphysique selon al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, et Maimonide: sources et antitheses de ces doctrine chez Alexandre d'Aphrodise et chez Themistius," *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 13, no.1 (1981): 211–25; 1–14; Pines, "Translator's Introduction," in Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, translated by Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 1:lvii–cxxxiv. Pines's thesis has generated a huge literature, some supporting but most challenging it. Those sympathetic to Pines or his general view include Warren Zev Harvey, "Maimonides' First Commandment, Physics, and Doubt," in *Hazon Nahum: Studies in Jewish Law, Thought, and History, presented to Dr. Norman Lamm on the occasion of his seventieth birthday,* ed. Jacob Elman and Jeffrey. S. Gurock (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1997), 149–62; Warren Zev Harvey, "Maimonides' Critical Epistemology and *Guide* 2:24," *Aleph* 8 (2008): 213–35; Kenneth Seeskin, *Searching for a Distant God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Joel L. Kraemer, "Is There a Text in this Class?" *Aleph* 8 (2008): 247–99; and Stern, *Matter and Form*. Critics include

I believe that Pines put his finger on the pulse of the *Guide* but in calling Maimonides a sceptic rather than a critical philosopher, I intend to depart both from Pines's conclusion that Maimonides surrendered the theoretical and adopted a practical or political ideal for human happiness *and* from Pines's empiricist basis for Maimonides's epistemic limitations. On the other hand, I do not mean to claim that Maimonides neatly fits into ancient categories of scepticism, either Pyrrhonian or Academic. Since his dogmatists are the *falāsifa*, the Arabic (some more, others less Neoplatonised) Aristotelians, the conception of knowledge (*epistēmē* or *ʿilm*), that is the target of his sceptical critique is different from the Hellenistic models of belief that his predecessors were attacking. And because his scepticism is also, I shall argue, restricted to metaphysics, the specific arguments he gives differ from the modes one finds in, say, Sextus.[12]

Notwithstanding these differences, I will argue that Maimonides is best characterised as a sceptic for two main reasons: First, his arguments follow the sceptic's general argumentative schemata. In some cases, he deliberately gives for each argument for a proposition *p* a counter-argument of equal strength for not-*p* (or a contrary of *p*), resulting in a state of equipollence with respect to which the inquirer is brought to suspend judgment, *epochē*, and not assent to either proposition. In other cases, he shows how reasoning specifically about metaphysics leads to its own self-refutation and, again, *epochē*. And in almost all arguments, the deciding factor is the lack of a criterion—although what that criterion is differs for Maimonides from the Ancients. As with the Pyrrhonists, what is critical for scepticism for Maimonides is that the arguments lead to conflicting claims of equal strength, equipollence (in Greek, *isosthe-*

Alexander Altmann, "Maimonides on the Intellect and the Scope of Metaphysics," in *Von der mittelalterlichen zur modernen Aufklarung* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1987), 60–129; Herbert A. Davidson, "Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge"; Davidson, *Maimonides the Rationalist*; Charles H. Manekin, "Belief, Certainty, and Divine Attributes in the Guide of the Perplexed," *Maimonidean Studies* 1 (1990): 117–41; Manekin, "Maimonides and the Arabic Aristotelian Tradition of Epistemology," In *Beyond Religious Borders: Interaction and Intellectual Exchange in the Medieval Islamic World*, eds. David M. Freidenreich and Miriam Goldstein (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 78–95; Barry S. Kogan, "What Can We Know and When Can We Know It? Maimonides on the Active Intelligence and Human Cognition," in *Moses Maimonides and His Time*, ed. Eric Ormsby (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 121–37; Alfred Ivry, "The Logical and Scientific Premises of Maimonides' Thought." In *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, edited by Alfred. L. Ivry, Elliot R. Wolfson, and Allan Arkush (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1998), 63–97; Ivry, "*Guide* 2:24 and All That (i)jâza," *Aleph* 8 (2008): 237–46.

12 Another difference I cannot discuss here for reasons of space is that, unlike the classical sceptics, who generally adopted *metriopatheia*, or moderation, as their stance towards moral behaviour and the emotions, Maimonides advocates *apatheia*, the eradication of (moral) emotions and bodily urges (to the highest degree possible) and, where that is not possible, their minimisation as a form of accommodation to necessity. This difference reflects Maimonides's Neoplatonic negative valuation of all things material or bodily. See Stern, *Matter and Form*, chapter 7. Because the body is physical or natural, this stance is again compatible with his scepticism about *metaphysics* but it yields a rather different picture than that of the classical sceptics.

neia). It is not sufficient to raise *a* doubt, the least possibility that would challenge the certainty of the knowledge claim. Second, the value Maimonides sees in suspension of judgment, *epochē*, or the self-refutation of reasoning, is never simply theoretical but also practical: to put oneself in a state of mind either of tranquillity, hence, a kind of happiness, and/or of awe and dazzlement that is an analogue to the kind of divine worship that the dogmatist holds one can achieve through the acquisition of positive knowledge about God. For Maimonides as for the Ancients, scepticism is always in the service of a practical end.[13]

In order to sharpen these two motivations for characterising Maimonides as a sceptic, I will begin by spelling out the dogmatic background to which he is reacting.

From the start to finish of the *Guide*, Maimonides emphasises time and again that the true human self is the intellect and that true human perfection is intellectual:

> [The human's] ultimate perfection is to become rational in actu, I mean to have an intellect in actu; this would consist in his knowing everything concerning all the beings that is within the capacity of man to know in accordance with his ultimate perfection (*Guide* 3:27, 511).[14]

> The true human perfection [...] consists in the acquisition of the rational virtues—I refer to the conception of intelligibles, which teach true opinions concerning the divine things. This is in true reality the ultimate end; this is what gives the individual true perfection, a perfection belonging to him alone; and it gives him permanent perdurance; through it man is man (3:54, 635).

Within Maimonides's Neoplatonised Aristotelian philosophical world, one achieves this ideal human perfection through full actualisation of one's intellectual potentiality: one acquires all possible concepts and truths—of physics, cosmology, and metaphysics—and then contemplates or uses these truths in theoretical reasoning constantly, exclusively, and continuously. The individual who achieves this intellectual state is as close as one can be to a disembodied (separate) intellect. This is the philosophers' ideal, and it is also Maimonides's ideal.[15]

But that leaves open the question—the core of the current controversy—as to whether Maimonides believed that this ideal of intellectual perfection can be realised or achieved by real human beings. The obstacle is that the human being for Maimo-

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13 See Burnyeat, "Can the Skeptic," on the practical dimension of scepticism in particular and, on ancient philosophy in general, Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. by Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

14 References to the *Guide* appear in parentheses in the body of the text according to book number and book chapter, followed by the page number in Pines's English translation.

15 Pines argued that, because of his critical epistemology, Maimonides gives up the theoretical ideal in the closing paragraph of the *Guide* 3:54 and opts for a life performing acts of *loving-kindness, righteousness, and judgment through assimilation to God's actions* which he interprets as civic or political happiness. This move has been criticised by many. For an alternative explication of this passage, see Stern, *Matter and Form*, 340–49.

nides is necessarily a hylomorphic substance composed of matter/body and form/intellect: there can be no form without matter and no matter without form. But this in turn raises the question whether the human's matter/body absolutely prevents her from achieving the perfection of her form/intellect. More specifically, (1) does one's matter/body, which includes bodily faculties like the imagination, prevent one from purely intellectual *apprehension* of metaphysics and the heavens; and (2) do bodily needs and desires prevent one from constantly, exclusively, and undividedly attending to and engaging in intellectual activity with the requisite *concentration* to be a fully actualised, constantly active intellect? If we answer yes to either question, the tension between the human's intellect and body leaves her at most with an incomplete grasp of metaphysics and with significantly less continuous and less intensive intellectual activity than what perfection demands.

In response to this open question, readers of the *Guide* fall into two camps. Dogmatic readers hold that Maimonides believed that the ideal of intellectual perfection is humanly realisable; hence, it must be possible for human beings to acquire knowledge of metaphysics, cosmology, and God. Sceptical readers hold that Maimonides did not believe this is possible for the reason that, as Maimonides states, "matter is a strong veil preventing the apprehension of that which is separate from matter as it truly is" (3:9, 436–37). Here "matter" signifies the imagination, which, as a bodily faculty, cannot conceive or represent anything except as a body, i. e., a subject or substance with attributes, a kind of compositeness or complexity that conflicts with the simplicity of the immaterial. But without knowledge, or apprehension, of the immaterial, there is no knowledge of metaphysics, hence, no absolute perfection of the intellect and no happiness consequent to that state.

In other words, dogmatic readers of the *Guide* identify Maimonides's views with those of his dogmatists, the *falāsifa*, the (more or less Neoplatonised) Arabic Aristotelians, like the earlier Al-Fārābī and Avicenna who, for all their differences, claim that perfected human intellects possess scientific knowledge of metaphysics that in turn enables conjunction or union with the Active Intellect and the highest kind of intelligible happiness. This widely-held identification of Maimonides with the *falāsifa* is easily understandable. On traditional dogmatic readings of the *Guide*, it was assumed that, because Maimonides harshly attacks the *kalām*, and because the *falāsifa* are their enemy, then, on the assumption that the enemy of one's enemy is one's friend, he must identify himself in general with the *falāsifa* and their Aristotelian views. However, the full picture is much more complicated and nuanced. First, Maimonides's deepest objection to the *kalām*—one senses genuine revulsion—concerns their method or philosophical ideology: he depicts them as apologists, polemicists, and theological opportunists who, rather than "[...] conform in their premises to the appearance of that which exists, consider how being ought to be in order that it should furnish a proof for the correctness of a particular opinion" (1:71, 178). They shape the facts to fit their theory rather than, as Themistius insisted, have "the correct opinions conform to that which exists" (1:71, 179). However, on particular questions of significance for metaphysics and epistemology—especially on the nature of

the modalities, the limits of causal explanation, and the evidence from the heavens for belief in a deity—Maimonides finds in the *kalām* not insignificant grains of truth and correctives to the philosophers' self-confidence in their claims to knowledge (see 1:73, 208; 211; 1:74, 219; 2:19, 303; 3:15, 460).

On the other hand, Maimonides is highly critical of the philosophers, especially on matters of metaphysics and cosmology. Of course, even given the received dogmatic picture, there are specific issues where Maimonides explicitly declares his disagreement with the philosophers, most notably that of creation vs. eternity. However, the default assumption is that where Maimonides cites the philosophers without indicating a disagreement, he agrees with them (and especially when he adds that the Law also agrees with them, for example, on the existence of separate intellects, namely, angels). Thus, it is frequently asserted that Maimonides accepts the philosophers' four proofs of the existence of God (in 2:1) and their doctrine of the unity of the intellect in act, its object, and subject (in 1:68).[16] In fact, however, when he attributes a given view to the philosophers, it is arguable that he means to distinguish it as *their* view, not his, which he then attacks.[17]

Furthermore, on a number of subjects (prophecy, providence, cosmology), Maimonides adopts the familiar sceptical strategy of arguing *ad hominem* against the philosophers, avoiding dogmatic assumptions of his own by assuming his opponent's own assumptions and showing the antinomies or conflicting opinions to which they lead—recognition of which should lead these opponents to give up their assertions and suspend judgment. One such example is the philosophers' theory of separate intellects, which they use to explain the motions of the spheres, and

16 See Altmann, "Maimonides"; Davidson, *Maimonides the Rationalist*, 126–27, Ivry, "Logical and Scientific Premises," 73; Joel L. Kraemer, "How (Not) to Read The Guide of the Perplexed," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 32 (2006): 350–403; Howard Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought: Studies in Ethics, Law, and the Human Ideal* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999); Tamar Rudavsky, *Maimonides* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Josef Stern, "Maimonides' Demonstrations: Principles and Practice," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001): 47–84. To be sure, some among both the medieval commentators and modern scholars argue that even on issues like eternity vs. creation, despite his explicit statements, Maimonides esoterically agrees with the philosophers; see Leo Strauss, "The Literary Character of the Guide of the Perplexed," in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1952), 38–94; Warren Zev Harvey, "A Third Approach to Maimonides' Cosmogony-Prophetology Puzzle," *Harvard Theological Review* 74, no. 3 (July 1981): 287–301. On the other hand, the sceptical reading that distinguishes Maimonides's stance from the philosophers' does not claim that Maimonides sees no cognitive value in the views of the philosophers. Maimonides generally adapts the philosophers' positions as the kind of wisdom that is appropriate to communal welfare even if is not "the truth as it really is," i.e., what science would demonstrate. For further discussion, see Stern, *Matter and Form*, 12–15; 32–37.

17 See Maimonides's explicit statement distinguishing the philosophers' premises and "methods of inference" to prove the existence of the deity from "the method I shall adopt" in 1:71, 183–84. Likewise, the doctrine of the unity of the intellect is proposed as the "dictum of the philosophers" (1:68, 163).

which Maimonides presents in detail only in order to launch a vigorous critique.[18] In the same spirit, he provides a deep critique of their account of divine attributes, and in particular negative attributes (as we shall explain below). But at critical moments in the *Guide*, Maimonides also takes scepticism as his own stance and cultivates suspension of judgment as the correct reactive attitude toward all metaphysical problems, exercise of which will lead to peace of mind and/or worship of God. Yet even at those moments when it turns out (as the sceptical reader argues, on Maimonides's own view) that the intellectual ideal cannot be realised by human beings, it does not follow that Maimonides surrenders the *ideal* of intellectual perfection. Instead it continues to serve as a *regulative* ideal that orients and shapes a life of unending enquiry. However, what is necessary is that we re-evaluate how we measure perfection: whether we judge it solely in terms of the product—the content of the knowledge—attained, or whether we focus instead on the process and practices of intellectual activity and enquiry, regardless of whether or not they achieve their ends.

Where Maimonides agrees with the *falāsifa* is that all knowledge including metaphysics, and in particular knowledge of God (if possible), must be based on the natural world explained by sublunar science:

> I have already let you know [1:34, 74] that there exists nothing except God [...] and this existent world and that there is no possible inference proving His existence [...] except those deriving from this existent taken as a whole and from its details. Accordingly it necessarily behooves one to consider this existent as it is and to derive premises from what is perceived of its nature. For this reason it follows that you should know its perceptible form and nature, and then it will be possible to make an inference from it with regard to what is other than it (1:71, 183).

But if the only route to knowledge of God is via "the existent world"—through the natural sciences—it follows that Maimonides does apparently believe that we *do* have knowledge of physics and nature. Indeed, he repeatedly states that "everything that Aristotle has said about all that exists from beneath the sphere of the moon to the centre of the earth is indubitably correct" (2:22, 319; cf. 2:24, 326). But not only is Aristotelian natural science true, it is also Maimonides's paradigm of scientific knowledge. Its demonstrations and proofs furnish standards and criteria that any other purported science or explanation, including divine science, or metaphysics, must meet. For example, what is metaphysically possible (or necessary) must both be compatible with and be constrained by nature as it actually is. And when he argues *ad hominem* against the *falāsifa*, the main fault he finds in their theories of cosmology and metaphysics is precisely their failure to live up to their own standards of knowledge given in their theories of physics.

The first moral to be drawn, then, for Maimonides's scepticism is that it is limited to what lies beyond physics, in particular the philosophers' *cosmological and metaphysical theories*. Elsewhere in the *Guide*, Maimonides explicitly disowns scepticism

18 See Stern, *Matter and Form*, 250–305.

with respect to the senses (1:73, 213–14), and he also allows for mathematical knowledge (1:31, 66). He also makes every effort to insulate his scepticism from the natural sciences—although I am not as confident that his attempt at insulation or his distinction between the epistemic credentials of human knowledge of physics and of metaphysics is as stable as he thinks.[19] Now, that one's sceptical stance can be restricted is not news; as we will next mention, Pyrrhonists also restricted their scepticism to non-evident beliefs, allowing themselves assent or at least acquiescence to the evident.[20] However, Maimonides's distinction is between two domains or subject matters (nature or the sublunar world vs. cosmology and metaphysics), and the fact that his scepticism is limited to metaphysics enables him to make dogmatic assumptions about the sublunar world that the classical sceptic could not make—for example, assumptions about what human (scientific) knowledge requires, about physical motion, causation, matter, and form presupposed by physics, assumptions from which Maimonides launches his sceptical critique of the philosophers' theories of metaphysics.

A complementary restriction on Maimonidean scepticism is that it is directed exclusively against claims to possess scientific *knowledge*, the kind of cognitive state the calibre of which would enable the human, in medieval terms, to achieve the status of a fully actualised or acquired intellect that either is in or leads to conjunction with the active intellect. Unlike some interpretations of classical scepticism, Maimonides does not challenge ordinary or rustic beliefs or "common knowledge," let alone generally accepted or "conventional" opinions or dialectical conclusions, or

19 Notwithstanding all these statements avowing scientific knowledge of the sublunar world and the natural sciences, at least one medieval commentator and one modern scholar have appealed to a passage in 3:23, 496 to argue that Maimonides was also sceptical of knowledge of the sublunar sphere. See Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera, *Moreh ha-Moreh*, [Heb.,] ed. Yair Shiffman (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies Press, 2001), 274–77 and Warren Zev Harvey, "Maimonides' Critical Epistemology and *Guide* 2:24," *Aleph* 8 (2008): 234–35. I discuss this passage in Josef Stern, *The Epistemology of Prophecy: Maimonides on the False Prophet* (manuscript in preparation). The larger issue is whether our lack of knowledge of ultimate superlunar causes impugns our knowledge of the proximate sublunar causes. Suffice it to say for now that, although it is clear that Falaquera himself takes scepticism to extend both to the sublunar and superlunar worlds, all that Maimonides denies in that passage is knowledge of the "origination" of sublunar natural things, i.e., explanation by their ultimate causes in the superlunar sphere.

20 It is a subject of endless scholarly controversy how to characterise the evident/non-evident distinction: whether the evident are mere appearances that one passively receives, (non-epistemic) reports about one's own mental state rather than the world, or ordinary (rustic) beliefs as opposed to theory-embedded or scientific/philosophical (gentleman's) beliefs; see Jonathan Barnes, "The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist," *Elenchos* 4 (1983): 5–43; Burnyeat, "Can the Skeptic"; Frede, "Skeptics's belief"; Frede, "The Skeptic's Two Kinds"; Striker, "Sceptical Strategies"; and Casey Perin, "Scepticism and Belief," in *Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, ed. Richard Bett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 145–64.

claims accepted because they suffer from fewer doubts than rival hypotheses.[21] Neither are his arguments directed against claims as to what really exists in the sublunar world or about the natures of things as opposed to their appearances.

Since he discusses certainty as a species of belief (1:50, 111), Maimonides's scepticism also does not exclude the possibility that someone may have certain belief in a proposition about which he has no knowledge or understanding, specifically concerning which he suspends judgment (I will sketch one example of this possibility).[22] His term for scientific knowledge is most frequently *ʿilm*, which translates the Greek *epistēmē* (less frequently, he uses *maʿrifa*). Like most of his philosophical terms, Maimonides nowhere explicitly defines *ʿilm*, and his use of the term is sometimes loose.[23] Within the Aristotelian tradition, *epistēmē* is closely linked to demonstration (*burhān*) and to the intellect (*ʿaql*). And among the conditions Aristotle requires for premises of a demonstration, the most important for Maimonides is that they must contain the cause, or explanation, of the conclusion. For in order to have scientific knowledge of *x*, one must understand *x* according to its "true reality" (*ḥaqīqa*), rather than as it appears or according to common opinion, and we only understand *x* when we know its causal explanation.[24] Aristotle goes on to distinguish explicitly between demonstrations that contain a middle term that is the cause and explanation of the conclusion, entailing both *the fact that* (*to hoti*; Arabic *inna*) the conclusion obtains and its *explanation why* (*to dioti,* Arabic *limā*) and those demonstrations that contain no cause and merely establish *the fact that* the conclusion is true. Among the scholastics, this distinction came to be known as the difference between demonstrations *propter quid* and *quia*, and I have argued elsewhere that only demonstrations *propter*

21 According to Alexander of Aphrodisias's principle; see *Guide* 2:3, 254; 2:23, 321. It is an intriguing question whether Alexander's principle may be related to the Academic's idea of reasonable or probable belief as a criterion in the absence of knowledge. On the status of Aristotelian (not *kalām)* dialectical arguments, see Joel L. Kraemer, "Maimonides on Aristotle and Scientific Method," in *Moses Maimonides and His Time*, ed. Eric Ormsby (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 53–88; Arthur Hyman, "Demonstrative, Dialectical, and Sophistic Arguments in the Philosophy of Maimonides," in *Moses Maimonides and His Time*, ed. Eric Ormsby (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 35–51; Ivry, "Logical and Scientific Premises."

22 On certainty as an epistemic notion in Arabic philosophy, see Deborah L. Black, "Knowledge (*ʿIlm*) and Certitude (*Yaqīn*) in Al-Farabi's Epistemology," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 16 (2006): 11–45, explicating al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, in *Al-Manṭiq ʿinda al-Fārābī*, volume 4, ed. Majid Fakhry (Beirut: Dar al-Machreq, 1987). Partial English translation in Jon McGinnis and David C. Reisman, eds., *Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007), 63–67. Manekin, "Maimonides," argues that Maimonides replaced explanatory understanding (*ʿilm* or *epistēmē*) by certainty as the standard of demonstration, hence, of scientific knowledge. For criticism, see Stern, *Matter and Form*, 142–45, and Stern, *Epistemology.*

23 See Hyman, "Demonstrative"; Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim* [Hebrew,] trans. Michael Schwartz (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2002), 1:7n12 (translator's note); Stern, "Maimonides' Demonstrations"; Stern, *Matter and Form*, 138–42.

24 See Myles Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Understanding Knowledge," in *Aristotle on Science*, ed. Enrico Berti (Padua: Antenore, 1981), 97–139.

quid furnish what Maimonides, following Alexander of Aphrodisias, believes is necessary to achieve knowledge or understanding.[25] I will return to this shortly, but the significant upshot for us is that the target of Maimonidean scepticism is exclusively scientific *knowledge or understanding* of *metaphysics*, not knowledge of physics and not even beliefs held with certainty about metaphysics.

Against this background, we can now turn to what I earlier called the practical orientation of Maimonidean scepticism. Maimonides does not simply make a theoretical case that the *falāsifa* and he himself (and generalising, all humans) lack the epistemic credentials for knowledge claims about metaphysics. He also makes the normative claim that, given a sceptical critique, one ought to "refrain and hold back," "stop," or "stand"—all translations of *wuqūf*, his term for *epochē*—upon recognising her lack of knowledge/understanding. But *wuqūf* or *epochē* is also not an end in itself. Rather it is a step, as we also saw for the classical sceptic, towards achieving a kind of happiness. For the Pyrrhonist, their non-eudemonian happiness is tranquillity (*ataraxia*), a certain kind of mental state, peace of mind, that follows almost as an accident (or so it is depicted) from *epochē*, the suspension of judgment on all questions. Maimonides, in contrast, describes two different practical states in the contexts of different arguments: one is also tranquillity, but the second is dazzlement or awe. First, he sees the sceptic's *wuqūf* as a way of freeing oneself from the unceasing anxiety, endless irresolvable disagreements, and bad science that result from the drive to satisfy the unsatisfiable epistemic desire to have knowledge of metaphysics.

> When [studying "obscure matters like metaphysics"] one should not make categoric affirmations in favor of the first opinion that occurs to him and should not, from the outset, strain and impel his thoughts toward the apprehension of the deity; he rather should *feel awe and refrain and hold back* until he gradually elevates himself (1:5, 29; my emphasis).
>
> [I]f you stay your progress because of a dubious point; if you do not deceive yourself into believing that there is a demonstration with regard to matters that have not been demonstrated; if you do not hasten to reject and categorically to pronounce false any assertions whose contradictories have not been demonstrated; if, finally, you do not aspire to apprehend that which you are unable to apprehend—you will have achieved *human perfection* and attained the rank of Rabbi Aqiba [...] who entered in peace [*shalom*] and went out in peace [*shalom*] when engaged in the theoretical study of these metaphysical matters (1:32, 68–69).
>
> When points appearing as dubious occur to him or the thing he seeks does not seem to him to be demonstrated, he should not deny and reject it, hastening to pronounce it false, but rather should persevere and *thereby have regard for the honor of his Creator* [*yaḥus ʿal kevod qono*]. *He should refrain and hold back* [Ar.: *yaqif*; Heb. *yaʿamod*] (1:32, 70).

In the first of these passages (1: 5), the "holding back" is in part an expression of caution in judgment, although the awe of the deity that motivates it and that it elicits hints at more. However, in the next two passages, the first of which alludes to an enigmatic rabbinic story of four scholars who entered a *pardes*, or orchard, which

25 See Stern, *Matter and Form*, 162–67.

Maimonides interprets as the study of metaphysics, *wuqūf*, "staying your progress" and "stopping," is *not* merely not assenting to or not rejecting individual metaphysical propositions. Rather it is not *aspiring* or *seeking* to know what one cannot know. It is giving up or divesting oneself of the very aspiration or drive, and *ipso facto* tranquillity follows by freeing oneself of this source of unhappiness. The Hebrew word *shalom*, here peace of mind or tranquillity, plays on *shelemut* (Arabic *kamāl*), perfection. But this perfection is achieved without knowledge and, indeed, only when one does "not aspire to apprehend that which you are unable to apprehend," namely, the truths one seeks in "the theoretical study of these metaphysical matters." Hence, the perfection Maimonides recommends is not the unachievable intellectual one that requires literally knowledge of everything including metaphysics. Instead it is the perfection of the one who, having disavowed his own unsatisfiable epistemic desires, lacks no unfulfilled desire. At the same time, Maimonides makes clear that the point is not to give up intellectual enquiry and the intellectual ideal: "The intention [...] is not [...] wholly to close the gate of speculation and to deprive the intellect of the apprehension of things that it is possible to apprehend [...] Their purpose, in its entirety, rather is to make it known that *the intellects of human beings have a limit at which they stop*" (1:32, 70). To stop at one's limits is *ipso facto* to redirect oneself back into enquiry into the domain of humanly achievable knowledge, physics, and the sublunar world. However, enquiry into natural sublunar phenomena leads one, naturally, as an inquisitive inquirer, to seek ultimate causes, hence, back into the realm of the unsatisfiable epistemic desire to have knowledge of metaphysics with all its ill effects, leading again to *wuqūf*/*epochē*, redirection to the sublunar, and so on. *wuqūf* is the cure for the intellectual unhappiness that is due to unsatisfiable epistemic desires. But it is also part of a circular exercise of *skepsis* as persistent, unending enquiry that never ceases at a final destination of secure dogmatic knowledge of ultimate metaphysical causes.

The second result, or practical effect, of *wuqūf* is an expression of divine worship —dazzlement, awe, spontaneous praise—that follows recognition of the limits of one's intellect. Just as Sextus tells us how Apelles achieved the effect of a horse's foam only when he gave up and flung his sponge at the canvas, so Maimonides depicts how at the very moment that his sceptic suspends judgment about metaphysical knowledge through the discipline of self-imposed limits on his intellect, he puts (or, better, finds) himself in a state of awe and dazzlement in the presence of God, the metaphysical object par excellence—analogous to the state of divine worship that the dogmatist seeks to achieve through the acquisition of positive knowledge about metaphysics and God. For example, following an antinomy concerning divine attributes (to which we will return), he exclaims:

> All men, those of the past and those of the future, affirm clearly that God [...] cannot be apprehended by the intellects, and that none but He Himself can apprehend what He is, and that apprehension of Him consists in the inability to attain the ultimate term in apprehending Him (1:59, 139).

> Glory then to Him who is such that when the intellects contemplate His essence, their apprehension turns into incapacity [...] (1:58, 137).
>
> For the governance and the providence of [God] accompany the world as a whole in such a way that the manner and true reality of this accompaniment are hidden from us; the faculties of human beings are inadequate to understand this. On the one hand, there is a demonstration of His separateness, may He be exalted, from the world and of His being free from it; and on the other hand, there is a demonstration that the influence of His governance and providence in every part of the world, however small and contemptible, exists. *May He whose perfection has dazzled us be glorified* (1:72, 193, my emphasis).
>
> [Following the interpretation of the parable of the Garden of Eden and Adam's "sin":] Praise be to the Master of the will whose aims and wisdom cannot be apprehended (1:2, 26).

In each of these cases, Maimonides works us through a process of sceptical reasoning leading to an equipollence of contrary propositions, followed by *wuqūf*. Treating this process as a Hadot-like spiritual exercise, he shows us how one puts oneself into a state in which one cannot but express awe and spontaneous praise of God—analogous or parallel to the state the dogmatist sought to achieve through the acquisition of positive knowledge of God.

One final feature of the Maimonidean sceptical programme that I will just mention—but, for reasons of space, not elaborate—is its distinctive brand of exegesis whose central element is the *parable* and the parabolic interpretation of texts in Scripture, Rabbinic literature, ancient philosophy, and of Maimonides's own making.[26] Maimonides's use of the parable is not, however, as it is usually presented, to control the *dissemination* of knowledge *fully* grasped by its author. Rather the parable serves him as a medium for the *expression* of its *author's* incomplete, partial, flash-like grasp of metaphysics. Maimonides begins the *Guide* with a rich parable depicting an inquirer's intellectual experience when engaged in enquiry into metaphysics, using images of a tug of war of perplexity and lightning-like flashes in dark night to capture the fact that none of "the great *secrets* [of metaphysics] are fully and completely known to *anyone among us*," i.e., all humans (1:Introduction, 7). The parable, he continues, is the primary verbal form by which his ancient predecessors among the prophets, rabbis, and Greek philosophers, for example, Plato, attempted to put this intellectual experience into words. Following suit, Maimonides composes his *own* parables to express *his* incomplete understanding of metaphysics. Interpreting the proverb "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in filigree, or finer tracery, of silver" (Proverbs 24:11) as itself a parable about the interpretation of parables, Maimonides argues that the multi-levelled semantic structure of a parable corresponds to the structure of the cognitive experience of incomplete understanding of metaphysics. He shows how we begin by working through propositions that are commonly believed but not scientifically demonstrated. These constitute the parable's external meaning and often turn out to express the Aristotelian position. Next we focus

26 For a detailed discussion of the Maimonidean parable, see Stern, *Matter and Form*, chapter 2.

on their implications and presuppositions and thereby expose problems, inconsistencies, and antinomies. Through this cognitive process, one comes to grasp what one can of the parable's inner meaning: an incomplete grasp of metaphysics and a sceptical acquiescence to the limits of one's understanding.

To give a feel for the character of Maimonides's scepticism with respect to knowledge of metaphysics and, in particular, God, I now turn to two of his arguments, sketched in broad strokes.

Recall Pines's empiricist claim that all knowledge for Maimonides must be abstracted from sensible images, thereby excluding the intelligible forms of purely immaterial beings, such as the Active Intellect or God. The dogmatist will object that we may not be able to *directly* apprehend or perceive intelligible forms of immaterial beings, but we can come to know general metaphysical propositions by inference, abstracting physical concepts (for example, body, time, and space) and more general intelligible concepts (such as unity, cause, simple, and incorporeal), combining them into propositions, building syllogisms, constructing a science, and demonstrating general propositions, say, that there is one simple, incorporeal, first cause of the universe—and this is God.[27] In reply to this dogmatic counter-argument, the sceptic must explain why the *falāsifa*'s demonstrations, their indirect proofs for metaphysical theses, do not meet the standards of scientific knowledge. As I have mentioned, the source of the problem is materiality and in particular the bodily faculty of the imagination.

The strongest case a dogmatist could make for the possibility of knowledge of metaphysics would be to produce a full-fledged demonstration for an unquestionable metaphysical proposition such as the existence of the deity.[28] Maimonides seems to refer to such a proof in the following three passages:

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27 See Altmann, "Maimonides"; Davidson, "Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge"; Davidson, *Maimonides the Rationalist*. For discussion, see Davidson, *Maimonides the Rationalist*, 65–66. Additional examples of metaphysical propositions that are said to have been demonstrated are found in *Guide* 1:58, 135; 1:59, 137–39; 1:68, 163; 165; 1:71, 180–81; 1:76, 227; 2:1, 246, 252; 2:4, 256; cf. Davidson, *Maimonides the Rationalist*, 173–74. In some of these cases, however, it is the philosophers who claim to have demonstrated them; in others, we are given what is designated a "proof" (*dalīl*) which may or may not be a demonstration.

28 Such a "full-fledged" demonstration would ideally be a demonstration *propter quid* of the existence of God, a demonstration containing among its premises the cause, or explanation, of the conclusion that God exists. A purported demonstration of this kind is, for example, Anselm's ontological proof which is, in turn, criticised by Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae* Ia, Q 2, A 1, ad. 2. Herbert Davidson claims that no ontological arguments are to be found in medieval Arabic and Jewish philosophy, which instead concentrate on cosmological arguments that invariably begin from the world, i.e., effects, from which they reason to a first cause or necessarily existent being. See Herbert A. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 214–15. However, apart from ontological arguments, Marwan Rashed has argued that al-Fārābī aimed to reconstruct "analytic" proofs that argue from effects as "synthetic" proofs that begin from causes, suggesting that "full-fledged" demonstrations are in fact *propter quid*. See Marwan Rashed, "Al-Fārābī's Lost Treatise *On Changing Beings* and the Pos-

> For it is the greatest proof through which one can know the existence of the deity—I mean the revolution of the heaven [...] (1:70, 175)
>
> On account of [its grandeur], the heaven is called a *throne*, indicating [...] He who caused them to exist and to move, and who governs this lower world [...] the heaven indicates My existence, grandeur, and power [...] (1:9, 34–35)
>
> [...] the heaven proves to us the existence of the deity, who is its mover and governor, as we shall explain. We shall make it clear that there is no proof indicating to us the existence of the Maker, according to our opinion, like the indication deriving from the heaven. The latter also proves, as we have mentioned, according to the opinion of the philosophers, the existence of the Mover of the heaven and His not being either a body or a force subsisting in a body (2:18, 302).

What is the proof in question? Maimonides says that the heavens prove the existence of God, but he does not tell us *what about* the heavens constitutes the basis of that proof; there are, in fact, two candidates. Either it is the eternal motion of the spheres from which the philosophers prove the existence of a *prime mover* or the irregular motions, different velocities, and different directions of the embedded planets which prove the existence of what Maimonides calls a "creator" or "particulariser" who freely chose or willed to originate the spheres.[29]

Now, it is well-known that Maimonides denies that either eternity or creation/origination can be demonstrated; for this reason, the evidence for eternity and creation must be the empirical observation of the motions of the heavens. That is, each is known from its effects or *quia* and the most that can be proven is *the fact that* the world is either eternal or originated (*to hoti*; *inna*), not *why* it is. Thus, lacking a full-fledged explanatory demonstration (*propter quid*; *to dioti*; *limā*), Maimonides does not choose one proof rather than the other (which would rest the existence of God on something less than fully demonstrated), and instead presents his own proof, which is in the form of a Stoic "simple constructive dilemma."[30] In fact, he

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sibility of a Demonstration of the Eternity of the World," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 18, no. 1 (March 2008): 19–58. As we shall argue below, Maimonides' critique of the best argument for the existence of God is not simply that it is from effects and not from a cause—after all God has no cause—but, more significantly, that the attempt to causally explain His existence runs into an antinomy.

29 For the former, see the philosophers' twenty-sixth premise (2: Introduction, 239–41); for the latter, 2:19, 310: "To my mind, there is no proof of purpose stronger than the one founded upon the differences between the motions of the spheres and upon the fact that the stars are fixed in the spheres. For this reason you will find that all the prophets used the stars and the spheres as proofs for the deity's existing necessarily."

30 In Stoic terminology, the argument has the form: "If the first, then the third; if the second, then the third; but either the first or the second; therefore in any case the third." William Kneale and Martha Kneale, *The Development of Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 178. It should be noted that this argument form is neither an Aristotelian demonstration nor a syllogism. For an earlier version of the argument, see Ibn Ṭufayl, *Hayy ben Yaqdhân: roman philosophique d'Ibn Thofaïl*, ed. and trans. Léon Gauthier (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1936). English translation in Lenn E. Goodman, *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 94; Jon McGinnis and David C. Reisman, eds. *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publish-

presents two versions of this proof— once in 1:71, 181–82, and again in 2:2, 252—the main difference between them consisting in the addition of a last line in the second proof. For reasons of space, I will give only the second version.

1. The fifth body, i.e., the sphere, hence, its motion, must either be subject or not be subject to generation and corruption (i.e., either originated or eternal).
2. [Suppose the sphere is subject to generation and corruption, i.e., originated.] Anything that exists after having been non-existent cannot have brought itself into existence, hence, of necessity must have been brought into existence by something else. (First Intelligible)
3. Therefore, if the sphere is subject to generation and corruption, there must be something else that brought it into existence after having been non-existent.
4. That being is the deity.
5. Therefore, if the sphere is subject to generation and corruption, the deity exists.
6. Suppose now that the sphere is not subject to generation and corruption (i.e., eternal). If it has always and never will cease to be moved in a perpetual and eternal movement, then the mover that causes it to move in this eternal motion is not a body or a force in a body. (Assumes premises 1, 3–11, 14–17, 16 in 2: Introduction)
7. Such a mover is the deity.
8. Therefore, if the sphere is not subject to generation and corruption, the deity exists.
9. But the world has either come into existence after having been non-existent or it has not (i.e., it either is or is not subject to generation and corruption, originated or eternal).
10. Therefore, on both lemmas, the deity exists.
11. This deity who has been proven to exist (according to both lemmas) is the being that necessarily exists by virtue of itself.

In the concluding line (11)—the line not found in the version in 1:71—Maimonides identifies the deity (proven on both lemmas) with the Avicennean Necessary Existent in virtue of itself, i.e., the being that is necessarily existent in itself and is entirely uncaused by anything else, hence, one and simple.[31] If you were to object that the two lemmas of eternity and creation prove the existence of very different deities, Maimonides's addition of line 11 may be intended to claim that there is only one such ultimate being that is both creator and cause of the first intellect or prime mover.[32]

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ing Company, 2007), 290–91. See Joel L. Kraemer, *Maimonides: The Life and World of One of Civilization's Greatest Minds* (New York: Doubleday Press, 2008), 383.

31 In Stern, *Matter and Form*, 156–58, I argue that Maimonides uses the term "Creator" to designate the Avicennean Necessary Existent in Itself, based on his description in *Guide* 1:69, 169–70 which he in turn identifies with the Particulariser in 2:19, 303; 310; 2:20, 314; and 2:15, 449–51.

32 For example, see Harvey, "Maimonides' First Commandment," 153; Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1998), 77–82; Harvey, "Maimonides' Critical Epistomology," 228–30; Kraemer, "How (not) to Read," 17; Kraemer, "Is There a Text," 365, who both see the two lemmas leading to different conceptions of the deity, one of the *kalām* or Bible, and one of the philosophers. Harvey, *Physic*s, provides a very good review and analysis of the classical commentators (including ibn Tibbon, Joseph Kaspi, Profayt Duran [Efodi], and Hasdai Crescas), who all take Maimonides's reference to the Necessary Existent in Itself to be based on the third of the philosophers' proofs in *Guide* 2:1, thereby creating a contradiction internal to the *Guide*. On my view, Maimonides's

Maimonides repeatedly refers to this proof as a "method of demonstration about which there can be no doubt" (1:71, 180), by which "perfect certainty is obtained" (1:71, 181), and "as to which there is no disagreement in any respect" (1:71, 182). Given this praise, I take it that the constructive dilemma is the "greatest proof" to which Maimonides is referring in the passages quoted earlier from 1:70, 1:9, and 2:18. The proof is so certain and indubitable that one would assume that it also yields *ʿilm*, or scientific knowledge, that God exists.

Yet, at the end of his long discussion of the set of incompatibilities between Ptolemaic astronomy and Aristotelian cosmology that led to the "crisis of the sciences" in twelfth-century Andalusia, Maimonides writes:

> For it is impossible for us to accede to the points starting from which conclusions may be drawn about the heavens; for the latter are too far away from us and too high in place and in rank. And even the general conclusion that may be drawn from them [the heavens], namely, that they prove the existence of their Mover, is a matter the *knowledge* of which cannot be reached by human intellects (2:24, 327, my emphasis).

This passage has been the subject of much recent controversy,[33] but what Maimonides literally says is that there is a proof—*prima facie*, the constructive dilemma—from the heavens to the existence of "their Mover" but that its conclusion is not something of which the human intellect has knowledge. How is that possible? If the constructive dilemma is a proof and, indeed, certain, why isn't it knowledge? And if it is not knowledge, how could it be a proof whose conclusion is believed with certainty?

My answer in brief is that the proof may move us to assent to its conclusion—after all, its two lemmas exhaust the possibilities and, therefore, it is necessary and certain—but it is not knowledge because our assent to the premises of the two lemmas, eternity and origination, is only based on their observable effects, the spheres' unending motion and irregular, different motions, respectively, and from the premises of eternity and origination, we in turn infer the deity, the necessarily existent being, as *their* cause. Hence, the proof is doubly *quia:* the existence of God is proven from His effects twice over, and we lack any explanatory cause of the conclusion that would yield understanding, knowledge, or *ʿilm*/*epistēmē*. Thus "the greatest proof" is simply the best we humans can do, the proof no greater than which is known by any human: indubitable, certain, and even necessary—but, lacking any explanation, "a matter the *knowledge* of which cannot be reached by human intellects."

However, this is not the end of Maimonides's story. One might take Maimonides's argument to show, as did his fourteenth-century commentator Moses of Narbonne,

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own proof is not that of the philosophers but the proof in *Guide* 2:2, thus avoiding any contradiction, although the proof nonetheless furnishes no knowledge.

33 See the symposium of papers in *Aleph* 8 (2008).

that "[The existence of God cannot be demonstrated] from prior [causes] because He [...] is prior to all and nothing is prior to Him. How could [His existence] be explained by a demonstration from the cause when He is the cause of everything and everything is His creation?"[34] But this only prompts the objection: If God's existence necessarily has no cause, why should the fact that *we* cannot give a cause or explanation count against *our* knowledge of His existence? There exists no cause we do not know. Why, then, shouldn't a certain, necessary, and indubitable *quia* demonstration suffice for (scientific) knowledge of this conclusion? Without some idea of *what* we do not understand, there is no punch to the sceptic's challenge.

Contrary to Narbonne, I want to propose that Maimonides's claim that we have no knowledge of the existence of the deity on the basis of this proof is not because God has no prior cause, true though that is. The real problem is that the attempt to provide an explanation of God's existence runs into an antinomy. The best explanation of the existence of God rests on contradictory premises: each is individually well-motivated but together they are incompatible. For Maimonides, this tension signals our incomplete understanding of the notions in question.

Maimonides presents this antinomy through an extended parable scattered throughout the *Guide* about a ruler who is known by his subjects only by means of his actions of governance.[35] However, for reasons of space, I will sketch the objection Maimonides raises by focusing on the two conflicting principles on which it rests. One is about final ends, the other about the structure of immaterial causation, a relation for which Maimonides appropriates the Neoplatonic term for emanation or overflowing, in Arabic *fayḍ*.

The principle about final ends is that "The end is nobler than the things that subsist [or act] for the sake of the end" (2:11, 275). The principle about emanation is that the direction of emanation is always from the more noble to the less noble.[36] Now, if we were to explain God's emanation of the world, it presumably would be by way of its final cause, the good it achieves. That good will never be a benefit for God (for how can He be benefited by His own act?) but necessarily a benefit for the world. However, according to the first principle, final ends must be more noble than what subsists or acts for their sake and, according to the second, emanation goes from the more noble to the less. So, either the final cause of the emanation would necessarily be something more noble than the deity or divine emanation, or emanation would proceed from the less to the more noble—both of which are absurd. Therefore, Maimonides concludes: "[Whenever an immaterial being, e.g., a separate intellect or the deity] causes a certain good thing to overflow from it, [...] the exis-

34 Moses Narbonne, *Der Commentar des Rabbi Moses Narbonensis su dem werke More Nebuchim des Maimonides,* ed. and trans. Jakob Goldenthal (Wien: K.K. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1852), 15b–16a.
35 For the parable of the ruler, see *Guide* 1:46, 97–98; 1:69, 168–71; 1:70, 175; 3:13, 454; and Stern, *Matter and Form*, 168–77.
36 On Maimonides's understanding of emanation, overflowing, or *fayḍ*, see *Guide* 2:12, 278–80; 3:22, 317–20.

tence, the purpose, and the end of the being conferring the benefits do not consist in conferring the benefits on the recipients" (2:11, 275).[37] The emanation of goods is never *for the sake of* anything else; instead there is simply a "residue" that suffices, or overflows, to perfect something else as a necessitated by-product of the divine cause. In quasi-ethical terms, emanation is an expression of grace, which is indeed one way to translate the Arabic term *fayḍ*. But this conclusion has a cost: without a final cause for the sake of which the emanating being subsists or the emanation acts, we cannot explain the causal relation between God (or a separate intellect) and the sublunary world, and, without an explanation, we have no understanding of emanation, hence, no knowledge.[38]

Before I turn to Maimonides's diagnosis of the source of this failure of apprehension, I want to sketch a second Maimonidean argument that shows the impossibility of knowledge of a class of metaphysical propositions. This argument is laid out in Maimonides's discussion of divine attributes which culminates in his frequently discussed *via negativa* or, more precisely, his analysis of categorial negations of privative attributive statements about God. Contrary to the dogmatic reading according to which Maimonides uses these negations to furnish us with knowledge about God—knowledge of what He is not—I shall argue for the sceptical reading that Maimonides argues that even these statements furnish no knowledge, not even knowledge of what He is not![39]

There are three background concepts that must be unpacked. First, because the dogmatist against whom Maimonides's argument seems to be directed is Avicenna, the distinguishing fact about God is His unity, not merely that He is numerically one, but that He is also indivisible, absolutely simple, incomposite, and, insofar as He has no parts or structure that would require any explanation of His unity, absolutely uncaused. This is what is meant by saying that God is necessarily existent in itself, from which it also follows that He is incomparable and unique. Maimonides also transforms the Avicennean God's metaphysical uniqueness into a semantic thesis that all predicates that apply to God and to creatures are totally equivocal and, because all *our* understanding of linguistic terms derives from their application to creatures, it follows that *we* have no understanding of any of the predicates that apply to God. (Here we see Maimonides shifting from an *ad hominem* argument, directed against

37 In more general terms: Whenever a being *b* of rank *n* emanates a good or benefit on a being *c* of rank *n*-1—which is necessarily the case because the direction of emanation is from the higher rank to the lower rank—the final cause or end of (the subsistence or act of) *b* cannot consist in emanating that good onto *c*.

38 For a similar objection, see al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī al-ʿAql*, ed. M. Bouyges (Beirut: 1938), 30. English Translation by Arthur Hyman: "Letter on the Intellect." In *Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. Arthur Hyman and James J. Walsh (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), 219. Al-Fārābī criticises those who explain why forms descend to this world by the final cause "so that matters attain a more perfect existence" because that "contradicts what Aristotle has shown" that the end must always be more noble than that which it acts for the sake of.

39 For a more detailed exposition of this argument, see Stern, *Matter and Form*, 191–249.

his Avicennean dogmatist, to his own sceptical stance.) Conversely, on this Avicennean conception, belief in a deity that is not uncaused or is a plurality, divisible, or composite is belief in something *other* than God; it is idolatry or polytheism, the false belief that God is not one, hence, material and even bodily. What Maimonides will argue against the dogmatist is that, in his attempt to provide a *theory* of our *knowledge* of divine unity, he ends up with idolatry.

Second, Maimonides argues that the objects of belief and knowledge are not words—the sounds that come out of our mouths that he calls "external speech"—but mental representations (*taṣawwur*), the system of which he calls "inner speech," the language of thought, which he thinks of as a language in its own right, as it were, with its own linguistic structure and syntax. This is to say two things. First, there is no cognition without representation. So, if no consistent, coherent inner representation corresponds to a string of words in external speech, one just mouths sounds instead of expressing beliefs (1:50, 111–12). Second, the expressive resources of inner speech, or of the mental representations, must be adequate to the demands of knowledge, and in at least the natural or sublunary sciences they are. Unlike the grammars of external speech that are conventional and vary across linguistic communities, the syntax of the language of inner representation is universal and, insofar as it is structured in ways that perspicuously reveal logical relations, it is therefore the preferred system of representations to guide one to knowledge in the sciences.[40] Nevertheless, however superior the inner mental representations are to external speech, they are also composed according to a syntax. As a consequence, they also will be problematic when it comes to expressing truths about metaphysics and, in particular, about the absolutely simple God.

Third, Maimonides assumes a significant constraint on all representations, including those of inner speech, if they are to count as knowledge. Not only must the representation be true; its content must correspond to what exists in the world. To this Maimonides adds the condition that, in order to serve as an object of knowledge, a true representation must not only represent what *is* the case: *how* it represents *what it represents* must also be the case.

So, a statement about God, such as (1) "God is one" is true not only if and only if God *is* one, the statement must also *represent* Him *as* one. In particular, it cannot represent Him as if He were a composite being with a substratum or essence and at-

40 See *Maimonides' Treatise on Logic (Maḳālah fi-Ṣinā'at al-Manṭiḳ)*, trans. and ed. Israel Efros, *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* 8 (1937–38), chapter 14. Arabic in Efros, "Maimonides' Arabic Treatise on Logic," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* 34 (1966). On al-Fārābī's influence on Maimonides's conception of logic here, see Josef Stern, "Maimonides on Language and the Science of Language," in *Maimonides and the Sciences*, ed. Robert S. Cohen and Hillel Levine (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000), 173–226; and for the Farabian background, the Introduction to Fritz W. Zimmermann, *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

tributes or accidents. With this constraint in place, Maimonides argues that there can be no representation by which we can know, for example, that God is one is true.

Suppose Maimonides's dogmatist opponent, the philosopher, demonstrates (1): that God is one, an absolute unity, simple, and incomposite.[41] Keep in mind that no term including "one" applied to God has the same content it possesses when applied to any other creature and, furthermore, we also simply do not understand its content. But even apart from its pure equivocality, the predicate "is one," insofar as it is a predicate or attribute-term, designates some affirmative attribute, or "possession," which is either essential or accidental, i.e., part of God's essence or a contingent attribute separate from His essence. In either case the dogmatist next needs to explain why the complex essence, or essence-attribute combo, constitute *one* being; he needs a cause. But God, he has said, is necessary in itself and uncaused. Hence, in demonstrating that God is one, the dogmatist has represented Him in a way that in turn requires an explanatory cause, contradicting his assertion that God is absolutely uncaused. In short, he has misrepresented Him and indeed ended up with idolatry.

> Accordingly, you have not arrived at a knowledge of the true reality of an essential attribute, but you have arrived at multiplicity. For you believe that He is a certain essence possessing unknown attributes [...] for if you say God [...] is a certain substratum upon which certain borne things are superposed and that this substratum is not like these adjuncts, the utmost of our apprehension would be, on the basis of this belief, polytheism and nothing else. For the notion of the substratum is different from that of the adjunct borne by it (1:60, 144–45).

To avoid this contradictory metaphysical consequence of affirmative attribution, Maimonides proposes to the dogmatist that he might translate or regiment the external speech statement, the affirmative (1), in inner speech as (2), the categorical negation of the privation ("is many") corresponding to the affirmative attribute or possession ("is one"): (2) "Not (God is many)." A categorial negation denies that the subject (here: God) falls under whatever category to which the predicate in question ("is many") belongs. So, to use Maimonides's own example (1:59, 136), (3) "A wall does not see" does not say that a wall is blind but that it does not fall in the category of thing that is either seeing or blind. And a privation, in turn, is the absence of the possession of an attribute in a subject in which the attribute ought to exist or normally does exist. So, blindness is a privation in creatures who, by nature, ought to have sight. Now, privations, being absences, are not parts of anything, hence, they avoid the problem of part-hood, hence, divisibility, created by affirmative attributes. But Maimonides also emphasises that they are nonetheless attributes attributed, or predicated, to subjects and that, like affirmative attributes, they serve to individuate

41 Note that Maimonides is arguing with the dogmatist, the *faylasūf*, on *his* grounds, on *his* assumption that the deity is the necessary existent.

subjects.[42] So, privations avoid the problem of divisibility, and the categorial negation in turn denies that the subject belongs to the superordinate category to which the privation (and its positive possession) belongs, hence, they doubly negate any complexity of God. Nonetheless, while these categorial negations are *better* than affirmative attributions to God, Maimonides argues they are still not good enough. In particular, they fail the condition that *how what* is represented is represented must also be true. "For there is no oneness at all except in believing that there is one simple essence in which there is no complexity [*tarkīb*; lit. "composition"] [...] and you will not find therein any multiplicity either in the thing as it is outside of the mind or *as it is in the mind* [...]" (1:51, 113, my emphasis).

Even though (2) is better than (1), its subject-predicate syntax still implies that there exists an attribute (signified by the predicate) formally distinguishable from the substratum or substance (signified by the subject term), and this structural division holds even if the attribute is privative and categorically negated. So, negated privative attributes are still subject to all problems of *attribution* from which Maimonides concludes: "[...] negation does not give knowledge in any respect of the true reality of the thing with regard to which the particular matter in question has been negated" (1:59, 139). So, whenever we can demonstrate that God is one or, in regimented inner speech, the (categorial) negation of (the privation of) multiplicity/compositeness, it is nonetheless presupposed (hence, entailed) from the syntactic form of the demonstrated proposition that He is composite! This problem for divine attribution—which I call the "syntactic problem" of divine attributes—infects all attribution, affirmative and negative. Maimonides, contrary to common opinion, is not an advocate but a sceptical critic of negative theology. And again, the philosophers' theory that attempts to capture divine unity ends up also representing God in an idolatrous form.

Without pursuing this antimony further, it puts Maimonides in the state of spontaneous awe and praise of God in the passages we quoted earlier (1:58, 137 and 1:59, 139). However, given his own critique of the possibility of expressing truths about God in language, what form can that praise take?

> The most apt phrase concerning this subject is the dictum occurring in the Psalms, *Silence is praise to Thee* (Psalms 65:2), which interpreted signifies: silence with regard to You is praise [...] Accordingly, silence and limiting oneself to the apprehensions of the intellects are more appropriate—just as the perfect ones have enjoined when they said: *Commune with you own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah* (Psalms 4:5) (1:59, 139–40).

The silence in this passage is not only silence in external but also in inner speech: neither affirmative nor negative privative attributions express truths, hence, praise

42 See 1:58, 134–35; 1:59, 137–39; 1:60, 143–44.

of God.[43] The silence is also an expression of *epochē*. By holding back from representing God using a false expression, thereby acknowledging the limitations of one's representational powers, one expresses God's greatness. At the same time, the silence is conjoined with "limiting oneself" to the domain in which there are "apprehensions of the intellect" in which knowledge is possible. Silence with respect to metaphysics goes along with continuing *skepsis* in the sublunar domain of natural science.

To return finally to Maimonides's diagnosis of his scepticism with respect to knowledge of metaphysics, his ultimate explanation of the human epistemic condition is that he is a hylomorphic substance whose matter limits the extent which his form or intellect can be actualised.[44] As he writes in explanation of why he cannot have knowledge of the existence of the deity: "[God] has enabled man to have knowledge of what is beneath the heavens, for that is his world and his dwelling place" (2:24, 327)—i.e., as a composite material substance, the human's natural place is the world of the elements, and it is there that he can achieve knowledge. But among his material, or bodily, faculties, a particular source of the sceptical limitations on the human intellect is his imagination.[45] As we saw with the syntactic problem of divine attributes, our human intellects must apprehend God through inner speech representations that necessarily employ composite subject-predicate syntax. Why "necessarily"? Because, as embodied intellects, we can never free our representation of an existent from the influence of the body, forced by our "wish to preserve the conception of the imagination" (1:51, 114).

For Maimonides, this representational role of the imagination is a general obstacle to knowledge of immaterial beings. Not only is the one God conceived in corporeal terms as an essence or substratum with attributes (1:51, 114). Similar antinomies

43 Maimonides employs Psalms 4:5 three times in the *Guide*. In 1:50, 112, the silence is of external speech; in 1:59, 140 it is of inner speech; and in 2:5, 260, he uses the verse to illustrate that the true praise of God, like that of the spheres (literally), is articulated in mental representations, not through "speech of lip and tongue." The image of Psalms 4:5 also underlies Maimonides's claim in 3:51, 623 that "true intellectual worship" of God occurs in those rare moments "when you are alone with yourself, and no one else is there and while you lie awake upon your bed."

44 Because this possibility is a fact about humans, hence, about something in the sublunar sphere, and not metaphysics, Maimonides can allow himself this diagnosis.

45 Unlike other Arabic philosophers who posit distinct faculties of imagination for each of these functions, Maimonides posits one faculty with multiple functions: retention of material forms corresponding to sense impressions, the composition of given forms into more complex ones and division of others, and the representation of truths (as propositions with, for example, essences as subjects and attributes in predicate position). Note that the last role of the imagination is problematic only when it is called upon to represent immaterial beings that are absolutely simple; the representation of composite material substances using composite structures is perfectly fine. In addition, Maimonides identifies the imagination with the "evil impulse" and the source of all deficiencies of reason and character (2:12, 280). Indeed, I know of no medieval philosopher other than Maimonides who assigns such a negative valence to the imagination and sees as much tension between it and the intellect. Among Maimonides's many references to the imagination in the *Guide*, see Maimonides 1:46, 98; 1:51, 114; and 1:73, 208–11.

arise, as we saw, with the idea of emanation (*fayḍ*) which Maimonides regards as the best available figure to express the causality of an immaterial being even though it is inadequate to the task of expressing the "true reality": "For the mental representation of the action of one who is separate from matter is very difficult, in a way similar to the difficulty of the mental representation of the existence of one who is separate from matter" (2:12, 279). Again, the difficulty is that the imagination, a bodily faculty, cannot represent any existent except as a body or any action except as a spatio-temporal event. Recall that it is through a parable (of the ruler's beneficence to his subjects)—i.e., an imaginative product—that Maimonides articulates the emanational final causal relation and exposes what we do not understand as glimpsed in the antinomy to which it leads.

Maimonides's objection, however, is not simply Aristotle's point that no intellection or intellectual representation is possible without imagination, but rather that we have no principled way to distinguish between the two.[46] For example, in order for demonstration to serve as the basis of scientific knowledge, we must be able to distinguish between the necessary, the possible, and the impossible. But are these modalities to be determined by the intellect and by science (i.e., that the possible is a potentiality that will be actualised at some point in infinite time) or by what is admissible to the imagination (i.e., by mental judgments about equal alternatives among which we choose to act)? What we need, Maimonides tells us, is a criterion "that would enable us to distinguish the things cognized intellectually from those imagined" (1:73, 211). Nonetheless, when pushed to produce this criterion, Maimonides concedes that he possesses no such principle "that permits differentiation between the imaginative faculty and the intellect" (3:15, 460). If there were one, would it be "something altogether outside both the intellect and the imagination, or is it by the intellect itself that one distinguishes between that which is cognized by the intellect and that which is imagined?" (3:15, 461).[47]

Of course, this question is no surprise. If our matter prevents our intellects from apprehending the immaterial, it will prevent us from clearly distinguishing the actualised intellect from bodily faculties like the imagination. And without a criterion to distinguish them, there can be no principled scientific knowledge. Maimonides concludes: "these are points for investigation which may lead very far" (3:15, 460): they are the stuff of *skepsis*, enquiry that never terminates in knowledge.

46 Aristotle, *On the Soul* 2.7.431a16.

47 See Emil Fackenheim, "The Possibility of the Universe in Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and Maimonides," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 16 (1946/47): 60n61.

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Henrik Lagerlund

Medieval Scepticism and Divine Deception

1 Introduction

In his 1937 work *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, Étienne Gilson writes: "Medieval philosophy entered it [i.e., scepticism] as soon as Ockham's philosophy took deep root in the European Universities of the fourteenth century."[1] This was an influential statement, but, as many have shown, it is simply not true. First, Ockham's philosophical thinking did not have sceptical implications, as Gilson asserts;[2] second, there were very few sceptics in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. To be fair, Gilson himself seems to have changed his mind in his great *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, which he published in 1955.[3] However, he was not wrong to claim that philosophy changed after Ockham. The generation following him rethought philosophy in general and epistemology in particular. There was a looming threat of scepticism after Ockham, but it never materialised. There were several reasons for this, as we shall see.[4] Although there were few actual sceptics in the Middle Ages,[5] this does not mean that sceptical arguments failed to play an important role in medieval philosophy. As I will suggest in this article, sceptical arguments played a central role in the Latin Middle Ages from the late thirteenth century onwards. At the time, philosophers started emphasising epistemology, which was accompanied by a rediscovery of ancient scepticism. As I will highlight, there is a remarkable knowledge of ancient scepticism in the Latin medieval tradition from the late thirteenth century up to the sixteenth century, which, for some reason, has been downplayed by previous scholarship.

The most important form of sceptical argumentation in the Middle Ages was the development of a new form of sceptical hypothesis akin to the kind of sceptical argument entertained by René Descartes in the seventeenth century. It grew up in the early fourteenth century and had a profound effect on philosophy. It developed

I am indebted to two anonymous reviewers for their comments.

1 Étienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 72. For an overview of this debate see Dominik Perler, *Zweifel und Gewissheit: Skeptische Debatten im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2006), 4–8.

2 Marilyn McCord Adams, *William Ockham* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 588–94.

3 Étienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955).

4 See Henrik Lagerlund, "Divine Deception," in *Skepticism: From Antiquity to the Present*, eds. Diego Machuca and Baron Reed (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 222–31, for more on this.

5 There were some noticeable exceptions. See Henrik Lagerlund, ed., *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

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from the idea that God, given his power, could deceive us. The mere possibility that God could be a deceiver had the consequence that nothing we think we know about the world is certain because everything can be called into question. Such a hypothesis had never before been seriously entertained in the history of philosophy; it could have had the implications that Gilson suggested, but it did not. There were several reasons for this, but the most philosophically interesting one was the development of a new conception of knowledge by John Buridan and his followers. They argued that the possibility of divine deception means that we should lower the standard for what counts as knowledge. Knowledge can no longer be thought of as infallible, which had been the prevailing view in the Aristotelian tradition up to the fourteenth century.

I will begin this article by considering the question: What was scepticism in the Middle Ages? I will then discuss the sources of ancient scepticism available to medieval philosophers. After this section, I will return to the argument from divine deception and its implications. Before addressing the question of why it did not cast philosophy into global scepticism, I will make an excursion into the history of both divine deception and external world scepticism.

2 What was Scepticism in the Middle Ages?

Medieval scepticism must be distinguished from ancient scepticism because medieval scepticism was not practical in nature, that is, its aim was not tranquillity or happiness. Consider Sextus Empiricus's definition of scepticism from *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. He writes: "Skepticism is an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgment and afterwards to tranquillity."[6] He immediately clarifies that by "ability" he does not mean a fancy ability in any metaphysical sense; it only means "to be able to." Basically, we "can" set out opposites among appearances and thoughts. Due to these opposites and the equipollence between them, we must suspend judgment, which will cause tranquillity. This is scepticism with a methodology and an aim, and, even though there is a recognition that perhaps there is truth and knowledge and, in some instances, we will perhaps not be able to set out the equipollence, the assumption seems to be that we will always be able to and we must live as if we can. Hence, there is in Pyrrhonism an emphasis on living life in a certain way.

Obviously, much more can be said about the Pyrrhonian approach to scepticism, but it is clear right from the start that there was nothing like this in the Latin Middle Ages, that is, there was no scepticism with the aim of the suspension of judgment

6 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, ed. and trans. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.8.

and tranquillity. As far as I have been able to ascertain, scepticism was never a way of life in the Middle Ages—at least for the clear majority of philosophers.[7]

What was scepticism in the Middle Ages, then? Scepticism, or sceptical argumentation, was used in epistemological debates, and then nearly always in a negative sense as an argument against certain views. Medieval scepticism, therefore, is epistemological, which also differentiates it from ancient scepticism. It is at this point in the history of philosophy that scepticism becomes connected with epistemology—a connection it will never shed. Hence, when we speak about scepticism in the Middle Ages, we must use the term in a broad sense that incorporates both the positive view (that is, that of actual sceptics like John of Salisbury and Nicholas of Autrecourt)—which holds that everything is merely probable—and the negative view, which uses scepticism as a tool or an argument against certain other views but whose user is not necessarily a sceptic.

One of the first such uses of scepticism or sceptical argumentation can be found in Peter Olivi (1248–98) as he argues against the species theory of cognition.[8] A similar kind of argumentation against species theory can be found in William of Ockham (1285–1347), who writes:

> The thing represented needs to be cognized in advance; otherwise the representative would never lead to a cognition of the thing represented as to something similar. For example, a statue of Hercules would never lead me to a cognition of Hercules unless I had seen Hercules in advance. Nor can I know otherwise whether the statue is similar to him or not. But according to those positing species, the species is something prior to every act of intellectively cognizing the object. Therefore, it cannot be posited on account of the representation of the object.[9]

Ockham here takes species to be representations, an idea which was common but not universal in the thirteenth century, and asks if a representation can lead to knowledge of an object external to us. His answer is that it cannot, unless we already know the object in question. Arguments like this one were already well-known

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7 Perhaps John of Salisbury (1115–76) is an exception. In any way, he seems to me to come closest to the view of scepticism defended by Sextus. He was, however, not influenced by Sextus at all, but by Cicero's *Academica*, and adheres to his own version of Academic scepticism. In his most famous work, *Metalogicon*, John defends something similar to Carneades's probabilism, as it was reported by Cicero. See Henrik Lagerlund, ed. *Rethinking the History of Skepticism*, and Christophe Grellard, "Jean de Salisbury. Un cas médiéval de scepticisme," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 54 (2007): 16–40, for more. There seem to be thinkers in the Greek, Byzantine, and medieval tradition that follow Sextus and Ancient scepticism more closely. See Börje Bydén, "'To Every Argument There is a Counter-Argument': Theodore Metochites' Defence of Scepticism (*Semeiosis* 61)," in *Byzantine Philosophy and Its Ancient Sources*, ed. Katerina Ierodiakonou (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 183–218.

8 Juhana Toivanen, "Animal Consciousness: Peter Olivi on Cognitive Functions of the Sensitive Soul" (PhD diss., University of Jyväskylä, 2009), chapter 4.

9 William Ockham, *Reportatio*, II, 12–13: *Opera theologica* V, 274. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

from Plato's *Phaedo* (74d9–e4). Sextus, as well, presents an argument against criteria of truth that is identical to Ockham's argument (although I know of no reason to think that Ockham had any knowledge of Sextus, it is possible, as we shall see in the next section). Sextus writes:

> Just as someone who does not know Socrates but has looked at a picture of him does not know whether the picture is like Socrates, so the intellect, studying the feelings of the senses but not observing the external objects, will not know whether the feelings of the senses are like the external existing objects. Therefore, it cannot rely on similarity to judge them.[10]

Hence, external objects cannot be judged based on appearances, Sextus claims. Ockham and Sextus seem to be using species and appearances in a similar way, namely, as representations of external objects that are supposed to convey knowledge of these objects by being similar to them. Both hold this to be impossible, and therefore also hold that invoking representations in this way must lead to scepticism. For Sextus, this is the end of the discussion, while for Ockham this is only the beginning, as he proceeds to develop a new theory of cognition that does not rely on representation. Ockham, after all, is not a sceptic—Sextus would have branded him a dogmatic thinker—but he does not hesitate to use sceptical arguments to his own advantage.[11]

In the earlier well-known debate between Henry of Ghent (1217–93) and John Duns Scotus (1266/8–1308) about divine illumination,[12] sceptical arguments are used in much the same way; it is here that we also find actual references to ancient sceptical authors, which are lacking in the writings of Olivi and Ockham. For example, in the first two questions of Henry of Ghent's *Summa*, the first question of Article 1 asks "whether humans can know anything" and the second question asks "whether humans can know anything without divine illumination." The ancient sources Henry uses to inform his answers to these questions are Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* and *Metaphysics* 4, naturally; however, Henry also uses Plato's *Meno*, which contains the theory of recollection that is the background to Augustine's notion of divine illumination and which is essential to Henry's argument. Another source frequently used is Augustine himself as well as the many references to ancient scepticism in his works.

10 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism* 2.75

11 There are important differences between Ockham and Sextus as well. For example, Ockham emphasises that the representation of a thing (a species) can only help to recognise a thing that is already known. In other words, it can only help to re-actualise habitual knowledge, but it cannot help to initially acquire knowledge, whereas Sextus does not seem to distinguish between these two cases.

12 See Martin Pickavé, "Henry of Ghent and John Duns Scotus on Skepticism and the Possibility of Naturally Acquired Knowledge," in *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 61–96, and Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus's Theory of Cognition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), especially chapter 4, for more on this debate.

Henry uses both Augustine's *Contra Academicos* and, more significantly, Cicero's *Academica*.[13]

As part of his discussion, Henry develops an argument similar to those that we found in Ockham and Sextus (although neither refer to "essence"). In the first question of the *Summa*, he writes:

> A thing cannot be known, if its essence or nature is not cognized, but only its image, because Hercules is now known, if only his picture has been seen. A human being only perceives a thing through its image, in the way of a species received through the senses, which is an image of the thing, not the thing itself.[14]

The question in which this argument is embedded asks whether humans can have knowledge. The argument is presented as one of several sceptical arguments that Henry will eventually reject. Ultimately, however, certain knowledge is only attainable, according to Henry, with the help of God. He argues this point with references to Augustine. In his rejection of divine illumination, Scotus portrays Henry as an Academic sceptic, and presents a strong but controversial defence of a naturalistic theory of knowledge acquisition.

After Henry, presentations of Academic scepticism and sceptical arguments can be found in most commentaries on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* (there are many of them from the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries). An early example of this is the commentary by Walter Burley (1275–1344) from around 1300. He begins by pointing out two sceptical positions about knowledge: the Academic one, which claims that we cannot know anything, and the Platonic one, which claims that we cannot know anything new.[15] The Academic position is outlined with explicit references to Cicero's *Academica*, and Plato's position is presented with references to *Meno* (his source here could be Averroes's outline of *Meno* from his commentary on *Metaphysics* rather than Plato's original work, but this is a speculation). From the fourteenth century onwards, these two positions came to be taken as representative of sceptical views and were mentioned in most *Posterior Analytics* commentaries.[16]

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13 See Pickavé, "Henry of Ghent and John Duns Scotus," for an account of Cicero's influence on Henry as well as an argument that Henry was the one who made Cicero's *Academica* popular again, which seems true to me. Henry quotes four passages from Cicero's *Academica* in the first three questions of his *Summa*. In all cases the quotations are from Lucullus's speech (*Lucullus* 19, 21, 22, 30). Henry uses these passages primarily to establish that knowledge is possible and that we can trust our senses, but also in one place to note that the Academics reject certain knowledge. Lucullus plays a positive role in an otherwise negative story. He is a Stoic and used by Cicero to defend Stoicism as well as to present arguments against the Academics.

14 Henry of Ghent, *Summa quaestionum ordinarium* I, 1, arg. 7 (Henrici de Gandavo Opera Omnia XXI).

15 Walter Burley, *Quaestiones super librum Posteriorum*, 64.

16 See Lagerlund, "Divine Deception."

They conveniently provide the "vicious" extremes in-between which the correct views should be located.

3 The Sources of Medieval Scepticism

In this section, I would like to say something about the various sources of ancient scepticism that were available in the Middle Ages. By putting these together, it might look like the Latin medieval thinkers had almost as good (or bad) a knowledge of the ancient sceptics as we have today, but this supposition is incorrect.[17] Although the sources were there and, to some extent, available and used, we know very little about just how well-used they in fact were. This is particularly true of the Latin translations of Sextus Empiricus and Diogenes Laertius. Here is the list of available texts:

1. Cicero, *Academica* (known throughout)
2. Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (late thirteenth century)
3. Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* (date unknown, but probably the same as item 2)
4. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (a partial translation from the twelfth century and a complete one from the fifteenth century)
5. Augustine's *Contra Academicos* (known throughout)

Cicero was enormously influential in the Middle Ages, perhaps even as influential as Aristotle, as Schmitt suggests in his pioneering study.[18] The manuscript tradition of the *Academica* (item 1) is divided into two because it is based on the two editions of the work that Cicero himself produced. They are often referred to as *Academica priora*, which survived only in the second of two books, and *Academica posteriora*, which survived only in the first of four books. These together are what we now refer to as the *Academica*. According to Schmitt, there is little influence of the *Academica posteriora* before the fifteenth century,[19] and this seems to me to be correct. Many medieval authors refer to the *Academica* as *Lucullus*, which is the name of the person delivering the main monologue from *Academica priora*.

The first references to the *Academica* appear in the ninth century, but one of the more important uses of the work can be found in the aforementioned twelfth century thinker John of Salisbury. The next important usage of it is in Henry of Ghent's

17 Neither Cicero nor Sextus were translated into Arabic, and as far as I know they had very little influence on the Arabic philosophical tradition.

18 See Charles B. Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus: A Study of the Influence of the Academica in the Renaissance* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1972).

19 Schmitt, chapter 2, for more on Cicero's *Academica* in the Middle Ages. Schmitt has made only a limited study of the influence of Cicero's books in the Middle Ages and does not mention at all the fourteenth century, a period which contains more references to Cicero than at any previous time in the Middle Ages.

Summa.[20] From that time onwards, however, the *Academica* came to be used and referenced in most *Posterior Analytics* commentaries. The Academics are, as mentioned, presented as representatives of the negative position that knowledge is not possible. Although he misses its influence on the *Posterior Analytics* tradition, Schmitt emphasises that Cicero's work gradually grew in influence in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In his book on the reception of Sextus Empiricus's work, Luciano Floridi mentions three medieval Latin manuscripts of Sextus's *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (item 2): one in Venice, another in Madrid, and a third in Paris.[21] As others have shown, they seem to be three different versions of one late thirteenth-century translation of all three books of Sextus's *Outlines* (Floridi, though, dates it to the fourteenth century). Floridi also mentions two additional sixteenth-century translations, one by Johannes Paéz de Castro, a known Spanish scholar and philosopher, and another by Henri Estienne (Henricus Stephanus), from 1562. It is the last one that became the most influential of the three different Latin translations: for example, it was printed and used extensively by Montaigne.

Floridi's conclusions about the first Latin medieval translation are not to be trusted, however. A better study of these manuscripts has been completed more recently by Roland Wittwer.[22] He has shown that the translation must be from between 1265 and 1280, and, although he cannot make an attribution to any named translator, he finds the closest stylistic parallels with an anonymous translator of Aristotle's *De partibus animalium* from the same time. Wittwer is, however, able to discredit the suggestion by Floridi and others that Nicholas of Reggio (born 1280) is the translator.[23] He also shows that the three manuscripts are written by different hands and are independent of each other. Interestingly, he also points out that there is a reference to Pyrrhonism in Peter of Auvergne's (died 1304) commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*. Wittwer is not able to document any substantial influence of this translation besides pointing out that its readership was not as small as scholars have previously assumed.[24] It must be noted, of course, that our Latin word for sceptic, *scepticus*, derives from this translation.

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20 Henry's treatment of knowledge is also brought up and defended against Scotus by Gianfrancesco Pico in the fifteenth century. See Schmitt, 41.

21 See Luciano Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus: The Transmission and Recovery of Pyrrhonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), chapter 3.

22 See Roland Wittwer, "Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* in the Middle Ages," *Vivarium* 54 (2016): 255–85.

23 Michael Frede argues that Nicholas of Reggio translated Galen's *An Outline of Empiricism* in the early fourteenth century, which is important since it contains multiple references to Sextus as well as Pyrrhonism. See Frede, "A Medieval Source of Modern Scepticism," in *Gedankenzeichen. Festschrift für Klaus Oehler zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Regina Claussen and Roland Daube-Schackat (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1988), 65–70.

24 Charles B. Schmitt argues that only one person read Sextus in the fourteenth century, namely the translator himself, but this is obviously false. He also has the date wrong. See Schmitt, "The Redis-

In his book on Sextus, Floridi also mentions a partial anonymous translation of *Contra mathematicos* (item 3) from around the same time as the translation of the *Outlines*. It survives in one manuscript from Venice and contains books 3.37 to 5.25. There are, furthermore, two manuscripts from another translation, from the fifteenth century: one preserved in a manuscript in Rome that contains books 1–4, and another in a Turin manuscript that contains books 1–3. The first complete translation is from 1569.[25]

Diogenes Laertius (item 4) was translated before the 1160s by Henricus Aristippus. The manuscript of the translation is lost, but Henricus is thought to have translated at least books 1–5, since those are referenced in two later works: Geremia de Montagnone's *Compendium moralium notabilium* (1285), and Pseudo-Burley's *De vita et moribus philosophorum* (between 1317 and 1320).[26] The latter work was for some time celebrated as a product of the famous early fourteenth-century logician and philosopher Walter Burley, since it is attributed to him in a fifteenth-century manuscript, but it is now known that he was not its author. The work was, however, extremely successful and is extant in over 270 manuscripts as well as in numerous translations into vernacular languages. It has a similar structure to Diogenes Laertius's work and often starts with a quotation from it. It contains entries on Academic sceptics like Arcesilaus and Carneades but makes no mention of the Pyrrhonian sceptics, which is probably because the author did not have access to Diogenes's entire work (Pyrrhonism is only treated in book 9). The more famous translation of Diogenes was composed in 1433 by Ambrogio Traversari. It is complete and contains references to Pyrrho, Timon, and Sextus, as well as Pyrrhonism. This translation was the first one to be printed, in the early sixteenth century.[27]

I do not need to add much about Augustine's *Contra Academicos* (item 5), since it was, along with Augustine's other works, known and referred to throughout the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, it is noticeable how much more frequently it is cited after the late thirteenth century. As with Cicero's *Academica*, *Contra Academicos* appears more often after Henry of Ghent's use. Henry uses it frequently in the first few questions of his *Summa* and from there it makes its way into *Posterior Analytics* commentaries in the fourteenth century. Burley's commentary, mentioned above, is a case in point.

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covery of Ancient Skepticism in Modern Times," in *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. Myles F. Burnyeat (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 225–51.

25 See Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus*, chapter 4, for more on these translations. Wittwer ("Sextus Empiricus," 272) argues that this translation is the work of the same person who translated the *Outlines*.

26 Rita Copeland, "Behind the 'Lives of Philosophers': Reading Diogenes Laertius in the Western Middle Ages," *Interfaces: A Journal of Medieval European Literatures*, 3 (2016): 245–63.

27 Charles B. Schmitt, "John Wolley (ca. 1530–1596) and the first Latin Translation of Sextus Empiricus, adversus logicos I," in *The Sceptical Mode in Modern Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Richard H. Popkin*, eds. Richard. A. Watson and James E. Force (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1988), 61–70, lists a first printing in 1565 but there are several earlier printings, some of which are complete and others that are shortened. I have consulted an edition from 1535.

4 Divine Deception

The epistemological debates of the early fourteenth century became increasingly intense and started to dominate the philosophical landscape. These debates were further fuelled by the introduction of a new sceptical argument—an argument that had the power to cast all medieval philosophy into scepticism, namely, the hypothesis of divine deception. In the early decades of the fourteenth century, following Scotus's introduction of logical possibility and the separation of necessity and possibility from essence, a new conception of divine omnipotence developed.[28] This new view of God's power generated the sceptical hypothesis of divine deception. God is so powerful, that the mere possibility of deception threatens to cast philosophy into global scepticism and undermine any knowledge of the external world. John Buridan puts it succinctly in his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*:

> As is commonly said, the senses can be deluded, and it is certain that the species of sensible things can be preserved in the organs of sense in the absence of sensibles, as is mentioned in *De somno et vigilia*. And then we judge about what does not exist as if it existed, and so we err through the senses. And the difficulty is greatly augmented by the fact that we believe on faith that God can form sensible species in our senses without the sensible things themselves, and preserve them for a long time. In that case, we judge as if there were sensible things present. Furthermore, since God can do this and greater things, you do not know whether God intends to do this, and so you have no certitude and evidentness [regarding the question] whether there are men before you while you are awake or while you are asleep, since in your sleep God could make a sensible species as clear as—indeed, a hundred times clearer than—what sensible objects could produce. And so, you would then judge formally that there are sensible objects before you, just as you do now. Therefore, since you know nothing about the will of God, you cannot be certain about anything.[29]

Buridan is very clear in his response to the sceptical argument that our intellects can correct for sensory illusion and that our senses are overall reliable. Under any natural circumstance, we can thus trust our senses and realise when they are deceiving us, but in the case of divine deception, this is obviously not possible, as he explains. If God chose to deceive us, we would have no way of knowing it, and, in this way, we cannot be certain about anything.

The kind of argument presented by Buridan swept over fourteenth-century philosophy and theology; all major thinkers of the time commented on the topic. Ockham, Robert Holkot, and Adam Wodeham were all very influential philosophers and theologians preceding Buridan and Peter Ailly. All of them agreed that God could be deceiving us. Wodeham adds the following observation about the conse-

28 See Lagerlund, "Divine Deception."

29 John Buridan, *In Metaphysicen Aristotelis Questiones argutissimae* (Paris, 1518). Rep. as *Kommentar zur Aristotelischen Metaphysik* (Frankfurt am Main: Minerva: 1964), II, q. 1, fol. 8rb–va.

quences of this doctrine: "we cannot know of any external thing—more precisely, of anything other than our own mind—that it exists."[30]

Even though secondary literature mostly discusses the notion of divine deception in the context of its use in theological works and *Sentence*-commentaries, it should be noted that this kind of scepticism also quickly worked its way into commentaries on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. A telling example of this is John Buridan's commentary, but also his somewhat younger contemporary, Albert of Saxony, who offers an extensive treatment of the implications of divine deception for scientific knowledge, that is, *scientia*. In question 3 of the first book of his commentary, he writes:

> Is it possible for us to know something? It is argued that this is not the case, because we cannot have evidentness about something without fear of the opposite. Hence, it is not possible for us to know something. The consequence holds from this, that *scientia* is evident without fear of the opposite, therefore, it is not possible for us to know something. And the antecedent is proved, because we cannot have a notion of something, that is neither evident by the senses nor the intellect, hence, in no way. The consequence holds. And the antecedent is proved, first, since this is not the case through the senses. For as much as it is apparent to me by the senses that fire is hot, nevertheless, it is at hand that I do not have the judgment or the evidentness about this, that is, that fire is hot, without fear for [the opposite]. For it is possible that some power, for instance a divine, produced in my senses a species representing hot, and that cold has been destroyed and hot introduced [in its stead], and that the action of the cold [thing] is suspended in the senses. If this is posited, then it is apparent to me that fire is hot, but in truth it is cold. By positing this case, which is possible, by the First Cause acting freely, it follows that as much as I see the fire, I must be in doubt about the hotness of the fire, namely, that the coldness has been corrupted and a hotness introduced. Hence, a species of hotness is represented in the senses, and the action of a cold [thing] is suspended in the senses by the First Cause. Therefore, as much as something appears to me to be hot, I have nevertheless to be in doubt about [this]. Hence, by the sense of touch, it is not possible to hold a certain judgment about something.[31]

Albert of Saxony goes on to draw very strong conclusions based on the idea of divine deception.[32]

This kind of argumentation can be found throughout philosophy in sentence-commentaries and commentaries on Aristotle's works all the way up to the sixteenth century. In his commentary on Peter of Spain's *Summaries of Logic*, John Mair writes

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30 Elizabeth Karger, "Ockham and Wodeham on Divine Deception as a Skeptical Hypothesis," *Vivarium* 42 (2004): 229.

31 Albert of Saxony, *Expositio et Questiones in Aristotelis libros Physicorum ad Albertus de Saxonia attributae*, ed. Benoit Patar (Louvain-la-Neuve: Peeters, 1999), I, q. 3, fol. 3vb. See also Albert of Saxony, *Questiones circa logicam*, in *Albert of Saxony's Twenty-Five Disputed Questions on Logic. A critical edition of his* Questiones circa logicam, ed. Michael J. Fitzgerald (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2002), 345.

32 Henrik Lagerlund, "Skeptical Issues in Commentaries on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics:* John Buridan and Albert of Saxony," in *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 193–214.

the following: "God can annihilate the ball without me knowing it while conserving in my soul the assent that I have. In this way, I have assented to [the proposition] that 'the ball is round' and in this I am mistaken."[33] Mair is here developing an example used by Ockham about a star that God annihilates while preserving my cognition of it. For Mair, this is a case of divine deception.[34] All these thinkers are, it seems to me, in the same situation as Descartes after the *First Meditation*. All knowledge claims about things to which God's power extends can be disproven and it seems we cannot know anything for certain anymore.[35]

5 The Predecessors of Divine Deception

Divine deception is a global sceptical argument—as opposed to the traditionally local sceptical arguments one can find in ancient thought—which generates scepticism towards the external world. As mentioned, this kind of scepticism first appeared in the early fourteenth century and continued in philosophy well into Descartes's time. It did have some predecessors, though, three of which I will mention here: a view outlined in Cicero's *Academica*; one present in Augustine's *Contra Academicos*; and a third, visible in al-Ghazālī. First, let us have a look at what Cicero has Lucullus say:

> Since the Academics have a methodical approach, I will set out their arguments systematically. The first type tries to show that there are often [persuasive] impressions of things that don't exist at all, since our minds are moved vacuously by what is not the case in the same way as by what is the case. After all, they say, you claim that some impressions are sent by god, for instance in dreams and revelations from oracles, auspices, or entrails. [...] Well, they ask, how is it that god can make persuasive impressions that are false, but can't make persuasive impressions that approximate the truth very closely? Or, if he can do that, why not persuasive impressions that can only be discriminated [from true impressions], though with considerable difficulty? And if that, why [not false but persuasive impressions] that don't differ at all [from true impressions]?[36]

This is a somewhat casual remark by Lucullus, who is reporting the arguments of some Academic sceptics. Since Lucullus is a Stoic, he does not accept these arguments, and Cicero employs him to ground arguments against the Academic position.

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33 John Mair, Commentary of Peter of Spain's *Summulae*, Section of Posterior Analytics, 144vb.

34 See Elizabeth Karger, "Ockham and Wodeham," and the response to this in Claude Panaccio and David Piché, "Ockham's Reliabilism and the Intuition of Non-Existents," in *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 97–118.

35 Unlike José L. Bermúdez, "The Originality of Cartesian Skepticism: Did it Have Ancient or Mediaeval Antecedents?" *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 17 (2000): 333–60, I think there is very little original thought in Descartes's sceptical arguments. For more on this see Lagerlund, "Divine Deception." Most medieval thinkers did not think that divine deception casts doubt on logic and mathematics, as Descartes does, but some did. See Lagerlund, "Skeptical Issues."

36 Cicero, *Academica* 2.47. The translation quoted here is from Cicero, *On Academic Scepticism*, trans. Charles Brittain (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 29.

Neither Cicero nor anyone else at the time the *Academica* was written deals comprehensively with the idea that the Gods can deceive us and impart impressions to us that are as persuasive as true ones. There is no indication that Cicero meant this to be applied globally so that the Gods would always do this, which is what would have to be the case for Cicero's suggestion to be like Descartes or the medieval idea of divine deception. It remains an intriguing, but isolated remark.

An equally fascinating passage can be found in book 3 of *Contra Academicos*, Augustine seems to suggest a view very near to external world scepticism. I quote the passage in its entirety:

> "How do you know that the world exists," replies the Academician, "if the senses are deceptive?" Your arguments were never able to disown the power of our senses to the extent of clearly establishing that nothing seems to be so to us. Nor have you ever ventured to try to do so. However, you've energetically committed yourself to persuading us that something seems so and yet can be otherwise.
>
> Therefore, I call the whole that contains and sustains us, whatever it is, the "world"—the whole, I say, that appears before my eyes, which I perceive to include the heavens and the earth (or the quasi-heavens and quasi-earth).
>
> If you say nothing seems to be so to me, I'll never be in error. It is the man who recklessly approves what seems so to him who is in error. You do say that a falsehood can seem to be so to sentient beings. You don't say that nothing seems to be so. Every ground for disputation, where you Academicians enjoy being the master, is completely taken away if it is true not only that we know nothing, but also that nothing seems to be so to us. However, if you deny that what seems so to me is the world, then you're making a fuss about a name, since I said I call this "world."
>
> You'll ask me: "Is what you see the world even if you're asleep?" It has already been said that I call "world" whatever seems to me to be such.[37]

The Academic sceptic with whom Augustine is arguing asks hypothetically whether we can be certain the world exists if we cannot trust our senses. Augustine backpedals in response and says that by "world" he means "my world," that is, the world as it appears to me, and the appearance of the world cannot be denied. Augustine does not develop this. He merely uses it as an argument against the sceptic, but what is interesting is, of course, that his view implies scepticism about the external world as well as the related problem of other minds. This might be the first statement of such a view in the history of philosophy. I am not aware of anyone else who had developed the view here expressed by Augustine, and he himself did not use it as a sceptical argument—on the contrary, he considered it to be an anti-sceptical argument.

There are also some extreme sceptical arguments expressed in Arabic philosophy, however, nothing quite like what we find in the Latin tradition. It is well-known, at least among scholars, that al-Ghazālī's (1085–1111) sceptical arguments are remarkably similar to arguments advanced by of Descartes and Hume. There

37 Augustine, *Against the Academicians and the Teacher*, trans. Peter King (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 74.

have even been attempts to show that he must have influenced them.[38] This similarity emerges not only in his most famous work, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*), but also in his attitude to knowledge in his lesser-known intellectual autobiography, *Deliverance from Error* (*al-Munqiḏ min al-Ḍalāl*). There he describes how he set out to find infallible knowledge, but could not. He writes, "I proceeded therefore with extreme earnestness to reflect on sense-perception and the necessary truths, to see whether I could make myself doubt them."[39] In the autobiography, he mentions some familiar objections to sense-perception and finds that he cannot trust it as a source of knowledge. He then proposes the now famous dream-doubt:

> Do you not see how, when you are asleep, you believe things and imagine circumstances, holding them to be stable and enduring, and, so long as you are in that dream-condition, have no doubts about them? And is it not the case that when you awake you know that all you have imagined and believed is unfounded and intellectual? Why are you content that all your waking beliefs, whether from sense or intellect, are genuine? They are true in respect of your present state; but it is possible that a state will come upon you whose relation to you waking consciousness is analogous to the relation of the latter to dreaming. In comparison with this state your waking consciousness would be like dreaming![40]

Like Descartes in the *Meditations*, al-Ghazālī suggests that what I take to be my conscious experience might turn out to be a dream. There is no way to be sure that this is not the case. Struck by this insight, al-Ghazālī is disheartened and cast into scepticism.

> When these thoughts had occurred to me and penetrated my being, I tried to find some way of treating my unhealthy condition; but it was not easy. Such ideas can only be repelled by demonstration; but a demonstration requires knowledge of first principles; since this is not admitted, however, it is impossible to make the demonstration. The disease was baffling, and lasted almost two months, during which I was a sceptic in fact though not in theory nor in outward expression. At length God cured me of the malady; the necessary truths of the intellect became once more accepted, as I regained confidence in their certain and trustworthy character this did not come about by systematic demonstration or marshalled argument, but by a light which God most high cast into my breast.[41]

38 See Ulrich Rudolph and Dominik Perler, *Occasionalismus: Theorien der Kausalität im arabisch-islamischen und im europäischen Denken* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000). Taneli Kukkonen, "Al-Ghazālī's Skepticism Revisited," in *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 29–59, expresses strong reservations concerning any direct influence by al-Ghazālī on Descartes and Hume.

39 See Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953), 23.

40 Watt, 24.

41 Watt, 25.

As this quotation reveals, the similarities with Descartes's *Meditations* are striking, but it is not just Descartes whom al-Ghazālī precedes. Consider the following quote from the seventeenth discussion of the *Incoherence of the Philosophers:*

> The connection between what is habitually believed to be a cause and what is habitually believed to be an effect is not necessary [...] It is not a necessity of the existence of the one that the other should exist, and it is not a necessity of the nonexistence of the one that the other should not exist—for example, the quenching of thirst and drinking, satiety and eating, burning and contact with fire, light and the appearance of the sun, death and decapitation, healing and the drinking of medicine, the purging of the bowels and the using of a purgative, and so on to include all that is observable among connected things in medicine, astronomy, arts, and crafts. Their connection is due to the prior decree of God, who creates them side by side, not to its being necessary in itself, incapable of separation. On the contrary, it is within divine power to create satiety without eating, to create death without decapitation, to continue life after decapitation, and so on to all connected things.[42]

This criticism of the necessary connection between cause and effect is remarkably similar to Hume's criticism and, before that, to Nicholas of Autrecourt's arguments. We cannot observe the necessary connection, but only that one thing follows the other in time. In the quotation, we can also see evidence of al-Ghazālī's occasionalism. He thinks that it is God who creates the coexistence of cause and effect, and, hence that God can also see to it that a cause does not produce an effect. He writes the following about God's ability to deceive us:

> I do not know what is at the house at present. All I know is that I have left a book in the house, which is perhaps now a horse that has defiled the library with its urine and its dung, and that I have left in the house a jar of water, which well may have turned into an apple tree. For God is capable of everything, and it is not necessary for the horse to be created from sperm nor the tree to be created from the seed—indeed, it is not necessary for either of the two to be created from anything.[43]

God can do pretty much anything he wants, al-Ghazālī argues, although he will not. On the contrary, God is for him the source of certainty and knowledge as he is for Descartes.

It seems that al-Ghazālī's sceptical discussions had very little influence on the Latin medieval and early modern tradition. *Deliverance from Error* was not translated in the Middle Ages or in early modern times, but the *Incoherence of the Philosophers* seems to have been. It was, however, not translated as a separate text in the Middle Ages, but as part of Averroes's refutation of that text. Averroes's work is called the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, and was translated into Latin in 1328.[44] A fair amount

42 Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, ed. and trans. Michael Marmura (Provo, Utah: Bringham Young University Press, 2000), 166.

43 Al-Ghazālī, 170.

44 The Latin translation was printed in 1497 together with a commentary by the late fifteenth-century Italian philosopher, Augustino Nifo. Averroes's work was then reprinted without Nifo's commen-

of knowledge of al-Ghazālī preceded this translation, however. Other works of his were translated, and Averroes referred to him. Still, it is interesting that he was being translated at a time when scepticism had become a problem and Latin philosophy had turned to worry about epistemology and the status of Aristotelian science.

6 The Rejection of Divine Deception[45]

The doctrine of divine deception did not lead the fourteenth century into scepticism. One might ask, why? It certainly could have, but there are at least three reasons why it did not. First, some thinkers argued that divine deception will simply not happen, since it would be contrary to God's benevolence. Second, other thinkers argued that, although God can deceive, he will not do so because of a covenant between God and humankind laid down at the moment of creation. The third and most philosophically interesting reason consists in the revision of the concept of knowledge and the relativising of the concept of evidence.

Gregory of Rimini argued that God cannot be a deceiver since this would contradict his benevolent nature. Gabriel Biel in the fifteenth century and Francisco Suárez in the sixteenth century defended similar views. Rimini's argument is that God cannot deceive, since it would imply saying or making someone believe something false. He writes: "God cannot say something false to someone, willing thereby that the person, to whom he says it, assents to what is said."[46] God cannot say something false or make someone else say something false if that means that what is said is said in a meaningful way, without irony, and in an assertive mode. Saying something false in this way amounts to lying, argues Rimini, and God cannot lie, even given his absolute power. Rimini is hence limiting God's omnipotence by saying that due to his benevolence he cannot be a deceiver.

A second reason why divine deception did not have the implications for philosophy it could have had was the appeal to a contract or covenant between God and humankind. This was a very common view, particularly among certain theologians following Ockham, and all the main thinkers who were concerned with divine deception adhered to this view. We find it in Ockham, Holkot, Rimini, Ailly, and Biel. The notion of a covenant governs both the natural and the moral order established by God in the creation of the world. It takes as its starting point the idea that what is is determined by God's will and that whatever natural or moral laws there are are

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tary in 1527. See Anthony H. Minnema, "The Latin Readers of Algazel, 1150–1600" (PhD diss., University of Tennessee, 2013), http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/2602. It is, hence, possible that Descartes had knowledge of it.

45 This section is similar to a section appearing in Lagerlund, "Divine Deception," 228–30.

46 Quoted in Dominik Perler, "Does God Deceive us? Skeptical Hypothesis in Late Medieval Epistemology," in *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 182.

also determined by an act of God's will. These laws, therefore, are not absolute but decided on or chosen by God. God had infinite possibilities from which to choose in creating this world, and chose to establish this particular moral law and this particular causal order, which, of course, makes them special and necessary.

As someone like Ailly understands, within the concept of "covenant" there are two covenants corresponding to the two kinds of ordained power. The first covers the world in general and is made with all humans. The second is made with the Church.[47] According to the first covenant, God has promised to uphold his creation and all the laws that govern it. According to his absolute power, God could act in whatever way he wanted towards his creation: change it, deceive us, and so forth. However, according to his ordained power, he will not. Instead, he acts in accord with the established laws. This view does not limit God's omnipotence in any way, since God is not limited by the laws he has put down, although given the covenant he will abide by them. As humans, we can hence trust that God will not make changes and that he is not deceiving us. The doctrine of covenant plays an important role in late medieval and early modern thought, but perhaps the most important aspect of the theory is that it did not allow divine deception to take hold of philosophy.

The third way to deal with divine deception is the most interesting philosophically. Buridan is generally credited with devising this approach; it was repeated by almost all philosophers following him well into the sixteenth century. I will here present the view as defended by Albert of Saxony and Peter of Ailly. Both philosophers take as their starting point the assumption that, in the face of possible divine deception, knowledge can no longer be assumed to be infallible. Given God's omnipotence, as we saw Buridan explain above, we can no longer be certain of anything; if we hold on to the idea that knowledge is infallible, we will have to accept scepticism. Buridan's way out is to say that knowledge is fallible and that we must relativise what he calls "evidentness" to the domain of enquiry we are concerned with. Albert of Saxony explains this very clearly. He writes:

> It must be noted that evidence is used in two ways, namely maximal and natural evidence. Maximal evidence is used for propositions in accordance with which the intellect by its nature cognizes with assent to the proposition, and cannot dissent from it. In this way, we say that the principle of non-contradiction is evident, and, similarly, it is by this evidence that it is evident that I know that I exist. Natural evidence, however, is such evidence that nothing opposite appears through human reasoning unless by sophistry. And in this way natural principles and conclusions are said to be evident. It must be noted that [such principles] are not strictly speaking evident, since the intellect that holds this to be evident can be deceived by a supernatural power.[48]

Albert uses the example to explain that God may have changed appearances so that Socrates, who appears human to me, is in fact a donkey, or that fire is hot when it in fact is cold. Hence, it is not maximally evident that "Socrates is a human being" or

47 William Courtenay, "Covenant and Causality in Pierre d'Ailly," *Speculum* 46 (1971): 94–119.
48 Albert of Saxony, *Questiones circa logicam*, 348–49.

that "Fire is hot." These are only naturally evident, which means that there is no natural counterevidence to them. These are truths only given the assumption that we are not being deceived by God.

Ailly explains this distinction in a similar way. He explains it, however, in terms of absolute versus conditional evidence. For the latter he also uses *secundum quid* and *ex suppositione*. In Albert's view, natural evidence is conditional in Ailly's terminology because it assumes that God is not deceiving us, that is, it puts God aside, so to say. He notes as well that whatever is absolutely evident is infallible (*infallibilis*), and the examples he gives are the principle of non-contradiction and the certainty that one is alive. He also adds to this list truths such as the fact that one cannot be made cold by warmth.[49] Ailly also adds a distinction between what is conditionally evident and what is merely probable. Something is probable if it is possible to conclude the opposite, but if something is evident, on the other hand, then there is no counterargument to it, save, of course, divine deception.[50]

Mainly through Ailly, this concept of knowledge and the new account of evidentness that followed from it influenced later philosophy. We can see its influence well into the sixteenth century.[51] It very elegantly short-circuited the global sceptical threat of divine deception and, although it ultimately moved from a view of knowledge as infallible to a view of it as fallible, it allowed philosophy and natural science to develop without the threat of scepticism, which it did well into the sixteenth century when the debate took a different turn.

7 Conclusion

Scepticism or sceptical argumentation in the Latin Middle Ages was very different from ancient scepticism. It took on an epistemological flair from the late thirteenth century onwards, which it never quite escaped. A strong motivator for the epistemological turn in the use of sceptical argumentations was the development of a new argument that had a power and global reach unlike anything previously suggested in the history of philosophy, namely, the hypothesis of God as a deceiver. This new argu-

49 Peter of Ailly, *Quaestiones super libros sententiarum cum quibusdam in fine adjunctis* (Frankfurt: Minerva, 1968), I, q. 1, art. 1, fol. 48r.

50 Peter of Ailly, I, q. 3, art. 3, fol. 78r. The same argument with the same terminology is used by John Mair in the early sixteenth century. See Henrik Lagerlund, "Knowledge and *Scientia* in Two *Posterior Analytics* Commentaries after Buridan: Albert of Saxony and John Mair," in *Knowledge in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 213–32.

51 See Elizabeth Karger, "A Buridanian Response to a Fourteenth Century Skeptical Argument and Its Rebuttal by a New Argument in the Early Sixteenth Century," in *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 215–32. Karger presents a debate between Mair and Antonio Coronel from the early sixteenth century about Buridan's theory. Coronel presents a sceptical argument questioning the idea that natural evidence is enough for knowledge.

ment threatened to cast philosophy into global external world scepticism, but due to new developments, particularly the suggestion that knowledge claims are not infallible, this threat was removed. At the same time as this debate about the status of knowledge claims, medieval philosophy also rediscovered both Academic and Pyrrhonian scepticism. This rediscovery was surely motivated, at least in part, by the debate. It was Academic scepticism that came to have the most influence on the ongoing debate.

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José María Sánchez de León Serrano

Spinoza on Global Doubt

1 Introduction

This paper proposes a reassessment of Spinoza's response to global or hyperbolic doubt, which is the distinctive mark of Cartesian scepticism. Scholars have traditionally interpreted the scarcity of Spinoza's pronouncements on the topic of doubt and scepticism as a sign of dogmatic indifference towards sceptical worries and as a weakness of his philosophy. Recent studies have detected greater nuance than this first impression and attempted to identify a more elaborate response to radical scepticism in Spinoza's metaphysical commitments, on which his epistemological views are based.[1] The majority of these studies conclude that monism constitutes Spinoza's main defence against scepticism. Despite variations, their chief argument is the following. Sceptical worries do not emerge unless we assume a fundamental disagreement between our perceptions and reality. The monistic framework presented by Spinoza, by contrast, conceives of reality as a unified whole in which ideas and physical things are one and the same substance, expressed in two different ways. Therefore, there is no place in such a monistic conception for the fundamental disagreement between ideas and things presupposed by the sceptic.

In what follows I will argue that Spinoza's monism, far from precluding sceptical doubt, is in fact liable to generate it. This is not to say that Spinoza is a sceptic (he is definitely not). What I would like to show is that his theoretical framework is more congenial to modern scepticism than is usually assumed. The perfect agreement between ideas and physical things, which Spinoza's monism in principle entails, disappears when we descend from the level of the one infinite substance to the level of the finite human mind. Whereas scholars have acknowledged this fact, they have underestimated its far-reaching implications. Spinoza explains the existence of doubt in us by the fact that we are part of nature and, consequently, grasp things partially. Moreover, he conceives falsity as the privation of knowledge that our partial apprehension of things involves. The problem of scepticism resurfaces here: how can the human mind, being part of nature, grasp things other than partially, i.e., falsely? The gap between the one infinite substance and the finite human mind entails a fundamental disagreement between our ideas and reality, analogous to the disagreement assumed by the sceptic. In this specific sense, I hold that Spinoza's monism unavoidably generates scepticism, *unless* there is a way to bridge the gap between the finite human mind and the one infinite substance. In this paper, I examine Spinoza's approach to this crucial problem. I argue that the adequacy of ideas, which makes them impervi-

1 See section 2.

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ous to doubt, is ultimately founded upon the human mind's ability to conceive the infinite. I further argue that this ability, in turn, requires the existence of features or properties that are common to God and the human mind and allow the human mind to transcend its partial viewpoint. I will proceed as follows: the next section provides a brief account of some recent readings of Spinoza's anti-scepticism as grounded in his monism. The third section examines Spinoza's reflections on doubt contained in his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*[2] and shows that only a clear apprehension of God's essence can dispel scepticism. The fourth section explores the conditions of possibility of such an apprehension in the finite human mind, according to the second book of Spinoza's *Ethics*. The final section proposes a new hypothesis concerning the theoretical presuppositions behind modern scepticism and argues that Spinoza and the modern sceptic, despite their antagonistic views, share a similar conception of knowledge.

2 Spinoza's Monism versus the Sceptical Challenge

Since the present paper deals with Spinoza's stance towards global doubt, let us first clarify the meaning of the expression "global doubt." Scholars generally agree that the variety of scepticism that emerges during the 16th and 17th centuries differs in crucial respects from its ancient counterparts. One possible way of explaining the main difference between the two is that whereas ancient scepticism argues that true perceptions are indistinguishable from false ones, early modern scepticism supposes that the entire set of my perceptions is false.[3] Although this might not sound like a significant difference, it is actually a crucial one. The ancient form of scepticism does not question the existence of veridical perceptions, only our ability to distinguish them successfully from false ones. Thus, one can endorse this form of scepticism and still admit "the possibility of some sort of knowledge of the world."[4] The

2 All the quotations in English from Spinoza's works are taken from Baruch Spinoza, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985–2016). References are according to *Spinoza Opera*, ed. Carl Gebhardt, 4 vols. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Verlag, 1925); henceforth: G. I employ the following standard abbreviations for Spinoza's works: TIE—*Treatise of the Emendation of the Intellect* (*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*); TTP—*Theological-Political Treatise* (*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*), Ep.—*Letters* (*Epistolae*). Passages in the *Ethics* will be referred to by means of the following abbreviations: a(-xiom), c(-orollary), p(-roposition), s(-cholium) and app(-endix); "d" stands for either "definition" (when it appears immediately to the right of the part of the book), or "demonstration" (in all other cases). Hence, E1d3 is the third definition of part 1 and E1p16d is the demonstration of proposition 16 of part 1.

3 See José Luis Bermúdez, "The Originality of Cartesian Skepticism: Did it have Ancient or Mediaeval Antecedents?" *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (October 2000): 337–38.

4 Bermúdez, 337. To make this clearer, consider the following example. A typical sceptical argument among ancient sceptics is that the same object appears differently under different circumstances, thus making impossible to determine which appearance is the true one. This kind of sceptical reason-

modern form of scepticism, by contrast, assumes that *all* my perceptions can be simultaneously mistaken, thus suggesting the extreme possibility that there is nothing but universal deception. Due to its all-embracing character, this form of doubt has been described as "global doubt."[5] This is the kind of doubt that Descartes adopts in his *Meditations*, expressed in sceptical scenarios such as the deceiving God.

How does Spinoza, well versed in Cartesian philosophy, respond to global doubt? We find his most explicit pronouncement on this issue in his account of true ideas (mainly contained in the TIE and in the second book of his *Ethics*). In conformity with the traditional conception of truth, Spinoza holds that "a true idea must agree with its object" (E1a6). However, he contends that the certainty of a true idea—i.e., the features through which the mind recognises an idea as true—must be contained in the idea itself, not in its relation to an external object. Certainty is thus an intrinsic rather than an extrinsic property of true ideas. This means that, by merely having a true idea, the mind is certain of its truth and can clearly distinguish it from a false one. One could of course ask whether the mind has true ideas at all. According to Spinoza, we *must* assume it does, for otherwise the acquisition of knowledge would be impossible. I can only know what certainty *is* if I already have a true idea which serves as a standard or model of truth. Spinoza illustrates this point in the TIE through the analogy with the fabrication of tools (G4:13–14). Since tools are produced by means of other tools, one could ask: how did the first human beings make their tools, when there were no tools available? They made them "with the tools they were born with" (G2:13). In like manner, Spinoza claims, "there must be a true idea in us, as an inborn tool" (G2:16), by means of which our intellect is able to form new true ideas. In order to serve as the standard of truth, this true idea in us must be certain in virtue of itself, not in virtue of something else.

This intuitionistic account of true ideas is of course unlikely to convince a sceptic who has embraced global doubt.[6] After all, global doubt affects the totality of our perceptions, even those that seem most certain. When confronted with the sceptic's profession of doubt, Spinoza's account of certainty seems to allow only for two explanations of her state of mind: either the sceptic has no true ideas at all, or she simply feigns her global doubt. Such responses are unsatisfying and rather ineffective against the worries raised by modern scepticism. Scholars have sought deeper reasons for Spinoza's apparent indifference towards doubt, and recent attempts have located them in his metaphysical commitments. Since Spinoza's epistemology is derivative of his metaphysical views, it is reasonable to look for a better response to

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ing still presupposes the existence of objects appearing to us. See Dominik Perler, "Wie ist ein globaler Zweifel möglich? Zu den Voraussetzungen des frühneuzeitlichen Außenwelt-Skeptizismus," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 57, no. 4 (October–December 2003): 484.

5 See Perler.

6 See Robert Mason, "Ignoring the Demon? Spinoza's Way with Doubt," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31, no. 4 (October 1993): 545–46.

scepticism in such views. Michael Della Rocca and Dominik Perler have presented, in my view, the most elaborate and compelling cases in favour of this reading.[7] In what follows, I will summarise the results of their inquiries.[8]

According to these scholars, the key to the question lies in Spinoza's monism, whose main claims are that "except God, no substance can be or be conceived" (E2p14) and "nothing can be or be conceived without God" (E2p15). By virtue of this monism, Spinoza rejects all claims based on an arbitrary separation between spheres or realms in reality.[9] Spinoza, thus, dismisses all views of human nature that isolate it from the rest of nature (or God) and treat it as a realm apart, insofar as such separation runs counter to nature's fundamental *oneness*. Certainly, Spinoza draws a sharp distinction between the mental and the physical and denies any causal interaction between the two. Yet the aim of this distinction is to establish their union more effectively. Strictly speaking, the mental and the physical are not parts or areas of reality, but the same infinite reality explained in two different ways. Spinoza thus concludes that "a circle existing in nature and the idea of the existing circle, which is also in God, are one and the same thing, which is explained through different attributes" (E2p7s).

When considered against this monistic background, Spinoza's dismissal of scepticism becomes more plausible. To begin with, as Perler observes, the sameness of the physical and the mental excludes all possible doubts regarding the existence of a physical world corresponding to our perceptions.[10] By virtue of this sameness, Spinoza establishes that the human mind is an idea whose object or *ideatum* is the human body. Since a body existing in nature and the idea of it are the same thing explained through different attributes, I cannot doubt, as Descartes does, the existence of my own body. Monism also provides the key to Spinoza's conception of certainty as an intrinsic property of true ideas—a point that Della Rocca stresses.[11] The sameness of thought (i.e., the mental) and extension entails that thought "contains in itself objectively the whole of Nature" and that "thoughts proceed in the same manner as Nature, its object, does" (Ep. 32; G4:173a–174a). The nature of thought thus consists in representing its objects as they are in themselves, i.e., in

7 See Michael Della Rocca, "Spinoza and the Metaphysics of Scepticism," *Mind* 116, no. 464 (November 2007): 851–74; Dominik Perler, "Spinozas Antiskeptizismus," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 61, no. 1 (January–March 2007): 1–26.

8 There is a wealth of literature on the relationship between Spinoza and scepticism. I confine my discussion to the studies of Della Rocca and Perler because they specifically trace Spinoza's anti-scepticism back to his monism. For further studies, see Martha Brandt Bolton, "Spinoza on Cartesian Doubt," *Noûs* 19, no. 3 (September 1985): 379–95; Willis Doney, "Spinoza on Philosophical Skepticism," in *Spinoza: Essays in Interpretation*, eds. Maurice Mandelbaum and Eugene Freeman (La Salle: Open Court, 1975), 139–57; José María Sánchez de León Serrano, "The Place of Skepticism in Spinoza's Thought," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (January 2018): 1–19.

9 See Della Rocca, "Spinoza and the Metaphysics of Scepticism," 853.

10 See Perler, "Spinozas Antiskeptizismus," 13–14.

11 See Della Rocca, "Spinoza and the Metaphysics of Scepticism," 860–61.

knowing them, and therefore certainty is inherent to it. Here, again, we must bear in mind that monism impels Spinoza to reject all arbitrary divisions of reality into separate compartments.[12] Thus, it makes no sense for Spinoza to divorce—as the sceptic does—ideas and certainty, for this is tantamount to arbitrarily dividing reality into unconnected spheres.

It is apparent that there is no place for global doubt within such a metaphysical framework. The sceptic is obviously not compelled to accept this monistic conception and can reject it as a dogmatic invention.[13] Yet here is where the sceptic's weapon turns against herself: Spinoza can also retort and demand a justification of the sceptic's assumption that ideas and cognition are not the same. The sceptic can only entertain the hypothesis that all my ideas are wrong under the assumption that ideas and knowledge constitute two separate realities, independent of one another. In this respect, there is also a certain view of reality—a quite dualistic one!—behind the sceptic's position, even if she refuses to make claims about reality and believes that her doubts are free from presuppositions. Thus, the strength of Spinoza's anti-scepticism consists in revealing the theoretical assumptions behind scepticism and showing their arbitrariness.[14]

This is, in broad strokes, the recent verdict of two important scholars on the question of the relationship between Spinoza's anti-scepticism and monism. Although I generally agree with this assessment, I believe it contains an important flaw: it mainly addresses the question of doubt from the viewpoint of the one substance or God—where all ideas are *true*—but not from the viewpoint of the finite human mind, where doubt actually occurs. If we descend, as it were, from one level to the other, the congruence between ideas and things ceases to be obvious and becomes a problem. As I show in the next sections, the question of global doubt, albeit inexistent with respect to God, resurfaces at the level of the limited human mind. Obviously, both Della Rocca and Perler take into account the limitation of the human mind and the fact that, beside true ideas, it also has inadequate ones. Yet they still address the issue only from the perspective of the one infinite substance, and therefore only admit the possibility of a "local" doubt, not a global one.[15] Certainly, if all ideas are true *in* God, and the human mind is part of the divine intellect, then the human mind necessarily partakes of God's true ideas. However, this "participation" is precisely the issue, insofar as, for Spinoza, the inadequacy of our ideas consists in the fact that they grasp reality *ex parte*, not *absolute* (E2p11, p34, p35). The fact that the human mind is part of God's intellect can lead to the conclusion that all the ideas in the human mind are also partial, and therefore inadequate. Unfortunately, Spinoza is unclear on this point, the importance of which scholars have not sufficiently emphasised. I will address this issue in the next two

12 See Della Rocca, 852–53.

13 See Perler, "Spinozas Antiskeptizismus," 22–23.

14 See Perler, 4.

15 See Perler, 23; Della Rocca, "Spinoza and the Metaphysics of Scepticism," 852–53.

sections, first by focusing on Spinoza's reflections on doubt contained in the TIE (which show that Spinoza admits the possibility of global doubt), and then by briefly examining his account of adequacy in the second book of the *Ethics*.

3 Spinoza's Analysis of Doubt

Paragraphs 77–80 in the TIE (G2:29–30) contain the most thorough examination of the question of doubt ever offered by Spinoza.[16] An attentive reading of these paragraphs shows that extreme doubt, far from being a false problem, is for Spinoza an almost inexorable consequence of our containment in nature (i.e., our limitedness).[17] It also shows that the elimination of doubt can only occur through an adequate grasp of God's essence. This puts Spinoza's approach to doubt in close vicinity to Descartes', although, as I also show in this section, their respective strategies on this point differ in crucial respects. Finally, the analysis of these paragraphs will help us define the actual question Spinoza has to solve in order to overcome global doubt: how can the finite grasp the infinite?

In §78, Spinoza writes:

> There is no doubt in the soul, therefore, through the thing itself concerning which one doubts. That is, if there should be only one idea in the soul, then, whether it is true or false, there will be neither doubt nor certainty, but only a sensation of a certain sort. For in itself [this idea] is nothing but a sensation of a certain sort. But doubt will arise through another idea which is not so clear and distinct that we can infer from it something certain about the thing concerning which there is doubt. That is, the idea that puts us in doubt is not clear and distinct (G2:29–30).

We can distinguish in this passage two important claims, which, as I will show later, provide the key for Spinoza's solution to global doubt. The first claim establishes that the cause of doubt differs from the thing concerning which one doubts. This implies that, in order for doubt to arise, a plurality of ideas is required. Indeed, the veracity of a given perception can only be challenged by *another* perception, for a perception

16 It has been argued that Spinoza's concern with doubt is only present in the TIE due to the early influence of Descartes and disappears in subsequent works, showing that Spinoza lost interest in the question. Yet there is, I think, a more convincing way to explain the *apparent* disappearance of the issue of doubt in Spinoza's later writings. Spinoza admittedly conceived the TIE as an introduction to a more systematic work. Thus, he formulates in the TIE problems that will only find their definitive solution in the *Ethics*. I contend that this is precisely the case with the issue of sceptical doubt, which, as I argue in this and the next section, finds a definitive answer in Spinoza's account (contained in the second book of his *Ethics*) of the human mind's ability to grasp God's essence adequately.

17 Thomas Nagel points out in a similar fashion the link between scepticism and our "containment in the world": "Skepticism is radical doubt about the possibility of reaching any kind of knowledge, freedom, or ethical truth, given our containment in the world and the impossibility of creating ourselves from scratch." Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 6–7.

cannot contradict itself. The second claim asserts that the idea that causes doubt is not clear and distinct. In other words, if I perceive something that challenges the veracity of a previous perception and generates in me doubts about it, this second perception will not increase my knowledge or make me apprehend the first perception better. There is, thus, no insight or cognitive discernment in doubt.

In order to illustrate these claims, let us consider the example Spinoza gives directly afterwards. Country people, he says, react with great surprise when they hear that the sun is much bigger than the earth. For them, the sun seems unquestionably much smaller, for this is the way it appears to them and nothing in their daily experience contradicts this perception. In order to cast doubt on such an ordinary perception, one must know that the senses deceive. We can recognise here Spinoza's first claim: what causes doubt about a given perception (i.e., our perception of the sun) cannot be this perception itself, but a different one (i.e., perception of the deceptiveness of the senses). Now, to know that the senses deceive does not improve my perception of the sun, it only makes me distrust its veracity, and for that reason Spinoza observes that "the idea that puts us in doubt is not clear and distinct." To know *that* the senses deceive does not really increase my knowledge.[18] To know *how* the senses deceive, on the contrary, does. If I know, for instance, *how* visual perception works, I can learn something certain about the size of the sun. This improvement of my knowledge will then make my doubts about my perception of the sun disappear. We thus conclude that doubt disappears as soon as the mind can form a clear and distinct idea of the cause of doubt.

The example just considered is about a particular doubt concerning visual perception. Let us now apply the two aforementioned principles to global doubt. Global doubt, as already noted, affects the entire set of my perceptions. I entertain this kind of doubt when I suppose, for instance, that a deceiving God distorts all my perceptions, even those which seem most certain and reliable. According to the first principle, the cause of doubt differs from the thing concerning which one doubts. In the hypothesis under consideration, the thing concerning which one doubts is the entire set of my perceptions (i.e., *everything*), whereas the source of doubt is the supposition of a deceiving God. The second principle establishes that "the idea that puts us in doubt is not clear and distinct." Certainly, the idea of a deceiving God is a fig-

18 These reflections show that doubt, insofar as it challenges the truth of our ordinary perceptions, constitutes for Spinoza a kind of middle stage between our pre-theoretical, biased view of things and true knowledge. Thus, even if doubt per se does not increase knowledge, it clears the ground for a true cognitive development. This approach to doubt is reminiscent of Hegel's, who in his early work *The Relationship of Scepticism to Philosophy* describes scepticism as "the free side of every philosophy," insofar as scepticism liberates thought from the limitedness and "the dogmatism of common sense." Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Jenaer Schriften 1801–1807*, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986), 229, 238. Interestingly, Hegel mentions some definitions and propositions from Spinoza's *Ethics* as examples of this organic link between scepticism and philosophy (Hegel, 229–30).

ment of the imagination, and as such it is not a clear and distinct idea. It simply designates an unknown source of doubt. The strength of this sceptical hypothesis lies in the fact that it locates the source of deception in an entity (i.e., God) that is *prima facie* beyond the scope of our perceptions. The solution to this predicament must therefore consist in expanding the scope of our perceptions to make God's nature accessible to the human intellect.[19] Is this not the same as *divinising* the human mind? In a way it is, as I will show later.

However, according to the account of true ideas examined in the previous section, Spinoza does not even accept the possibility of global doubt. For Spinoza, as has been already noted, the mere possession of *any* true idea makes me certain of its truth and dispels all doubts. Yet the continuation of the text we are analysing suggests the opposite:

> From this it follows that, only so long as we have no clear and distinct idea of God, can we call true ideas in doubt by supposing that perhaps some deceiving God exists, who misleads us even in the things most certain. I.e., if we attend to the knowledge we have concerning the origin of all things and do not discover—by the same knowledge we have when, attending to the nature of the triangle, we discover that its three angles equal two right angles—anything that teaches us that he is not a deceiver [...]. But if we have the kind of knowledge of God that we have of the triangle, then all doubt is removed (G2:30).

This intricate passage is quite explicit regarding the following three points. First: we can indeed doubt true ideas by supposing that a deceiving God exists. Second: this supposition is conceivable as long as we have no clear idea of the origin of all things (i.e., God). Third: if we are able to form a clear idea of God (comparable, in terms of clarity, to the idea of the triangle), then *all* doubt disappears. Spinoza, then, *does* admit the possibility of global doubt. In fact, global doubt seems to result almost inexorably from an imperfect knowledge of God.[20] Yet how does this conclusion cohere with Spinoza's account of true ideas as self-validating? At first glance, the requirement of knowing God in order to remove global doubt seems to contradict the claim that true ideas are certain in virtue of themselves. The contradiction is indeed inescapable if we wrongly interpret this requirement—as some scholars tend to do—in a Cartesian fashion, as implying that God is a "supernatural guarantor" of our rational certainty, external to rationality itself.[21] As a result of this extended misinter-

19 Suppose that there indeed is a deceiving God and I can form a true idea of it. Since "to have a true idea means nothing other than knowing a thing perfectly" (E2p43s), the way this deceiving God manipulates my perceptions would no longer be a mystery for me. Therefore, its deceiving mechanism would be neutralised.

20 This is not the only passage where Spinoza affirms this. Consider the following ones from the TTP, Chapter 6 (G3:84, ADN. VI): "So long as the idea we have of God himself is not clear and distinct, but confused, we doubt God's existence, and consequently, we doubt everything."

21 See for instance Robert Mason, *The God of Spinoza: A Philosophical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 105: "It is not the *origin* of our clear and distinct ideas that matters. The whole

pretation, scholars have generally disregarded Spinoza's requirement, consequently assuming that the possession of any true idea is enough to dispel global doubt.[22] In what follows I want to show that Spinoza's understanding of God as the foundation of certainty differs substantially from Descartes' and is consistent both with his monism and with his conception of true ideas as self-validating.

The apparent contradiction between basing our certainty on God and conceiving of true ideas as self-validating dissolves when we take into account Spinoza's analogy of tools, examined in the previous section. Recall that, according to Spinoza, "there must be a true idea in us, as an inborn tool" (G2:16), which serves as the standard of truth and enables the intellect to form new true ideas. In order to serve as the standard of truth, this true idea in us must be certain in virtue of itself, not in virtue of something else. Employing the analogy of tools, we can say that, just as the rest of tools exist *in virtue of* an original tool, true ideas are certain *in virtue of* this original true idea in us. Thus, the certainty of true ideas is derivative of the certainty of the original true idea from which they stem. The TIE suggests (§38; G2:16) that the original true idea in question is the idea of the most perfect being. We can thus understand how it is possible to doubt true ideas in the absence of a clear idea of God. Properly speaking, only clear knowledge of God—understood as the standard of truth—is self-validating and impervious to doubt. The remaining true ideas are certain *only* insofar as they derive from this fundamental knowledge, and, for this reason, Spinoza states that God is the principle and foundation of our knowledge (E5p36s).[23] Without this basic knowledge, true ideas are "like conclusions without premises" (E2p28d) and hence subject to doubt.[24]

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notion of God as a supernatural guarantor 'supremely good and veracious' is wholly out of keeping with Spinoza's metaphysics." Mason automatically assumes here that to make distinct ideas dependent upon their origin is tantamount to embracing Descartes' conception of God.

22 See again Mason, 105–6: "Rather, the point of Spinoza's apparent afterthought to his exposition of Descartes must have been that knowledge of *any* clear and distinct idea is enough to remove the possibility of a general suspension of reason." See also Pierre-François Moreau, *Problèmes du Spinozisme* (Paris: Vrin, 2006), 181: "[...] l'idée vraie, quelle qu'elle soit, nous rend incapables de doutes."

23 For a similar reading of the dependence of true ideas on God, see Aron Garrett, *Meaning in Spinoza's Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 71: "For an idea to be adequate means it relates to God's idea and part of its adequacy derives from this relation, there is something of what it means to be God's idea involved in each adequate idea. This 'something' must be known adequately, otherwise we could not have adequate knowledge. To have adequate knowledge is to know the cause. The regress of causes stops at God's infinite and eternal essence in thought. Consequently, to have an adequate idea is to have knowledge of God's eternal essence in thought."

24 One could argue that, since adequate knowledge of God is like an inborn tool in us (that is, an innate idea), global doubt is utterly impossible for Spinoza. In apparent agreement with this, Spinoza declares in E2p47s that "God's infinite essence and eternity are known to everybody." Yet in the very same passage, Spinoza states that "men do not have such a clear cognition of God as they have of common notions," due to "the fact that they cannot imagine God, as they can bodies, and that they have joined the name *God* to the images of things which they are used to seeing." Thus, having innate knowledge of God is compatible with ignoring God's nature and sinking into scepticism. This

Yet what exactly makes clear knowledge of God the standard of truth and impervious to doubt? In §76 of the TIE, Spinoza describes God as "a unique and infinite being, beyond which there is no being" (G2:29). Recall that, as Spinoza's analysis of doubt has established, the cause of doubt differs from the thing concerning which one doubts. We can therefore doubt any content whatsoever—including true ideas—as long as we can conceive of *something else* that negates it. Yet in the case of God, this is not possible, for God is "a unique and infinite being, *beyond which there is no being*" (italics mine). Since God encompasses all beings, forming a clear idea of God leaves literally no room for the supposition of another being *beside* it (like an evil genius) that could challenge the truth of this idea. Similarly, if a clear idea of God leaves no room for another idea that could deny its truth, it also cannot be certain in virtue of *something else*. Therefore, clear knowledge of God must be, due to its all-embracing character, certain in virtue of itself.

Spinoza's conception of adequacy, developed in the second book of the *Ethics*, is in perfect accord with the foundational role that he attributes to the idea of God. By "adequacy" Spinoza understands the intrinsic properties of a true idea regardless of its relation to an external object (see E2d4). In other words, adequacy is what makes a true idea self-validating or certain in virtue of itself. In E2p34, Spinoza defines more precisely the notion of adequacy in the following way: "Every idea that in us is *absolute*, or adequate and perfect, is true" (italics mine). An adequate idea is, thus, an idea that is *absolute in us*. This equation between adequacy and absoluteness deserves our attention. The adjective "absolute" has different meanings. Philosophically, it can refer to something that is not relative to something else, as well as to something that features no restrictions or limitations. Spinoza employs the adjective in this twofold sense with reference to ideas in §108 of the TIE (G2:38–39). There he states that the intellect forms certain ideas *absolutely*, and certain ideas from other ideas. "Those that it forms absolutely," he adds, "express infinity." Absoluteness is thus, in its twofold sense of infinity and non-derivability from prior concepts, the intrinsic property of those ideas that are certain in virtue of themselves and, for this very reason, constitute the foundation of knowledge.[25] It is easy to see that these intrinsic properties are present in the idea of God described above, insofar as God is "a unique and infinite being" and "the origin of all things."

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innate knowledge can still be confused because of deeply entrenched prejudices or other natural inclinations. The task of philosophy consists precisely in removing such obstacles to adequate knowledge. Regarding Spinoza's affirmation that "God's infinite essence are eternity are known to everybody," see Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "On the Fish's Knowledge of God's Essence, or Why Spinoza was not a Sceptic" (unpublished manuscript).

25 Descartes had already argued in his *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (particularly in *Rule Six*), that the "secret" of the true philosophical method consists in correctly identifying the "absolute" and the "relative." See René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1:21–24.

Yet the most pressing question still remains unsolved. For, even if we know now that adequate knowledge of God removes general doubt, it is not obvious at all that such knowledge is within our reach. It is not just the theological and philosophical tradition before Spinoza that disagrees with him on this point.[26] Even from the standpoint of Spinoza's monism, the possibility of adequate knowledge of God presents serious difficulties. Certainly, Spinoza equates God with nature, thus making the divine accessible to rational inquiry. Yet the very fact that we doubt—even true ideas—shows that the human intellect is limited and unable to apprehend nature in its entirety. Spinoza states in E4p4 that "it is impossible that a man should not be a part of Nature." If the cause of doubt is our limitation, which is irremediable, how can we possibly remove doubt? Differently put, how can a part of nature transcend itself and adequately grasp the whole that contains it? In the next section, I examine Spinoza's answer to these crucial questions in the second book of his *Ethics*.

4 How Can the Finite grasp the Infinite?

Spinoza stresses in numerous passages throughout his writings that the human mind is part of God's infinite intellect. This claim has, with respect to human knowledge, two opposite consequences. On the one hand, as the scholium of E2p43 states, being part of God's intellect enables the human mind to "perceive things truly."[27] On the other hand, as the corollary of E2p11 establishes, the very same fact entails that the human mind perceives things partially, i.e., inadequately. Since Spinoza admits both the imperfection of human knowledge and its capacity to know things adequately, we must assume that he employs the same expression (i.e., "being part of God's infinite intellect") in *two different senses*. The sense in which our being part of God obstructs knowledge is easier to understand than the sense in which it enables it. In the corollary of E2p11, Spinoza affirms:

> [...] and when we say that God has this or that idea, not only insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human Mind, but insofar as he also has the idea of another thing together with the human Mind, then we say that the human Mind perceives the thing only partially, *or* inadequately.

The fact that God's mind has countless other ideas besides the human mind explains for Spinoza that we perceive things partially, or inadequately. Our partial perception of things does not merely restrict the scope of our knowledge in comparison to God's:

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26 Most philosophers and theologians before Spinoza agree that God's essence is unknowable to the human intellect. See Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 25–28.

27 E2p43s: "Add to this that our Mind, insofar as it perceives things truly, is part of the infinite intellect of God; hence, it is as necessary that the mind's clear and distinct ideas are true as that God's ideas are."

it also makes our ideas *false*. According to E2p35, "falsity consists in the privation of knowledge which inadequate, or mutilated and confused, ideas involve." Spinoza, thus, equates falsity with ignorance. This equation is *prima facie* contrary to good sense: why should the unlimited extent of our ignorance render our ideas false? In principle, knowledge of a particular thing does not require knowledge *of everything*. Yet here lies precisely the issue, for, as already shown in the previous section, Spinoza's monism does not allow the possibility of having *complete* knowledge of anything without knowing the whole of nature. Ideas of particular things are unavoidably mutilated (i.e., false) if they are not accompanied by clear knowledge of the "unique and infinite being" that encompasses them. The difficulty is aggravated by the fact that, according to Spinoza, "the object of our Mind is the existing body and nothing else" (E2p13d). On the face of it, the prospects of human knowledge could hardly look worse: if the human mind only perceives the body, which is a tiny fragment of nature, and fragmentary knowledge of nature unavoidably entails falsity, then the human mind is doomed to total error.

Spinoza, however, holds that this is not the case. There is also a sense in which participation in God's intellect enables the human mind to perceive things truly. Spinoza expresses this "positive" participation in the divine intellect by means of a rather obscure phrase, namely: "God insofar as he constitutes the essence of the human mind" (E2p34). As opposed to the previous understanding of our mind's participation in God, this one stresses the common identity between God's intellect and ours. Certainly, if the falsity of our perceptions results from the difference of scope between God's intellect and ours, it seems that true perceptions must consist in some sort of coincidence or conjunction between God's total perspective and our partial perspective.[28] According to Spinoza, this coincidence occurs when the human mind grasps "those things which are common to all, and which are equally in the part and in the whole" (E2p38). Let us first focus on the expression "equally in the part and in the whole" (*aeque in parte ac in toto*). If something is equally present in the part and in the whole, it will remain the same considered either as a part or as a whole. Therefore, such a thing will be perceived *in exactly the same way* from God's total perspective and from our limited, partial perspective. Our limitation is no impediment for perceiving such thing: since it is equally present in the part and in the whole, perceiving it partially does not entail any deformation or mutilation of its nature. The same can be said about the expression "common to all" (*omnibus communia*). If something is common to all, or is present in all parts of nature, then it must be cognitively accessible from all possible perspectives, even the most restricted and partial ones. Otherwise, such thing would not be "common to all." In sum, Spinoza's main claim concerning all-pervasive things is that the human

28 See Lilli Alanen, "Spinoza on the Human Mind," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 35, no. 1 (December 2011): 16.

mind can grasp them adequately (i. e., without mutilating them), precisely because they are equally spread throughout all parts of nature.

It remains to determine what exactly these all-pervasive things are. As Spinoza indicates in E2p37, the expression "common to all things" refers to the fact that all particular things (be they thoughts or bodies) "agree in something," namely, in that "they involve the concept of the same attribute." To clarify this, take for instance the attribute of extension. All particular bodies have in common the mere fact of being extended; extension is therefore the quality or nature that pervades all bodies. The same applies to thought: all ideas have in common the mere fact of being modes of the attribute thought, which is equally present in all of them. Extension and thought are, thus, the all-pervasive contents that the human mind, despite its constitutive limitation, can grasp adequately *or absolutely.*[29] But this is not all. Thought and extension are two among God's infinite attributes, which express an eternal and infinite essence (E2p1–2). Therefore, through the adequate grasp of thought and extension, the human mind adequately grasps God's infinite essence. We find conclusive evidence in favour of these claims in E2p46d, where Spinoza affirms that "what gives knowledge of an eternal and infinite essence of God is common to all, and is equally in the part and in the whole." In sum, we must conclude that, by adequately grasping those things that are equally present throughout all parts of nature (i. e., thought and extension), the human mind attains adequate knowledge of God and overcomes global doubt.

5 The Presuppositions of Global Doubt and Spinoza's Ideal of Knowledge

The previous section has shown that Spinoza's conception of those things that are "common to all" (*omnibus communia*) contains his actual response to scepticism as well as the epistemological grounding of his monism. Yet this response is also quite revealing of the kind of scepticism that Spinoza seeks to combat. As I want to argue in this final section, Spinoza and modern scepticism share a similar ideal of knowledge, despite their opposite views concerning the possibility of achieving it. A close examination of this common ideal can shed some light on the much-debated question regarding the theoretical presuppositions of global doubt and the origins of modern scepticism.

29 One could argue that extension and thought are not the only things that are common to all. Being, for instance, is also something that all things have in common. Yet, in spite of its common character, being does not designate anything existing outside of the mind (as extension and thought do), but merely an imaginative/subjective way of grouping things, as Spinoza expresses in E2p40s1: "But when the images in the body are completely confused, the Mind also will imagine all the bodies confusedly, without any distinction, and comprehend them as if under one attribute, viz. under the attribute of Being, Thing, etc."

In the second section, I have outlined in broad strokes (following Bermúdez and Perler) the main difference between ancient and modern scepticism. Whereas the former points at the impossibility of distinguishing between false and true perceptions, the latter entertains the much more radical hypothesis that *all* our beliefs about the world might be mistaken. The difference between them is thus one of scope. The kind of doubt that characterises ancient scepticism is "local": it does not question the assumption that things manifest themselves to us, only our capacity to discern the right manifestations. The second kind of doubt, by contrast, questions *all* my beliefs about the world, even the deeply entrenched one that supposes external objects as the source of my perceptions. The hypothesis of a deceiving deity corresponds to this second kind of doubt, which is also the kind of doubt with which Spinoza grapples. Scholars have tried to understand why the sceptical worries of ancient thought remained merely "local" and did not reach the scope and degree of radicalism that characterise modern scepticism. Does modern scepticism have conceptual resources at its disposal that ancient scepticism lacked? If so, which resources are they? At any rate, everything indicates that a significant conceptual shift took place between the two.

Bermúdez and Perler, among many others,[30] have proposed interesting theories to answer this question.[31] Bermúdez invokes the notion of divine omnipotence to explain what he calls "the originality of Cartesian scepticism." The absence of this notion in the ancient mindset might explain why ancient scepticism did not conceive sceptical scenarios such as the deceiving God. After a thorough examination of late medieval sources, however, Bermúdez concludes that the notion of omnipotence is a necessary, yet not in itself sufficient condition for generating Cartesian scepticism. Late medieval discussions regarding the possibility of God deceiving us by virtue of God's omnipotence remained strictly confined to the sphere of theology. The reliability of our knowledge, which late medieval thinkers generally took for granted, was *not* at the centre of these debates. In order for divine omnipotence to become a source of sceptical doubt, other factors are required, such as Descartes' scientific outlook, which according to Bermúdez "shows that there is systematic and pervasive error in our experience".[32] Bermúdez's theory can be complemented with Perler's. Perler argues that global doubt is only possible in virtue of a strict separation—foreign to the ancient mindset—between the realm of material objects and the realm of

30 We can mention here Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003); Myles F. Burnyeat, "Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed," *The Philosophical Review* 91, no. 1 (January 1982): 3–40; Gail Fine, "Descartes and Ancient Skepticism: Reheated Cabbage?" *The Philosophical Review* 109, no. 2 (April 2000): 195–234. In this list we should also include the aforementioned early text by Hegel, *The Relationship of Scepticism to Philosophy* (Hegel, *Jenaer Schriften 1801–1807*).

31 See Bermúdez, "The Originality of Cartesian Skepticism"; Perler, "Wie ist ein globaler Zweifel möglich?"

32 Bermúdez, "The Originality of Cartesian Skepticism," 352.

mental representations. The "autonomisation" of the mental that this strict separation entails sets the ground for extreme sceptical conjectures such as the inexistence of a reality beyond our representations. Such extreme conjectures are only conceivable under the assumption that representations are completely disconnected from material objects and have an existence of their own, devoid of physical substrate.[33] Perler then uses this theory to give account of Spinoza's anti-scepticism (see section 2). In Spinoza we also find the strict heterogeneity between the mental and the physical that is at the foundation of modern scepticism. Yet, since this heterogeneity does not indicate for Spinoza real ontological diversity (for thought and extension are for him attributes of one and the same substance), the threat of global error is prevented by his monism from the very outset.

I would like to complement the two theories I have just presented with a third one, based on my previous inquiries. My main claim is that global doubt is bound up with an ideal of knowledge that takes divine knowledge as the standard or measuring stick of valid cognition. Spinoza's philosophy is governed by this ideal of knowledge. I argue that global doubt results from the failure to meet this standard.

My exposition has started with Spinoza's account of true ideas, according to which certainty is an intrinsic rather than extrinsic feature of true ideas. We can recognise here the "autonomisation" of the mental described by Perler, which according to him enables Descartes to conjecture the inexistence of an external world. Spinoza turns this "autonomisation" into an advantage for human knowledge in the following way. Since mental entities are causally independent of external objects, the achievement of truth must take place in the mind by virtue of its own power, without the aid of any external entity. The knowledge that the mind has of its objects does not derive from the objects themselves, but from its own active nature. Knowledge is thus for Spinoza a self-sufficient domain identical with the sphere of the mental and governed by its own rules. I have then shown how extreme doubt fits into this picture. If knowledge and the mental are the same, the only possible way of accounting for error and doubt (which are mental states) is by construing them as *fragmentary knowledge*. In order rank as such, knowledge must be all-embracing, not in the sense of being omniscient, but in the sense of grasping the general structure of reality (i. e., those things that are "common to all") by virtue of its own power. Fragmentary or mutilated knowledge unavoidably leads to error, and eventually to the hypothesis of a deceiving God. According to Spinoza, only adequate knowledge of God can remove such a hypothesis, for knowing God is tantamount to apprehending the general order of nature. This knowledge, in turn, renders the mind fully autonomous and self-sufficient, insofar as it consists in a certain conjunction between the total perspective of nature and the partial perspective of the human mind.

In the third section, I pointed out that Spinoza's solution to global doubt entails a certain "divinisation" or "deification" of human knowledge. Indeed, the account of

33 Perler, "Wie ist ein globaler Zweifel möglich?" 501.

human knowledge just presented exhibits striking similarities with the way medieval thought generally conceived of divine knowledge as opposed to human knowledge. Prior to the "autonomisation" of the mental described by Perler, human cognition was viewed, to a great extent, as receptive and causally dependent upon its objects.[34] According to this view, the privilege of knowing things a priori is reserved to God, who as the creator of the world knows everything in the same way as an artisan knows the objects she produces. Human knowledge, by contrast, comes after its objects.[35] Due to its dependence on external objects, human knowledge cannot be one and all-embracing, as divine knowledge is. From the "medieval" viewpoint, the variety and multiplicity of things requires different sciences governed by different rules and endowed with varying degrees of certainty.[36] This is not the case with divine science, which, insofar as it is prior to the things themselves, is not affected by their plurality and mutability. In a way, the medieval distinction between divine and human knowledge becomes in Spinoza the distinction between true knowledge and imagination: whereas true knowledge is unitary and autonomously produced by the mind, imagination is multiple and dependent upon external factors.

As paradoxical as it may sound, Spinoza's ideal of knowledge is more liable to generate extreme doubt than the medieval conception from which it departs. To begin with, Spinoza's ideal stands in stark contrast to the limitedness, fallibility, and relativity of human conceptions. As has been shown in this paper, Spinoza is

34 See Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, 298–99.

35 Take for instance the following passage from Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*: "For we know all that we know only through looking at the beings; therefore our knowledge does not grasp the future or the infinite. Our insights are renewed and multiplied according to the things from which we acquire the knowledge of them. He, may He be exalted, is not like that. I mean that His knowledge of things is not derived from them, so that there is multiplicity and renewal of knowledge. On the contrary, the things in question follow upon His knowledge, which preceded and established them as they are: [...]. Hence, with regard to Him, may He be exalted, there is no multiplicity of insights and renewal and change of knowledge. For through knowing the true reality of His own immutable essence, He also knows the totality of what necessarily derives from all His acts." Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), part III, chapter 21 (vol. II, 485). For a similar approach to divine knowledge, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 14, a. 8.

36 See Dominik Perler, "Does God Deceive Us? Skeptical Hypotheses in Late Medieval Epistemology," in *Rethinking the History of Skepticism*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 190. It is noteworthy that, right up until the fourteenth century, theologians and philosophers abided by the famous Aristotelian prohibition against *metabasis eis allo genos*, i.e., mixing methods from different areas of knowledge. See Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, 303–12; see also Cohen, *How Modern Science Came into the World: Four Civilizations, One 17th-Century Breakthrough* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 509–19. This prohibition is based on the assumption that there exist clearly differentiated domains of knowledge, corresponding to the different genera of beings. Each domain requires its own particular method, and hence it is "unscientific" to apply the method of one domain in another one. From this point of view, sciences are (and must be) irreducibly disparate and plural. Jean-Luc Marion shows how Descartes reverses this principle. See Jean-Luc Marion, *Sur l'ontologie grise de Descartes*, 4th ed. (Paris: Vrin, 2000), 30.

aware of this fact and attempts to prove that all-embracing knowledge is within the human mind's reach despite its finitude. Modern sceptic thinkers such as Montaigne and Sanchez argued, analogous to Spinoza, that the only acceptable form of knowledge is one that transcends all partial perspectives and limitations—such as God's knowledge.[37] However, they rejected the possibility that the human mind could attain such knowledge and, consequently, advocated scepticism. The medieval ideal of knowledge does not involve this difficulty, simply because—unlike Spinoza and the sceptics just mentioned—it does not restrict valid knowledge to divine cognition.

A closely connected aspect of Spinoza's ideal of knowledge that is liable to generate scepticism is its strict requirement of unifying knowledge under a clear notion of God. Plurality of ideas and sciences is for Spinoza the breeding ground for doubt: all our ideas (even true ones) are for him subject to doubt as long as they lack a unifying principle, i. e., a clear idea of God. If this unifying principle turns out to be unattainable, then global doubt becomes inescapable. From the "medieval" point of view, by contrast, a plurality of disciplines and methods does not entail uncertainty. One can have one science without having another, and this circumstance does not detrimentally affect the soundness of the science one possesses.

In sum, a good case can be made for viewing modern scepticism and global doubt as the result of the collapse of the medieval ideal of knowledge and its replacement by a more "monistic" ideal (such as the one endorsed by Spinoza). A compelling substantiation of this claim, however, would require a separate study.

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37 Consider the following passages from Francisco Sanchez's (1550–1623) *That Nothing is Known* (*Quod nihil scitur*), which show striking parallels with Spinoza. "In the natural universe there is but one kind of knowledge, not several kinds (or would be, if it could be obtained), by which all things might be fully understood; for one thing cannot be fully understood apart from all other things." Francisco Sanchez, *That Nothing is Known (Quod Nihil Scitur)*, eds. and trans. Elaine Limbrick and Douglas F.S. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 211; "Therefore, in order to understand any one thing perfectly we must understand everything; and who is capable of this?" (Sanchez, 207); "Only He, being Himself perfect wisdom and understanding, and perfect intelligence, enters into all things, is wise in relation to all things, comprehends everything and understands everything, because He Himself *is* all things and is in all things, while all things *are* God Himself and are in Him" (Sanchez, 239). Regarding the connection between pantheism and the scepticism of Montaigne and Sanchez, see Ernst Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der Neueren Zeit* (Berlin: Verlag Bruno Cassirer, 1922), 1:176–78.

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Scepticism in Early Modern Times

Introduction

Anyone interested in defining the nature and function of scepticism in early modern thought cannot overlook the remarkable and always useful work of Richard Popkin on the subject. By emphasising the decisive importance of scepticism in understanding the complexity of early modern thought, his *History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* has modified our view about the early modern history of ideas, which cannot be reduced to a simple philosophical variation on Cartesian rationalism. That being said, it seems to me that Popkin's *History of Scepticism* has provided a somewhat truncated reading of early modern scepticism, for example (1) by exaggerating the sceptical orientation of some of the thinkers he has considered, as we will see later with the example of Pierre-Daniel Huet; (2) by insisting on the influence of Pyrrhonian scepticism at the expense of Academic scepticism;[1] and (3) by dogmatically denying the existence of a scepticism proper to the Enlightenment (aside from Hume, of course), even though he subsequently modified some of his positions.[2]

In order to propose a specific and critical reading of Popkin's interpretation of the nature and function of early modern scepticism, I will present three figures of that period analysed by Popkin, namely those of Pierre-Daniel Huet, Simon Foucher, and Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville. In doing so, I want also to underline the difficulty in presenting a coherent and consistent history of early modern scepticism and the importance of determining precisely the role and function of scepticism at that time, where it is more of an individual attitude than a shared legacy or "school" (as it was in the ancient period), which raises of course the question of its interpretation. This individual attitude varies according to the historical and philosophical context in which it occurred. Indeed, scepticism could not be used in identical ways in, for example, the pre-Cartesian and post-Cartesian contexts; for Cartesian rationalism, in claiming to surmount doubt and achieve certainty by means of the *cogito*, had required a reconfiguring of the sceptical toolkit, a fact that gave rise to the emergence of a new sceptical typology aimed at opposing this new dogmatism. Similarly, scepticism was obliged to reconceptualise itself in response to the success of Newtonian physics, and this may account for the difference between the radical

1 This is a common criticism, particularly in the work of French scholars working on Early Modern scepticism. A good summary of such criticism can be found in Sylvia Giocanti, "Histoire du fidéisme, histoire du scepticisme," *Revue de Synthèse* 199, nos. 2–3 (April 1998): 193–210.

2 See my "Introduction: What is Enlightenment Scepticism? A Critical Rereading of Richard Popkin," in *Scepticism in the Eighteenth Century: Enlightenment, Lumières, Aufklarüng,* eds. Sébastien Charles and Plinio Junqueira Smith (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 1–15.

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scepticism more characteristic of the seventeenth century—at a moment where all fields of knowledge were being criticised and all forms of dogmatism were a target—and the mitigated scepticism, limited in its spheres of application, of the Enlightenment.

At this level, the analysis I propose contrasts sharply with the usual attacks against Popkin's *History of Scepticism*. Indeed, what is generally faulted in Popkin is the excessive importance he attributes to the religious question, using Pyrrhonism first and foremost as a critical tool in the service of atheism,[3] and the relatively vague definition of Pyrrhonism he proposes, which takes little account of the textual tradition in which the sceptical texts are inscribed in order to stress its argumentative dimension.[4] So in considering the three examples I have just mentioned, the purpose of this work is not so much to criticise Popkin's analysis as to try to demonstrate how difficult it is to speak univocally about early modern scepticism *stricto sensus*, that is to say in the form of a relatively fixed and consistent method as found in Sextus Empiricus. Rather than rejecting Popkin's general reading of modern scepticism, I prefer to show, by using some striking examples, how the exclusive reduction of scepticism to Pyrrhonism does not work, and represents an important interpretative mistake, similar to a form of reductionism. On the contrary, it is important to understand how any form of reductionism on this topic is unthinkable, because it is impossible to present early modern scepticism as a philosophical stream with internal coherence and a unique purpose.

1 The Nature and Function of Pierre-Daniel Huet's Scepticism

Let me begin with the figure of Pierre-Daniel Huet, who is regarded by Popkin as an exemplary representative of "Christian Pyrrhonism," Huet being in fact a "complete Pyrrhonian sceptic."[5] That Popkin adopted this reading of Huet is no surprise, since his general approach concerning scepticism consisted chiefly of emphasising the moderns' rediscovery of ancient Pyrrhonism, even if this meant obscuring or forgetting the other strands of scepticism such as Academic thought in the Classical period. This somewhat biased interpretation is currently being counterbalanced by much more charitable readings of the influence of Academic scepticism on seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophy. For example, Thomas Lennon and José Raimun-

3 Giocanti, "Histoire du fidéisme, histoire du scepticisme."

4 Emmanuel Naya, "Le phénomène pyrrhonien: lire le scepticisme au XVI^{e} siècle" (PhD diss., Université Stendhal—Grenoble III, 2000), 5–10.

5 Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 278–82.

do Maia Neto[6] treat today Pierre-Daniel Huet as a central figure in the revival of Academic scepticism.[7] It is true that a reading of Huet's work soon makes it clear that he was deeply familiar with the sceptical tradition, Pyrrhonian and Academic.[8] He cites in turn Diogenes Laertius, Sextus Empiricus, Cicero, Aulus Gellius, and Saint Augustine, in support of his arguments, and in so doing he displays a subtle and precise intimacy with ancient scepticism. But if Huet advances an informed reading and a comparatively fair interpretation of the themes and proponents of scepticism, it remains to be demonstrated that he *really* is a sceptic, and what role he assigns to scepticism within his own philosophical enterprise. In this sense, it is as useless to present Huet as a Pyrrhonian (Popkin) or as an Academician (Lennon and Maia Neto), the stakes of the debate being more consequential than a characterisation which seems as anachronistic as it is sterile. And, in fact, a closer look at his *Censure de la philosophie cartésienne* quickly reveals that scepticism serves him above all as a weapon against the modern dogmatism represented by Cartesianism. In that sense, the differences between Pyrrhonism and Academism are not really important to him, and he largely prefers to underline their proximity by showing that sceptics have in fact a very similar vision of the real nature of philosophy.[9] Thus, if he takes the differences between Pyrrhonians and Academic sceptics to be essentially verbal after all, it is because he thinks that they agree to suspend judgment in the realm of theory while following appearances in the realm of practice. In this respect, they are the only true philosophers, for unlike the dogmatics, they seek to attain wisdom and truth rather than claiming to have already achieved them.

In that sense, Huet's recourse to both Pyrrhonian and Academic arguments serves to show how Descartes and his disciples had warped the very essence of philosophy, which consists of doubting and of questioning one's own prejudices. This the Cartesians had done by exceeding the limits imposed by the exercise of doubt and claiming that it is possible for certainty to be borne out of uncertainty by means of the *cogito*, which is, according to Huet, "a principle that is no less uncertain

6 Thomas Lennon, "The Skepticism of Huet's *Traité philosophique de la foiblesse de l'esprit humain*," in *Scepticisme et modernité*, eds. Marc-André Bernier and Sébastien Charles (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2005): 65–75; José Raimundo Maia Neto, "Huet n'est pas un *sceptique chrétien*," *Les Etudes philosophiques* 2 (2008): 209–22. See also Maia Neto, "Academic Skepticism in Early Modern Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58, no. 2 (1997): 199–220, and Maia Neto, "Huet sceptique cartésien," *Philosophiques* 35, no. 1 (2008): 223–39.

7 See Sébastien Charles, "Pierre-Daniel Huet's Readings in Scepticism," in *Academic Scepticism in the Development of Early Modern Philosophy*, eds. Plinio Junqueira Smith and Sébastien Charles (Dordrecht: Springer, 2017), 259–74.

8 On this topic, see the sections "La ripresa dello scetticismo antico" and "Huet e la tradizione scettica," in Elena Rapetti, *Pierre-Daniel Huet: erudizione, filosofia, apologetica* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1999), 255–79.

9 Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Traité philosophique de la faiblesse de l'esprit humain* (Amsterdam: Henri du Sauzet, 1723), 138.

than all the others that he subjected to doubt."[10] In Huet's strategy, sceptical arguments serve to show that it is impossible to treat the *cogito* as a certain proposition. Hence he accumulates arguments that show that the *cogito*, which Descartes presents as an intuition, is in fact a deduction, and an invalid one.[11] This is the central concern of both his *Censure de la philosophie cartésienne* and his *Censure de la réponse de Monsieur Régis à la Censure de la philosophie cartésienne*, an incomplete manuscript that Huet intended as a response to a book by Pierre-Sylvain Régis defending Descartes' philosophy.

In fact, for Huet, nothing is less self-evident than the purported self-evidence of the *cogito*. First, Descartes does not even raise the question of knowing what this term "to be" means and whether the thinking subject really *is*—a question he ought to have broached if his doubt were as radical as he claimed and extended so far as the category of existence. For after all, as Montaigne had already recognised, the predication of existence should apply in reality only to a single subject, God, the sole truly existent being, since all other natural beings have only a phenomenal, not a substantial, existence. Next, had Descartes examined the question of what being is more thoroughly, he would have recognised that the "I" or the "self" that thinks cannot think without being, and hence that the *cogito* is nothing more than a tautology: "I am a thinker, therefore I am"; indeed, it is a defective syllogism of the question-begging kind: "If I think, I am; I am; therefore I am." If we look upon the *cogito* as a line of argument, Huet suggests, we must acknowledge that it is not valid. The major premise that deals with thought is also problematic, for what can it mean if not, "I think that I have thought," since there is both a logical and a chronological anteriority between the moment when we think and the following moment when we have deduced that we exist? Given that Descartes himself recognised that memory is a deceptive faculty, I cannot be sure of having truly thought before concluding that I have true existence, because there is nothing to assure me that this idea of having thought is certain—hence the impossibility of reaching a valid conclusion. Huet presents this line of thought as follows:

> La mémoire de l'homme étant peu ferme et peu fidèle, la conclusion peut fort bien s'appliquer à une autre proposition qu'à celle d'où elle est tirée. Ce qui nous arrive tous les jours dans les entretiens familiers, où l'on oublie souvent en raisonnant le sujet de la conversation, et ce qu'on a dessein de prouver. Il n'y a donc rien de certain et il peut y avoir de l'erreur dans la connexion de l'argument de Descartes, et par conséquent il ne vaut rien. Ajoutons à cela que ce raisonnement étant fondé sur ce principe, que tout ce qui pense est au moment qu'il pense, il s'ensuit

10 Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Against Cartesian Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Thomas M. Lennon (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2003), 1.14.109–10.

11 For an analysis of Huet's critique of the evidence of the *cogito*, see Sébastien Charles, "Évidence, vraisemblance et vérité selon Huet : le cartésianisme en question," in *Les usages de la preuve d'Henri Estienne à Jeremy Bentham*, eds. Jean-Pierre Schandeler and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin (Paris: Hermann, 2014): 101–17; Charles, "On the Uses of Scepticism against a Certain Philosophical Arrogance: Huet as a Critic of Cartesian Logic and Metaphysics," *Science et Esprit* 65, no. 3 (2013): 299–309.

> que quand je conclus que je suis de ce que je pense, je ne veux rien dire autre chose sinon que je suis dans le moment où je pense. Or, est-il que cette pensée s'évanouit et ne subsiste plus dès que je dis «Donc je suis», puisqu'il y a une différence de temps entre la première proposition et la conséquence ? C'est pourquoi ce raisonnement doit nécessairement signifier ou «Je pense, donc je serai» ou «J'ai pensé, donc je suis». Et, ainsi, cet axiome «Tout ce qui pense est dans le moment qu'il pense», d'où Descartes fait dépendre toute la force de son argument, n'y aura aucun rapport, et pour lui donner quelque force, il faudra le tourner ainsi : «Tout ce qui pense est, même quand il ne pense point». Autant de changements et de corrections qui produiront un sens entièrement faux et ridicule, de l'aveu même de Descartes.[12]

In short, there is no criterion of truth on which we can found a philosophical system in an assured manner. If the arguments against the *cogito* are not all demonstrative or original, what matters to Huet is to show that deductive propositions purportedly founded on reason are all subject to doubt, based on the fact that reason is a limited and fallible faculty. In that case, scepticism has a protreptic function, but it does not mean that Huet *is* a sceptic. In fact, Huet's recourse to scepticism is incomprehensible without taking the theological dimension of his thought into consideration. Indeed, scepticism is in no way an end in itself for Huet; it is a strategic means of rejecting Cartesianism because it tends towards conceptualising a unique kind of truth, placing faith and reason on the same level. The Preface to Huet's *Censura* leaves no room for doubt about his apologetic intentions, which are to criticise Descartes above all, because "although he teaches that philosophy should submit to faith, he in fact adjusted the faith to the principles of his philosophy,"[13] thereby opening the door to a subjection of religious truth to reason and allowing the mysteries of faith to be interpreted by reason and rejected on the basis of their implausibility, with, as a consequence, a negation of Christian revelation. On the contrary, Huet thinks that the truths of reason must be subordinate to those of faith and that the exercise of reason

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12 Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Censure de la philosophie de Descartes*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, manuscript fonds français 14702, 6v–7r. English translation in Huet, *Against Cartesian Philosophy*, 88–89:

> Moreover, since man's memory is weak and unstable, the conclusion can be referred to some premise other than the one from which it follows. Something like this happens to us in everyday ordinary discourse, in which it is customary for us not to remember what the subject is of the conversation and what one is trying to prove. Therefore, the connection of this pair of propositions, «I am thinking,» and «I am,» is uncertain and deceitful, and is therefore an invalid argument. To this it may be added that since the argument, «I am thinking, therefore I am,» depends on the proposition, «whatever is thinking, is so long as it thinks,» it follows that when I conclude that I am from the fact that I am thinking, nothing else is meant but that I am so long as I am thinking. And that thought has already ceased when I say, «I am.» The antecedent, «I am thinking,» is at a different time from the conclusion, «therefore I am.» The argument therefore means either «I am thinking, therefore I will be,» or else «I thought, therefore I am.» And the proposition, «whatever is thinking, is so long as it is thinking,» on which Descartes would base his argument, is irrelevant to it. The result is that for it to be useful to his argument, it must be changed to the following, «whatever is thinking is, even while it is not thinking.» Even according to Descartes, these changes and alterations are ridiculous and false.

13 Huet, *Against Cartesian Philosophy*, 64.

has to be limited: "I believe that God is three in one, not by virtue of reason, but by virtue of the first truth that revealed this."[14] In this respect, asking the question whether Huet was truly a Pyrrhonian (Popkin) or an Academic sceptic (Lennon and Maia Neto), or more one than the other, is not of great importance. He is above all a Christian philosopher who uses scepticism in a purely strategic way to serve his apologetic project, which is to preserve Christian religion from the attack of early modern rationalism.

2 Simon Foucher's Academic Scepticism, or the Sceptical Way to Modern Science

The interpretation of the second figure, Simon Foucher, is more problematic considering my presentation of Popkin as having little interest in the renewal of Academic scepticism. Foucher presents himself as a modern representative of this philosophical current, and Popkin was of course aware of it, as he quoted it in his *History of Scepticism:* "Foucher saw himself as the reviver of Academic scepticism."[15] Nevertheless, it is not Foucher's interpretation of Academic philosophy that interests Popkin, but his anti-Cartesian epistemology and in particular his critique of the possible distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Surprising as it may sound, the way Foucher interpreted Academic scepticism in the seventeenth century did not interest Popkin, reflecting his disinterest in the question of the modern revival of Academic scepticism.

However, this question is far from trivial. Even if Foucher's interpretation of Academic scepticism is sometimes confusing, it nevertheless enables us to understand what the role of scepticism in early modern thought could be and why it was, according to Foucher, the best and perhaps the only philosophy for his times.[16] In that case, it is a *juste milieu* between dogmatism and Pyrrhonism, which is a useful position to legitimatise the scientific spirit of his century: "On peut distinguer les Académiciens des Pyrrhoniens, en ce que les Académiciens reçoivent quelques vérités, comme de géométrie et de mécanique."[17] If Foucher wished to rehabilitate Academic philosophy, this was because he saw significant advantages in it. Indeed, Academism ap-

14 Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Alnetanae quaestiones de concordia rationis et fidei* (Caen: J. Cavelier, 1690), 1.2, §7, 30.

15 Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, 275.

16 Joël Boudreault and Sébastien Charles, "Simon Foucher's Academic Scepticism: Between Truth and Probability," in *Academic Scepticism in the Development of Early Modern Philosophy*, eds. Plinio Junqueira Smith and Sébastien Charles (Dordrecht: Springer, 2017), 245–58.

17 Foucher Simon, *Dissertation sur la recherche de la vérité* (Paris, Estienne Michallet, 1687), 29–30. English translation: "The Academicians can be distinguished from the Pyrrhonians, in that sense that the Academicians receive some truths, such as in the domains of geometry and mechanics." All English translations of Foucher are my own.

peared to be the only philosophy capable not only of dismantling the impasses created by Cartesianism (by making a more useful use of doubt, for example), but also of achieving reconciliation with Christianity, all the while providing the nascent sciences of the time with more flexible, less dogmatic foundations than those advocated by the Cartesians.[18]

Because Foucher thought that a peculiar use of scepticism could support Christianity, assuming a close proximity to Huet's position, as Popkin does, may be understandable, but actually amounts to a significant misinterpretation. Foucher has a much more charitable conception of philosophy than Huet, he stresses its *pars construens* rather than his *pars destruens*, and every philosopher who seeks truth with sincerity is on the right path, as long as he knows how to recognise the evidence where it manifests itself, and to remain doubtful when there is no evidence. In fact, it is important to escape either to positive dogmatism (Cartesianism) or negative dogmatism (which is symbolised, for him, by Pyrrhonism, a philosophical current which rejects all type of truths[19]). Furthermore, according to Foucher, this is really the method of the Academics:

> Il est vrai que les Académiciens doivent douter d'une très grande quantité de choses, mais c'est parce que ces choses sont douteuses, et il se trouve néanmoins que les principales vérités leur sont connues, de sorte que leurs doutes regardent seulement les matières de sciences et les propositions dogmatiques que l'on pourrait faire sur les sujets de pure spéculation humaine.[20]

Another fundamental difference between Foucher and Huet concerns their relation to Cartesianism. Indeed, Foucher's conception of the Academic method of philosophising is strongly influenced by his reading of Descartes, particularly his *Discours*

18 It should not be forgotten that Foucher prided himself on his own knowledge of science and that he was the author of a study on hygrometers in which he touted the methodological advances of science in his era. See his *Nouvelle façon d'hygromètres* (N.p., 1672), reissued in his *Traité des hygromètres, ou machines pour mesurer la sécheresse et l'humidité de l'air* (Paris: Estienne Michallet, 1686).
19 Foucher often tends to present Pyrrhonism as a form of negative dogmatism. This strategy aims to highlight the positivity of academic scepticism. But he tries sometimes to bring them closer, by insisting on their zetetic method: "Les pyrrhoniens et sceptiques différaient de nos académiciens en ce qu'ils ne reconnaissaient aucune vérité, au lieu que nos philosophes en reconnaissent plusieurs. Mais en cela leur différence n'était pas si forte qu'elle ne se pût ôter avec le temps, car les uns et les autres faisaient profession de rechercher la vérité." Foucher, *Dissertations sur la recherche de la vérité* (Paris: Jean Anisson, 1693), 177. English translation: "The Pyrrhonians or Sceptics differed from our Academicians, in that they did not recognise any truth, instead of our academic philosophers recognize several. In this, their difference was not so strong that it could not be taken away with time, for both professed to seek the truth."
20 Foucher, *Dissertation*, IX. English translation: "It is true that the Academics must doubt a very large number of things, but that is because these things are doubtful; and it is nevertheless the case that the principal truths are known to them, such that their doubts relate only to the subject matters of the sciences and the dogmatic propositions that could be formulated on topics of pure human speculation."

de la méthode. Hence it is no coincidence that some maxims of this method resemble those of Descartes, as, for example, the first one, which consists of refusing to treat the senses as the criterion of truth, and the second one, which requires us to set aside opinions and prejudice. Due to this method, it is possible to demonstrate a number of metaphysical truths that have the advantage of being certain because they are not based on sense perception but on the work of the mind upon itself.[21] These truths, supposedly all known to the Academics and transmitted esoterically, recall in part the results Descartes arrived at in his *Meditations*. They consist first (1) of the immediate and primary knowledge of the soul; then (2) of the knowledge of its fundamental characteristics, namely its unity, spirituality, and immortality; (3) then of the knowledge of God and God's essential attributes, namely unity, infinity, and eternity; and last comes (4) the reconciliation of divine providence with human freedom. These truths emerge from demonstrations that are based solely on the work of the mind on itself, which has caused them to follow from one to another and, according to Foucher, transforms Academic philosophy into a kind of *praeparatio evangelica*,[22] and Cartesianism into a modern form of Academism. As we can see once more, we cannot embrace a uniform reading of the modern reception of scepticism without questioning the use made of sceptical texts by early modern authors who resort to them. In the specific case of Foucher, the recourse to Academic scepticism leads him to adopt a purified form of Cartesianism, in which its overly dogmatic aspects have been rejected because they tended to lead to an opposition between philosophy and theology.

If Foucher's interpretation of Academic philosophy seems somewhat disconcerting and hardly "sceptical," this has to do with his inclination to stress the epistemological productivity of this method to defeat Cartesianism on its own ground, even if he shares with Descartes more or less the same conception of truth founded on evidence, and the same rejection of probabilism.

It is in the context of this debate with Cartesians that we must view Foucher's critical reading of Carneades' probabilism.[23] While Cicero seems to have granted an enviable epistemological status to the probable, Foucher considers it as no more than a makeshift which ought not to constitute an essential component of Academic philosophy, since that philosophy ultimately aims at the true and the certain

21 Foucher, *Dissertation*, 125: "The Academics having admitted that the things we know begin from our ways of being [ideas], they assume that the first things we know belong to us and are in our souls, that is, in the being that knows within us."

22 Foucher, *Dissertation*, 144: "It is this that led Saint Augustine to say that if the Gospel had been preached at the time of these philosophers, they would have said, 'This is what we were looking for.' As well, we have had the experience of Platonists and Academics having willingly embraced our religion, so true is it that this disposition of mind which leads to contempt for sensory things and to avoiding prejudices is beneficial to Christianity."

23 Section 10 of the *Dissertation* (*Ce que c'est que connaître les choses probablement, suivant les Académiciens*; "What probable knowledge consists of, according to the Academics") is entirely dedicated to an exposition of the concept of the probable. See Foucher, 144–47.

and to this end possesses a sure criterion, none other than evidence. According to Foucher, who again follows Descartes, it is evidence that provides that highly sought-after criterion of truth, while probability always contains an immanent reason for doubt:

> Nous ne saurions trouver une meilleure marque de la vérité que la force qu'elle a d'emporter notre consentement malgré nous-mêmes, et sans que nous ajoutions quoi que ce soit à son action. Au lieu que la vraisemblance nous peut bien solliciter à consentir, mais elle ne saurait nous obliger de le faire malgré nous.[24]

In that case, a distinction must be made between the apodictic (or demonstrative) sciences such as mathematics—in which the probable plays no more than a methodological role and must bow out in favour of the demonstration to which it has given rise, whose evidence imposes itself on our minds—and hypothetical "sciences" such as medicine and moral philosophy, in which the probable finds justification because it allows for the desired action to occur but without our necessarily being able to know whether any better action could have occurred. Thus, according to Foucher, we must distinguish opinion—that is, the fact of acquiescing in things that are not evident and are at best probable, which means that opinion always includes a component of prejudice and is thus doubtful—from sensation, which consists of acquiescing in things that are clear and evident. Foucher reminds us that in matters of science, the wise person must assent only to the true and never to the probable, for assent to the probable is only tolerated in the sphere of the practical in order to avoid inaction and the reproach of *apraxia* levelled by the dogmatists.

This is why our knowledge is at one and the same time certain and limited, in contrast to divine knowledge; and it is in this respect that Cartesianism represents the height of philosophical arrogance, for it treats extension as the very substance of the material world, whereas for Foucher, although it is clear that we know the sensible world through our ideas, it is not obvious that the modifications of our immaterial soul are capable of representing a material thing. We are dealing here with one of the major issues of Foucher's epistemology, according to which the perceived world is no more than a relative one,[25] of which science provides us with no more

24 Simon Foucher, *Critique de la Recherche de la vérité* (Paris: Martin Coustelier, 1675), 98: «We cannot find a better mark of the truth than the force with which it impels our consent in spite of ourselves and *without our adding anything whatever to its action*. Whereas, the probable can very well invite us to consent, but it cannot force us to consent in spite of ourselves.»

25 On this score, see the fictional dialogue between an Academic and a dogmatic presented in Foucher, *Dissertation*, 100: "'It is not just with regard to a stick that appears to us to be bent in the water that our senses deceive us, it is with regard to everything we see in any setting whatever.' 'What?' he [the dogmatic] said, displaying astonishment, 'we only see phantoms?' 'If by that you mean that we only see the images of things that are outside of ourselves and not the things themselves, that is certain, because the senses only acquaint us with the effects and results of the action of external things. But these effects and results are no more than ways of being or modifications of

than a summary description.[26] Thus Foucher advances a "fallibilist" conception of science, because he deems that scientific propositions can be considered true so long as we manage to show that any other explanations for the same phenomena are false. In this way, progress is possible in science so long as we are in agreement about both the fact that scientific claims are revocable and the fact that they are not of the same order as the truths proper to the apodictic sciences. This scientific method, whose discovery, according to Foucher, is to be credited to the Academics, has the advantage of avoiding dogmatism and Pyrrhonism at the same time, as for Foucher, Pyrrhonism is a form of negative dogmatism.

3 Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville: from Universal Scepticism to Revolutionary Dogmatism

My third and final point deals with the radical differences between the reinterpretation of scepticism specific to the seventeenth century and the use made of it in the eighteenth century, in a context where Cartesianism and Christianity were both in crisis and no longer served as unconquered philosophical and theological reference points as in the previous century.

In these circumstances, the legacy of scepticism once more took on new shape and the sceptical texts of Antiquity ceased to serve primarily for the condemnation of the dogmatic arrogance of rationalist metaphysics, even though thinkers such as Voltaire continued to use them occasionally for this purpose.[27] Rather, those texts were consulted primarily for their methodological value. Losing part of its critical radicality, scepticism now became a preparatory stage in which doubt was used to question current knowledge not in order to refute it but to deepen it. All of this harmonised with the concept of scientific progress established at that time. Of course, an ongoing increase in knowledge does not imply the disappearance of sceptical doubts. Indeed, doubt retains all its validity when a philosopher seeks to extrapolate from facts given by experience a metaphysics that would try to explain them within a system. Hence is the distinction made by the French thinkers of the Enlightenment between the "systematic mind" (*esprit systématique*), which is only concerned with classifying and ordering facts and discoveries, and the "spirit of the system" (*esprit de système*), which claims to be able to give them a final and ul-

our own substance, which depend on a large number of circumstances. It is not at all by the senses that we can judge of the realities of things, by the senses we can judge only of how they appear; and it is impossible that things should truly be everything they seem to be.'"

26 Which does not, of course, preclude the progress of science and an increasingly nuanced description of nature, as Foucher testifies when he mentions the progress achieved through the use of the microscope.

27 On Voltaire and scepticism, see Sébastien Charles, "Entre pyrrhonisme et académisme : le scepticisme de Voltaire," *Cahiers Voltaire* 11 (2012): 109–31.

timate explanation. But if sceptical doubt is useful at a methodological level, the fact remains that the progress of science is undeniable and makes incongruous a radical and global form of scepticism, in which the idea of truth would be problematic. Hence Enlightenment thinkers often invoked a mitigated scepticism or reasonable Pyrrhonism,[28] whose sphere of application must be restricted to the moral and political fields. This reasonable or mitigated scepticism, as it was then called, consists in making use of humility in the scientific domain and therefore has a methodological function. Moreover, it is strongly limited in its scope, touching only the field of natural philosophy, and leaving aside moral and political philosophy, not to mention religion.

On this score, the figure of Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville will now serve me well, for Brissot's case is one of a transition from radical scepticism to reasonable scepticism condensed into a period of just a few years. In this perspective, the reading proposed by Popkin, which renders Brissot an "optimistic sceptic"[29] is highly questionable. To achieve this, Popkin would have to erase the subtle variations that led Brissot away from sceptical withdrawal to political engagement and assume that the young Brissot—who draped himself in the mantle of scepticism at the end of the 1770s—shared the convictions of the Brissot of ten years later, who wished to fulfil political ambitions. To assert, as Popkin does explicitly,[30] that if Brissot did not complete his project of universal scepticism it was because he was so tragically cut down in 1793, is to overlook a large portion of Brissot's intellectual journey and to miss the fact that right from 1782, with the publication of his work on truth, his sceptical project had already been somewhat compromised.

It is true that in his early writings, Brissot is among the few eighteenth-century authors who present themselves as disciples of Sextus Empiricus, borrowing from Sextus the idea of a systematic critique of the sciences and applying it to the modern sciences for demonstrating both their vacuity and their uncertainty. In so doing, Brissot went against the tenor of a century that congratulated itself on the continuous progress of knowledge and the dissemination of the Enlightenment spirit.

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28 Beausobre used this expression in 1755 in his *Pyrrhonisme raisonnable* (Berlin: Étienne de Bourdeaux, 1755). On this interpretation of scepticism, see Sébastien Charles, "Des excès dogmatiques à la guérison sceptique : le pyrrhonisme raisonnable de Beausobre," *Libertinage et philosophie au XVII^e siècle* 12 (2010): 205–17.

29 Richard H. Popkin, "Scepticism and Optimism in the Late 18th Century," in *Aufklarüng und Skepsis. Studien zur Philosophie und Geistesgeschichte der 17. und 18. Jahrunderts*, ed. Lothar Kreimendahl (Stuttgart: Fromman Verlag, 1995), 173–84.

30 Popkin, "Scepticism and Optimism," 176: "At the very end of his treatise, Brissot said that he hoped to discover in each science the very few truths that there are. He thought it would take him several years to do so. Then, in a footnote at the end, he said that if his work on legislation and politics permit, in two or three years he could present a 'tableau' of these truths along with a universal scepticism applied to all the sciences, and this would constitute a reasonable scepticism. Unfortunately Brissot was executed before he could complete his work because he was the leader of the Girondists."

The first delineation of his monumental undertaking to undermine the scientific optimism of the Enlightenment is found in a manuscript Brissot referred to as *Plan du scepticisme universel appliqué à toutes les sciences* ("Plan for Applying Universal Scepticism to All the Sciences").[31] In this manuscript, which outlines a project conceived by the young Brissot as a collective enterprise that would offer readers a sceptical encyclopaedia to compete with Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*, Brissot's reflections take the form of a critical review of all the knowledge of his time:

> Ressusciter le pyrrhonisme trop longtemps oublié, détruire les fondements de toutes les connaissances humaines, étendre le doute jusque sur les sciences qui semblent le plus évidemment marquées du sceau de la certitude, paraître le projet le plus fou, le plus ridicule, le plus atroce aux yeux des philosophes, des savants, des théologiens, des femmes même, qui tous se flattent de savoir quelque chose. On croit en effet dans ce siècle décoré du titre fastueux de philosophique, que l'homme a perfectionné toutes les sciences, parcouru tous les degrés de leur échelle; on croit que les erreurs ont disparu, que la vérité n'a plus de voile, on croit être au milieu de la lumière et on est toujours dans les ténèbres.[32]

The radicalism of Brissot's project resides above all in his rejection of certainty in the sphere of science, in which every discovery gives rise to new difficulties and adds to what is unknown, indeed unknowable. Passing from theology to metaphysics to other fields of thought, he uses and reuses the method of *diaphōnia*, assuming that the clash between philosophical factions on every issue refutes dogmatism.

According to Popkin, Brissot's thought constitutes "the most extended presentation of French Enlightenment scepticism,"[33] and we are indebted to him for having "carried scepticism beyond the usual moderate view of the preceding philosophers and scientists of the Enlightenment."[34] But isn't this too optimistic? Brissot's radical scepticism is in evidence only in his unpublished manuscript on universal scepti-

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31 See Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville, *De la vérité, ou Méditations sur les moyens de parvenir à la vérité dans toutes les connaissances humaines* (Neuchâtel: Imprimerie de la Société typographique, 1782), 361. The title Brissot uses there for the manuscript was the one he finally settled on; another title, *Plan raisonné du système de pyrrhonisme général* ("Reasoned Plan for a System of General Pyrrhonism"), is found on the manuscript itself, but struck out (See Brissot de Warville, *Plan raisonné du système de pyrrhonisme général,* Paris, Archives Nationales, pressmark 446 AP 21).

32 Brissot, *Plan raisonné*, f. 1. English translation: «To revive Pyrrhonism, too long forgotten, to destroy the foundations of all human knowledge, to extend the reach of doubt to include those sciences that seem to have been most clearly stamped with the seal of certainty, will appear to be the most foolish, ridiculous, and outrageous of projects in the eyes of philosophers, learned people, theologians, and even women, who all flatter themselves that they know something. It is the case that in this century, so lavishly styled 'philosophical,' it is believed that human beings have brought to completion all the sciences and climbed every rung of their ladders. It is believed that error has vanished, that truth is no longer obscured by a veil; it is believed that we are bathed in light even as we continue to dwell in darkness.» All English translations of Brissot de Warville are my own.

33 Popkin, "Scepticism and Optimism," 176.

34 Richard H. Popkin, "Brissot and Condorcet: Skeptical Philosophers," in *The Skeptical Tradition around 1800*, eds. Johan van der Zande and Richard H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998), 31.

cism. The true project of his treatise on truth published in 1782 was no longer to demonstrate the vanity of the scientific enterprise, but rather to "seek what is certain in human knowledge."[35] Brissot had now embraced the "reasonable scepticism" of his century, which consisted at the theoretical level of developing a pragmatic concept of science and at the moral level of giving an ethical purpose, namely, human happiness, to the philosophical enterprise.[36] Moreover, he expressed his hopes of establishing an organ intended to disseminate scientists' and scholars' observations in order to increase and perfect human knowledge, a project he followed up on in 1783, when he established, in London, both a "Lyceum," whose mission was to bring together scholars and scientists, and a journal designed to publish their discoveries.

Brissot's later thinking acknowledges that obstacles of course lie in the path of the search for truth and always will: the fallibility of the senses; confused and obscure ideas proper to certain fields such as metaphysics; the difficulty of grasping all the relationships that come together to produce a fact; the limits of the human mind; the misuse of words, especially abstract terms; the systematising spirit; false erudition; passions and prejudices. These are all factors that lead us to a recognition of the highly limited nature of the truths we can arrive at. But for all that, they do not invalidate this enterprise of making us wise and happy. From this perspective, philosophical inquiry should no longer seek to doubt for doubt's sake, but should aim to meditate in order to be useful to others and to one's self. For this reason scepticism is to be condemned, since it turns philosophy away from the consideration of the public good.

I think the interest of Brissot's case resides in the way he allows us to picture the transformation of the role of the philosopher at the end of the Enlightenment, which prefigures the *intellectuel engagé* of the last century and renders the sceptical posture, if not impossible, at least extremely rare. Of this transformation, Brissot was himself conscious, emphasising in his autobiographical sketch that he "wanted to liberate philosophy from the yoke of despotism."[37] But being an activist for equality and liberty is to acknowledge value in ideals, which ancient sceptics taught to be irrational. Thus Brissot appears to have understood that the reactivation of scepticism in the eighteenth century presumed its readjustment and that the scepticism of the Enlightenment could not be independent of the new imperative of public utility which the philosopher must obey, therefore breaking with the Hellenistic ideal of the philosopher who is indifferent to the values shared in the public space.

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35 Brissot, *De la vérité*, 1.

36 On the expressions "reasonable scepticism" and "mitigated Pyrrhonism" and their meaning, see Sébastien Charles, "Introduction," and Charles, "Escepticismo ilustrado: entre pirronismo razonable y escepticismo radical," in *Dudas filosóficas. Ensayos sobre escepticismo antiguo, moderno y contemporáneo*, eds. Armando Cintora and Jorge Ornelas (Barcelona: Editorial Genisa, 2014), 177–202.

37 Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville, "Portrait de Phédor," in *Mémoires (1754–1793)* (Paris: Alphonse Picard & Fils, 1910), 1:15.

Conclusion

The figures of Huet, Foucher, and Brissot illustrate well the plural uses made of scepticism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the difficulty of providing a just interpretation of its nature and its function. Rather than trying to overestimate the importance of the Pyrrhonian current in relation to the Academic one, or to privilege the epistemic role played by scepticism in the question of the relationship between faith and reason, as Popkin did in his work, I wanted to show in this paper the difficulty of arriving at an unambiguous definition of the nature and function of early modern scepticism. It is thus difficult to define Huet's scepticism, be it Academic or Pyrrhonian, without taking into account the apologetic purpose of his work, where scepticism is an instrument used principally to serve the cause of Christianity. The same holds for Foucher, whose avowed purpose is identical, even if his use of scepticism follows a methodology ultimately very close to Cartesianism, which seems to him to make sceptics the best craftsmen of the development of early modern science. As for Brissot de Warville, his recourse to scepticism is just as dependent on a certain context, where scepticism is conceived primarily in a propaedeutic role, as a foundation for the natural philosophy of its time, which amounts to making him lose much of his radicality.

If I had *malgré tout* to give my definition of early modern scepticism, I would distinguish two forms. First, a radical form, dominant in the seventeenth century, which either employed sceptical arguments for religious purposes in order to save religion from rationalist criticism or, alternatively, employed sceptical arguments in order to question the principles on which religion is based (dogmas, miracles, prophecies, etc.). Second, a more mitigated form of scepticism, specific to the eighteenth century, which is mainly used as a method to overcome our prejudices and to build knowledge collectively according to the encyclopaedic model. In this respect, Hume's scepticism is an exception during the Enlightenment, as if the sceptical radicalism of the previous century was perpetuated through his thought. All this may appear very different from ancient scepticism, but it seems to me, nevertheless, that a certain spirit of scepticism has been preserved over time, which consists in thinking by oneself and distrusting dogmatism and prejudices, as if there were in fact a kind of *skepsis perennis* integrating both sides, Academic and Pyrrhonian.

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Stephan Schmid

Three Varieties of Early Modern Scepticism

Introduction: Richard Popkin on Early Modern Scepticism

Scepticism loomed large in the early modern period. In fact, many philosophers from the late sixteenth until the midst of the eighteenth century grappled with the problem of how to justify our knowledge claims in a much more explicit and fundamental way than their Aristotelian forerunners had.[1] In numerous articles and books, particularly in the latest edition of his volume *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*, Richard Popkin argued that the early modern obsession with scepticism was prompted by the rediscovery of Sextus Empiricus's writings from the second century CE. As Popkin puts it, the reception of Sextus's writings led to "an insoluble *crise pyrrhonienne*, as the various gambits of Sextus Empiricus are explored and worked out."[2] While Sextus's sceptical considerations were first applied in theological contexts and religious debates, Popkin explains, they were soon transferred to other areas as well. In Popkin's diagnosis, this led to a *nouveau pyrrhonisme*, which "was to envelop all the human sciences and philosophy in a complete sceptical crisis, out of which modern philosophy and the scientific outlook finally emerged."[3]

It is hard to overstate the importance of Richard Popkin's work on the history of scepticism. Not only did his investigation of early modern scepticism bring to the fore authors who were widely neglected before him, but it also paved the way for a range of outstanding studies in the history of early modern scepticism, which would have been plainly impossible without his pioneering work.

All these merits notwithstanding and without denying due credit to Popkin's exceptional historiographical work, I want to challenge his main tenet that the early

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1 This is not to say that Aristotelian philosophers were uninterested in sceptical or even epistemological questions. This long-standing historiographical prejudice is finally about to be corrected. For nuanced investigations into medieval or Aristotelian debates about scepticism, see Dominik Perler, *Zweifel und Gewissheit: skeptische Debatten im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2006), and Henrik Lagerlund, ed., *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

2 Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 5.

3 Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, 59.

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modern period was shaken by a Pyrrhonian crisis which then led to a *nouveau pyrrhonisme*. I am not the first to do so, but my criticism is different from previous ones. In order to clearly articulate my objection and to distinguish it from other critiques, it is important to distinguish two dimensions of Popkin's main tenet.

Popkin's claim that the early modern period was characterised by a *crise pyrrhonienne* can be read in two ways—and it seems that Popkin is happy to defend it in both. In one reading, which highlights the historical dimension of Popkin's tenet, he makes a claim about the *historical origin* of early modern scepticism, stating that it was triggered, influenced, and inspired by the rediscovery and reception of Sextus Empiricus's writings. In another reading, which emphasises the taxonomical dimension of Popkin's tenet, he makes a claim about the *nature* of early modern scepticism, stating that it is indeed a form or species of Pyrrhonian scepticism and is therefore aptly described as "new Pyrrhonism" (*nouveau pyrrhonisme*). While most critics of Popkin focused on the historical dimension of Popkin's tenet and argued that early modern scepticism was influenced and inspired by many other writings and traditions besides those of Sextus Empiricus,[4] here I want to take issue with the taxonomical dimension of Popkin's claim. More precisely, I will argue that understanding early modern scepticism as a species of Pyrrhonism is misleading at best. Even the two most famous early modern sceptics, René Descartes and David Hume, I submit, developed and employed varieties of scepticism which are distinctively non-Pyrrhonian.[5] In addition, I argue that distinguishing between different varieties of scepticism is of pivotal historical importance insofar as appreciating the fact that Pyrrhonian, Cartesian, and Humean scepticism differ in crucial ways from one another is key to understanding the historical development of sceptical ideas. These three varieties of scepticism differ from one another in that each is in an important sense stronger or broader than its antecedent versions; in other words, each calls into question what had been taken for granted by their antecedents. In particular, it is important to distinguish between Cartesian and Humean scepticism in order to understand Kant's philosophical project after the early modern period. Kant's project was developed in response to Hume's scepticism about causation, which is different from both

4 Good examples are José Raimundo Maia Neto, "Academic Skepticism in Early Modern Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58, no. 2 (1997): 199–220; Dominik Perler, "Was There a 'Pyrrhonian Crisis' in Early modern Philosophy? A Critical Notice of Richard H. Popkin," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 86, no. 2 (June 2004), 209–20; and Ian Maclean "The 'Sceptical Crisis' Reconsidered: Galen, Rational Medicine and the *Libertas Philosophandi*," *Early Science and Medicine* 11, no. 3 (2006): 247–74.

5 By this restriction I do not mean to imply that the two varieties of scepticism developed by Descartes and Hume are the only varieties of scepticism to be found in the early modern period nor that they were exclusively and originally developed by Descartes and Hume. My restriction is simply due to the fact that Descartes and Hume are both famous and highly influential early modern philosophers.

Cartesian and Pyrrhonian scepticism.[6] Thus, understanding the history of scepticism in general—and the proper target of Kant's philosophising in particular—requires us to appreciate varieties of scepticism different from the Pyrrhonian scepticism presented by Sextus Empiricus.

The paper consists of four sections. In section 1 I provide a brief characterisation of Pyrrhonian scepticism on the basis of Sextus Empiricus's description of Pyrrhonism in his *Outlines of Scepticism*. This will set the basis for my comparative analysis in the two subsequent sections, devoted to the two presumably most famous manifestations of scepticism in the early modern period: section 2 will be concerned with the "hyperbolic" scepticism of René Descartes, which he famously develops in his *Meditations*, while section 3 will focus on David Hume's scepticism about causation. Section 4 will summarise my findings.

1 Pyrrhonian Scepticism

We can only properly assess the taxonomical correctness of Popkin's tenet, according to which the early modern period was shaken by a Pyrrhonian crisis which led to a new Pyrrhonism, once we clarify the meaning of Pyrrhonian scepticism. Only then can we compare it with early modern varieties of scepticism.

At this point, one might raise a fundamental objection to my project. Describing Pyrrhonism as a variety of scepticism parallel to early modern varieties presupposes that ancient Pyrrhonism is an intellectual endeavour of the very same form or type as modern scepticism, such that both enterprises are forms of "scepticism" in the same sense. As recent scholarship in ancient philosophy has shown, however, this assumption is highly problematic.[7] For, unlike modern scepticism, which is concerned with undermining knowledge claims about certain domains by raising doubts about these domains, ancient Pyrrhonism is not particularly concerned with doubt at all. In fact, there is not even an ancient Greek term for "doubt," and if the Latin term *dubitatio* is used in treatises in the ancient sceptical tradition, it is not wielded in any

6 This is meticulously defended by Michael Forster, *Kant and Skepticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

7 See for instance Michael Williams, "Descartes' Transformation of the Skeptical Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, ed. Richard Bett (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 289–91, who lists altogether nine differences between Pyrrhonian and Descartes's scepticism. Other enquiries into the difference between ancient and (early) modern scepticism are Myles Burnyeat, "Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed," *The Philosophical Review* 91, no. 1 (January 1982): 3–40; and José Luis Bermúdez, "The Originality of Cartesian Skepticism: Did It Have Ancient or Mediaeval Antecedents?" *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (October 2000): 333–60.

technical sense.[8] The Greek word *skeptikos* simply means "seeker" or "investigator." This is exactly how ancient sceptics conceived of themselves: as investigators interested in the very questions of physics, ethics, and logic addressed by their dogmatic opponents. Unlike their opponents, however, they recommended suspending judgment about these matters since they did not find conclusive evidence to decisively answer these questions.[9] What is more, ancient sceptics advertised their scepticism as a means for happiness or an untroubled life. By contrast, modern scepticism is and was considered mainly as a threat, which not only undermines the endeavour of scientific research but is also at odds with our self-understanding as cognitive agents living in a material world.

I do not want to question these findings; especially in light of the fact that they are grist for the mill of my case against Richard Popkin's identification of a *crise pyrrhonienne* in the early modern period. However, these findings provide such a fundamental refutation of Popkin's identification of a *crise pyrrhonienne* in the early modern period that it is hard to believe that he really wanted to claim that early modern sceptics were in fact Pyrrhonists in the sense portrayed by Sextus Empiricus. Instead, I will assume that Popkin construed "Pyrrhonism" as a position one can come to adopt on the basis of Sextus's views if one is interested in the typical modern epistemological project of exploring the limits of our knowledge by raising specific doubts. Accordingly, my sketch of Pyrrhonian scepticism is not to be read as an adequate representation of ancient Pyrrhonism, but as a systematisation of the sorts of doubts that Pyrrhonians would have launched had they engaged in a kind of project typically pursued by their early modern successors.

That said, what does (a "modernised" version of) Pyrrhonian scepticism consist of? Towards what kind of epistemic state does a Pyrrhonian aim, and which types or domains of knowledge does s/he undermine?

In response to these questions, the opening paragraph of Sextus Empiricus's *Outlines* turns out to be particularly revealing. In this passage, Sextus distinguishes three schools of philosophers concerned with finding the truth. One school of thought—which Sextus associates with Aristotle, Epicurus, and the Stoics—believes that they have actually discovered the truth. Sextus calls adherents of this school *dogmatists*. Another school—which Sextus associates with "Clitomachus and Carneades, and other Academics"—asserts that we cannot arrive at the truth. In making such a definite assertion, adherents of this school also qualify as dogmatists in Sextus's view. They are, as it were, *negative* dogmatists.[10] Finally, followers of the third

8 Katja Vogt, "From Investigation to Doubt: The Beginnings of Modern Skepticism," in *Roman Reflections: Essays on Latin Philosophy*, ed. by Gareth Williams and Katharina Volk (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 262–64.

9 Vogt, 262.

10 It should be noted that, as a matter of historical fact, Sextus's characterisation of the Academics is probably wrong: as Cicero reports (in his *Acad*. 45 and *Luc*. 28), both Arcesilaus and Carneades declared that they did not even know whether they know anything. For an investigation into the real

school—whom Sextus identifies with the (Pyrrhonian) sceptics—have yet to come to a conclusion about the truth. They are still investigating—and are for that matter true "sceptics" in the original sense of the Greek term, or "seekers." Lacking a convincing resolution of the question as to what the truth is, Pyrrhonian sceptics withhold their judgments about the truth of things or even about our capacity to know the truth.

Pyrrhonian scepticism, then, is a philosophical stance that —unlike the one Sextus attributes to the Academics—is entirely *anti*-dogmatic. Pyrrhonian sceptics are opposed to two dogmatic camps of philosophy in that they neither claim to know the truth nor definitely deny our capacity to know it. Rather, they suspend their judgment about the nature of things and our capacity to (eventually) know it. This anti-dogmatic nature of Pyrrhonian scepticism is reflected by Sextus's official definition of Pyrrhonism:

> Scepticism is an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgement and afterwards to tranquillity (PH 1.4.8).[11]

A Pyrrhonian sceptic, Sextus explains, is able to counter every argument for a putative knowledge claim with an equally strong or convincing counter-argument. In light of these conflicting arguments for and against a certain view, a Pyrrhonian sceptic will suspend judgment. As it turns out, this suspension of judgment results in the sceptic's tranquillity or peace of mind. This is, Sextus explains, because the dogmatics "who hold the opinion that things are good or bad by nature are perpetually troubled" (PH 1.12.27); as long as they lack what they take to be good, they feel that they are victims of some natural evil, and when they have reached it they are in constant fear of losing it. Pyrrhonian sceptics, by contrast, "who make no determination about what is good and bad by nature neither avoid nor pursue anything with intensity; and hence they are tranquil" (PH 1.12.28). Due to their suspension of judgment about the truth of the matter, Pyrrhonian sceptics are less troubled than their dogmatic opponents, and acquire—albeit accidentally—the desired peace of mind, in hope of which philosophers come to philosophise in the first place.

Sextus's definition of Pyrrhonian scepticism hints at another essential element of Pyrrhonism: The Pyrrhonian sceptic comes to withhold her or his judgment about the nature of things by setting out "oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all." In doing so, the Pyrrhonian sceptic does not call into question that *there are things* that appear to us in a certain way and

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difference between historical Pyrrhonists and Academics, see Gisela Striker, "On the Difference between Pyrrhonists and the Academics", in *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 135–49, and Striker, "Academics versus Pyrrhonists, Reconsidered," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, ed. Richard Bett (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 195–207.

11 All references from Sextus, abbreviated as PH, are cited in parentheses and taken from *Outlines of Scepticism*, trans. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

are thought of in many ways. Sextus is explicit about this point, writing that "no-one, presumably, will raise a controversy over whether an existing thing appears this way or that; rather, they investigate whether it is such as it appears" (PH 1.11.22). The scepticism launched by a Pyrrhonian sceptic, then, is of a restricted scope: it is restricted to the true nature of things, leaving untouched the fact that there are things, which appear to us in various ways.[12]

In sum, we should note two core features of Pyrrhonian scepticism: First, Pyrrhonism is *anti-dogmatic* in nature. As opposed to positively denying that we can know the true nature of things, a Pyrrhonian sceptic simply suspends judgment and is silent about the true nature of things. Whether we can, in principle, know the true nature of things or not, the Pyrrhonian merely observes that there are as many convincing arguments for a given position about the nature of things as there are arguments against it and thus refuses to take a stance on the question, withholding judgment. For all that—and this marks the second core-feature of Pyrrhonism—a Pyrrhonian sceptic is a realist of a certain stripe: the Pyrrhonian does not doubt or question the very reality of things that appear in a certain way. He or she only questions whether the things in themselves *really* exist in the way they appear to us.

There is much more to be said about Pyrrhonian scepticism. This should be enough, though, for my present purpose of assessing Popkin's claim that the early modern period was shaken by a *crise pyrrhonienne*.

2 Cartesian Scepticism

Descartes was no sceptic. To the contrary, he was convinced that we can achieve absolutely certain knowledge (*scientia*) about ourselves, God, and the nature of bodies. In fact, he took great pains in defending his epistemological optimism, but in the course of doing so, he famously employed sceptical strategies and doubts. Far from defending scepticism, Descartes was only a *methodological* sceptic who consciously invoked doubts in order to lay bare an unshakable and firm foundation for certain and stable knowledge.[13] But what is the nature of the scepticism that Descartes employs in his search for certain knowledge?

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12 This "realist character" of Pyrrhonism has been convincingly pointed out by Burnyeat, "Idealism and Greek Philosophy," and Stephen Everson, "The Objective Appearance of Pyrrhonism," in *Psychology (Companions to Ancient Thought 2)*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 121–47. Cf. the critical remarks by Gail Fine, "Sextus and External World Skepticism," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 24 (2003): 349–52.

13 See the opening lines of Descartes' *Meditations*, where he explains that "once in the course of his life" he wanted to "demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations." See *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: Vrin, 1974–1989; henceforth AT), 7:14; *Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Edited and translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff,

It is well known that Descartes develops his methodological doubt in three stages, each of which is stronger than its preceding stage to the extent that it calls into question what was left untouched in the previous stage. Concerning Popkin's tenet, the crucial question is whether these three forms of doubt are indeed Pyrrhonian in nature. Popkin himself had no doubts about this. Or so it seems, when he characterises Descartes's three stages of doubt:

> By moving from [1] the partial Pyrrhonism of doubting the reliability of our senses to [2] the metaphysical Pyrrhonism of the dream hypothesis, doubting the reality of our knowledge, to [3] the total Pyrrhonism of the demon hypothesis, doubting the reliability of our rational faculties, we finally discover the *cogito*, a truth so subjectively certain that we are incapable of doubting it at all.[14]

Let us have a brief look at Descartes's three stages of doubt in order to see whether Popkin was right in describing them as three forms of Pyrrhonism.

Descartes begins his sceptical "demolition" of beliefs by casting doubt on his sensory beliefs, that is, those beliefs he "acquired either from the senses or through the senses." Noting that he has often found that "the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once" (AT 7:18; CSM 2:12), Descartes finds doubt in all our sensory beliefs at once and consequently rejects them as uncertain.

At the same time, Descartes is clear that just pointing out that the senses *sometimes* deceive us is not sufficient for undermining our confidence in sensory beliefs in general. As he remarks, sensory beliefs might be problematic with respect "to objects which are very small or in distance," but he admits that "there are many beliefs about which doubt is quite impossible, even though they are derived from the senses," citing examples like his belief that he is "sitting by the fire, wearing a winter dressing-gown" (AT 7:18; CSM 2:12), and so forth.

Descartes's first stage of doubt, based on the occasional deceptiveness of our senses, does not venture very far. It does not even undermine our perceptual beliefs in general, as it leaves untouched our beliefs about objects that are neither very small nor distant.

Descartes's second stage of doubt, which he induces by his famous dream hypothesis, is more ambitious. It might well be, Descartes considers, that we are asleep and that we just dream about the things that we seem to perceive. "How often, asleep at night, am I convinced of just such familiar events," he remarks, "that I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire—when in fact I am lying undressed in bed!" (AT 7:19; CSM 2:13). However, as long as I cannot reject the hypothesis that I am just dreaming what I seem to perceive, my sensory beliefs become dubitable. Unlike

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Dugald Murdoch (vols. 1 and 2; henceforth: CSM), and Anthony Kenny (henceforth: CSMK) (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984–1991), 2:17. References to Descartes's writings are given in parentheses.

14 Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, 156–57 (numbering added).

the observation that our senses are sometimes deceptive, then, Descartes's dream hypothesis can undermine *all* our sensory beliefs. Given the possibility of dreaming, it might well be that his formerly unquestioned beliefs—"that my eyes are open, that I am moving my head and stretching out my hands—are not true. Perhaps, indeed, I do not even have such hands or such a body at all" (AT 7:19; CSM 2:13).

But the doubt induced by the dream hypothesis goes farther than just affecting our beliefs in the qualities of external things. It also undermines our confidence in the very existence of these things. As for the dream hypothesis, it is not only the case that extra-mental things might in fact be quite different from the way they appear, but also that they may not exist at all. Given that he might just be dreaming, Descartes ponders, he might "not even have such hands or such a body at all."

For all this, Descartes's second stage of doubt leaves many other beliefs unaffected. In particular, it does not undermine non-empirical beliefs. "For whether I am awake or asleep," Descartes argues, "two and three added together are five, and a square has no more than four sides" (AT 7:20; CSM 2:14).

It is only Descartes's third and last stage of doubt, which is induced by the evil demon hypothesis, that undermines non-empirical beliefs as well. Given that it is (epistemically) possible that we are all victims of an evil demon that persistently deceives us and interferes with our cognitive faculties, almost all our beliefs can be doubted. As Descartes vividly puts it:

> How do I know that he [i.e., an evil demon] has not brought it about that there is no earth, no sky, no extended thing, no shape, no size, no place, while at the same time ensuring that all these things appear to me to exist just as they do now? What is more, since I sometimes believe that others go astray in cases where they think that they have most perfect knowledge, may I not similarly go wrong every time I add two and three or count the sides of a square, or in some even simpler matter, if this is imaginable? (AT 7:21; CSM 2:14)

To the extent that I cannot rule out the possibility that all of my thoughts—together with their appearance of certainty—could have been instilled by an evil demon (and how could I know for certain that I am not a victim of such a pervasive deception), pretty much everything that I usually accept as true could be false. Even such simple non-empirical beliefs as that $2 + 3 = 5$ or that squares have four sides could have been instilled in me by an evil demon together with the conviction that these facts cannot be otherwise. As it is well known, there is only one belief that survives this third stage of doubt according to Descartes. This is the *cogito*, Descartes's insight that "this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind" (AT 7:25; CSM 2:17).

So much about Descartes's three stages of doubt. Are they aptly described as forms of Pyrrhonism, as suggested by Popkin? As has become plain in this brief sketch of these three stages already, this question is clearly to be answered in the negative. As seen above, Pyrrhonian scepticism is committed to a certain sort of realism: the Pyrrhonian does not doubt the reality of things that appear in a certain way, but only questions whether the things are *by nature* the way they appear to

us. Descartes's second and third stages of doubt, by contrast, undermine such a realist commitment: As long as we cannot rule out the possibility of dreaming or being deceived by an evil demon, we cannot be certain whether there are in fact external things that appear to us in a certain way—or whether we are simply hallucinating.

Unlike Pyrrhonian scepticism, the scepticism raised by Descartes's last two stages of doubt, which Popkin describes as "metaphysical" and "total Pyrrhonism," concerns our beliefs in the *existence* of extra-mental things, of which there is "no controversy" according to Sextus. In fact, undermining our confidence in non-empirical beliefs (such as our beliefs that 2 + 3 = 5 or that squares have four sides), Descartes's third stage of doubt even undermines our beliefs in what we usually take to be necessary truths.[15] For if we might be mistaken in thinking that squares have four sides, squares with five, six, seven, or any other number of sides might well be possible, after all—and the same holds for the rational square root of 2 or the largest prime number.

Relying on the criterion of scope, only Descartes's first stage of doubt, which concerns the reliability of our senses and which leaves our confidence in the existence of extra-mental things untouched, retains a legitimate claim to count as a form of Pyrrhonism. But when we also take the first core-feature of Pyrrhonism into account—its anti-dogmatic nature—even the scepticism induced by Descartes's first stage of doubt fails to be Pyrrhonian. This is due to the strong epistemological use Descartes makes of his methodologically employed doubts. As he writes in the second *Meditation*:

> Anything which admits of the slightest doubt I will set aside just as if I had found it to be wholly false; and I will proceed in this way until l recognize something certain, or, if nothing else, until I at least recognize for certain that there is no certainty (AT 7:24; CSM 2:16).

In employing his scepticism as a method for revealing an indubitable foundation of knowledge, Descartes uses his doubts not only to incite suspension of judgment, but as an immediate reason for denying claims of true knowledge or certainty about a particular domain. This is quite different from the Pyrrhonian, who would always remain open to the possibility of overcoming these doubts and therefore refuse to adopt the negative epistemological verdict announced by Descartes. Hence, far from yielding an anti-dogmatic state of universal suspension of judgment, Descartes's scepticism, if successful, helps us "to recognize for certain" that we do not have any true or certain knowledge after all. In his quest for certain knowledge, Des-

15 This result is closely related to another famous and widely debated view of Descartes: his conviction that necessary and eternal truths depend on the will of God (and are to this extent not ultimately necessary insofar as God could have chosen a different set of necessary and eternal truths). As an entry point into the debate, see his Letter to [Mersenne], 27 May 1630 (AT 1:152; CSMK 25) and David Cunning, "Descartes' Modal Metaphysics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2014 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/descartes-modal/.

cartes takes the possibility of (the slightest) doubt about the belief that *p* to immediately establish the (dogmatic) epistemological verdict that we do not have any certainty or true knowledge as to whether *p*.[16]

Starting from the textually well-founded premise that Pyrrhonian scepticism is essentially characterised by that fact that it is (1) anti-dogmatic in nature (and merely aims at our suspension of judgment) and (2) restricted in scope to the extent that it does not question the existence of extra-mental things that appear to us in a certain way, we have to conclude that, *pace* Popkin, none of the scepticisms invoked by Descartes's three stages of doubt qualify as genuine forms of Pyrrhonism. As an instrument for laying bare a secure and lasting foundation of knowledge, Descartes takes his scepticism to be sufficient to refute our claims of certain knowledge about a particular domain and for this reason it is clearly dogmatic in nature. Furthermore, the forms of scepticism invoked by Descartes's dream and evil demon hypothesis go far beyond the restricted scope of Pyrrhonism in that they undermine our beliefs in the existence of extra-mental things in general. Descartes's scepticism is distinctively non-Pyrrhonian.[17]

3 Humean Scepticism (about Causation)

In fairness to Popkin, it is important to note that he did not classify David Hume[18] as a Pyrrhonian sceptic in the traditional sense, though he argued that "Hume, himself, actually maintained the only 'consistent' Pyrrhonian point of view."[19] In fact, Popkin identifies two aspects in Hume's scepticism that he takes to be different from Sextus Empiricus's standard formulation of Pyrrhonism.[20] First, Popkin contends that Hume's scepticism is more dogmatic than Pyrrhonism in that Hume assertorically

16 Note that even if we take Descartes to articulate only a maxim of assent here, according to which we should not accept what can be doubted, this maxim is stronger than the ancient sceptic's precept to only accept a proposition for which there is more evidence than counter-evidence. For a discussion of this point, see Janet Broughton, *Descartes' Method of Doubt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 43–49.

17 This is not changed by the fact that Descartes' contemporaries (like Hobbes; see AT 7:171; CSM 2:121) as well as Descartes himself (AT 7:171–72, CSM 2:121; AT 5:147, CSMK 333) denied that the sceptical considerations of his first *Meditation* have any title of novelty or originality. Vis-à-vis ancient Pyrrhonism, Descartes's sceptical considerations were original indeed.

18 Hume's works are cited in parentheses according to the following abbreviations: EHU refers to *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); T refers to *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David F. Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Citations from both works are followed by a reference to L.A. Sebly-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch's Clarendon editions (1975 and 1978, respectively), abbreviated as SBN.

19 Richard Popkin, "David Hume: His Pyrrhonism and His Critique of Pyrrhonism," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 1, no. 5 (October 1951): 385.

20 Popkin, 386–87.

claims that (many) philosophical questions are ultimately unanswerable. Second, Popkin holds that Hume does not discuss, let alone accept the traditional Pyrrhonist strategy for deciding practical questions by appeal to our appearances and local customs and traditions. Unlike Sextus, who would concede that we can "have opinions about what appears to be the case, without giving up one's suspensive attitude as to what really is the case,"[21] Hume famously denied that we are able to persistently withhold judgments about what appears to be the case even if philosophical enquiry reveals that we lack any rational grounds for these judgments.

I do not want to discuss Popkin's characterisation of Hume's scepticism here. Let me just note that, unlike Popkin, I am not fully sure whether there is more than a verbal disagreement when it comes to Hume's and Sextus's diverging verdicts on the possibility of shedding our opinions by suspending our judgment.[22] However, I very much agree that many of Hume's sceptical considerations are much more dogmatic than those provided by Sextus insofar as they aim not only at our suspension of judgment but also at defeating our claims of true or certain knowledge altogether.[23]

I will thus follow Popkin in his first assessment that Hume's scepticism is less anti-dogmatic than traditional Pyrrhonism. All this leaves the second core feature of Pyrrhonian scepticism—its scope—untouched. What about the scope of Hume's scepticism?

Given the many sceptical facets of Hume's philosophy, this question defies a unified and simple answer. There are just too many sceptical strands in Hume's thought to determine *the* scope of Hume's scepticism. In the following I will focus on only one form of scepticism in Hume—his famous scepticism about causation. As I will argue, Hume's scepticism about causation is not only decidedly wider in scope than traditional Pyrrhonism, but also ventures beyond Descartes's most radical from of scepticism, his evil demon hypothesis.[24]

Hume's worries about causation have many facets: One of these concerns our justification in making causal inferences—our practice of inferring from a perceived

21 Popkin.

22 For similar concerns in this direction, see Terence Irwin, review of *Doubt and Dogmatism: Studies in Hellenistic Epistemology*, ed. Malcolm Schofield, Myles Burnyeat, and Jonathan Barnes, *Noûs* 17, no. 1 (March 1983): 127; Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study, Vol. 2: From Suarez to Rousseau* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 253–54; and Julia Annas, "Hume and Ancient Scepticism," *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 66 (2000): 271–85. I have profited considerably from discussions with Máté Veres on this point.

23 A particularly telling passage with respect to Hume's negative dogmatism is his famous dictum that all reasoning must, in light of sceptical reflections, "from knowledge degenerate into probability" (T 1.4.1.3, SBN 181).

24 Note that the kind of scepticism that I am interested in with respect to Hume also manifests in his considerations about substances (T 1.1.6; 1.4.6). I confine myself to Hume's scepticism about causation because Hume is more explicit about the distinctive nature of this form of scepticism and because it is this kind of scepticism to which Kant explicitly refers.

object the existence of its (unperceived) cause.[25] Another worry concerns our very notion of a cause, which is taken to undergird our practice of causal inferences because it is traditionally conceived as a notion of *necessary connection* between objects or events, which licenses the inferential transition from the perception of one object or event to another. Here I focus on the latter.

Hume's worry about our notion or our idea of causation goes back to his empiricist commitment that all our ideas must ultimately be derived from impressions. Or, as Hume puts it: "all our ideas or more feeble perceptions are copies of our impressions or more lively ones" (EHU 2.5, SBN 19).[26] Even though Hume allows for minor exceptions to this principle, he is clear that these are only singular cases, and a singular case is "scarce worth our observing, and does not merit that for it alone we should alter our general maxim" (T 1.1.1.10, SBN 6). He is thus firmly convinced that his "general maxim" applies to our idea of causation as well. Accordingly, Hume opens his inquiry into the experiential sources of our idea of causation by noting:

> I begin with observing that the terms of *efficacy*, *agency*, *power*, *force*, *energy*, *necessity*, *connexion*, and *productive quality*, are all nearly synonimous; and therefore 'tis an absurdity to employ any of them in defining the rest. By this observation we reject at once all the vulgar definitions, which philosophers have given of power and efficacy; and instead of searching for the idea in these definitions, must look for it in the impressions, from which it is originally deriv'd (T 1.3.14.4, SBN 157).

Given that there is a whole family of conceptually interrelated causal concepts or ideas, it will not help to uncover the empiricist source or basis of our idea of causation by appealing to other ideas of this family (as it is done by what Hume calls "vulgar definitions"). In order to give an empiricistically acceptable analysis of causation, we "must look for it in the impressions, from which it is originally deriv'd".

As Hume famously argues, however, there is no single impression that could serve as the experiential basis or source for the idea of causation that philosophers seem to rely on when they conceive of causation as a necessary connection between events or objects. While experience makes us acquainted with events or objects (regularly) succeeding each other, it does not provide us with any impression of a force or connection between them. As Hume lucidly puts it:

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25 As Hume famously explained, "[a]ll reasonings concerning matter of fact seem to be founded on the relation of *Cause and Effect*. By means of that relation alone we can go beyond the evidence of our memory and senses" (EHU 4.4, SBN 26).

26 In his *Treatise*, Hume articulates his so *copy-principle*, saying "*[t]hat all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent*" (T.1.1.1.7, SBN 4). For further discussion of this principle and problems connected with it, see Don Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 41–57.

> [E]ven in the most familiar events, the energy of the cause is as unintelligible as in the most unusual, and [...] we only learn by experience the frequent *Conjunction* of objects, without being ever able to comprehend any thing like *Connection* between them. (EHU 7.21, SBN 70)

Consider a thrown stone breaking a window. We take it for granted that the thrown stone *causes* the window to shatter. But on what grounds? Hume is clear that this "ground" is no impression or experience of a certain connection holding between the stone and the breaking window because all we can actually observe is the fact that one event—the stone hitting on the window—is followed by another event—the window's breaking; an experience, indeed, that we can have repeatedly: whenever we have seen a stone hitting a window, we have observed the window breaking afterwards. But far from being aware of any causal tie or connection between events or objects, "we only learn by experience the frequent *Conjunction* of objects," i.e., their regular succession.

The lack of a single impression that could figure as a source of our idea of causation leaves us in an awkward situation. Given Hume's "general maxim" that an idea is nothing but a "feeble copy" of a corresponding impression, the lack of an impression that underlies our idea of a causation seems to imply that we do not have an idea of causation in the first place. Hume is well aware of this difficulty—and suggests an ingenious solution to it:

> Thus upon the whole we may infer, that when we talk of any being [...] as endow'd with a power or force, proportion'd to any effect; when we speak of a necessary connexion betwixt objects, and suppose, that this connexion depends upon an efficacy or energy, with which any of these objects are endow'd; in all these expressions, so *apply'd*, we have really no distinct meaning, and make use only of common words, without any clear and determinate ideas. But as 'tis more probable, that these expressions do here lose their true meaning by being *wrong apply'd*, than that they never have any meaning; 'twill be proper to bestow another consideration on this subject, to see if possibly we can discover the nature and origin of those ideas, we annex to them (T 1.3.14.14, SBN 162).

As Hume reminds us, concluding that we do not have any causal notions or ideas—such that all of our causal vocabulary is meaningless—is only one of two possibilities. Another possible conclusion—and this is the conclusion that Hume is going to embrace—is that our causal vocabulary has a different meaning than philosophers usually assume: it does not express an idea of a necessary connection between distinct events or objects (which—due to a lack of a corresponding impression—we do not have in the first place). According to Hume, our idea of a cause is rather the idea of "*an object, followed by another, and where all the objects, similar to the first, are followed by objects similar to the second*" (EHU 7.29, SBN 76), as our experience reveals us no more than such regular sequences.

Hume's solution to the awkward situation mentioned above consists in providing a revisionist theory of causation according to which causation simply amounts to a regular succession or "conjunction"—as Hume puts it—as opposed to a modally robust relation or a "connexion." In addition to this, Hume offers an explanation for

the fact that many philosophers take their idea of causation to be about a necessary connection between distinct objects or events, even though we simply cannot have such an idea. In Hume's diagnosis, philosophers are usually mistaken about their idea of causation because they misinterpret the impressions that accompany our ideas of regular successions. If we observe a regular succession between objects or events frequently, we grow accustomed to this succession. And having grown accustomed to this sequence, we tend to expect and thereby mentally anticipate the succeeding event or object upon the observation or imagination of its typical antecedent. In the course of acquiring an idea of a regular succession of events, then, we also acquire the habit to mentally transit from the appearance of the former to the idea of the latter. This habit manifests itself in a typical feeling: upon the experience of an event of a regular succession we feel urged to expect its usual attendant. It is "[t]his connexion," Hume explains, "which we *feel* in the mind, this customary transition of the imagination from one object to its usual attendant, [that] is the sentiment or impression, from which we form the idea of power or necessary connexion" (EHU 7.28, SBN 75). Philosophers, then, tend to conceive of *A* causing *B* as a form of *A* necessitating *B*, because they themselves feel psychologically forced or necessitated to think of *B*s upon the appearance of *A*s. And since they acquired this psychological determination in the course of having observed *B*s regularly following *A*s, they mistakenly take to perceive this psychological "necessitation" as a metaphysical necessitation in the regularly succeeding objects or events themselves.

Let me clarify the precise nature of Hume's scepticism about causation. As revealed by my brief sketch, this scepticism is primarily directed towards our *idea* or *notion* of causation. Not only does Hume call into question the possibility to know whether events or objects are genuinely causally connected (in the sense of being related by a necessary connection), he even disputes that we can have the very idea or notion of such a relation. In Hume's words:

> [W]e cannot [...] point out that circumstance in the cause, which gives it a connexion with its effect. We have no idea of this connexion; nor even any distinct notion what it is we desire to know, when we endeavour at a conception of it (EHU 7.29, SBN 77).

Closely inspecting our idea of a cause and cognate notions, Hume argues, we find that they only refer to a regular succession of objects or events and that every assumption about this regular succession having a distinct modal character is due to a misunderstanding of our felt psychological tendency to transit from the appearance of one object to its usual attendant. Lacking a distinctive impression of a cause necessitating its effect, we cannot even have an idea or notion of what the distinctive mode of necessitation that we tend to attribute to what we describe as causal relations would actually be like.

4 Three Varieties of Scepticism

How is Hume's scepticism about causation to be distinguished from the other varieties of scepticism considered in this chapter? Being first and foremost concerned with our ideas or notion of causation, it goes significantly beyond the forms of scepticism that Descartes invokes by his dream and evil demon hypothesis. For as radical as Descartes's "hyperbolic" doubt might be, it never questions the very meaning of our ideas. This is particularly evident from the strategy Descartes uses to rebut the hyperbolic doubt he introduced, namely proving God's existence, who—as a benevolent and omnipotent being—would never allow us to be systematically deceived along the lines suggested by Descartes's dream and evil demon hypotheses. This argument for God's existence proceeds from a survey of our ideas in our minds, about which Descartes explains, in the third *Meditation*:

> [A]s far as ideas are concerned, provided they are considered solely in themselves and I do not refer them to anything else, they cannot strictly speaking be false; for whether it is a goat or a chimera that I am imagining, it is just as true that I imagine the former as the latter (AT 7:37; CSM 2:26).

According to Descartes, there can be no question about the "falsity" of our ideas: they have a distinctive representational content, which is—at least primarily—fully transparent to us and about which we cannot be deceived; an idea about a goat is about a goat, and an idea about a chimera is about a chimera.[27] The question invoked by Descartes's scepticism only appears when we ask ourselves about the relation between our ideas and the external reality: do our ideas, with their distinctive content, correspond to an extra-mental reality? In this vein, Descartes's scepticism takes the intentionality of our ideas for granted. He does not question that they have a distinctive intentional content or representational purport. He simply questions their truth: is the world really the way that our ideas represent it to be?

This is different from Hume's scepticism about causation. Unlike Descartes's form of scepticism, Hume's scepticism about causation not only calls into question whether things are in fact causally related, but undermines our very idea of causation as a necessary connection. In Hume's view, when we think about causation as a necessary connection, we are deceived about our own ideas. Being misled by our psychological habit to associate ideas of causes with ideas of their effects, we

27 Note that in the third *Meditation*, Descartes concedes that while ideas by themselves cannot strictly speaking be false, still some of them qualify as materially false, "when they represent non-things as things" (AT 7:43, CSM 2:30). (His paradigm example is the idea of coldness that represents something as real and positive even though it is just an absence of heat.) Nonetheless, Descartes is clear that materially false ideas exist and have a distinctive representational content, it is just that this content is so confused that "I am unable to judge whether or not what it represents to me is something positive which exists outside of my sensation" (AT 7:234, CSM 2:146).

take causes to stand in a necessary connection to their effects, even though "we have no idea of this connexion; nor even any distinct notion what it is we desire to know, when we endeavour at a conception of it" (EHU 7.29, SBN 77). As opposed to the truth of our thoughts, which are questioned by Descartes's scepticism, Hume's scepticism about causation concerns the very meaning or intentional content of our idea of causation: are our causal notions in fact about a necessary connection or about something else? The particular threat of Hume's scepticism consists in his case of the possibility that we can be and in fact are deceived about the content of our own thinking, something which had been exempt from Descartes's hyperbolic doubt.

This all makes plain that far from just rehashing forms of Pyrrhonian scepticism, Descartes's hyperbolic scepticism and Hume's scepticism about causation introduce varieties of scepticism that are markedly different from the kind of scepticism described by Sextus Empiricus. Not only are Descartes's and Hume's forms of scepticism both "negatively dogmatic" in the sense that they justify the claim that we do not have any genuine knowledge about their specific domains, they are also significantly more comprehensive, calling into question what Pyrrhonism still takes for granted. In fact, Hume's scepticism about causation defines a variety of scepticism that is even stronger than Descartes's hyperbolic scepticism insofar as it calls into question the very intentionality or meaning of our ideas, which Descartes takes to be unquestionably transparent (though not necessarily adequate).[28] We should thus distinguish between at least three forms of scepticism, each characterised by a distinctive form of doubt:

Pyrrhonian Scepticism asks whether *x* is really *F*, or only appears to be *F*, and pertains to the *adequacy of our thoughts as to the nature of things*, leaving the existence of the things revealed in our thoughts untouched.

Cartesian Scepticism—as manifested in Descartes's hyperbolic doubt—asks whether there is in fact an *x* that is *F*, as it appears to be and pertains to the *truth of our thoughts* (of the form *x* is *F*), leaving their meaning or intentionality untouched.

Humean Scepticism—as manifested in Hume's scepticism about causation—asks whether the thought of *x* being *F* is a thought about *x* being *F* at all and concerns the very *meaning or intentionality of thoughts*.

28 In fact, I think that Cartesian scepticism and the Humean scepticism induced by Hume's reflections on causation correspond to the two kinds of sceptical problematics that Jim Conant has distinguished in terms of "Cartesian" and "Kantian scepticism." See Conant, "Two Varieties of Skepticism," in *Rethinking Epistemology, Volume 2*, ed. Günter Abel and James Conant (Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter, 2012), 1–72. My understanding of Cartesian and Humean scepticism developed here is very much indebted to Conant's revealing discussion of these two varieties of scepticism.

Given that Pyrrhonian, Cartesian, and Humean scepticism articulate distinctive forms of doubt, each of which undermines a different claim or pretence of our thought (is it adequate? is it true? and is it genuine thought or about anything at all?), it is certainly of systematic importance to avoid subsuming them under the uniform label of "Pyrrhonism," as Richard Popkin had done. But distinguishing between these varieties of scepticism is also important from the point of view of the history of philosophy. This is because these three varieties of scepticism raise different philosophical questions or problematics that have influenced prominent discussions in different periods of the history of philosophy. While Pyrrhonian scepticism raises questions about the adequacy or veracity of our thought, Cartesian scepticism calls into doubt the very existence of things outside our thought. Humean scepticism, in turn, raises a question about the content of our thought and our capacity to decide whether our thought is about certain objects in the first place.

The Pyrrhonian type of question is representative of the ancient discussion about a criterion of truth: is there a feature of our thought that we can appeal to in order to justify its truth or adequacy—a criterion by which we can decide whether things are really the way that we take them to be? While the Epicureans and Stoics have famously defended such a criterion, Pyrrhonists have denied its existence.[29]

The Cartesian problematic invites the exploration of radically revisionist metaphysical options that we can famously observe among prominent early modern philosophers such as Berkeley and Leibniz. Is there a material reality which our thoughts correspond to or should we rather embrace a version of idealism according to which reality is ultimately constituted by mind-like entities with particular thoughts?[30]

Humean scepticism, finally, is a key for understanding Kant's philosophical project. While Kant concedes in a famous letter to Herz that in previous work he just passed over the "question of how a representation that refers to an object without being in any way affected by it can be possible,"[31] it is this question that lies at the heart of his transcendental philosophy, which he develops in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. In this work Kant prominently asks how there can be meaningful metaphysical thoughts, which are about something that we cannot experience. It should not come as much of a surprise that this is the problem raised by Humean scepticism about causation: how can we be sure that our metaphysical idea of causation as a necessary connection between two events or objects is really about something rather than an empty phrase that we take to express an idea, even though it does not.

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29 For a discussion of this debate, see Gisela Striker, "The Problem of the Criterion," in *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 150–65.

30 Burnyeat, "Idealism and Greek Philosophy," makes a powerful case to the effect that idealism is a peculiar early modern idea, which is virtually absent from ancient thought.

31 Kant, Letter Nr. 65, to Marcus Herz, February 21, 1772, in *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin 1900–), 10:125.

Against this backdrop, Kant's famous Copernican revolution—according to which we should conceive objects as conforming to our mode of cognition rather than taking our cognition to be determined by its objects—can be seen as a means to ensure the representational purport of our metaphysical thoughts that has been forcefully undermined by Hume's scepticism about causation. Given that our objects of cognition are constituted by our cognitive faculties, we can be sure that there are objects that our cognition is about.[32] In fact, Kant himself points out that it was David Hume who "interrupted his dogmatic slumber and brought him to adopt a fully new direction in his investigations in the area of speculative philosophy."[33]

In light of the fact that it was David Hume's scepticism rather than Descartes's that awakened Kant from his dogmatic slumber and brought him to develop his transcendental philosophy, it is important not to conflate these different varieties of early modern scepticism, each of which is concerned with a different problematic of our thought.

5 Conclusion

Richard Popkin famously argued that the early modern period was shaken by an "an insoluble *crise pyrrhonienne*, as the various gambits of Sextus Empiricus are explored and worked out".[34] In this chapter, I argued that Popkin's description of the varieties of scepticism developed in the early modern period as a species of Pyrrhonism is highly misleading and blurs important differences.

As I have shown, both, René Descartes and David Hume, invoked and employed certain forms or varieties of scepticism which differ from Pyrrhonian scepticism. Even setting aside worries about the problematic assumption that ancient and early modern forms of "scepticism" are indeed forms of a single overarching genus of intellectual endeavour, the forms of doubt launched by Descartes and Hume are crucially different from the doubts that would have been raised by Pyrrhonians if they had raised any doubts at all. In fact, the early modern varieties of scepticism, which I have analysed here, not only differ from traditional Pyrrhonian scepticism with respect to the kinds of doubt they incite, but also with respect to the epistemological verdict they justify.

Concerning the latter, we have seen that Sextus Empiricus puts great emphasis on the fact that Pyrrhonian sceptics recommend suspension of judgment about ev-

32 Kant articulates his thought of a Copernican revolution in philosophy in the preface of the second edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xvi–xvii (*Schriften* 3:11–12). For an excellent commentary of Kant's critical project and its relation to his Copernican revolution see Sebastian Gardner, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Routledge, 1999), 18–33.
33 Kant, *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können* (*Schriften* 4: 260).
34 Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, 5.

erything and even withhold their judgment as to the question about our possibility of knowledge. Pyrrhonism is anti-dogmatic, as it were. The varieties of scepticism articulated by Descartes and Hume, by contrast, are not anti-dogmatic in this sense.

Moreover, the forms of scepticism put forward by Descartes and Hume and discussed in this chapter, which I labelled as Cartesian scepticism and Humean scepticism, raise different and more all-encompassing kinds of doubts than those raised by Pyrrhonism. While the Pyrrhonian sceptics mainly call into question whether we can know the nature of things, they do not doubt that there are things that appear to us in a certain way. They leave the question about their existence untouched and merely question our ability to discern the adequacy or veracity of our thoughts with respect to the metaphysical structure of the world. Cartesian scepticism, by contrast, is directed precisely against the realist presumption of Pyrrhonism by calling into question the very existence of the external world. It thereby questions our ability to discern the truth of our thoughts in general. Still, it leaves unquestioned whether—and thereby presupposes that—we have thoughts with a determinate content in the first place. This presupposition is undermined by Hume's scepticism about causation. In Hume's view, we have no genuine idea of causation proper—viz. a necessary connection between two events or objects. Unlike Cartesian scepticism, then, Humean scepticism is concerned not only with the truth of our thoughts but with their intentional content or representational purport. It puts into question whether what we take to be thoughts about certain things are proper thoughts about these things at all.

Being clear about these three varieties of scepticism is important for both systematic or philosophical *and* historical reasons. The distinction is philosophically important because the three varieties of scepticism differ in scope and strength: They call into question what is taken for granted by other varieties of scepticism.

Distinguishing these three varieties of scepticism is also pivotal for doing history of philosophy as it provides us with a better understanding of the problems that historical authors were grappling with. In particular, distinguishing Cartesian from Humean scepticism is crucial to understand the objective of Kant's critical project, which was first and foremost a response to David Hume's scepticism about causation, and not to the varieties of scepticism suggested by René Descartes or Sextus Empiricus.[35]

35 This is not to say that Kant's philosophy was not also influenced by other forms of scepticism. Michael N. Forster, *Kant and Skepticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), argues quite convincingly that Kant's discussion of the antinomies is crucially influenced by Pyrrhonian scepticism.

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Nancy Abigail Nuñez Hernández

Narrowing of "Know" as a Contextualist Strategy against Cartesian Sceptical Conclusions

1 Introduction

This paper proposes that the free pragmatic enrichment process of narrowing can explain the context-sensitivity of knowledge attribution sentences, which is a central tenet of epistemic contextualism. Epistemic contextualism is a semantic thesis about the truth conditions of knowledge attribution sentences of the form "S knows that *p*." Even though it is a linguistic claim, it is proposed to solve an epistemic problem, i. e., the threat posed by Cartesian-style sceptical arguments. The rough idea behind epistemic contextualism's solution to the sceptical problem is to argue that the premises of Cartesian-style sceptical arguments (specifically, the first one) generate a context in which the epistemic standards for knowledge attribution are extremely high and impossible to meet, leading to the sceptical conclusion: "S does not know that *p*"; under those standards, the sceptical conclusion seems to be true. But ordinarily, the negation of the sceptical conclusion (which is the sentence that asserts "S knows that *p*") is evaluated as true because the epistemic standards operating in that context are loose.

Though epistemic contextualism provides an intuitive and elegant solution to the problem posed by Cartesian-style sceptical arguments, it seems to have become unpopular because of linguistic objections blaming epistemic contextualism for the lack of a semantic model capable of accounting for the context-sensitivity of "know." Unlike indexicals or gradable expressions, "know" is not clearly context-sensitive. Therefore, the context-sensitivity of knowledge attribution sentences cannot be accounted for in a satisfactory manner. In this paper, I will propose that there is no need of such a semantic model to account for the context-sensitivity of knowledge attribution sentences, because it can be explained through a free pragmatic enrichment process—i. e., lexical narrowing—that operates on the meaning of knowledge attribution sentences. This proposal for overcoming these linguistic objections will

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allow us to recover confidence in the effectiveness of the contextualist strategy against Cartesian-style sceptical arguments.

2 The Legacy of Cartesian Scepticism for Contemporary Epistemology

Scepticism is one of the main concerns of contemporary epistemologists. It can take many forms, of which the so-called "Cartesian" scepticism is one of the most debated. Contemporary epistemologists understand the problem of Cartesian scepticism in terms of the following type of argument, which is characterised by the use of a sceptical hypothesis whose main features are its impossibility of being ruled out by the available evidence and its inconsistency with propositions we ordinarily take ourselves to know:

1. S does not know that not-*h*.
2. If S does not know that not-*h*, then S does not know that *o*.
3. S does not know that *o*.

This is the general template for a Cartesian-style sceptical argument. The varieties of sceptical hypotheses that can stand for the *h* in this type of argument are inspired by the dreaming or evil demon scenarios that Descartes portrays in the *Meditations*,[1] though he did not devise them in order to buttress a sceptical argument, but rather to bring old prejudices into question.[2] The main feature of these scenarios is their incompatibility with many propositions we ordinarily believe ourselves to know (like "I have hands"). These propositions are the ones that stand for the *o* in the argument.

The dreaming scenario is incompatible with knowledge of the external world. In the *First Meditation*, Descartes sets it by inviting the reader to consider the possibility of being asleep dreaming. The assumed resemblance between some dreams and the reality of the external world known through perception is strong enough to make dreams and reality indistinguishable from one another: "waking can never be distinguished from sleep."[3] Such resemblance raises the possibility of mistaking dreams for perceptions of the external world. But dreams can be deceitful: "Let us suppose that we are dreaming, and that these particular things (that we have our eyes open,

1 René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy. With Selections from the Objections and Replies*, trans. Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

2 Recall this passage from the *First Meditation:* "Hence I saw that at some stage in my life the whole structure would have to be utterly demolished, and that I should have to begin again from the bottom up if I wish to construct something lasting and unshakable in the sciences" (Descartes, *Meditations*, 17).

3 Descartes, 19.

are moving our head, are stretching out our hands) are not true; and that perhaps we do not even have hands or the rest of a body like what we see."[4] In such circumstances, we would not know that we have hands. The impossibility to distinguish dreams from the reality known through perception precludes knowledge of the external world.

The evil demon scenario is incompatible with portions of knowledge that did not seem to be under threat in the dreaming scenario, such as mathematical knowledge. The dreaming scenario is a threat to knowledge of physics, astronomy and any other subject matter pertaining to the external world, but

> arithmetic, geometry and other disciplines of the same kind, which deal only with the very simplest and most general things, and care little whether they exist in nature or not, contain something certain and indubitable. For whether I am waking or sleeping, two plus three equals five, and a square has no more than four sides; nor does it seem possible that such obvious truths could be affected by any suspicion that they are false.[5]

Near the end of the *First Meditation*, Descartes invites the reader to consider the possibility of the existence of an evil demon or spirit "supremely powerful and cunning, [who] has devoted all his efforts to deceiving me."[6] The existence of such an evil demon raises the possibility of error even about mathematical truths. Therefore, the possibility of being deceived by an evil demon is a threat to knowledge so problematic that it even precludes mathematical knowledge.

The core of Cartesian-style arguments discussed by contemporary epistemologists are the sceptical hypotheses inspired by the scenarios depicted in Descartes's *Meditations*. Among the sceptical hypotheses standing for the *h* in those Cartesian-style sceptical arguments are:

a) The possibility of being asleep dreaming.

b) The possibility of being deceived by an evil demon.

c) The possibility of being a bodiless brain in a vat that is being electrochemically stimulated to form the kind of beliefs a human being has as a result of its ordinary perceptual experiences.

d) The possibility of being in a sort of matrix world or any other alternative reality.

The Cartesian inspiration is obvious in a) and b), but the incompatibility with large portions of ordinary knowledge—characteristic of Descartes's sceptical scenarios—is also a feature of c) and d). For instance, being a bodiless brain in a vat (BIV) is incompatible with knowledge of many propositions I would ordinarily claim to know,

4 Descartes, 19.
5 Descartes, 20.
6 Descartes, 22.

such as "I have hands." If I was a BIV, I would not have hands, even though I was being electrochemically stimulated to believe that I have hands. Therefore, if I was a BIV, I would not know that I have hands.

Thus, Cartesian scepticism has set the agenda for one of the main concerns of contemporary epistemology: to defeat scepticism. John G. Cottingham refers to the influence of Cartesian scepticism in contemporary epistemology, asserting that

> The subsequent development of a branch of philosophy known as "epistemology" has tended to see the theory of knowledge as a perpetual battleground between the sceptic and the anti-sceptic, with the latter attempting to establish such basic truths as the existence of the external world, in face of the extreme "hyperbolical" doubts of the kind raised in the *Meditations*.[7]

Contemporary epistemologists have deployed many strategies to overcome those hypebolical doubts and defeat scepticism. Among those strategies epistemic contextualism has been the most debated due to its originality and perspicuity. In the next section of this chapter I will outline that strategy.

3 The Contextualist Strategy against Cartesian-Style Sceptical Arguments

3.1 Outline of Epistemic Contextualism

Epistemic contextualism holds that knowledge attribution sentences of the form "S knows that *p*" are context-sensitive, which means that the truth conditions of those sentences can vary from one context to another, depending on which epistemic standards govern the context of the attribution.[8] Broadly speaking, epistemic standards are standards for knowledge that vary according to the attributor's context. Thus, many epistemologists label this theory as "attributor contextualism." For instance, Michael Brady and Duncan Pritchard claim that

> the view is known as *attributor* contextualism, in order to emphasise that it is the context of the person making the assertion that is important to epistemic status, rather than, the context of the subject who is being ascribed knowledge.[9]

7 John G. Cottingham, *A Descartes Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 52.

8 Keith DeRose, "Contextualism and Knowledge Attributions," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52, no. 4 (December 1992): 913–29; DeRose, "Solving the Skeptical Problem," *The Philosophical Review* 104, no. 1 (January 1995): 1–52.

9 Michael Brady and Duncan Pritchard, "Epistemological Contextualism: Problems and Prospects," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 55, no. 219 (April 2005): 161.

Given the interests, expectations, and other characteristics of knowledge attributors, some contexts could be governed by high epistemic standards, which means that a knowledge attribution sentence uttered in them will be assessed as true only if the allegedly-known proposition *p* is true and the subject of the knowledge attribution sentence is in a very strong epistemic position with respect to *p*; other contexts could be governed by lower epistemic standards, namely that an assertion of the very same knowledge attribution sentence will be assessed as true even if the subject's epistemic position with respect to *p* is weaker. To illustrate these points, let us quote DeRose's bank cases:

> *Bank Case A.* My wife and I are driving home on Friday afternoon. We plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit our paychecks. But as we drive past the bank, we notice that the lines inside are very long, as they often are on Friday afternoons. Although we generally like to deposit our paychecks as soon as possible, it is not especially important in this case that they be deposited right away, so I suggest that we drive straight home and deposit our paychecks on Saturday morning. My wife says, "Maybe the banks won't be open tomorrow. Lots of banks are closed on Saturdays." I reply, "No, I know it'll be open. I was just there two weeks ago on Saturday. It's open until noon.
>
> *Bank Case B.* My wife and I drive past the bank on a Friday afternoon, as in Case A, and notice the long lines. I again suggest that we deposit our paychecks on Saturday morning, explaining that I was at the bank on Saturday morning two weeks ago and discovered that it was open until noon. But in this case, we have just written a very large and very important check. If our paychecks are not deposited into our checking account before Monday morning, the important check we wrote will bounce, leaving us in a *very* bad situation. And, of course, the bank is not open on Sunday. My wife reminds me of these facts. She then says, "Banks do change their hours. Do you know the bank will be open tomorrow?" Remaining as confident as I was before that the bank will be open then, still, I reply, "Well, no. I'd better go in and make sure."[10]

If the bank will be open on Saturday, it seems that in Case A when DeRose asserts that he knows the bank will be open on Saturday, his assertion is true. But considering only case B, it seems that when he denies that he knows the bank will be open on Saturday, his denial is also true. So, we have assessed as true a knowledge attribution sentence ("I know that the bank will be open on Saturday") and its denial ("I don't know that the bank will be open on Saturday"). How is this possible? Because the standards for knowledge in Case B are higher than in Case A. DeRose meets the lower standards in place in Case A but he does not meet the higher standards in place in case B, even though the strength of his epistemic position in both cases is the same.

DeRose's example illustrates the context-sensitivity of knowledge attribution sentences and displays two key notions for epistemic contextualism: strength of an epistemic position and epistemic standard. A subject is in a strong epistemic position with respect to a proposition she believes when her belief in that proposition corresponds to the truth in a non-accidental way, i.e., when her belief is true and has

10 DeRose, "Contextualism and Knowledge Attributions," 913.

enough properties to constitute a piece of knowledge.[11] The truth of a knowledge attribution sentence depends on the epistemic standards governing the context in which the sentence is uttered, because those standards determine how strong must be the subject's epistemic position to count her as knowing a proposition.[12] Thus, one speaker can truthfully attribute knowledge to a subject in one context, but in another context—in which higher standards are in place—that knowledge attribution would no longer be true, even though the subject and the allegedly known proposition are the same in both contexts.

3.2 Epistemic Contextualism versus Scepticism

Although epistemic contextualism is a linguistic claim regarding the context-sensitivity of knowledge attribution sentences, it was proposed to solve an epistemic problem, i. e., the threat posed by Cartesian-style sceptical arguments. To illustrate that threat, let us recall one instance of such kind of argument:

1. I don't know that I'm not a BIV.
2. If I don't know that I'm not a BIV, then I don't know that I have hands.
3. I don't know that I have hands.

According to the contextualist, the previous argument is problematic because although each premise is plausible, the conclusion seems extremely implausible, yet the argument is formally valid. The first premise is plausible because it involves a sceptical hypothesis we cannot rule out through the available evidence. Therefore, it seems that we actually do not know that we are not a BIV. The second premise is plausible because it is an instance of the epistemic closure principle, which epistemic contextualists assume to be true. But the conclusion of the argument strikes us as highly implausible because it is something that ordinarily no one would assert.

Epistemic contextualists understand the problem of Cartesian scepticism as a clash between two premises that seem to be true and a conclusion that seems to

11 To define the properties that a belief has to have in order to constitute a piece of knowledge, DeRose appeals to Robert Nozick's truth-tracking account of knowledge. The rough idea behind this account of knowledge is that a belief constitutes a piece of knowledge if it is true and tracks the truth in nearby possible worlds where the subject uses the same method of belief-formation she uses in the actual world. According to DeRose, those conditions must be fulfilled in order to be in a strong epistemic position. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that Saul Kripke presented counterexamples to Nozick's truth-tracking account of knowledge in a lecture given at the American Philosophical Association in the early 1980s, and that having a non-accidentally true belief is what matters for being in a strong epistemic position.

12 Keith DeRose, *The Case for Contextualism: Knowledge, Skepticism, and Context. Vol. 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7.

be false, all within a valid argument. This particular way of conceiving the problem posed by Cartesian-style sceptical arguments is exhibited by Keith DeRose:

> We must explain how two premises that together yield a conclusion we find so incredible can themselves seem so plausible to us. Only with such an explanation in place can we proceed with confidence and with understanding to free ourselves from the trap.[13]

It is important to keep in mind that epistemic contextualists understand the problem of scepticism in these terms. Consequently, they believe that an adequate solution to the problem should fulfil the following *desiderata:*

i. explain the clash between the intuitions that lead to endorsing the premises of the argument and the intuitions that lead to rejecting its conclusion;
ii. safeguard the ordinary intuitions regarding knowledge attributions.

In order to fulfil these *desiderata* and "free ourselves from the trap" of sceptical arguments, epistemic contextualism appeals to the context-sensitivity of knowledge attribution sentences. Roughly, the idea behind this solution is that the premises of sceptical arguments (specifically, the first one) generate a context in which the epistemic standards governing knowledge attribution are impossible to meet, leading to the sceptic's concluding sentence: "I don't know that I have hands." Under these high standards, the sceptic's conclusion is assessed as true. But the truth conditions of knowledge attribution sentences in the Cartesian-style sceptical argument context are at variance with the ordinary context, because the latter is governed by lower epistemic standards. Due to such variation, knowledge attribution sentences made in ordinary contexts (like the denial of the sceptic's conclusion "I know that I have hands") are assessed as true. Therefore, in ordinary contexts we normally claim that subjects *do* know the very same propositions whose knowledge is subsequently denied in the sceptical conclusion. In other words, the variation among the truth conditions of knowledge attribution sentences allows us to safeguard our ordinary intuitions concerning knowledge attributions.

Now that we have outlined the contextualist strategy against scepticism, let us see how it manages to fulfil *desiderata* i) and ii).

In order to fulfil *desideratum* i), epistemic contextualism explains that Cartesian-style sceptical argument's premises seem plausible whenever the sceptical hypothesis is well chosen. Recall that because of the main features of a sceptical hypothesis it is impossible to rule out the argument's first premise with the available evidence and this premise turns out to be inconsistent with propositions we ordinarily take ourselves to know. A well-chosen sceptical hypothesis possesses these features, due to which the argument's first premise seems plausible and is endorsed. Since it is impossible to rule out the sceptical hypothesis through the available evidence, then it seems that we do not know that it is false. To illustrate this point, let us think

13 DeRose, "Solving the Skeptical Problem," 3.

about premise 1 of the previous instance of a Cartesian-style sceptical argument. Regarding 1, DeRose claims that "however improbable or even bizarre it may seem to suppose that I am a BIV, it also seems that I don't know that I'm not a BIV. How could I know such a thing?"[14] The use of a well-chosen sceptical hypothesis in the first premise makes it salient and impossible to ignore, raising the standards for knowledge attribution.[15]

The second premise of the Cartesian-style sceptical argument gains plausibility from being an instance of a highly intuitive epistemic principle: the epistemic closure principle.[16] In addtition, once the first premise of a Cartesian-style sceptical argument is endorsed, the second one will be endorsed as well, as long as the ordinary proposition involved in it is incompatible with the truth of the sceptical hypothesis. Premise 2 of the previous instance of the Cartesian-style sceptical argument illustrates this point: having hands is incompatible with being a brain in a vat; therefore, if my epistemic position is not strong enough to inform me that I am not a bodiless brain in a vat, neither will it be strong enough to let me know that I have hands. And once premises 1 and 2 are endorsed, 3 should be endorsed as well because it validly follows from them. That is how, in the context of the Cartesian-style sceptical argument governed by unusually high epistemic standards, an assertion like "I do not know that I have hands" seems to be true.

However, endorsement of the argument's premises does not entail that it is easy to endorse its conclusion. The intuitions leading to reject the conclusion of a Cartesian-style sceptical argument arise whenever the argument is assessed through ordinary epistemic standards, which are looser and allow us to assert that we know many things. Assessing the conclusion of the Cartesian-style sceptical argument through ordinary epistemic standards, while assessing its premises through sceptical epistemic standards, results in a clash between the intuitions leading to reject the conclusion and the intuitions leading to endorse the premises.

The previous explanation allows epistemic contextualism to fulfil *desideratum* i), and contains the seeds for fulfilling *desideratum* ii). Epistemic contextualism manages to safeguard our ordinary intuitions regarding knowledge attributions precisely by claiming that a sceptical conclusion does not threaten the truth of our ordinary knowledge attribution sentences because these appear in a context in which stand-

14 DeRose, 2.

15 Different contextualist theorists have proposed different conversational mechanisms to explain how epistemic standards are raised through the use of the sceptical hypothesis (David Lewis proposes a Rule of Accommodation, DeRose proposes a Rule of Sensitivity, etc.). The details of such mechanisms are not relevant for the present exposition of the general strategy used by epistemic contextualists to defeat scepticism.

16 Though there is much controversy surrounding the epistemic closure principle, its most accepted version states that "if one believes a conclusion by competent deduction from some premises one knows, one knows the conclusion." Timothy Williamson, "Probability and Danger," *The Amherst Lecture in Philosophy* 4 (2009): 2, http://www.amherstlecture.org/williamson2009/.

ards for knowledge attribution are more relaxed and easier to meet. Thus, according to contextualism, a "skeptic's present denials that we know various things are perfectly compatible with our ordinary claims to know those very propositions," because the truth value of a knowledge attribution sentence depends on the epistemic standards governing the context in which the sentence is uttered.[17] Recall that the sceptic truthfully states her conclusion only by raising epistemic standards, therefore her argument "doesn't threaten the truth of our ordinary claims to know the very Os [ordinary propositions] our knowledge of which the skeptic attacks."[18] Explaining "how two premises that together yield a conclusion we find so incredible can themselves seem so plausible to us"[19] has freed us from the sceptical trap by showing that our ordinary practises of knowledge attribution are safe from the sceptic's threat.

By claiming that the same sentence can have different truth-conditions in different contexts, epistemic contextualism holds that the conclusion of Cartesian-style sceptical argument poses no threat for our ordinary claims to know many things. Though epistemic contextualism provides an intuitive and elegant solution to the problem of Cartesian-style sceptical arguments, it seems to have lost its steam due to the linguistic objections raised by Herman Cappelan and Ernest Lepore,[20] Jason Stanley,[21] and others. These authors argue that epistemic contextualism lacks a semantic model capable of accounting for the context-sensitivity of "know"—which is not clearly context-sensitive like indexicals or gradable expressions—and therefore cannot satisfactorily account for the context-sensitivity of knowledge attribution sentences. In response to this specific criticism, I claim that there is no need for such a semantic model to account for the context-sensitivity of knowledge attribution sentences, because it can be seen as the result of a modulation-free pragmatic process called narrowing, which operates on the meaning of knowledge attribution sentences.[22] Before explaining my proposal to account for the context-sensitivity of knowledge attribution sentences, I will introduce and explain the narrowing process.

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17 DeRose, "Solving the Skeptical Problem," 5.

18 DeRose, 38.

19 DeRose, 3.

20 Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore, "Context Shifting Arguments," *Philosophical Perspectives* 17 (2003): 25–50.

21 Jason Stanley, "On the Linguistic Basis for Contextualism," *Philosophical Studies* 119, nos. 1–2 (May 2004): 119–46; Stanley, *Knowledge and Practical Interests* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

22 Robert Stainton and Geoff Pynn each propose similar strategies to defend epistemic contextualism from linguistic objections. See Robert Stainton, "Contextualism in Epistemology and the Context Sensitivity of 'Knows,'" in *Knowledge and Skepticism*, eds. Joseph Keim Campbell, Michael O'Rourke, and Harry S. Silverstein (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010), 113–39; Geoff Pynn, "Pragmatic Contextualism," *Metaphilosophy* 46, no. 1 (January 2015): 26–51. However, my proposal assumes that knowledge attribution sentences are truth-evaluable and that the word "know" has an extension at a context, which is fixed through a function, as I will explain later. Stainton and Pynn would disagree, since they take epistemic contextualism to be about knowledge attributions as speech acts, and

4 Narrowing of "Know" in the Conclusions of Cartesian-Style Sceptical Arguments

4.1 Narrowing

"Narrowing" is a term used in lexical pragmatics for one type of pragmatic effect on the meaning contributed by a word to the proposition expressed. Some words can be seen as having extensions: the noun "meerkat" denotes (i.e., has as its extension) all and only meerkats (i.e., the set of meerkats), and a statement such as "Meerk is a meerkat" is true if and only if Meerk is a member of that set. "Narrowing" is the term used for cases where the meaning of a word is "narrowed" to cover just a proper subset of its usual extension. Consider an utterance of "John drinks" used to express the proposition that John drinks alcohol. Events of drinking alcohol are a proper subset of drinking events, so this is an instance of narrowing. In this case, the narrowed meaning of the word "drink" has become lexicalized. In other cases, the narrowed meaning is purely occasion-specific, as with "John cut the cake" to mean that John cut it with a knife. Some metaphors may also be cases of narrowing, for example the use of "John is a man" to express the idea that he is a man with certain qualities: for example bravery and determination. The converse of narrowing is broadening, and both are species of lexical modulation. I will now outline the main proposals given to explain narrowing, and then show how the variations of the truth-conditions of knowledge attribution sentences can be explained by appealing to the narrowing of the usual extension of "know."

Narrowing is a pragmatic process in which the use of a word pragmatically conveys a more specific meaning than the word's lexically encoded meaning.[23] Classical examples of this phenomenon are:

(1) I don't *drink*.

Even though the lexically encoded meaning of "drink" is something like the ingestion of any liquid, since I do drink several kinds of liquids, in (1) "drink" is used to mean "drink alcohol," therefore conveying a more specific meaning. To make sense of (1), the linguistic denotation of "drink" must be narrowed to a more specific one. This process is generally understood as a pragmatic one, since it occurs for purely pragmatic reasons, i.e., to make sense of what the speaker is saying; it is not triggered by the encoded or linguistic meaning of the words in that sentence. The main proposals to explain this phenomenon have been the neo-Gricean account, Relevance Theory, and Truth-Conditional Pragmatics.

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deny that "know" is a context-sensitive word whose meaning involves a function to fix the extension of the word in a given context.

23 Yan Huang, *The Oxford Dictionary of Pragmatics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Neo-Gricean account of narrowing. Yan Huang provides a neo-Gricean account of narrowing in which a modified set of maxims is assumed.[24] This set reduces the original Gricean programme (the maxim of Quality apart) to three neo-Gricean pragmatic principles: Quantity, Informativeness, and Manner principles. These maxims are designed to account for "generalised implicatures," treating them as default inferences. In this framework, narrowing is a kind of default inference to a stereotypical or prototypical interpretation governed by the Informativeness principle (I-principle). The basic tenet of the I-principle is:[25]

> Speaker: Do not say more than is required.
> Addressee: What is generally said is stereotypically and specifically exemplified.

The I-principle generates a conversational I-implicature in which the general lexically encoded meaning of an expression I-implicates a more specific interpretation which accords best with stereotypical and explanatory expectations, thereby increasing informativeness. An example of lexical narrowing based on this kind of I-implicature is:

(2) John had a glass of *milk* for breakfast this morning.

In this case, "milk" I-implicates that the milk in question was cow's milk, not goat's milk or any other mammal's milk, so the semantically general term "milk" is narrowed via I-implication to denote stereotypically expected cow's milk.

Relevance Theory account of narrowing. According to relevance theorists,

> Narrowing is the case where a word is used to convey a more specific sense than the encoded one, resulting in a restriction of the linguistically-specified denotation. ...The effect of narrowing is to highlight a proper subpart of the linguistically-specified denotation.[26]

Relevance theorists explain how listeners bridge the gap between linguistically encoded meaning and what speakers intend to communicate by appealing to relevance, which is a property of inputs to cognitive processes characterised in cost-benefit terms: the greater the cognitive effects, the greater the relevance; the greater the processing effort, the lower the cognitive relevance. In this framework, understanding an utterance is the result of an interpretative process generated by expectations of relevance; this process adjusts the communicated meaning of individual words based on the interaction between linguistically encoded meaning, contextual assumptions, and contextual implications. According to this view, narrowing would be triggered

24 Yan Huang, "Neo-Gricean Pragmatics and the Lexicon," *International Review of Pragmatics* 1, no. 1 (January 2009): 118–53.
25 Huang, "Neo-Gricean Pragmatics."
26 Deirdre Wilson, "Relevance and Lexical Pragmatics." *Italian Journal of Linguistics* 15, no. 2 (2003): 274.

by the search for relevance following a path of least effort to choose easily accessible contextual assumptions, expectations and implications, adjusting them with linguistic meaning and cognitive effects, until the expectations of relevance raised by the utterance are satisfied. For example, a conversation in which the speaker utters (3) as an excuse to avoid some commitment:

(3) I have a *temperature*.

If the hearer does not narrow the linguistic meaning of "temperature" in (3) to convey high temperature, the utterance would be trivial and irrelevant; hence to understand the speaker's intentions, the hearer must derive potential implication following a path of the least effort and stop when expectations of relevance are satisfied.

Truth-Conditional Pragmatics (TCP) account of narrowing. According to the TCP view, truth-conditional content of an utterance may be affected by free pragmatic processes—i.e., "top-down" or context-driven processes not triggered by an expression in the sentence, but taking place for purely pragmatic reasons—in order to make sense of what the speaker is saying.[27] Such enrichment takes place when the following conditions are met: (i) the context adds some element to the interpretation of the utterance; (ii) the element is truth conditionally-relevant; and (iii) its contextual provision is not necessary (i.e., not mandated by the linguistic material). François Recanati refers to these kinds of free pragmatic processes as modulation processes.[28]

Modulation operates on the meaning of expressions and returns a meaning of the same type, by narrowing down the extension of an expression through the contextual addition of a component to its meaning.[29] Therefore, according to this view, through free enrichment "drink" in (1) is interpreted as meaning "drink alcohol," adding to the meaning of the verb a specification of the kind of liquid I have in mind. This interpretation enables to make sense of the intuitive truth-conditional content of (1).

TCP offers a semantic construal of pragmatic modulation because the meaning of the expression is mapped to another, more specific meaning. A systematic truth-conditional semantics for natural language is explained by appealing to a *mod* function which takes an expression *e* and the context *c* in which it occurs as arguments; the particular modulation function *g* that is contextually salient/relevant/appropriate for the interpretation of that expression in that context is the value of *mod*. The value of *mod* will be the identity function whenever modulation is unnecessary and the expression receives its literal interpretation.[30] So, there is a

27 François Recanati, *Truth-Conditional Pragmatics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4.
28 Recanati, *Literal Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Recanati, *Truth-Conditional Pragmatics*.
29 Recanati, "Pragmatic Enrichment," in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Language*, ed. Gillian Russell and Delia Graff Fara (New York: Routledge University Press, 2012): 67–79.
30 Recanati, 76.

literal sense of a simple expression *e*, which is its semantic interpretation *I(e)*; and there is a modulated sense *M(e)c* carried by an occurrence of *e* in context *c*. The modulated sense of an expression *e* in a context *c* results from applying the contextually appropriate modulation function *mod(e,c) = g* to its semantic interpretation *I(e)*:

$$M(e)c = mod(e,c)\ (I(e)) = g(I(e))$$

To illustrate how this accounts for the interpretation of (1), let us take "ingestion of any liquid" as the semantic interpretation of "drink." Let us assume that I am the speaker uttering (1). As a matter of fact, I don't drink any alcoholic beverages but I drink water on a regular basis, like any other human being. In such a context, "drink" is modulated to narrow down its literal sense to a more specific one, delivering "drink alcohol" as the value of the *mod* function; therefore, affecting the truth-conditions of (1), which I utter to mean that I don't drink alcohol. Thus, according to this view, the semantic interpretation of a complex expression, like a sentence, is a function of the modulated senses of its parts and the way they are put together.[31] That is how, according to TCP, pragmatic modulation may affect the semantic content of complex expressions.

4.2 Narrowing of "Know" in Knowledge Attribution Sentences

As we have seen, epistemic contextualism claims that the truth conditions of knowledge attribution sentences can vary from one context to another. Attempts to explain such context-sensitivity through indexicality or gradability have not been satisfactory because "know" does not exhibit the semantic behaviour or properties attributed to clearly indexical or gradable terms. Nevertheless, the context-sensitivity of the truth-conditions of knowledge attribution sentences is widely acknowledged. Here I propose that narrowing, understood as a free pragmatic enrichment process, can explain the context-sensitivity of the truth-conditions of knowledge attribution sentences. Since this proposal is based on TCP, as formulated by Recanati, it differs from what Jeremy Fantl and Matthew McGrath call "speech act contextualism," which focuses on speech acts rather than sentences.[32]

31 Recanati, 77.

32 See Jeremy Fantl and Matthew McGrath, *Knowledge in an Uncertain World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). It is worth recalling that, though I am talking about a free pragmatic enrichment process, I am not fully endorsing the kind of pragmatic stance proposed by Robert Stainton, which Fantl and McGrath call "speech act contextualism." My explanation of that process appeals to the modulation function proposed by Recanati, which would operate in the meaning of "know." Stainton would disagree with such a manoeuvre and with any other operating on the meaning of "know."

As explained in the previous section, free pragmatic enrichment occurs when the following three conditions are satisfied: (i) context adds some element to the interpretation of the utterance; (ii) the element is truth-conditionally relevant; and (iii) its contextual provision is not necessary. Utterances of knowledge attribution sentences meet all these conditions: (i) the context adds an epistemic standard to the interpretation of a knowledge attribution sentence; (ii) the truth-conditions of a knowledge attribution sentence depend on that standard; but (iii) even if the epistemic standard is left aside, the knowledge attribution sentence would still express a complete proposition. The epistemic standards are taken into account just to make sense of what the speaker is saying. For instance, asserting the conclusion of a Cartesian-style sceptical argument like "she does not know she has hands"—when the subject actually has hands—does not seem to make sense unless the epistemic standards generated by the sceptical hypothesis in the Cartesian style argument are taken into account. Thus, the conclusion of the sceptical argument should be interpreted as saying that knowledge cannot be properly attributed to a subject if she does not fulfil certain epistemic standards. Otherwise, the conclusion would seem to be bluntly false.

Condition (iii) deserves attention if the truth-conditions of a sceptical argument's conclusion are regarded as the result of a narrowing process. In contrast to this kind of free pragmatic enrichment processes, in bottom-up pragmatic processes (saturation) no proposition is expressed unless something like a value is assigned to a variable: in the sentence "she is cute," no proposition has been expressed if no individual can be contextually singled out as the reference of "she."[33] But knowledge attribution sentences, like the conclusion of a Cartesian-style sceptical argument, express complete propositions even though the element added by the context—the epistemic standard—is not taken into account.

Therefore, the truth-conditions of the conclusion of a Cartesian-style sceptical argument can be explained by appealing to a free pragmatic enrichment process in which the extension of "know" is narrowed down through the contextual addition of the epistemic standards generated by the sceptical hypothesis. The sceptical hypothesis in the argument gives place to a context in which the epistemic standards are so high that it is necessary to eliminate such hypotheses to consider the subject as knowing anything. But ordinarily, the fulfilment of those unrealistic high epistemic standards is not considered necessary for attributing knowledge; therefore, according to the epistemic standards governing ordinary contexts, a knowledge attribution sentence like the one asserted in the conclusion of a Cartesian-style sceptical argument would be regarded as false. This can be explained as the result of a narrowing process in which the sense of "know" is narrowed down from its ordinary sense to a more specific one, determined by sceptical epistemic standards.

33 Recanati, "Pragmatic Enrichment," 70.

In order to understand how this could work, let us assume along epistemic contextualism lines that the literal interpretation of "know" is given by the ordinary practises of knowledge attribution sentences, which take into account loose epistemic standards according to which everyone knows many things, including that they have hands (whenever they actually have them). Thus, in ordinary contexts, the extension of "know" includes many cases where the strength of a subject's epistemic position is relatively low. But in the context of a Cartesian-style sceptical argument, epistemic standards are higher and "know" is modulated to narrow down its literal sense to a more specific one, according to which the extension of "know" only includes cases where the subject's epistemic position is very strong, delivering something like "know according to sceptical standards" as the value of the *mod* function. This means that in the context of a Cartesian-style sceptical argument, "know" is understood in a more specific sense, through the provision of high epistemic standards. Such narrowing may affect the truth-conditions of knowledge attribution sentences, as, for example, a Cartesian-style sceptical argument's conclusion:

(4) I don't know that I have hands.

An utterance of (4) made in the context of a Cartesian-style sceptical argument seems to be true because in that context the meaning of "know" is narrowed down to convey just a proper subset of its usual extension. The extension of that proper subset is restricted to cases in which the subject knows something according to high epistemic standards; since I do not fulfil those standards, an utterance of (4) in the context of a Cartesian-style sceptical argument seems true. Such narrowing of "know" happens as the result of a free pragmatic enrichment process given in a context governed by extremely high epistemic standards. This process, then, is not necessary but allows us to make sense of the conclusion of a Cartesian-style sceptical argument, a conclusion that otherwise would seem nonsense. In this case, the three conditions for a free pragmatic enrichment are satisfied: (i) the context adds some element—a sceptic standard—to the interpretation of the utterance; (ii) this element has an impact in the truth-conditions of (4); and (iii) the contextual provision is not necessary but allows us to make sense of a problematic assertion. In contrast, an assertion of "I know that I have hands" in ordinary contexts is assessed as true because in those contexts the extension of "know" covers not only cases in which the subject knows according to high sceptical standards, but also cases in which the subject knows according to low epistemic standards. When low epistemic standards govern the context of assertion, the extension of "know" is broad enough to include many cases in which the subject does not fulfil the demands imposed by the sceptic standards for knowledge attribution.

As happens with any other case of narrowing, in this case the speaker can make sense of her assertion appealing to the contextual provision that modulates the sense of the expression. For instance, when asked, the speaker of (1) can make sense of her assertion of (1) explaining that she meant "drink alcohol" when she used the word "drink"; likewise, the speaker of (4) can make sense of her assertion of (4) explaining

that she meant "know according to sceptical standards" when she used the word "know." According to epistemic contextualism, this kind of explanation should be available to us, since

> Even while we're in a context governed by high standards at which we don't count as knowing that *o* [any ordinary proposition incompatible with the chosen sceptical hypothesis], we at the same time realize that as soon as we find ourselves in more ordinary conversational contexts, it will also be wrong for us to deny that we know these things.[34]

If we realise that as soon as we find ourselves in more ordinary conversational contexts, it will be wrong to assert something like (4), we can make sense of our assertion of (4) and explain that it belongs to a context governed by high epistemic standards, in which either you "know according to sceptical standards," or you don't know at all. In line with this, the speaker can realise that her assertion of (4) in the context of the Cartesian-style sceptical argument does not commit her to assert something like that in an ordinary context governed by lower epistemic standards. From the exposition of the contextualist strategy (section 3.2), we know this is a key element of the epistemic contextualist solution to the Cartesian-style sceptical problem:

> according to the contextualist solution ...the skeptic's present denials that we know various things are perfectly compatible with our ordinary claims to know those very propositions. Once we realize this, we can see how both the skeptic's denials of knowledge and our ordinary attributions of knowledge can be correct.[35]

So, once we realise that the context may affect truth-conditions of knowledge attribution sentences, we should be able to explain that a knowledge attribution sentence could be assessed as true in an ordinary context, but as false in the context of a Cartesian-style sceptical argument. In the latter context, it is necessary to fulfil the sceptical standards in order to count as knowing something, narrowing down the extension of what is ordinarily conveyed by "know." In ordinary contexts, where it is not necessary to fulfil these high epistemic standards, the extension of "know" is broader and permits the assessment of more knowledge attribution sentences as true.

5 Concluding Remarks

Epistemic contextualism provides an effective strategy against the problem posed by Cartesian-style sceptical arguments. However, its effectiveness seems to be threatened by some linguistic objections. In this paper, I showed how to overcome those linguistic objections and account for the context-sensitivity of knowledge attribution

34 DeRose, "Solving the Skeptical Problem," 41.
35 DeRose, 5.

sentences through a free pragmatic enrichment process called narrowing. I proposed that variations in the truth values of knowledge attribution sentences can be the result of such a narrowing process. Through narrowing, the extension of an expression or word as it is used in an utterance is more specific than the extension expected from its linguistic meaning. As I explained in this paper, narrowing can account for the variations of the truth conditions of knowledge attribution sentences if we assume that the epistemic standards governing ordinary knowledge attributions define our understanding of knowledge itself. Therefore, when the sceptic states her conclusion, this turns out to be true only because the epistemic standards she imposes are higher than the ordinary ones, and thus, tend to narrow the meaning or extension of "knowledge."

This proposal shows that advocates of epistemic contextualism do not need to provide a semantic model to account for the context-sensitivity of the knowledge attribution sentences. This, in turn, paves the way to re-examine epistemic contextualism as a satisfactory solution to the problem posed by Cartesian-style sceptical arguments. The effectiveness of epistemic contextualism as a satisfactory solution to that problem tended to be disregarded because of some linguistic objections. I showed that it is not necessary to fulfil the specific demands implied in those objections because it is possible to account for the context-sensitivity of knowledge attribution sentences through the process of narrowing. Thus, the solution of epistemic contextualism against Cartesian-style sceptical arguments is safe from those objections and retains its effectiveness.

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